Histories of a Burnt House: An Archaeology of Negative Spaces and Dispossession

Dante Angelo

ABSTRACT   The last few decades have witnessed the emergence of an unprecedented interest in the archaeology of the contemporary past. Here, building on that scholarship, I present a diachronic analysis of a fire that partially destroyed a late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century house in the city of Arica, Chile. Combining historical, archaeological, and ethnographic methods, I produce the frame for a biographic storytelling that lets the house tell about its life and take center stage in the fabrication of notions like morality and belonging, attesting to the production of social space. I contend that the house and its materiality have historically played a decisive role in the production of the mechanisms of dispossession and the displacement of its inhabitants through a negative portrayal. I conclude with some thoughts about how archaeology's privileged viewpoint of contextual historical scrutiny provides nuanced insights about the repercussions of current phenomena of gentrification and heritage making. [*historical archaeology, nationalism, squatters, contemporary past, dispossession*]

RESUMEN   En las últimas décadas se ha presenciado el surgimiento de un interés sin precedentes en la arqueología del pasado contemporáneo. Aquí, basado en la investigación, presento un análisis diacrónico de un incendio que destruyó parcialmente una casa de fines del siglo XIX o principios del XX en la ciudad de Arica, Chile. Combinando métodos históricos, arqueológicos, y etnográficos, planteo el marco para una narración biográfica que permite a la casa contar acerca de su vida y tomar protagonismo en la fabricación de nociones como moralidad y pertenencia, dando testimonio de la producción del espacio social. Afirmo que la casa y su materialidad han jugado históricamente un papel decisivo en la producción de los mecanismos de desposesión y desplazamiento de sus habitantes a través de una representación negativa. Concluyo con algunas ideas sobre cómo el punto de vista privilegiado de la arqueología del escrutinio histórico contextual provee una comprensión más aguda acerca de las repercusiones de los actuales fenómenos de aburguesamiento y producción de patrimonio. [*arqueología histórica, nacionalismo, ocupantes, pasado contemporáneo, despojo*]

RESUMO   Nas últimas décadas, assistimos à emergência de um interesse sem precedentes pela arqueologia do passado contemporâneo. Com base nessa produção académica, apresentaremos neste artigo a análise diacrónica dos efeitos do incêndio que destruiu parcialmente uma casa do final do século XIX/início do século XX em Arica, no Chile. Através da articulação de métodos históricos, arqueológicos e etnográficos, pretendemos dar enquadramento a uma narrativa biográfica, deixar que a casa nos conte sobre a sua própria trajetória e que assuma o papel central na definição de noções de moralidade e de pertença, atestando a construção social do espaço. Defendemos que a casa e a sua materialidade jogaram, através de representações negativas, uma função decisiva na produção de mecanismos de desapropriação e deslocamento dos seus habitantes. Concluiremos com uma reflexão sobre como a arqueologia, pelo ponto de vista privilegiado que oferece no escrutínio histórico e contextual, proporciona um

olhar único sobre as gradações de fenómenos atuais de gentrificação e de patrimonialização e suas consequências.

[*arqueologia histórica, nacionalismo, ocupa, passado contemporâneo, desapropriação*]

The importance of things for people lies, in part, in the ways they
may contribute to new futures.
— Webb Keane (2009)

How could the decaying remains of the past contribute to a better understanding of past and present societies, and make room for new futures? This question is central to archaeology and has stirred heated debates as the question demands from the discipline a direct contribution that will make it relevant for our societies. My study emphasizes the relevance of a particular house, as a tangible and material imbroglio, in creating and enabling different senses of place and memories enmeshed in the construction of the social fabric (Harrison 2011a; Herzfeld 2006). By assessing a single, although not singular, case study, this article seeks to echo the efforts for an archaeology that is more socially committed and expects to provide an answer to the question asked above.

As a result of the theoretical debates that the discipline witnessed over the last decades of the twentieth century, the validity of the production of knowledge about the past "just for the sake of knowledge" was questioned (Atalay et al. 2016; Hodder et al. 1995). With the acknowlegment of the politics and power relations involved in archaeological practice, many archaeologists turned their attention to more contemporary issues and more critical stances (Dawdy 2010, 2016; Harrison 2011b). Deeply influenced by the politics of memory and its processes of historical remembering and forgetting, archaeologists started dealing with some of the conflicting social scenarios produced by late capitalism (Buchli and Lucas 2001; Funari, Zarankin, and Salerno 2009; González-Ruibal 2006; McGuire and Reckner 2003; Olivier 2001; Schofield 2009).[1] Additionally, works like Rathje and Murphy's (2001) critical approach to current attitudes regarding garbage disposal in different cities in the United States; Zimermann, Singleton, and Welch's (2010) inquiry into the lives of homeless people in urban contexts (see also Kiddey 2014); recent archaeological approaches to poverty (Walker, Beaudry, and Wall 2011; cf. Spencer-Woods and Matthews 2011); or De León's (2012) work on undocumented migration all insist on an "archaeology of us" and on bringing research closer to contemporary contexts.

Building on this scholarship, I frame my argument through a diachronic analysis of a fire that partially destroyed a late nineteenth-century house in the city of Arica, Chile. Through archaeological mapping, a review of historical material, documentation of architectural features, and an ethnographic approach to the life of its inhabitants, the house takes center stage and attests to the intricacy of the historical contexts in which it is inserted. In this work, the house is at the core of a biographic narrative that permits access to some of the stories and events imprinted on the material vestiges of the house. As González-Ruibal claims, "ruins are full of involuntary mementos, presences and stories" (2014, 369).

Here, I will produce a frame for a biographic story and let the house speak about its life. As with any biography, this one will involve some gaps. I identify these gaps as tensions in the process of remembering and forgetting, which are relevant in the understanding of the politics of memory and in providing historicity. Prior to that, I offer some historical context for the house, which hopefully will be useful in pinpointing some elements of the politics of placemaking and dispossession that inform the construction of the social. I conclude with some thoughts about how archaeology's priviledged viewpoint of contextual historical scrutiny provides nuanced insights about the repercussions of current phenomena of gentrification and heritage making.

STORIES FROM THE MARGINS: A HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE BLUE HOUSE

The house that is central to this study lies in the heart of a complex history of colonialization and violence that spans the Hispanic occupation of Chilean valleys like Moquegua, Azapa, and Pica, and the foundation of port cities such as Arica, in the sixteenth century, to the aftermath of the War of the Pacific, stretching into the twentieth century. In colonial times, Arica attained notoriety as a port through which the silver obtained from Potosí was dispatched to Spain (Figure 1). Later, these towns supplied agricultural and maritime products to a wide network of settlements on both sides of the Cordillera de los Andes (Andean Mountains)(Assadourian 1979; Herrera 1997). All of these colonial economic activities set up commercial networks that reached as far south as present-day northwestern Argentina, establishing a strong commercial elite throughout the región (Justiniano 2008; Langer and Hames 1994; Michel and Savic 1999).

The advent of the *republicas* created the need to negotiate a rigid social structure, which, however fraught, guided the relationships between Spaniards and other peoples (cf. Carillo 2006). The rise of national elites resulted mainly from the implementation of power relations defined by the structures of the new nation-states and the displacement of previous indigenous elites. The newly established elites generally attained power and control by either successfully retaining their privileges by blending themselves into the national discourse or by capitalizing on the commercial networks previously established and seizing control of productive lands and preexisting economic activities. Apparently built around the last decades of the nineteenth century and
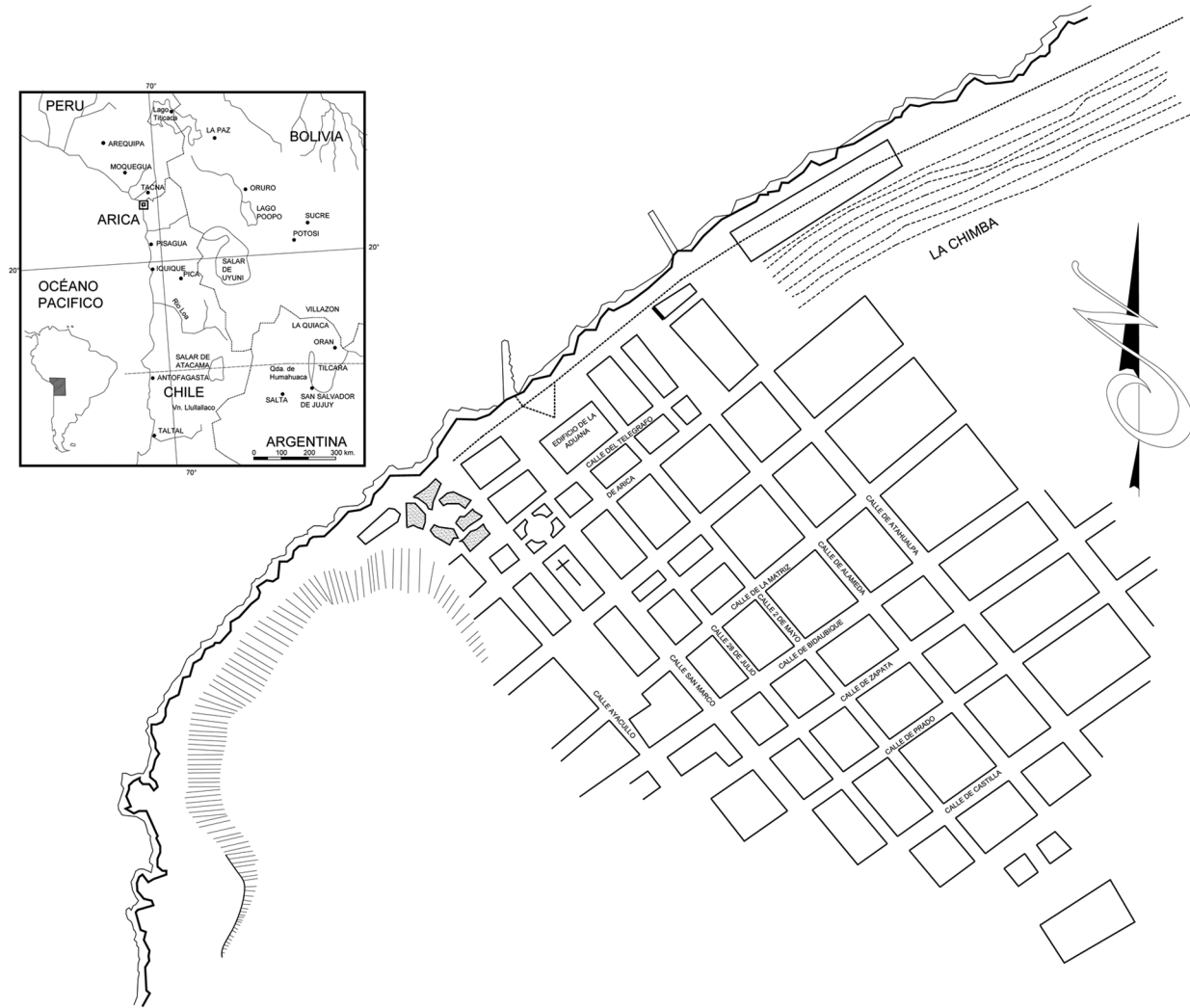
FIGURE 1. *Map of the region (inset) and the city of Arica. The latter was redrawn after a 1902 map of the city made by the Asociación de Aseguradores Contra-Incendio.*

belonging to a republican aristocrat family, the house at issue was amid this complex restructuring of Arica's society and its urban spaces.

In Arica, as in other cities of Tarapacá, the tensions that emerged from this social upheaval at the beginning of the republican era manifested again when the War of the Pacific prompted a new configuration of ethnic and social forces against a different national backdrop. During the war, the cities of Arica and Tacna were at the center of a territorial dispute between Chile and Peru that was partially settled by the Ancón Treaty in 1883 (Borchard 1922). This controversy was finally sanctioned in 1929 when, with the mediation of the United States, Arica became part of the Chilean territory, whereas Tacna remained part of Peru; both diplomatic arrangements established the present-day national frontiers, defining Arica's identity as a border city. Immediately after the war, the Chilean state launched a social engineering program to establish its leading nationalist values, as well as its norms, legislation, and economic, social, and cultural practices.

This program, known as Chilenization, sought to transform a significantly diverse and multicultural population, comprising *criollo* and *mestizo* Peruvians, as well as indigenous and descendents of former African slaves, into modern Chilean subjects by instilling its national ideology. The study of the Chilenization process and the pernicious effects of state policies over indigenous communities in the territory of Tarapacá has been extensively documented by historians and anthropologists (H. González 1997; Van Kessel 1992). However, a study of how this process attempted to overturn the ideology of Peruvian nationality while infusing the Chilean one—as expressed in terms of its materiality, both rural and urban—is still missing. The architecture of the blue house—its style and materials—provides such an opportunity because it bears testimony to this very conflict-ridden and traumatic historical process. Although Chilenization had an official side, it also resulted in violent actions when fascist parties known as the Ligas Patrioticas attacked anything evoking a stigmatized Peruvian identity (S. Gonzalez 2004; Palacios 1974). As such, its permanence (or survival),

exhibiting some distinctive elements of the old Peruvian houses, attests to the stubborness to the transforming process of Chilenization of the territory in the first half of the twentieth century.

During the second half of the 1900s, when the house was occupied by an Italian migrant family, it was a silent witness to the urban growth of Arica and the modernization of the city through urban and economic development strategies promoted by the Junta de Adelanto de Arica, a council formed by local intellectuals and politicians. Arica experienced rapid demographic growth, which came with the expansion of its industrial park into new areas of the city, the creation of new residential neighborhoods, and the construction of public buildings, such as a stadium, an airport, and a university. Many families moved out to occupy better-suited spaces, leaving the old historic center as a business and administrative sector. However, despite the significant economic growth, some sectors of the city, including the margins of the old historic center, remained stagnant (Quiroz 2015). By the last decades of the twentieth century, the house remained mostly occupied by different tenants who were finally evicted by 2010, when the house was put up for sale.

Despite its apparent vacancy, archaeological evidence suggests that the house remained occupied—illegally—until October 2014, when the fire forced the occupants out. Soon after, neighbors noticed the presence of new squatters in the house and complained about its use as a dumpster by unknown people. Again, the house was depicted negatively and, this time, as an unpleasant void space, prompting action by municipal officers, which resulted in the cleansing of the house and its subsequent demolition. Through the analysis of this fire, which hints at stories of the house's life, I connect the dots to reveal the contours of what I perceive as historically sedimented mechanisms of dispossession, epitomizing what Ann Stoler (2013) has called "imperial formations." The blue house, therefore, provides archaeological correlates to historical accounts that situate it within the social turmoil that characterized the region at the beginning of the 1900s. As such, it conforms to an uncomfortable heritage that stands out and challenges an official discourse based on the displacement of other pasts.

BIOGRAPHIES, TORN WALLS, AND RUINOUS MEMORIES: ON HISTORICITY AND ABJECT STORY-LIVES

In the introductory essay to his groundbreaking edited volume, *The Social Life of Things*, Arjun Appadurai (1986) argued against the dichotomous separation between humans and things by emphasizing their intricate relations in the configuration of everyday life and social reality (cf. Hodder 1982; Strathern 1999). He contended that, like human beings, things could be framed and understood within their own lifecycles, entering the social world (as gifts, commodities and so forth), becoming part of different social dynamics while in use, and then departing from life when discarded. Based on Kopytoff's (1986) idea that the circulation of commodities situates things within socially and culturally dynamic processes, Appadurai's edited volume challenged the ortodox economic perspective in which the production of value is seen as a single and static process. As such, the different contributions implied temporal and polysemic aspects created in the intertwined relations between humans and things (cf. Appadurai 1986, 2006).

The biography metaphor has provided archaeologists with a tool, however rudimentary, to incorporate objects and things as active agents in the construction of the social (Gosden and Marshall 1999). Incorporating this nuanced perspective, archaeologists acknowledge a certain centrality of things, previously foreclosed. These works have demonstrated how short and long life histories of artifacts (jars, houses, megaliths, sherds, ruins, sites, and other things) are interwoven in a constant process that always takes place in a historical present, from which we attempt to reveal the manifold connections in which they are embedded (Holtorf 2002). Biographies of objects, however, also have been harshly criticized for reifying an anthropocentric view that, in the personification of nonhuman beings as bio-subjects, not only casts away or neutralize their potential for interpelation but also reinforces conventional epistemologies framed on a rhetoric based on genealogical and genetic bio-principles (Domanska 2007, 180). Because biographies take human beings as their main point of reference, critics argue, they void things of their thingness, turning them into subaltern subjects whose voice can be heard *only* in terms of the anthropocentric discourse allowing them to talk. In other words, once turned into persons and bound by our (human) bio-principles, objects and things remain silent while their lives are told by, in our case, archaeologists.

Challenging such anthropocentric traps in what has been called the "turn to things," different authors have attempted to move on from previous considerations of things as passive to view them as active in the production of the social (González-Ruibal 2008, 2014; Hodder 2012; Olsen 2010; Witmore 2014; cf. Bauer and Kosiba 2016). In order to make my argument and consider the potential of the biographic metaphor, while also taking its critiques as a caution, I resort to González-Ruibal's (2014) take on contemporary archaeology. Informed by a new materialist perspective, he asserts: "I understand the archaeology of the recent past as a form of *ekphrasis*: a creative work that respects the truth inherent to the thing with which it works—in this case, ruins" (375). Drawing on Walter Benjamin's work, González-Ruibal's *ekphrasis* is not necessarily concerned with the explanation of what is represented but rather in disclosing what is embedded in it. This resonates with my biographic take on the ruinous house (and its materiality, which is composed of experiences, events, and stories), emphasizing historicity through its vestiges that are present in our encounter, telling histories and confronting us as we study them.

Similarly, reflecting on recent trends in archaeology, modernity, and temporality, Dawdy highlights Benjamin's ruminations on ruins as "'dialectical images' that reveal time's twists and strip away the facades that mask the contradictions of social life" (2010, 761; cf. 2015). According to Dawdy, "looking for dialectical images is akin to provoking involuntary memory of the conditions that produced the relations between objects and people" (2010, 769). While subjectivities and relationships (dependences and dependencies, *sensu* Hodder 2012) tend to fade, they become evident when impregnated on things and spaces; they remain to bear witness and interpellate. By considering the hybrid mingling of objects and people as rhythms displayed in a syncopated fashion, these nuanced temporalities emerge, producing their own story.

Not all stories about ruins are stories about magnificence. What's more, some objects never achieve the conditions to enter into the category of ruins, as understood by the romantic gaze or the disciplinary scrutiny of archaeology. That is when ruination, as part of a process of constant becoming (Bergson 1947), takes center stage. Ruination refers to the process through which landscapes and spaces are hollowed out and negated, and decay becomes the main protagonist in the production of a "social afterlife of structures, sensibilities, and things" (Stoler 2013, 9). Here, Kristeva's theory of the abject is important, because ruination could also be seen as a way of "jettisoning of what seems to be part of oneself" (see McAfee 2004, 46). I equate Kristeva's notion of the abject with ruination because the latter is also a way of letting things go.

Through ruination (as decay), something is discarded and/or excluded by being confined to the margins (or negative spaces). But as with the abject, that something constantly returns to challenge the very borders of the social self. In his celebrated treatise, *Matter and Memory*, Bergson (1947) opposes analysis, the positivist method through which an object is dissected and categorized, to intuition, a way to grasp duration and change. What is at stake here is Bergson's concept of duration, which is defined by simultaneous unity and multiplicity. In referring to palimpsests as cumulative phenomena of sequences and physical changes (erosion, recycling, alteration, destruction, abandonment, and so forth), Olivier (2011) points also to their singularity (a single archaeological site, a landscape, an archaeological feature).

Ruination evidences the multiplicity of palimpsestic phenomena embedded in the very materiality and its substantial and singular physicality. However, unlike some early claims about agency discussed above, I am not conceiving the house as an animistic or fetishistic entity that performs some sort of human-like agency; to the contrary, I contend that, through the lenses of archaeology, ruination provides the possibility of a dialectical exercise to understand a social world in which things, objects, and ruins are crucial elements *in* and *through* the processes of social transformation. The histories of a burned house, told by the very process of decay and fragmentation of its walls and its whole structure, reveal the discourses of dispossession and their contradictions, as holes in the social fabric.

THE BLUE HOUSE FIRE: DOCUMENTING SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL DISPLACEMENTS

> When studying recent ruins, then, we study the most dynamic period of an abandoned site. This requires a particular way of telling things, including a sensibility for the non-human.
> — Alfredo González-Ruibal (2014, 372)

The exploration of derelict and abandoned places has become a common practice; recently coined as urban exploration, it has attained the status of a subdiscipline (Garrett 2013). According to Orser (2011), this fascination can be traced back to the nineteenth century when "the practice of slumming—visiting the poorest districts of the West's urban centers to view its residents and their conditions—was a common amusement of the upper and upper-middle classes" (541). Paul Mullins (2012) has also reflected on the idea of "ruin porn" and the strange fascination that ruins have recently sparked in popular culture (cf. Dawdy 2010). How can an archaeological perspective differ from those of urban exploration, the romantization of ruins, or the problematic exotization of poverty? What kinds of issues and discussions does it bring to the table?

In the early hours of October 2, 2014, several firefighter companies of Arica, the northernmost city of Chile, joined forces to battle a fire. According to witnesses and the fire department report, the fire had started around two o'clock in the morning and quickly consumed part of the frontis and one of the three *mojinete* roofs of a nineteenth-century house: the blue house, as it came to be known, for its distinctive color (Figure 2). After a couple of hours of intense work, the centennial house, then badly damaged, was declared free of the voracious fire.

The blue house was one of the few remaining expressions of the architectural style that characterized the region at the beginning of the twentieth century (Figure 3). The iconic roof of the house, where the fire apparently started, was destroyed by the flames, but no casualties were reported. Considered an unoccupied building, scarce attention—other than that shown by a few people interested in historic heritage—was devoted to the event. After the fire, the house stood without doors and windows in one of its units, leaving the place completely open to outsiders, until the remains were demolished in mid-2015.

In November 2014, the municipality announced in a local newspaper that, due to several complaints, they would intervene to clean the house and deal with the potential health hazard. Until that time, the owners of the property had not come forward to deal with the problem or to secure the house. Having read the annoucement, I asked municipal officials for permission to accompany the team of workers during the cleansing process. I was granted permission by the Office of Salubrity Management (Dirección de Aseo y

FIGURE 2. *The blue house after the fire. At the left, an excerpt from the local newspaper* La Estrella de Arica *(October 5, 2014) about the fire. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]*
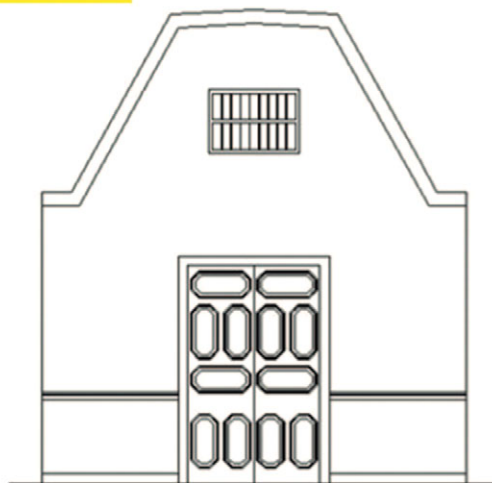

FIGURE 3. *Excerpt from the newspaper* La Estrella de Arica *about the burned house, emphasizing its architectural features. At the right, a sketched profile of the roof, characteristic of* mojinete *houses (Perez 2014, 54). [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]*

Ornato) in coordination with the Office of Culture (Departamento de Cultura) of the municipality of Arica. My initial objective—to have an archaeological team participate in the salvage operation—was aimed at documenting the architecture of early twentieth-century Arica and analyzing current processes of negotiating urban space from an archaeological perspective.

In order to archaeologically document its architecture, materials, and contexts, the house was divided into three units, each comprising two rooms under the *mojinete* roofs and a fourth unit (the house's patio) located in the back (Figure 4). The changes in the configuration of the house—for instance, the addition of new rooms or new divisions of

the space—were recorded as chronological markers, and the activities of itinerant occupants of the house were mapped. The latter allowed us to distinguish some particularities in the use of certain areas as opposed to others. Complementarily, a stratigraphic sequence that attests to the last phases of occupation of the house, when it was occupied by squatters, was documented.

The information attained through the "abrupt archaeological excavation," allowed by the expedited cleansing of the premises, showed evidence of these (un)expected presences both before and after the fire took place. Many iterative actions that conformed to the daily lives of its inhabitants, some of them quite ephemeral, had become concretely inscribed
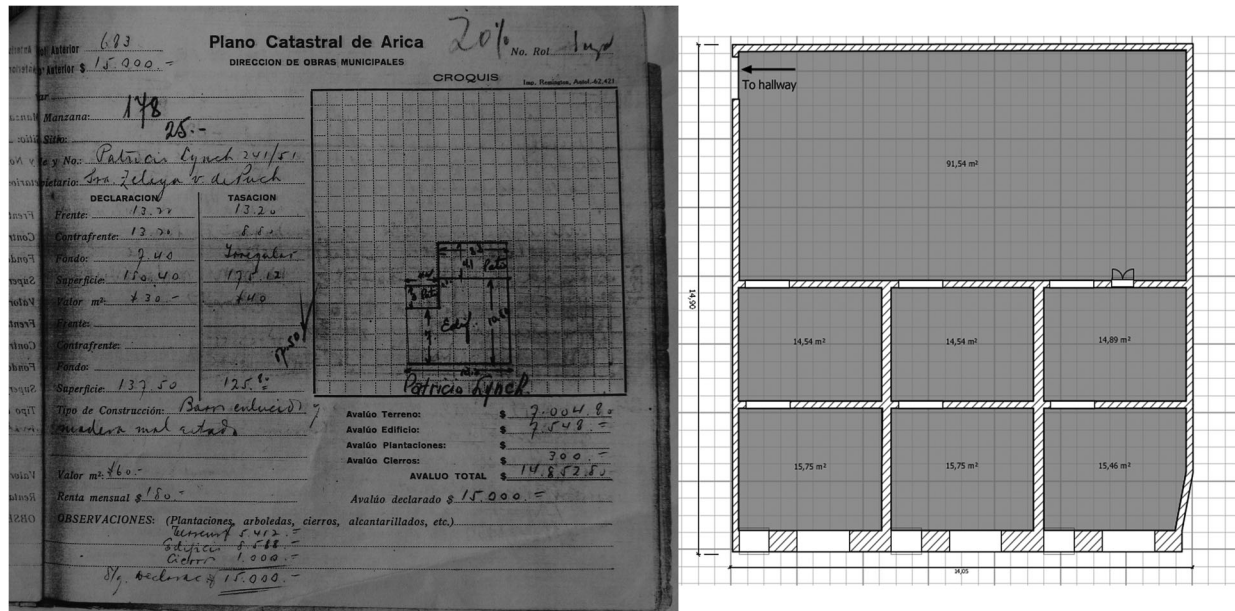
FIGURE 4. *Cadastral document with information about the house. At the right, a plan of the house according to archaeological documentation.*

by a constant process of deposition of materials and the decay of the place. Although most of the archaeological deposits observed consisted of recent, and not consolidated, layers of garbage, there were a few clear stratigraphic deposits related to the burning event. The burning was evidenced not only in the remaining poles and walls of the house but also in a layer of debris that clearly separated squatting activities as pre- and post-fire.

Once the fire was doused, the wall's matrices remained standing (although affected by the water used to put out the fire), and most of the floors ended up covered by debris resulting from the collapse of the mats of thatched roof. As a result, some of the contexts of occupation of the house prior to the fire, like the ones described below, were covered and sealed. In the following sections, after brief comments on the house's architecture, I will discuss the phases of occupation as intertwined and juxtaposed instead of discretely separated. I would expect that the chronicle of the house's life will emanate from these observations. I argue that the main elements in the narrative and the forthcoming analysis refer to processes of displacement and the negotiation of negative spaces that I aim to scrutinize.

Part I. Meshed Histories and Entangled Lives in Traumatic Settings: Racial Stains and Social Marks

Despite the lack of an accurate dating, it seems that the blue house was built around, if not before, the time when some major historical events affected the city: the earthquake that literally wiped out most of the city in 1868 and, a few years later, the War of the Pacific. When Chile took possession of the conquered lands in 1883, the territory of Tarapacá experienced traumatic social, cultural, and demographic changes, mainly resulting from extractive economic

strategies used by British and American capital in the region (Gonzalez 2004). Fitting right into this narrative, the blue house was one of the few buildings that characterized the architecture of southern Peru since colonial times; just like before, however, hollow cane and mud remained as indices of racial and social "otherness."

Mojinete houses are defined by their gabled roofs with trapezoidal, flattened peaks. They usually have tall walls built on a rectangular or quadrangular foundation, especially in the southern regions of colonial and early republican Peru (Montenegro 2010; Perez 2014; Walker 2008). After major earthquakes shook the colonial cities, Spanish authorities sought construction techniques that would not only be affordable but also resistant to the seismic nature of cities on the Pacific coast. They decided to adopt the *quincha*—an indigenous technique of construction that roughly relates to wattle-and-daub architecture (Walker 2008). The incorporation of the quincha walls allowed architects of the Viceroyalty of Peru to "provide a definitive solution to the earthquake problem that had plagued [Lima, and to build] the monumental and lofty interiors which paralleled and even rivaled with European designs" (Rodriguez 2003, 1741). Similarly, although the origins of the mojinete are unclear (cf. Montenegro 2010), they are also deeply rooted in pre-Hispanic construction techniques.

Thus, praised for its antiseismic qualities, the use of quincha walls and mojinete roofs has characterized the architecture of southern Peruvian cities like Moquegua, Tacna, and others, and its prevalence extends through the independence era (Montenegro 2010). During most of the colonial and early republican periods, the low cost of the materials was also decisive in the popularization of quincha and mojinete houses, contrasting with more expensive constructions. However, even when the Bourbon authorities ruled

that quincha walls were the most appropriate after the 1746 earthquake that hit Lima, they were resisted by upper classes as a way to distance themselves from the poor classes; the former were willing to disregard safety in order to maintain notions of space and power as markers of their status. Despite their functional advantages, quincha walls kept the original sin of bearing features of indigeneity in the City of Kings, as Lima was known, reflecting its "residents' laziness and hedonism" (Walker 2008, 65, 102–3), and clearly demarcating social and racial lines. This sort of distinction was present in the architecture of cities like Moquegua (Perez 2014) and, presumably, also in the rest of the Tarapacá region.

With foundations that suggest its permanence in Arica's social scene at least since the end of the nineteenth century, the blue house was originally connected to a bigger house that currently remains standing in the south-southeastern corner of the block (Figure 4). According to the cadastral information, the house belonged to David Puch, a merchant native from Jujuy, Argentina, and member of the plutocratic elite of the young Peruvian republic. He had a prosperous business, established prior to the War of the Pacific, which was part of the internal market and regional commerce networks of the southern Andes. Additionally, the Puchs seem to have owned different properties in Arica, the neighboring valley of Camarones, and possibly other locations in the region. According to oral history, the blue house hosted the individuals who served for the Puch family and remained in their possession after the War of the Pacific due to the subsequent changes made by the Chilean administrators of the region in 1929, when the situation led the original owners to flee the area.

This narrative is also consistent with the spatial ordering and the oral history that attributes the blue house to three occupants who were part of the staff: the cook, the gardener, and the butler. According to Montenegro (2010, 38), these features characterized the houses of servants in the architecture of the nineteenth century in southern Peru (cf. Walker 2008). All the sections that comprised the blue house were connected through an internal patio (Figure 5) and were attached to the bigger house through a narrow hallway in the back, which was sealed when the former owners left Arica. At the beginning of the 1900s, the bigger house seems to have been transferred to the Copaja family, renowned descendants of a lineage of indigenous leaders of the region since the eighteenth century (Hidalgo and Castro 2004). However, although it is known that the Copaja family aparently owned the bigger property, at least since 1902, there is no clear indication about what happened to the blue house around that time.

If during the eighteenth century the region was connected to the silver-mining economy, with the advent of the republics at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the emergent Peruvian plutocracy was keen to engage in commercial enterprise with foreign investors. After the War of the Pacific, the Chilean state's goals to redefine the territory and people's identity were clear. Boasting a prevalent liberal thinking, the new republican states were determined to promote a society that would mirror the enlightened European ones (culturally and ethnically) and decided very early to open to European migration.

The fact that the Puch family left for Lima and northern Argentina, leaving behind a significant part of their property in the Arica and Camarones regions after the War of the Pacific, shows that the conflict affected the regional social fabric and modified the social structure of the city. Following the turmoil caused by the war, under Chilean administration, the blue house appears registered as the property of an Italian immigrant (Venegas and Peralta 1927, 276). Whereas this information can be corroborated in Arica's Cadastral Record of 1930, the details about the legal transactions within or between families are missing. In any case, the blue house remains at the center of the social dynamics of the time, and the changes it underwent, which can be observed archaeologically (i.e., closing of the pathways and other reconfigurations of the blue house), are precisely related to the incorporation of this territory and its new demographics under Chilean jurisdiction.

It is not surprising that, in this scenario, mojinete houses were still an important element of Arica's urban landscape at the beginnings of the twentieth century. At the time, as mentioned earlier, the mojinete roofs were an architectural feature of Peruvianness that became a stigma when Chile took over the territory of Tarapacá. Thus, I argue that both mojinete houses and quincha walls can also be seen as elements that embody the constitution of "the marginal," historically and socioeconomically. As such, exclusion and displacement can be tracked down in the unfolding history of the house, its foundations, its decay, and its destruction.

Part II. Hints of Intimacy: Shaping Memories with Clashing Recollections

For Chile, establishing control over the population meant bolstering a new national identity, preferably erasing any signs of previous "Peruvianness" or "indigeneity." The social scenario changed significantly by the turn of the twentieth century. As Stefanie Gänger (2009) puts it:

> The immediate impact of the annexation of Tarapacá in 1884 marked the intended cultural, political, and social appropriation of the region. In the 1890s the Chilean government allowed a plural society composed of workers and capitalists from different national contexts to emerge in the annexed and occupied nitrate regions.

As part of this process, the blue house was owned by an Italian immigrant who had arrived in Arica in 1917 and became "a prestigious member of the Italian colony, highly regarded by the community of Arica" (Venegas and Peralta 1927, 276; my translation; cf. Aprile and Pellegrini 1926).[2] The changes in the spatial organization of the house during this period (1917–2015) became archaeologically evident underneath the accumulated trash.
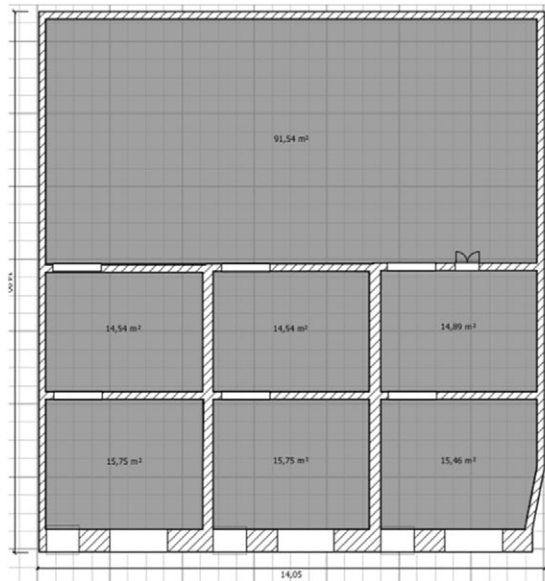
FIGURE 5. *Plan and isometric figure of the house foundation. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]*

Apparently, the blue house was modified during the last decades of the twentieth century, when new toilet rooms were added and new arrangements of the space took place. The house was divided into three units, each of them with its own entrance and bathroom, and with a consequent reduction of the patio. The separation of each unit as a domestic household seems to have been related to the adaptation of the building as a place for leasing. At some point during the early 1990s, the patio areas of units 1 and 2 were reworked and paved, and unit 3, divided by a plywood wall, became independent of the rest of the original house (Figure 6).

Although an accurate chronology of subsequent changes is hard to pin down, an analysis of the similarity of materials and construction techniques shown by some of the rooms suggest that most of these modifications occurred between the decades of 1970–1990. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, the house underwent a few minor repairs observed in the archaeological record, such as the fixing of the hallway in room 1, which connected the entrance of the house to room 2. This arrangement, I found out later, was done by Maria (pseudonym), a young woman who came forward a few days after a picture of the house, then marching toward its demolition, was posted on social media by a group of historical enthusiasts called Arica Revive (roughly, Arica's Revival). She had lived in the house before and was utterly touched by the news of the fire. She was keen on telling her story, so an interview was arranged.

Maria recalled that her family moved into the house when she was eleven and had great memories of living there. Some of the happiest memories Maria described were about her and her little brother mischievously throwing water balloons from a small attic at people passing by the front doors, and then hiding. The attic was located on top of room 4 and served as the living room for her family. According to Maria, when they moved in, the building already
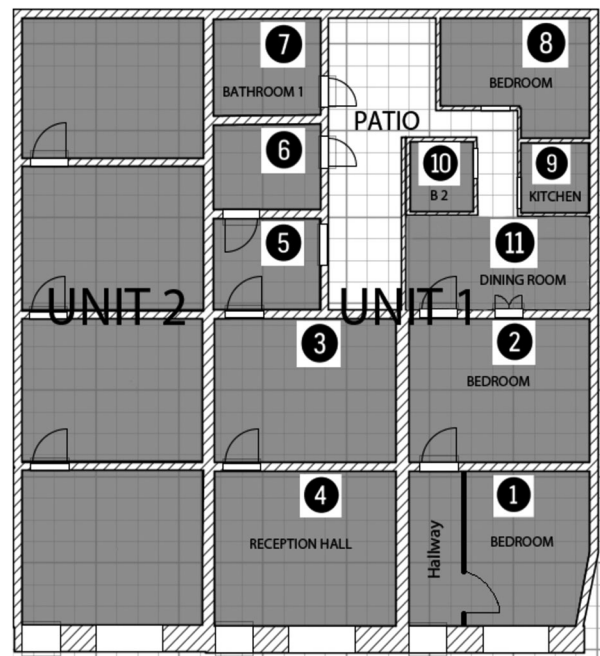
FIGURE 6. *Modifications at the house (ca. 1990–2010). Previous units 1 and 2 became a single compound and the rest of the house became an independent unit.*

had two separate units: the first unit comprised by previous units 1 and 2, with a joint backyard, and the second unit comprised by former unit 3. By then, the back patio of unit 1 was already transformed and accomodated a kitchen, a dining room, and a toilet (rooms 5, 6, and 11). Along with these new arrangements came the repairing of the division of room 1. Transitioning from youth to adulthood, Maria was eager to have her own room; the interior curtain wall made of hardboard panels that she installed,

replacing the original light wall, provided her with such a place. While her mother and her youngest brother occupied room 2, her little sister occupied room 8, in the rear of the house.

Although the fire did not affect the back section of the house seriously, its aftermath completed the decay. As in the front rooms, the roof of the back rooms fell down and sealed some of the contents, covering a deposit of old papers, receipts, and documents. When Maria was shown some of the findings documented in the process of cleansing of the house (mostly scraps of paper and old notebooks), she recognized several items and provided some context for them. For instance, she immediately identified the hand-writing on some of the pieces of paper—song lyrics and letters that her younger sister would write to one of her friends—and was noticeably affected seeing the fractured walls of her former bedroom.

In that particular exercise, singular items reflected a multiplicity of meanings (interweaving material remains and memory) and heterogenous temporalities embedded in them. Maria's recollections make clear the significance of encountering a physical and material world that shaped different aspects of her life and social world. The torn and cracked walls revealed layers of wallpaper, initially meant to separate the plaster mud of the quincha walls, but which eventually covered deterioration and decoloration, and *démodé* designs, revamping sections of the house and leaving others neglected. Similarly, some of the walls were transformed—metal windows were added to blank walls, others were erected, and some of them, having lost their hardness and luster even before the fire, were left to crumble. The scraps of bygone days not only acted as mnemonic devices but also attested to their stubbornness to resist and, simultaneously, to assert the immanence of time.

There is little information about what happened in the house after the eviction of Maria's family; nevertheless, what is worth highlighting here is that, built in the walls of the house and imprinted on the dispersed odds and ends that cluttered the decaying rooms, hints of intimacy otherwise elusive and ephemeral emerged when Maria engaged the iconocity of the remains (Shanks, Platt, and Rathje 2004, 62). These scraps of evidence revealed intimate aspects (about privacy, young love, friendship, and so on) related to the coming of age of two girls in the diachronic construction of personal identities, and showed how the sense of social belonging was experienced and negotiated by some of its occupants. Processes of individualization, socialization, and the very definition of the girls' personas are tightly attached to fragments that provide glimpses of a certain time (actuality), defining temporalities through story-lives.

Part III. Morality, Absence, and the Production of the Uncanny: Abandonment, Squatters, Eviction

The fire of October 2014, which basically destroyed half of the house, brought it back from oblivion to haunt the social imaginary yet again. The house, far from being relegated to the past, emerged as a place that still guarded some of the memories of Arica citizens and its (conflicted) heritage. Simultaneously, nevertheless, it was promptly transformed into a marginal place, devoid of sanity and order. I argue that the negativity projected on to this kind of space conjugates historical and cultural as well as social and economic elements, which are key in the negotiation of urban space.

A few years earlier, after the eviction of the last tenants, the house was unsuccessfully put on sale. Included on the list of buildings worth preserving, the house was protected by a local statute based on national heritage legislation.[3] This legislation prevented the owners of such buildings to conduct any modification or alteration for the sake of patrimonial preservation, but it barely supported initiatives or acts of preservation. Without many possibilities of being restored or even being sold to developers, the blue house slowly faded into ruination.

Nevertheless, rather than showing a state of complete abandonment, the archaeological evidence exposed an active use of the site expressed through: (1) the continuous accumulation of trash by neighbors and outsiders, and (2) scavenging activities by unofficial occupants of the house. It almost immediately revealed itself as a wild territory dominated by vagrant people. Nobody knows when the outcasts entered the house, but everyone on the block knew that the house was inhabited by squatters, and their presence cast a shadow of negativity that was soon highlighted by the stench of the garbage accumulated in the house.

Because of the nature of the site and the rushing process of its documentation, contrary to other reported experiences excavating contemporary archaeological sites (i.e., Buchli and Lucas 2001, 158), it was impossible to keep an accurate register of items removed by municipal workers, much less to categorize them by attributes. However, a large repertoire of items was registered in an improvised inventory of things and objects that resulted from material deposition after the fire. The differences between the existing items in the rooms shed light about the use of the spaces; while some of them were purposely used to dispose of waste (littering), there were others that were kept more habitable.

Rooms 1 and 2 were first documented when the cleansing began. Located next to the street, and with the doors and the windows gone after the fire, room 1 was the most affected by the littering from outsiders, who filled the room almost a half-meter high. This was also the case in room 3. Middens of trash covered the first couple of rooms and a large portion of the patio, overflowing even to the interior of rooms 3, 4 and 11 (Figure 6), attesting to the use of the place as a dumpster after the fire. The trash in these rooms comprised skeletons of old mattresses (wires of springs and frames), scraps of paper, notebooks and newspapers, stuffed animals, shoes and clothes, all of them battered and worn out, and many plastic bags containing even more waste.

Clothes of different kinds, all torn and ragged, were certainly a central component of this particular collection that was deemed worthless and, therefore, thrown away by

FIGURE 7. *Plan of the house and areas of occupation by squatters: (a) cooking and eating areas; and (b) sleeping areas. The inset pictures show the sleeping areas after the fire. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]*

the team in charge of the cleansing. Most of them were simply worn-out rags, showing sweat and other stains, which gave away signs of being part of lives that were lived on their own terms and with scarce regard to social rules. The promiscuity of this assemblage hinted at chaotic aspects and activities—what has been termed "unconstituted practices" (Buchli and Lucas 2001, 14)—that had taken place in the house, which are commonly not recognized as socially acceptable (cf. Kiddey 2014; Kiddey and Schofield 2011). A considerable amount of cigarrette butts, lighters, and empty bottles of various alcoholic drinks, ubiquitous among the trash, were scattered on the surface, suggesting the continuous consumption and use of such items. Spatial patterns analysis suggests that some sectors of the house were used repeatedly as part of daily activities. For instance, cooking and probably eating was done in the open space between rooms 7 and 8 at the back of the patio (Figure 7). There, an improvised hearth made of cement blocks standing sideways provided a kitchen area where the preparation of meals seems to have taken place. The presence of remains of discarded food as well as plastic cups, forks, and spoons suggests the frequent reuse of discardable utensils and little attention to hygiene, which attests to an underclass condition.

According to this archaeological evidence, after the fire this specific sector of the house hosted particular social activities (eating, drinking, and smoking) whereas rooms 5 and 6 were used, not exclusively, as sleeping areas. Heavy drinking seems to have taken place around the hearth's fire, as per the bottles of alcohol scattered around, and most of the social activities of the squatters were probably taking place in

the rear part of the house to avoid being seen from outside. This attempt to hide these activities from public scrutiny relates to the fact that alcohol consumption among these groups is commonly stigmatized in Western(ized) societies (Kiddey 2014; Room 2005). The kinds of garbage described above differs from the kinds related to a former phase of occupation of the house by squatters prior to the fire, as I will show.

Under the fill of garbage chunks, the original roof (made of hollow cane and combed straw tied with reeds, and coated with mud) emerged. In some sections of rooms 1, 2, 8, 10, and 11, the collapsed roof formed a stratigraphic layer that sealed contexts of previous occupations. At least two sleeping areas belonging to this phase, located in rooms 1 and 10 (Figure 7), were clearly documented. Both rooms presented improvised beds made out of cardboard layers with sponge mattresses on top, which were placed next to the walls and opposing the entrance. The condition of the blankets, comforters, and pillows, especially in the small kitchen room, denoted a heavy use, which probably means that they were being recycled for use or reuse after having been discarded. Room 1, however, seems to have had a different use before the fire; next to another improvised bed, and also sealed by the collapse of the roof, there was a medium-sized luggage bag. When opened, the bag showed different items that were not consistent with the evidence found in the rest of the house.

Most of the components of this assemblage, such as shoes and clothes, stood out for their good condition in comparison to that of other contexts. Additionally, the presence of

FIGURE 8. *Close up of the cache of items (toys, religious figurines, cologne, and so on) contained in the bag. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]*

toiletries like soap bars, deodorant, and perfume and cologne bottles suggest that personal care was important. Among the personal belongings that survived the fire when covered with the collapse of the building's roof were women's clothes and shoes, and children's clothes, toys, and stuffed animals, all in good condition. Along with these items, there were a saint's figurine, an empty smartphone box, and a bottle of men's cologne, which greatly differed from other assemblages recorded during the cleansing (Figure 8).

Archaeological evidence suggests that at the moment of the fire, the unauthorized residents, portrayed abjectly by neighbors, were present at the house and had to flee the residence, leaving everything behind. Whereas no additional evidence could have been collected, it can be gleaned from the remains (clothes, toys, and other personal items) found in this context that, at the time, at least one young person was occupying the room with one or more adults. Whoever these occupants of the house were, they did not conform to the usual profile of abject and drug-addicted homeless; however, even when it can be said that the material culture recovered could easily be related to an image of a family—traditionally comprising parents and children—it is still unclear who was inhabiting this abject space. Were they, perhaps, part of the large crowds of inmigrants who sometimes make a stop in Arica on their way to Santiago, the capital city? Where did they go after the fire? Why did they not seek to recover their belongings, or did they? All of this remains unknown.

DISCUSSION

The fact that most of the neighbors with whom I spoke held "junkies and [illegal] foreigners who lived at the house" responsible for the fire is very telling about how the house was seen in a local imaginary as something in which

"morality and materiality co-constitute each other" (Dawdy 2010, 771). Neglected and ruinous spaces are commonly related to deviant social conduct and normless practices; this relation, however, has begun to be interrogated only recently. Understood as the most relevant manifestation of the aftereffects of capitalism under the guise of national and imperial projects (Gordillo 2014; Stoler 2013), ruins—archaeological or other—move away from the image and aesthetics commonly projected by heritage and tourist industries (González-Ruibal 2008). Abandonment and ruination, thus, are processes that not only contradict the ideal of progress in a modern city but also can question what is seen as valuable—or not—to preserve as heritage.

As stated before, the fire in the building brought the blue house back to the center of public debate. Once located at the edge of the *casco antiguo* (historic center), the blue house is now pretty much part of downtown Arica, a location that has recently gained notoriety and the interest of developers. Unlike its southern neighboring cities, Arica's proximity to the border has made it difficult to come to terms with the legacy of the War of the Pacific, even after a century (Camus and Rosenblitt 2011). The social memory that shapes the historical imaginary of Arica comprises a far more diverse and conflicted heritage than the one promoted by the official nationalist discourse. This imaginary involves racial and ethnic tensions that accentuate its condition as a frontier zone.

The house, bearing features of traditional Peruvian architecture, hosting those "unconstituted practices" and situating itself as a heterotopic presence in the city, amounts to that tension. The blue house thus poses a significant challenge to the heritage debate and colonial orders by celebrating a rather uncomfortable or undesired heritage. Although a

few people attempted to raise concerns about the house as historic heritage, the building remained neglected and transformed into a dumpsite after the fire. The presence of squatters in houses like the one described here come as no surprise. Abandoned houses and installations of various kinds, ranging from old industrial centers and mining towns (Andreassen, Bjerck, and Olsen 2010) to churches (Gordillo 2014) and civic centers (Vergara 1999), are bound to be scavenged and deteriorate. Interestingly, however, at some point, these presences (and absences) emerge, breaking structural regularities and questioning the very congruence of social and cultural norms in societies (De León 2012; Gordillo 2014).

In this sense, ruinous and haunted spaces like the blue house challenge market dictations and the regulatory restrictions established by planning authorities (first, as an undesired and abject heritage and then, after its cleansing and purification, as a prospective space for an upcoming gentrification process). Thus, the blue house epitomizes a burgeoning process of displacement and, as Kiddey (2014) asserts, through it we can see that "the practice of forcibly exporting poor people to less desirable places continues to the present day, as data . . . reveal" (39). Calling out anachronic heritage values, the blue house's ruination reveals structures and orders historically produced, and makes explicit the "political project that lays waste to certain peoples, relations, and things" (Stoler 2013, 11), and makes its life, and that of its occupants, expendable.

Most of the people who I've approached regarding the house affirmed, "the house was burnt down by the *fumones*[4] who lived there. They burnt it down!" These words summarize the general sentiment toward homeless people, deepening their conditions of abjection and social alienation. The littering of the house can be seen as a way to fight fumones and, yet, at the same time, produces a ghostified place through its rationalization as a negative and voided space. The amount of trash was more than the improvised occupants of the house could ever produce. It was the result of the people living nearby who had decided to turn the place into a negative spot. As Shanks, Platt, and Rathje put it: "garbage is a matter of relationships negotiated between hygiene and disease, matter in place and matter displaced, what is to be kept and cherished for the future, what is to be discarded on the midden of history" (2004, 80).

Whereas *use* epitomizes presence and action, *abandonment* points to an outsider condition of what is consider the social sphere. As Pétursdóttir asserts, "there is no archaeology simply of things abandoned and for things abandoned, since the ultimate goal is essentially to get beyond this nuisance in order to reconstruct a pure and un-abandoned past" (2014, 338). But what about the social outside the social? As I said at the beginning of this article, this case is just one of many cases where abandoned and derelict places become voided places; as such, they barely receive the attention of archaeologists as places where the social is constructed in negative ways in order to become oblivious (see Gordillo

2014; Stoler 2013; Zimmerman, Singleton, and Welch 2010).

Interestingly, whereas most archaeologists regard trash middens as important sources of information about societies, only a few observe or are interested in these middens as socially active. What's more, it is commonly thought that dumpsters usually reflect the spaces where the social life of objects has come to an end. The blue house provides an excellent instance to understand how modernity is built in the very process of producing some sort of order in which garbage, its social byproduct *par excellence*, becomes disentangled from the social. It also shows how destruction and decay are crucial in the constant prefabrication of a modern actuality that negates other temporalities (Dawdy 2010), which return to challenge the limits of the social as abject and negative spaces. Gonzalez-Ruibal asserts that "it is impossible to understand the creation of the new world without paying attention to the destruction of the old one" (2006, 178). In the case of the blue house, the archaeological evidence left by the fire foretells that a new world is underway. This coming, I contend, demands some kind of engaged intervention from archaeology.

CONCLUSIONS

The blue house puts the concepts of the social and social life, usually conceived within the dichotomous and antagonistic relationship between use and abandonment, under scrutiny. Understood as part of a process of constant becoming that does not stop with the destruction of things, ruination possesses the powerful ability to combine the palimpsest of debris with memories and feelings. Whereas this combination has been commonly used to inspire the grandeur of nations, it also attest to the possibility of understanding history as a constant struggle; therefore, it moves away from the static effect that the former produces to a nuanced, dynamic sensing of the social, as expressed in the material changes and the production of these negative spaces. This dynamic view of ruins, I contend, is crucial to understand things as intimately enmeshed in the process of shaping social spaces or creating vacuums and displacement, as well as challenging oblivion, or being forgotten.

The presence(s) imprinted on the materiality of the refuse evidence those "haunting absences" lurking in the insterstices of our social worlds (Gordillo 2014) and bear witness to the cruel mechanisms enacted to produce these ghostified and exorcized existences by a system that depends on their creation to support itself. The blue house, in that sense, constitutes a negative space where the outcasts have been pushed, excluded from social and political life (Agamben 1999). Thus, this precarious world provides evidence of a silent, although effective, social carnage that makes life expendable and forgettable, if it weren't for the evidence that their removal left behind.

Following Bill Rathje's (1981) claim, archaeology should no longer be seen as exclusively concerned with digging and collecting old data. It is also a way to understand the

interaction between humans and nonhumans (things, places, sites, and people), independent of their time or space. The present case study shows the abandoned house as an archaeological fingerprint of modern alienation and speaks out about the historical conditions of dispossession, nonbelonging, and abjection.

Although concepts such as dispossession and disenfranchisement have been considered and debated in archaeology (Scham 2001), they are mainly seen as related to longer-term historical processes. In other words, we have been consistently good at relating these concepts to more familiar themes in archaeology—namely, imperialism, colonialism, and to those "more traditional" disenfranchised communities, such as indigenous peoples. However, few have dealt with this issue from a more contemporary perspective.

As a result—and in spite of these contributions—the traditional perspective that sees/presents archaeology as mainly concerned with a distant past and a certain understanding of societies is still prevalent. This perspective has enabled archaeology to elide the fact that most of what is going on in terms of historical and political dispossession and disenfranchisement is still taking place. I strongly believe that these processes of disenfranchisement and dispossession should be archaeologically analyzed and called out to make archaeology's contribution relevant to new futures.

Dante Angelo *Department of Anthropology, Universidad de Tarapacá, Arica, Chile; dangeloz@uta.cl*

NOTES

1. It is important to mention that, in the last decades, there has been an increase in research pertaining to the archaeology of the contemporary past in Latin America. Most of these contributions have focused on the interplay of archaeology, materiality, and memory, and reflectively scrutinized the political violence that racked South American countries during the military regimes, what has been termed "archaeology of repression," notably Zarankin and Salerno (2008), Zarankin and Funari (2008). See also the volumes edited by Funari, Zarankin, and Salerno (2009) and, more recently, Biasatti and Compañy (2014). Here, I explore a set of issues (social displacement and ruination) that are rather neglected in debate about the archaeology of the contemporary in Latin American contexts.

2. The relatives of this person, who currently live in town, were approached as part of this research but, unfortunately, opted not to participate or offer any information about the house or their relatives. In order to respect their privacy, I decided to refrain from incorporating further information regarding their Italian ancestor or the history of the family. This refusal and the fact that no particular documentation of material related to this phase of occupation of the house, which was probably removed in order to make room for tenants to come, constitute a gap in the story-life of the house. However, situated in a much larger historic context, this gap can be seen as the resulting stability achieved during this particular historic time.

3. See the *Inmuebles de Conservación Histórica* (IMA 2009).

4. *Fumones* is the local term commonly used to describe drug addicts and homeless people, interchangeably. The term derives from the Spanish word *fumador* (smoker) and makes reference to the consumption of marijuana, a practice that, besides being illegal, is commonly vilified and socially sanctioned as morally questionable, to which—along with drinking and the consumption of other drugs—homeless are allegedly related.

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