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Moran, Dominique; Turner, Jennifer

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Carceral and military geographies: Prisons, the military and war

Dominique Moran
University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK

Jennifer Turner
Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg, Oldenburg, Germany

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Abstract

Geographers have expanded notions of the carceral, the military and war far beyond conventional ideas of the prison, the armed forces of the nation state and armed conflict, thus situating spaces of confinement, surveillance and monitoring in deep histories of violence. Nevertheless, we argue that renewed attention to these ‘conventional’ institutions reveals unanswered questions about prisons during and after war, conversion of military bases, and deployment of ex-military personnel, whose exploration would enhance understandings of the nature of the carceral, and the relationship between ‘military’ and ‘civilian’.

Keywords

carceral geography, military geography, prison, war, ex-military

1 Introduction

In June 2014, Syrian government forces broke a year-long siege of Aleppo Central Prison, a strategically important location on a key supply route for fighters in rebel-held parts of the city. The prison had been caught in the deadly stalemate of Syria’s civil war; rebels rammed car bombs into the front gates and threw shells into the compound. In appalling conditions under starvation rations, eight hundred prisoners had already died and been buried inside, and tuberculosis, gastroenteritis and gangrene were rife. Three years later, the Jabhat Fateh al-Sham jihadist group seized Central Idlib Prison from another rebel group in the ongoing struggle for control of north-western Syria.

The fate of these prisons held the world’s attention, demonstrating both the significance of robust, fortified prison buildings as strategic sites in urban

warfare, and the privations suffered by those held captive within them. Concern for the prisoners’ welfare echoed the sentiment of UK Prisons Commissioner and ex-Army Captain Alexander Paterson during the London Blitz of World War II: that ‘there are few things so inhuman as to cause a man to be at the same time under fire and under constraint’ (Paterson 1940: 12). The envelopment of prisons within urban conflict may be uncommon, but it is

Corresponding authors:

Dominique Moran, School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT, UK.
Email: d.moran@bham.ac.uk

Jennifer Turner, Institute for Social Sciences, Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg, Ammerländer Heerstr. 114-118, 26129, Oldenburg, Germany.
Email: jennifer.turner@uol.de

merely one of a multitude of diverse contexts in which the military and the carceral converge through the prison.

In this paper, we explore the ways in which the carceral, the military and war are intertwined, drawing on carceral geographers' desire to more fully situate the carceral spaces of imprisonment, immigration detention, and the surveillance and monitoring of bodies in deep histories of war and violence, and to expand a reading of 'military' space to include less 'obvious' sites, of immigration detention, uricide and intimate violence. However, we also argue that there is scope for further research attention to be paid to the more 'obvious' institutions of the military and the carceral – such as the military base, the prison, and 'conventional' warfare – in order to further reveal the intertwining of these phenomena. In putting forward a typology of intersections between the carceral, the military and war, we advance a research agenda which builds on and extends prior scholarship in carceral and military geographies, and identifies key directions for future research.

We take our cue in part from a critical study of the intimate dynamics of war in refuge, in which Jacobsen traces Syrian refugees in Denmark, a country that 'is purported to be a place of peace and protection *from* war', but which they experience as 'a place *of* war' (2021: 4). She argues for greater attention to be paid to 'how refugees themselves draw on and articulate geographical imaginations and knowledges of war, violence, and safety as they try to make new lives as refugees', and urges a rethinking of where war is, what counts as war and who decides (2021: 1). In this compelling account, and elsewhere (Whyte et al., 2019), passing mention is made of the accommodation of refugees in military barracks, hinting at a convergence of conventional military infrastructure with the carcerality of spaces of refuge. This fleeting glimpse at the deployment of military infrastructure for the confinement of undocumented migrants begs the question of how and with what implications conventional military infrastructure comes to serve a carceral purpose (and potentially vice versa).

This paper also responds to the critical intervention from Moran et al. (2019) who addressed

Foucault's often-cited observation that 'prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons' (Foucault 1991: 228) drawing renewed attention to the assumed similarities between such institutions. They conceived the term 'prison-military complex' to describe 'the deep-rooted, long-standing, widespread, and diverse connections between prisons and the military' (Moran et al., 2019: 2). Pointing to phenomena (such as senior leadership of prisons and prison services by ex-military personnel; military contingency planning for prisons; the incarceration of military veterans; military ranks and quasi-military insignia in prisons; ex-military personnel employed as prison staff, and so on), they argued that these phenomena comprise 'a complex web of connections... that is both under-researched, and whose significance... is underestimated' (ibid). Critically, they called for a full exegesis of the multidirectional interpenetration of the prison and the military, and the web of practical and conceptual connections between them, through which carceral techniques and practices inform military activities and vice versa. A further rationale for our thinking is the relative lack of extant dialogue between carceral and military geographies, the two subdisciplines which perhaps seem best placed to map military-carceral interconnections.

Accordingly, we first consider the development of military and carceral geographies, before tracing out the contours of scholarship which uncover military-carceral convergences across a range of spaces that are less obviously 'military' or 'carceral'. We argue here that, although geographers have rightly expanded notions of the carceral, the military and war far beyond the 'obvious' conventional sites of the prison, the armed forces of the nation state and armed conflict, there may be other military-carceral convergences 'hiding in plain sight', in just such conventional sites. As a first step towards a full exegesis of military-carceral interpenetrations, and as a move towards a research agenda, we next think through a set of intersections between the prison and the military in relation to armed conflict, before concluding with a set of suggestions of the potential synergies between carceral and military geographies in exploring such sites and practices.

II Military geography, carceral geography and military-carceral convergences

Military geographies understand ‘war, armed conflict, militarism, militarization, military activities, and military institutions, organizations and capabilities as both geographically constituted and geographically expressed’, in that ‘there is a spatiality inherent and active in the processes which bring these phenomena into being, and in turn these phenomena operate to shape places, spaces, environments, and landscapes’ (Rech et al., 2015: 47). Originating in the 19th century and initially applying the tools and techniques of geographical inquiry to the pursuit of military objectives (e.g. Collins, 1998; Doyle and Bennett, 1999; Jackman, 1962), military geography has since developed a more critical approach, tracking human geography’s increasing concern with militarism and its effects (e.g. Gregory, 2010). Outlining the development of the subdiscipline, Woodward delineated geographies of military activities as the ‘patterning of material entities and social relations across space shaped by the production and reproduction of military capabilities’ (2005: 721). And, ‘the shaping of civilian space and social relations by military objectives, rationales and structures’ is understood as the geographies of militarism. Here, such influence on society may be a result of either ‘deliberate extension of military influence’ or a ‘byproduct of those processes’ (2005: 721).

Military geographers have expanded the scope of this subdiscipline to ‘the social and political construction of military activities, militarism, and militarization’ with reference to ‘the spaces and places in which they are constituted, and through which they are expressed’ (Rech et al., 2015: 57). Such focus has seen extensive and diverse work exploring military battlefields; military defence infrastructure; militarised landscapes; the intersection between military norms and domestic spaces; landscapes constituted by military objectives and power, such as military academies; and landscapes of commemoration (e.g. Johnson, 2010; Keller, 2009; Lutz, 2001).

Much like the specialised sub-discipline of military geography, so too has carceral geography

developed its own discrete foci. In its early development, carceral geographers turned their attention to spaces of captivity, holding, detention, quarantine, and imprisonment in particular (Moran, 2016). Under this remit, scholars have investigated diverse aspects of carceral life; focussing upon change and difference for various groups of individuals – for adults, children, young people, those convicted of crimes, migrant detainees, asylum-seekers, etc. – across space and time, and between cultures and jurisdictions (see Bloch and Olivares-Pelayo, 2021; Martin, 2021; McGeachan, 2019; Repo, 2019; Schliehe, 2021, among other numerous recent examples). The breadth of empirical work is vast, often attending to emotional and embodied geographies of carceral life. Such considerations may encompass analyses of the lived experience of architecture and design (e.g. Jewkes and Moran, 2017), regime and practice (e.g. Norman, 2019), and the performance of particular identities (Moran et al., 2017). And, working at a broader scale, a large body of literature has considered how carceral spaces come to represent society’s wider views on crime and punishment (e.g. how they become a mechanism to justify criminalising of the poor or minority groups). Examples include prisons’ influence on communities both local to and distant from them, and the impact of prison and prison privatisation as part of a wider state economy and discussion of the everyday violences of incarceration (Bonds, 2019; Morin, 2019; Story, 2019, among others).

As a result of broader disciplinary efforts to theorise spaces of surveillance and control, geographers have considered the ways in which other, non-‘prison’ spaces may be considered ‘carceral’. The scope of such work is now too extensive to provide an exhaustive list but includes carceral examinations of urban and city spaces (e.g. Fraser and Schliehe, 2021); education and labour practices (Cassidy et al., 2020) and even beyond landed spaces, to islands, ships, ‘carceral seas’ (Peters and Turner, n.d.) and, simply, the ‘carceral wet’ (Dickson, 2021). In sum, carceral geography has done much to bring the prison to the attention of critical human geographers, but also to challenge

the primacy of this type of institution in conceptualisations of carcerality.

In conceptualising conditions which bear upon carcerality itself (Moran et al., 2018), carceral geographers have also suggested that spaces of extraordinary rendition (Moran et al., 2012), Prisoner of War camps (Turner and Peters, 2017) and other spaces that are perhaps more readily associated with the conventional military and circumstances of war, are also carceral. Yet, much in line with elision of these sites within criminology (Goldson, 2016), very few such spaces have been the focus of empirical research. Similarly, just as criminologists have tended to overlook military detention (Goldson, 2016), research focus within military geographies has tended to fall on sites and practices other than those forms of imprisonment, detention and confinement that are associated with military activity. Where these sites have been studied, research has been limited to analyses of 'post-military' landscapes (Woodward, 2014). As Jones has argued, perhaps in efforts to distance itself from the more traditional origins of the subdiscipline, and in order to understand *militarism* and *militarisation* rather than simply military *action*, contemporary military geography seems to have privileged research into 'the *preparation* for war at the expense of examining the violent and injurious practices of war' (Jones 2019: 94, original emphasis). Military geography in its earlier guises (and indeed in its current expression within contemporary military establishments, e.g. Galgano and Palka 2012) focused narrowly upon battlefield terrain, tactics and topography. More contemporary military geographies, on the other hand, pay greater attention to those factors that make armed conflict possible, as well as to conflict itself. Jones' call for military geographers 'not to neglect the spaces of war where material violence is done, and where lives and bodies are torn, traumatised, injured and disposed of' (Jones 2019: 94) is perhaps something of an overstatement of a complete *neglect* of war, but it indicates that there is more work to be done. Although by no means all such spaces of war are spaces of imprisonment and confinement, many of the intersections between the military and the carceral, which are also spaces of conflict, have not yet been subject to intense scrutiny within critical military geographies. These sites often

persist, developing and evolving into new and different forms, yet still they evade scholarly attention.

III Uncovering military-carceral convergences

Arguably it is within scholarship of spaces *beyond* conventional notions of the prison, and/or the military and war that military-carceral convergences have been most readily recognised and most thoroughly analysed. Just as the 'carceral' is more than 'just' the prison, so the 'military' and 'war' are more than simply the conventional Eurocentric conceptions of war (Jacobsen, 2021; Pain, 2009; Pain 2015) and the associated materialities of the armed forces of the nation state, and military equipment and infrastructure.

Considering the intertwinement of the military and the carceral *beyond* the narrowly masculine dictates of what conventionally 'counts' as military, and/or what counts as prison, geographers have foregrounded carceral spaces of intimate geopolitics and of sexual violence, and paid attention to militarised invasion of private spaces of home and household. We see a vital development of work on the relationship between international warfare and domestic violence (Pain, 2015) and the influence of war and militarism on everyday spaces usually thought beyond their reach (Cuomo 1996). Additionally, research concerns 'militarised' camp spaces, such as the spatial configuration of memory at former concentration camps (Azaryahu, 2003; Charlesworth, 2004; Charlesworth and Addis, 2002; Drozdowski et al., 2016) and the contestation of sovereign power at Guantanamo Bay (Reid-Henry, 2007).

In work informed by feminist scholars concerning the complex geographic and intimate boundaries of war (e.g. Cowen and Gilbert, 2007; Massaro, 2015; Pain, 2015), there is a hesitance to analyse intimate uses of violence in relation to geographical work on militarism as put forward in military geographies. For Pain (2015), the notion of militarisation as considered in military geographies is insufficient for a number of reasons. One is that many of the emotional and psychological dynamics and tactics deployed can be found among men and women with

no direct experience of the military or of war. Another reflects the fact that processes of militarisation do not automatically create militaristic practices in the everyday, but primarily, she argues, militarism is ‘an awkward concept in this context... because it might imply that domestic violence arises directly because of military activity elsewhere, or is inflected by its traces’ (2015: 71). In other words, perhaps the extant focus of military geographies – arguably on the more ‘conventional’ definitions of war, and of the military as the armed forces of the nation state, its equipment, infrastructure and so on – does not readily lend itself to scholarship of a more diverse set of violences.

Expanding a reading of military space to include immigration detention, scholars have drawn attention to the convergence of US military and immigration policies (Loyd et al., 2016), and to the intersection of US detention and military regimes for undocumented youth (Diaz-Strong et al., 2010). This work is in dialogue with scholarship focussing on the ways in which the criminalisation of Black, Indigenous, and other bodies of colour takes place within the context of militarisation as a process and the US military as an institution (Alvarez et al., 2021). Underscoring these contemporary processes is the legacy of slavery, in which military strength determined control of trading routes for enslaved persons who had frequently themselves been traded for military technologies (Hacker 2008). And, as McKittrick has argued (2011, 955) the prison industrial complex is the logical extension of the plantation to which enslaved Black peoples were forcibly secured.

Mountz et al., (2013) and Sudbury (2004) have called for greater attention to the militarised basis of contemporary imprisonment and detention and, as Simon (1998) has argued, long histories of war-making and colonialism underscore the deployment of imprisonment and detention within imperialism and capitalism. These works draw attention to the intertwining of the military and the carceral, pointing out their structural similarities, their interdependencies and the need to consider them as integral parts of capitalist and imperialist structures, whilst calling for more attention to be paid to the specific nature of these connections. Geographers have been at the forefront of examination of sites of

military detention such as Guantanamo Bay (Gregory 2006, 2007), and sites of rendition (Paglen and Thompson, 2006; Sidaway, 2010). In much of this work, the focus has been on understanding the circumstances which enable(d) the creation and operation of facilities and practices that sit between international law and sovereignty, operating outside of conventional law. Critiques have viewed such sites as part of a current imperial moment, connected to ambiguous political geographies (Belcher et al., 2008; Leib and Smothers-Marcello, 2016); American imaginations and materialisations of power (Reid-Henry, 2007); in relation to torture within the wider geopolitical account of empire (Hannah, 2006); and necropolitics and the forcefeeding as the violation of the corporeal body (Ibrahim and Howarth, 2019).

Building on works that have drawn attention to their topographies and topologies (Debrix, 2015; Giaccaria and Minca, 2011; Katz 2015; Minca 2015), Martin et al., (2020) speak to a different form of military-carceral entanglement in their meticulous discussion of the diversity of form and function of camps. They describe camps both as ‘quasi-military facilities’ and as having ‘quasi-carceral functions of exclusion and containment, care and abandonment’ (2020: 745, 757). The carceral function is well described by Pieris in her exploration of WWII internment and Prisoner of War camps. Here, she deploys the term ‘Pacific carceral archipelago’ to argue that ‘wartime political exigency is commonly used to legitimise the punitive jurisdiction of sovereignty and related suspension of civil rights’ (Pieris 2016: 260). Martin et al. (2020) draw attention to the frequent blurring and overlap between the encampment of civilian populations as a means of serving military spatial strategy, and to provide humanitarian relief (Hyslop, 2011; Smith and Stucki, 2011). Nisa’s work on spaces of military detainment in Cold War Korea also highlighted this indistinct functionality, with carceral enclosure seen to perform a number of different functions, not all of which were overtly punitive. He noted that it variously ‘serves punitive ends..., focuses on the instrumental management of martial terrain..., functions to assure the safe circulation of commodities in a region, and ... manifests as an extension of the refugee camp’s carceral

humanitarianism...' (Nisa 2019: 15). Within this vibrant body of camp geographies – a sub-discipline already well-articulated with carceral geographies – there is a less comprehensive engagement with military geographies. This is perhaps because camps, although exhibiting a 'variable mix of custody, care and control, at times involving explicit and/or implicit forms of violence' (Minca, 2015:75) take form in different ways – from the summer camp to the refugee camp to the concentration camp – each with a different degree of (apparent) articulation with military structures and systems. Nevertheless, military bases are themselves frequently repurposed into camps (of different types) and vice versa. For example, Napier Barracks in Kent, UK, now houses asylum seekers; there are plans to convert Anthorn Army Camp in northern England into a holiday park (Walker, 2020), and a Butlin's holiday camp founded in 1939 in Filey, North Yorkshire UK, was quickly requisitioned by the state and became RAF Filey during WWII, returning to leisure use after the war.

Within a growing literature highlighting the detention of migrants on islands which are also military bases (Giannacopoulos and Loughnan, 2020; Lemaire, 2014), this indistinction of military purpose is also debated. Loyd et al. demonstrated the long-standing connection between US military operations abroad and immigration to the US, showing that 'military bases are located and maintained not only to exercise regional control, deter state aggression, and protect trade routes, but also to police the mobility of migrants and asylum seekers' (2016: 65). They argue that 'humanitarian militarism' is fundamental to a 'carceral archipelago' of island detention, 'with the militarization of islands part and parcel of the geopolitical 'management' of human mobility' (ibid: 73).

There is, then, a rich, vital and diverse body of work tracing the intertwinement of the carceral and the military, in myriad sites which lie *beyond* the 'conventionally' narrow conceptions of 'military', 'prison' and 'war'. However, this work exhausts neither the range of sites of military-carceral intertwinement, nor the scope for potential geographical enquiry into them. We suggest that a focus *on* these conventional institutions – the military as the armed forces of a nation state, war as conventional armed conflict, and on their 'obvious' sites (such as the

military base and the prison) – can *also* offer insights into military-carceral convergence. That said, the relative neglect of such sites is likely related to the sheer difficulty of conducting research into these sites. Obtaining research access to carceral sites such as prisons (Patenaude, 2004; Reiter, 2014) or military facilities (Carreiras and Castro, 2012; Gray, 2016) is challenging enough in its own right, and negotiating access to sites which are both carceral and military is likely more difficult still. Many sites of military-carceral convergence are temporary and contingent, taking form (perhaps covertly) in circumstances of war and, again, making data generation a demanding, ethically-challenging and possibly dangerous task. Nevertheless, negotiation of such obstacles ought to be pursued given the significance of such research enquiry.

To demonstrate the potential utility of such a move, we next draw attention to the shifting temporality of military-carceral intersections, with the prison being variously created or repurposed by the military during war, only later to be spun out of the military 'orbit' and sometimes subsequently drawn back in. We also highlight the differing degrees of clarity with which the carceral and the military are connected, from the clearly apparent convergence in, for example, Prisoner of War camps, to much more subtle and intangible modalities of association. Discussion begins by considering prisons during war, starting with the fate of pre-existing prisons caught up in warfare or requisitioned for military purpose. It then considers prisons created by the military – often at times of war – before emphasising those enabled through the repurposing of defunct military infrastructure left redundant by the cessation of war. It then thinks through the ways in which the aftermath of war influences the prison system, through reform and legislative change. Finally, we reflect upon less tangible but still-pervasive connections between the prison and the military. We take the UK as our primary geographical focus. We acknowledge that many of these examples are context-specific – pertaining to particular geographies of prisons and war deriving from WWII. Although they may not be directly replicated elsewhere and their implications cannot be unproblematically generalised, we use these examples as an indication of the ways in which we can, by moving

through these types of relationships, consider the propensity for prisons to move into and out of the orbit of the military in a range of different contexts and in different ways.

I Pre-existing prisons and war

There are many potential fates for pre-existing prisons during war. They could continue to operate, albeit in very difficult circumstances with regard to staffing and resourcing. They could be requisitioned by the Armed Forces and put to use for military purposes, such as the internment of 'internal enemies' (e.g. Japanese-Americans during WWII) or the imprisonment of PoWs or of Conscientious Objectors. They could be taken over by occupying or 'enemy' forces (who might liberate such PoWs or internees) and repurposed to hold political prisoners resisting occupation – as in the case of Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. As part of these processes, prisons as robust fortified buildings might, perhaps, also serve as strongholds during urban conflict. Although these and probably more potential fates are possible, there are few accounts of such circumstances. Below is a summary of the scarce academic research illuminating them.

As the account with which this paper opened demonstrates, one vivid convergence of the prison with the military is the capture and occupation of prisons as embattled strongholds during military conflict. Although the deadly events at Aleppo, Sednaya and Idlib prisons may be the most recent examples (Abbara et al., 2018; Souleimanov, 2014), this phenomenon is not unique to Syria. Model Prison was strategically important in the siege of Madrid during the Spanish Civil War 1936-9 (Lines, 2011). Likewise, the prison of Hue City was a strategic objective for US Forces during the 1968 Tet Offensive of the Vietnam War (Villard, 2014). Moabit Prison was one of the last Nazi bastions breached by the Soviet 3rd Army in the Battle for Berlin in April 1945 (Ziemke, 1969). Liberation of prisoners is also a frequent occurrence during urban warfare, taking place, for example, during the Taliban's takeover of Kunduz in 2015 (Osman, 2015). Military history records prisons as prominent and substantial positions in urban warfare, but

unlike other urban infrastructure such as hotels (Fregonese and Ramadan, 2015), their strategic role in urban warfare, and the plight of those incarcerated within them, has received little academic attention.

Even when prisons are not themselves sites of battle, they often come under military control during conflict. For example, during the First World War, the US established a military government over the Dominican Republic (Moran, 2001) in order to protect US control of the strategic Panama Canal (McPherson, 2013). The US Marine Corps maintained control of the Dominican prison system until occupation ended in 1924. Military takeover of prisons is also common in *coups d'état*, such as in Turkey where the military took control of prisons in 1980 under martial law, enforcing order through extreme violence (Ibikoglu, 2012; Yildiz, 2016). The most notorious example of a pre-existing prison being placed under military control is perhaps Abu Ghraib. Constructed in the 1950s by British contractors during the pro-Western rule of King Faisal, this prison was used under the military dictatorship of Saddam Hussein and was later the scene of well-documented human rights abuses of prisoners at the hands of occupying US Forces. Abu Ghraib has now become shorthand for an assumed propensity for military detention to become 'the most concentrated institutional site' alongside 'a broader array of incarcerations erected out of the field of battle' (Sexton and Lee, 2006: 1008), such as the imposition of curfews and 'no-fly' airspace, and the takeover of water and food supplies, communication technologies, transportation systems, and material supply routes that often accompany military occupation. Similarly, Saydnaya military prison in Syria, run by the military police of the Assad regime and previously used to confine military officers and soldiers, has been used since the onset of the Syrian war in 2011 to detain civilians suspected of government opposition, subjecting them to intense surveillance and torture (Ristani, 2020).

Prisons such as Model, Moabit, Aleppo and Idlib were subsumed within conflict itself. However, prisons not directly involved in ground war can still be affected – physically and/or functionally – by both acts of aggression and the circumstances of military conflict. During WWII, for example, the French

prison system was reportedly in a 'disastrous' condition 'due to the destruction or deterioration of numerous institutions, the complete lack of physical equipment, difficulties in food supply, and so forth' (Germain, 1954: 139–40). In the UK, some urban prisons such as London's Pentonville were bombed and evacuated. Everyday life in most prisons was affected in some way (Jewkes and Johnston, 2011), with most urban prisons experiencing frequent air raid warnings, and fire- and incendiary-bomb training. However, the dearth of research means that very little is known about either how these establishments were managed or the experience of imprisonment within them.

Some pre-existing UK prisons were partially or fully transferred to military control for a defined period of time, usually relating to an ongoing conflict, before returning to 'civilian' use; in a series of transfers which complicate notions of a military/civilian 'binary'. For example, HMP Brixton was a military prison between the two Boer Wars and during British military deployments in Burma and Africa. HMPs Chelmsford and Lewes, alongside parts of HMPs Wakefield and Wandsworth, were temporarily handed over to the military a year into WWI. By 1918, Wandsworth operated as two separate units, one military and one civilian (Richardson, 1918). HMP Dartmoor held military prisoners after WWII and HMP Preston was used as a naval prison in the 1930s. HMP Stafford, which had held political prisoners from the Easter Rising in 1916, was later loaned to War Office as a military detention barracks in WWII, whilst HMP Usk was used for winter quartering of troops in WWII. Such multiple transfers also took place in the US. For example, the first prison on the site of the current USP Leavenworth in Kansas was a military fort created in 1827. It was deployed as a military prison in 1875 before being transferred from the War Department to the Department of Justice for civilian use in 1895. After the 10 years (1896–1906) taken to build a new civilian penitentiary next door, the old fort was returned to the military for use as a military prison (Partin, 1983).

Despite the complex governance issues which must have been raised by these carceral/military transfers, the logistical and political challenges

they undoubtedly created and the legacies they likely left behind in both organisational and collective memory, they are usually recounted without further commentary or consideration.

2 Prisons created by the military in war

As well as the requisitioning and occupation of *existing* prisons, some prisons are *created* by the military during war. These either cater to an imperative for imprisonment and detention directly connected to military activity or serve the purposes of immobilising and containing specific populations. An extensive literature now explores the history and experience of such facilities (e.g. Cowley, 2002; Havers, 2003), including reports on archaeological investigations: for example, of WWII internment camps at Fort Hood, Texas (Thomas, 2011); sites of Japanese-American internment (Camp, 2016); camps for British civilians on the Isle of Man (Mytum, 2011); internment camps operating in Francoist Spain (González-Ruibal, 2011); and WWI PoW camps in Poland (Kobiałka et al., 2017) and in the UK (Grady, 2019). The operational lives of many of these facilities ended with hostilities but, as Martin et al. (2020) have noted, many former Nazi concentration camps in Europe were transformed into refugee 'assembly centres' after the end of WWII and used again to host refugees during the recent 'migration crisis' in Europe.

Prisons holding military offenders – that is, military personnel being disciplined by their own armed forces – often also evolve out of conflict-related facilities. The site of the UK Armed Forces' Military Corrective Training Centre (MCTC) in Colchester was a PoW camp until 1947 (Kotecha, 2013: n.p., cited in Goldson, 2016: 295). It now holds military personnel for offences against military discipline, including offences that would *not* have merited a custodial sentence if committed by a civilian. It also briefly holds military personnel sentenced to civilian imprisonment ahead of transfer to civilian prison. Facilities such as the MCTC are amongst those few military detention facilities that have attracted (limited) research attention (e.g. Brodsky and Eggleston, 1970) such as consideration of the potential privatisation of military prisons in the

US (Agrawal and Sharpe 2010) and transition into 'civilian' life after military imprisonment (Van Staden et al., 2007).

Although these narratives most often see civilian prisons being drawn into military orbit, the opposite is also possible. For example, the MCTC itself was partially within the 'civilian' prison service when, in 1997 as a part of the tough 'prison works' policies of the UK Conservative government, one of two new 'boot camps' saw civilian young offenders accommodated in a special unit at the MCTC, which became Colchester Young Offenders' Institution (YOI). The Governor was the Army Commandant, with a Deputy Governor drawn from the Prison Service, and the unit was mainly run by military staff. Operating for scarcely a year, it was closed by the new Labour government on the grounds of cost (Farrington et al., 2002). In such cases of prisons taken over or created by the military during war, the relationship between the carceral, the military and war is clearly evident, if rarely researched.

3 Prisons enabled by war

The other 'boot camp' was located at HMP Thorn Cross in Cheshire, which was previously Royal Navy Air Station Stretton. It operated as a military airfield before opening as a prison in 1960. In instances such as this, where defunct military bases are repurposed as prisons during post-conflict military downsizing, the prison is arguably *enabled* rather than created by war through the redeployment of military land and/or infrastructure.

For example, as (Moran and Turner, 2021c) note, at least 27 of the prisons currently operating in England and Wales were originally military facilities. Some have always had a carceral function, such as HMP Huntercombe, originally a WWII internment camp holding Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess (BBC, 2012). After the war, it re-opened initially as a Borstal¹, then a prison for adult men and today holds foreign national offenders. In some cases, military spaces have had other quasi-carceral uses prior to conversion into prisons. For example, the site of HMP Highpoint was previously first RAF Stradishall, a WWII bomber base,

which closed in 1970 and was initially used as a holding camp for Ugandan refugees before becoming a prison.

In some cases, prisons were constructed on the cleared sites of military bases, or on RAF airfields, such as HMP Bullingdon, HMP Gartree (RAF Market Harborough), HMP Northumberland (RAF Acklington) and HMP Rochester. HMP The Mount was built on the site of RAF Bovingdon, used by the US Army Air Force in WWII to house General Eisenhower's personal B-17 aircraft. During the construction of HMP Isis, on the site of the Royal Arsenal, excavations uncovered old ordnance testament to the armaments manufacture, ammunition proofing, and explosives research for the Armed Forces which had taken place there (BBC, 2009). HMP Wealstun was built in 1965 on the site of Royal Ordnance Factory Thorp Arch. Other prisons, such as HMP Brinsford, were constructed on land acquired from the Ministry of Defence.

In other cases, existing military infrastructure has been retained and there is a clear transformation of purpose where a whole site now functions as a prison. For example, HMP Channings Wood was converted from Rawlinson Barracks in 1970 (Heritage Gateway, 2018). HMP Deerbolt was previously Deerbolt Camp, used as military accommodation until early 1970s decommissioning. Premises which are now HMP Drake Hall accommodated WWII female munitions workers. HMP Guys Marsh was a US Military Hospital, opening as a Borstal in 1960 and housing prisoners in WWII Nissen huts. HMP Isle of Wight and HMP Leyhill were military hospitals. HMP The Verne was an infantry barracks and HMP Wetherby was naval station HMS Ceres.

Often, only elements of military infrastructure have been retained. Built on military bases, HMPs Haverigg, Hewell and Kirkham still have WWII military buildings. Further examples are geographically widespread and equally diverse in their architectural permutations. For example, at HMP Bure (previously RAF Coltishall), prisoners are held in the accommodation blocks, junior ranks mess and social club of the former airbase. Prisoners at HMP Ford are housed within the former Non-Commissioned Officers' accommodation of what

was a Royal Naval Air Station. RAF buildings are still in use at HMP Lindholme, a former RAF base used by the US Air Force (USAF) at the height of the Cold War. At HMP Stanford Hill, a former Battle of Britain RAF station, accommodation was until the 1980s in military huts dating from 1923–45. Prisoners at HMP Sudbury are still housed in a USAF hospital built for the D-Day landings. Other prisons started life as entirely different types of facilities, requisitioned during conflict and later converted into prisons. HMP Erlestoke, for example, was previously a country house used as a training school for the Special Operations Executive during WWII before opening as a prison. More recently, in the US, a proposed conversion of part of New Jersey military base Fort Dix into a penitentiary involved the re-use of five barracks, medical buildings, gymnasiums and mess halls (Hanley, 1992).

This enabling-via-redeployment of military sites as prisons speaks to the layering and sedimentation of military and carceral landscapes, and to the propensity for ‘function’ to follow ‘form’ in ways that recall Foucault’s observation that prisons ‘resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons’ (1991: 228, our emphasis). At a larger spatial scale, such repurposing matters for prison siting. Re-use of military infrastructure and/or cost-neutral use of state-owned land means that prisons may be more cheaply and conveniently located on former military bases than at sites which might better support their intended function (e.g. proximity to prisoners’ home communities, to facilitate visitation). In the UK, the wartime logic of RAF airfield location – the military geography of large, level sites close to the North Sea – arguably becomes sedimented as an almost accidental logic of carceral spatiality through prison siting. As Muir and Loader noted, these sites, at significant distance from large urban centres and lacking well-developed transport links, contribute to the ‘inappropriate’ distribution of prisons in the UK (Muir and Loader 2010: 20, citing Carter, 2003). It is likely that a similar slippage of ‘location logic’ takes place wherever military bases are converted into prisons, yet this phenomenon is overlooked in extant literatures on prison siting (e.g.

Cherry and Kunce, 2001; Farkas, 1999; Marianov, 2015).

4 Prisons influenced by the aftermath of war

In addition to the role of prisons as battlefields, the requisitioning of prisons by the military during war and the creation and enabling of individual prisons through military activity, there is evidence that warfare has also influenced the operation of prison systems.

Despite the lack of research into prisons *during* war, it seems that prisons in Western Europe experienced a wave of reform in the aftermath of war. Writing of France, Germain noted that ‘it was the conditions produced by World War II that occasioned a vast reform movement’ (1954: 139–40). Seemingly, the ‘troubles’ of wartime were considered ‘appropriate for drafting a plan for reforms, the urgent necessity of which no one contested any longer’ (ibid). These reforms were based on ‘the concept that ... the rebuilding of lives and the ultimate social rehabilitation of inmates is [prisons’] primary objective’ (ibid). In Belgium, the aftermath of ground warfare also catalysed prison reform. During German occupation 1914–18, a large number of Belgian citizens were arrested and incarcerated. During this time, as Cornil observed, ‘the inconveniences and defects of this system seemed evident to them’ (1954: 131) leading to reforms in the 1920s. Similarly, highly literate Conscientious Objectors imprisoned during WWI in the UK pooled their recollections of incarceration in a report (*English Prisons Today*, Hobhouse and Brockway, 1922) that critiqued the prison system and initiated a wave of prison reform whose effects were felt for several decades (Brock, 2004). And, less than a year into WWII, the UK Prisons Commissioner reflected on lessons learned from changes forced upon the UK prison system by conflict (1940: 16).

More broadly, the contemporary international regulation of punishment has its roots both in the international humanitarian law that emerged after WWII as a means of regulating armed conflict and in the development of international human rights law. The latter includes the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which outlaws cruel, inhuman or

degrading treatment or punishment (later affirmed in legal instruments such as the UK's Criminal Justice Act 1948 and the 1955 UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners) (Coyle and Smit, 2000). However, this relationship between war and prison reform is spatially and temporally inconsistent. Prisons in the contemporary Global South frequently face similar post-conflict challenges to those of post-war Western Europe: severe overcrowding, dilapidated and battle-damaged buildings, persistent human rights abuses, poor medical provision and limited food supplies, as well as more systemic problems of lack of trained prison officers, corruption, non-payment of salaries, and collusion between prisoners and staff. Rather than military conflict leading to reform, these prisons are 'systematically ignored and, when deemed worthy of consideration, poorly understood' by risk-averse international donors (Martin et al., 2014: 4; see also Jefferson and Martin, 2016; Macaulay, 2013; Mobekk, 2009; Manning and Trzeciak-Duval, 2010; Van Der Spuy, 2000). Support is frequently limited to construction of new facilities to tackle extreme overcrowding, or training for prison officers (Jefferson, 2007; Murdoch, 2015). Rarely is post-conflict reform informed by an understanding of the historical trajectories that underpin the realities of the prisons themselves or their traditions and culture (Jefferson and Martin, 2016).

5 Prisons and military influence

In the foregoing sections, we have moved from considerations of prisons as urban battlefields and during military takeover to the conversion of military bases into prisons and the propensity for warfare to precipitate systemic prison reform. With each step, we move further from 'war' per se and closer to contemporary military geographers' interests in the military (and its related activities and features) and the imprint of military activities, militarism and militarisation (Pearson, 2012; Woodward, 2014).

In our earlier narration of the innumerable transfers and conversions of prisons moving into and out of military orbit, during or after war, the

lack of scholarly research meant that we unavoidably listed these in a bald and decontextualised manner. Presenting the histories of these sites as a series of dates of transfers and conversions seems implicitly to suggest that military influence ended neatly with a change of prefix from 'RAF' to 'HMP'. However, the retention of 'Fort' as a prefix in US military-base-to-prison conversions, such as FCI Fort Dix and USP Fort Leavenworth, perhaps more accurately reflects a certain military overhang. Even if all transfers were seamless and efficient, without any period of dual function or extended handover (for example, to enable the gradual relocation of personnel or the completion of bureaucratic process) it is more likely that military influence more generally would not have been so neatly curtailed. It is improbable that such shifts went unnoticed by those living and working in these facilities or by local communities; contemporary examples suggest that shifts and overlaps between military and prison authorities can result in specific tensions. For example, in the late 1980s, USAF bases commonly housed low-risk prisoners who provided labour for grounds maintenance and other work. Pagel (1989) noted that although the conversion of military bases into prisons had been one of George Bush's US presidential campaign positions (given rapid expansion of the prison population), conversions would require both Congressional legislation and strategies to overcome objections from the National Federation of Federal Employees, who argued that inexpensive inmate labour had led to civilian job losses at military bases. Conversely, as at Fort Dix, conversion has been seen as a 'win-win'; a means to soften the economic blow of military downsizing and retrenchment on communities local to bases slated for closure, which previously employed hundreds of civilians, whilst at the same time reducing the cost of creating a new prison by re-using pre-existing military infrastructure (Hanley, 1992). In this case, the direct intention that those who *used* to work at the military base will *now* be employed at the new prison, implicitly assumes that their prior experience will equip them well for this type of work – a supposition that speaks to assumptions about the convergence of

military/prison working practices critiqued by [Moran and Turner, 2021](#).

Even for prisons that were not created, enabled or requisitioned by the military (and which appear to have eluded explicit military influence of the types described earlier), there are more subtle and pervasive forms of connection through which prison systems in general are implicated in military operations and activities. In the UK, for example, those refusing to serve in the military during the First and Second World Wars were incarcerated as Conscientious Objectors. More recently, the threat posed by the ‘war on terror’ saw the normalisation of special judicial powers to detain indefinitely without trial ([Sim 2004](#)). In both eras, detained individuals were held in civilian prisons, thus arguably bringing the whole prison system into dialogue with the military through the detention of individuals in relation to military activity.

Since neither the transfer of prison facilities between military and civilian control nor these more systemic convergences of the military and the prison have been extensively researched, it is unsurprising that, as [Moran et al. \(2019\)](#) have noted, many other connections that hide in plain sight also remain unexplored. Sketching out just some of these, they point to the leadership of prisons and the prison service by ex-military personnel; the incarceration of Veterans-in-Custody; the use of military technology in penal contexts; and an axiom of ‘military discipline’ in media and policy discourses about prison reform. As they note, the influence of the numerous significant figures in the history of the UK prison system who have drawn on military experience has barely been considered. Alexander Paterson (1884–1947) was Commissioner of Prisons and Director of Convict Prisons 1922–46, having previously been an Army Captain in WWI. His role in prison reform via the Criminal Justice Act 1948 and a number of specific reform initiatives is well known, but the significance of his military experience in effecting these changes has not been widely studied. More broadly, military ranks and quasi-military insignia are commonly used to describe prison officer grades ([King, 2013: 32](#)) and, in terms of who is physically present within prisons, Veterans-in-Custody are known to make up the largest occupational group

within UK prisons ([Wainwright et al., 2017: 741](#)). Perhaps less well known is the fact that ex-military personnel are and have been employed in prisons in large numbers ([Moran and Turner, 2021, 2021b; Treadwell, 2010; Turner and Moran, 2021](#)). Arguably these less-tangible synergies between the prison and the military – which have seen (ex)military personnel overseeing, governing, and present in large numbers (as both prisoners and staff) within prison facilities – are perhaps just as influential as the more overt prison-military connections described above, but conceivably more subtly pervasive.

IV Conclusion

We opened this paper by explaining a three-fold purpose. First, to explore how and with what implications conventional military infrastructure comes to serve a carceral purpose, and vice versa; second to respond to [Moran et al., \(2019\)](#)’s call for a full exegesis of the multidirectional interpenetration of the prison and the military; and third to stimulate dialogue between carceral and military geographies, two subdisciplines well-placed to map military-carceral interconnections. In response to these provocations, it is clear that consideration of the prison-military complex ([Moran et al., 2019](#)) in general and the relationships between prisons, the military and war in particular, has the potential to open new avenues of exploration for both carceral and military geographies. There are, as we have laid out above, innumerable unanswered questions about the experience of prisons during and after war, the conversion of military bases into prisons, and the deployment of ex-military personnel in prisons.

Resolution of such questions would enhance understandings both of the nature of the carceral itself ([Moran et al., 2018](#)) and also speak directly to [Woodward’s \(2014\)](#) concern for the ways in which military landscapes ‘are (or are not) seen, portrayed, understood and experienced as ‘military’ or ‘civilian’” (2014: 53). Military-carceral connections clearly extend after and between periods of conflict, lying dormant and being revived, as in the case of military facilities converted into civilian prisons, before being drawn back into the military orbit. We know very little about the ways in which these

multiple transfers and handovers take place, despite it being plausible that they might enable the prison-military complex to take form. As well as being forged in the heat of battle, connections perhaps coalesce over time, incrementally strengthened by repeated contact between military/prison personnel, and cooperation over bureaucratic and administrative tasks. The effects of the longstanding employment of ex-military personnel in the prison service and the incarceration of large numbers of Veterans are still poorly understood. Does something of the military 'adhere' to the prison (and vice versa) and, if so, how and with what implications? To what extent is the prison a 'military landscape' (Woodward, 2014)? How far does the military rely upon carceral practices, or the prison rely on military styles of management? What is the role of war in developing carceral institutions and structures, and (how) is the carceral implicated and leveraged by the military in conflict? Rather than pursuing these questions in isolation, we suggest here that there are advantages in a coordinated approach.

Dialogue between carceral and military geographies may assist in addressing the key question of the effect of military-carceral convergence: what does the co-presence of the carceral and the military actually *mean*? Prior scholarship of the military prisons at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo (Brown, 2005; Gregory, 2007), and of 'militarised' urban spaces (Coaffee, 2015; Fussey and Coaffee, 2017; Graham, 2009; Saborio, 2014), suggests a particular outcome. There is a sense within these literatures that the convergence of the military and the carceral renders these spaces 'hyper-carceral'. The use of prefixes to qualify carcerality enables more- or less-carceral forms to be denoted, as in accounts of 'trans-carceral' spaces in which freed prisoners experience reconfinement (Allspach, 2010) and 'semi-carceral' spaces of humanitarianism where security and care are integrated (Dadusc and Mudu, 2020; Pallister-Wilkins, 2018). 'Quasi-carceral' has been used to describe spaces of prisoners' home-visits (Moran and Keinanen, 2012); prison transportation (Haywood, 2018); nursing homes (Repo, 2019); a hospitality centre for asylum seekers (Altin and Minca, 2016); gated communities (Kurwa, 2019); domestic spaces under covid lockdown (Sarkar, 2021); and

institutions whose purpose is ostensibly to care rather than control (Disney and Schliehe, 2019; Philo and Parr, 2019). In very few of these works is the deployment of this 'graduated' terminology elucidated in detail, but the qualification of carcerality implies that there are circumstances in which it is somehow diluted and others in which it is enhanced.

'Hyper-carcerality' seems to imply that the overlaying of the military on top of the carceral (or vice versa) *enhances* carcerality. Where this terminology is used, the convergence of the military and the carceral is signified both by the deployment of military techniques and technologies, and (often connectedly) by a direct relationship to military activity. For example, Coaffee (2015: 199) referred to the 'military-carceral' features of London 2012 Olympic security strategies. Here, military hardware was deployed to control city spaces, airspace and transport corridors. 'Hyper-carceral' tactics were also deployed at the 2014 Sochi Olympics, where proximity to the frontline of the 'war on terror' through ethno-national conflict in the North Caucasus led to 'hyper-carceral' security (Coaffee, 2015). The ensuing states/spaces of exception (after Agamben, 1998, 2005), saw suspension of the rule of law facilitating extraordinary forms of control through which citizens are stripped of political rights and the relationship between the state/sovereign and the citizenry is fundamentally altered. The perception that a convergence of the military and the carceral may enhance, legitimise and perpetuate carcerality, is worthy of attention from carceral and military geographers. Is this outcome inevitable? Or, are there circumstances in which military-carceral sites and practices are *not* 'hyper-carceral'? Sustained research attention to some of the other intersections between the carceral and the military outlined above may suggest alternative possibilities or identify the processes through which this outcome is delivered.

Relatedly, carceral and military geographies may together offer an instructive perspective on the commonly-invoked state of exception, frequently deployed in understandings of the incarceration of suspected enemy combatants in military prisons such as Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib (e.g. Gregory, 2006; Gregory, 2007). Discussing Guantanamo, Goldson argued that 'imprisonment in military

realms fundamentally upsets and disturbs the legitimizing logics that are conventionally applied to penal detention, with ‘military licence’ creating conditions in which ‘otherwise universal human rights protections, safeguards, and guarantees are compromised, if not utterly negated’ (2016: 289). Invoking Agamben in all but name, he described captives at Guantanamo as ‘human beings who are deliberately and comprehensively denied access to due legal process and stripped of the right to defend themselves by recourse to law, in conditions where zero accountability prevails and, within which, there is seemingly no political price to be paid for systematically violating the most fundamental human rights’ (2016: 305). Studies of prisons other than Guantanamo under military rule are scarce but, in rare detailed explorations of Turkish prisons after the military *coup d’état* of 1980 (Ibikoglu, 2012) and Saydnaya in Syria (Ristani, 2020), military licence took the form of extremely harsh discipline, with extreme torture and violence following the pattern of hyper-carceral exceptionality. Some voices, however, dissent from the widespread portrayal of military-carceral exceptionality. Gordon (2008), for example, took issue with ‘the routine treatment of the conditions at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo as exceptional or isolated instances of the abuse of state power’, arguing that this perception obscured the relationship between US military prisons abroad and territorial US civilian prisons (Gordon, 2008: 165). He contended that these establishments shared a punishment regime, with procedures implicated in the (mis)treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib resembling those in US civilian jails – which he in turn traced back to a history of military influence in the development of the supermax jail, intended to deliver severe and unremitting punishment (Gordon, 2008: 172; Ward and Werlich, 2003). Rather than countering the narrative of military-carceral exceptionality at Guantanamo, then, Gordon extends it to ‘civilian’ landed prisons in the United States – effectively by arguing that ‘military licence’ is also evident there. This notion of ‘military licence’ seems key to understandings of the development of exceptionality both within military-carceral spaces such as Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib and in prison systems more generally, and military and carceral

geographers together are well placed to uncover the ways in which militarisation may deliver such ‘licence’, to influence the operation of carceral spaces and systems.

We opened this paper by noting that geographers have extended notions of the carceral, the military and war far beyond orthodox notions of the prison, the armed forces and armed conflict. In so doing, they have positioned spaces of confinement, surveillance and monitoring within deep histories of violence. Taking a lead from this critical scholarship, we have argued that turning attention back to those ‘conventional’ institutions draws military and carceral geographies together into new dialogues and interchanges. In doing so, it reveals multiple vital but unanswered questions about prisons during and after war, conversion of military bases, and deployment of ex-military personnel. This in turn illuminates broader questions about the nature of the carceral, the military, and conflict, and the relationship between the ‘military’ and the ‘civilian’.

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ORCID iD

Dominique Moran  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6537-3591>

Note

1. A type of youth detention centre – term now defunct.

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Author biographies

Dominique Moran is Professor in Carceral Geography at the School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences at the University of Birmingham, UK. Dominique’s work has progressed theorisation of the carceral, and understandings of carceral experience. She is currently working on nature contact in prison, the persistence of Victorian-era prisons in the UK, and the carceral-military complex.

Jennifer Turner is the leader of the Crime and Carcerality Research Group at the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg. Jennifer’s work is concerned with spaces, practices, and representations of incarceration, past and present. Jennifer has published widely in the fields of carceral geography and criminology. She is the author of *The Prison Boundary: Between Society and Carceral Space* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) and co-editor of *Carceral Mobilities: Interrogating Movement in Incarceration* (Routledge, 2017) and *The Prison Cell: Embodied and Everyday Spaces of Incarceration* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).