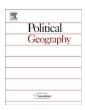


Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Political Geography

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/polgeo



The militarization of islands and migration: Tracing human mobility through US bases in the Caribbean and the Pacific



Jenna M. Loyd ^a, Emily Mitchell-Eaton ^b, Alison Mountz ^{c,*}

- ^a Zilber School of Public Health and Urban Studies Program, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1240 N. 10th St., PO Box 413, Milwaukee, WI 53201-0413, USA
- ^b Department of Geography, Syracuse University, 144 Eggers Hall, Syracuse, NY 13244, USA
- ^c Balsillie School of International Affairs and Geography, Wilfrid Laurier University, 67 Erb Street West, Waterloo, ON N2L 6C2, Canada

ARTICLE INFO

Article history: Available online 3 February 2016

Keywords:
Militarization
Islands
Migration
Detention
Empire
Humanitarianism

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we argue that the confinement of people on island military bases, whether narrated as humanitarian rescue, migration management, refugee resettlement, or militarized border enforcement, is an imperial process of ruination that impairs human possibility and erodes access to rights. Furthermore, the government's categorization of mobile people – as refugees, displaced, detainees, or migrants – informs the naming of these spaces, the bureaucratic and legal processes that they are subjected to, and their treatment (by local communities, federal authorities, the media, and the law). Empirical material is drawn from qualitative research conducted on US migration control in the Caribbean and Pacific. We identify spatial patterns of militarization operating across these sites, wherein migration is intertwined with enforcement, confinement, and militarization.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Two persistent criticisms of President Barack Obama's administration were the ongoing imprisonment of 'foreign enemy combatants' on the United States (US) Guantánamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba and maintenance of historically high levels of non-citizen detention and deportation. These are seemingly disconnected issues, one concerning war powers and the other domestic policy. Both tend to be read as exceptional to American ideals of respect for the rule of law and inclusion. Yet historical examination of the basis - and bases (Vine, 2009) - of detention across US mainland and nonmainland territories reveals an intertwined history of militarization and "gradated zones of sovereignty" embedded in imperial formations (Stoler, 2013, p. 8; also see Benton, 2010). Indeed, islands have long functioned as grounds for national projects of migration control and exclusion through enforcement and detention in remote locations where jurisdiction and lack of autonomy make legal status and asylum seeking complex.

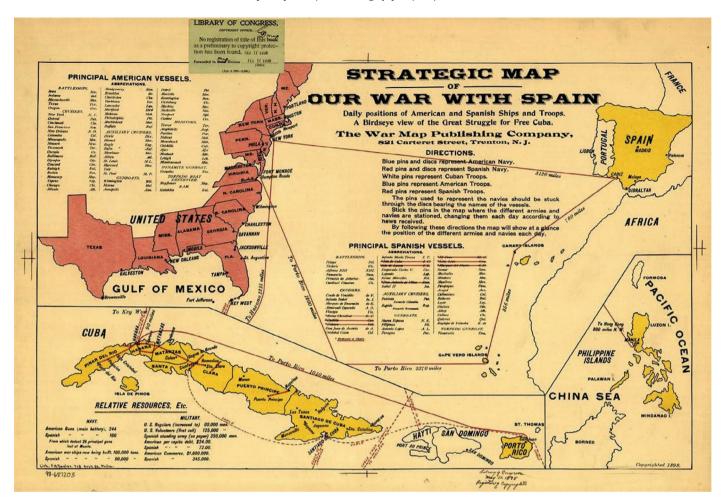
In this article, we bring imperialism and militarization into contemporary understandings of migration control and border studies by centering islands and US territories in our analysis. We emphasize both the historical and spatial continuities at work on islands in the confinement of people and their mobility. Within litera-

tures on imperialism, colonialism, and empire, we observe the repetition of geographical patterns, including militarization, confinement, exceptionalism, and dispossession. Although processes of colonial and neocolonial control do not happen solely on islands, islands figure centrally in government efforts to control territory and human mobility (e.g., Bastos, 2008; Burnett, 2005; Kaplan, 2005; Lipman, 2012; Vine, 2009).

Taking a longer view of recent detention of asylum seekers on islands enables us to historicize two assertions that are frequently made in discussion of contemporary migration control practices and uses of islands. First, we demonstrate a long-standing connection between US military operations abroad and US immigration at home. We ground this argument especially in the discussion of the evacuation of Vietnamese refugees through Guam in 1975. Second, we show 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 asylumseekers. We ground this argument in the discussion of Haitian asylum seekers detained in the Caribbean in the 1980s and 1990s. In so doing, we extend work by scholars of feminist geopolitics who argue that greater attention be paid to finer scales and marginalized groups to understand international relations (e.g., Hyndman, 2004; Sharpe, 2004). This approach and these histories thereby provide insight into longstanding connections between US geopolitics and migration control efforts.

We accomplish our analysis by drawing on Ann Stoler's (2013) conceptualization of ruination, which we suggest enables careful inquiry into the relationships between colonial and imperial past

^{*} Corresponding author. Balsillie School of International Affairs, 67 Erb Street West, Waterloo, ON N2L 6C2, Canada. Tel.: +1 585 507 5886; Fax: 226 772 3002. E-mail address: amountz@wlu.ca (A. Mountz).



Map 1. *Strategic Map of Our War With Spain*, 1898. (Source: Library of Congress).

and present. The heuristic of "colonial legacy," whereby the colonial past shapes the present, prevents us from grappling with how "imperial formations persist in their material debris, in ruined land-scapes and through the social ruination of people's lives" (2013, p. 10). By contrast, *ruination* functions as "an active, ongoing process that allocates imperial debris differentially and *ruin* as a violent verb [...] unites apparently disparate moments, places, and objects" (2013, p. 7). Working with the concept of ruination enables us to connect apparently discrete moments when histories of US colonial territorial control combine with imperial geopolitical conflicts over human mobility in the form of humanitarian militarization (Williams, 2014). Rather than being understood as exceptional to or departure from military or border violence, migration operations narrated as humanitarian relate to and facilitate state violence.

Acquired through conflict and conquest, the island territories we discuss have distinct yet intersecting histories of colonialism, occupation, dispossession, and state violence. As others have noted (Burnett, 2005; Vine, 2009), these intersecting histories provide insights into the work of and limits to imperial sovereignty (Benton, 2010). We explore the conditions that underlie repeated rounds of securitization on US island territories in the Pacific and Caribbean – one narrated as humanitarian refugee resettlement and the other as humanitarian interception or exclusion – by looking at specific episodes from the 1970s to 1990s. In so doing, we draw together a constellation of island sites where American empire is at work (Vine, 2012), often carried out through militarism yet narrated as humanitarianism (Espiritu, 2014; Ticktin, 2011). The islands we examine

feature long-standing struggles over migration and citizenship, legality, governance, and the development of military bases (Davis, 2011; Vine, 2009), struggles that date to the turn of the 20th century and earlier – exemplified here in Map 1.

Baldacchino and Milne (2006) coined the term "subnational island jurisdiction" to characterize the complex array of jurisdictions and degrees of sovereignty. An important insight from scholarship in island studies involves the complexity of island governance and status, alongside the observation that spatial forms of territorial control on islands rehearse long-standing forms of imperialism and empire at work everywhere. While we use the term *offshore* in this article, we work to problematize the term for its connotation of disconnection and exceptionalism. Island territories have complicated histories and forms of imperial belonging, exemplifying what Benton calls "disaggregated and uneven sovereignty" (2010, p. 30). The islands we discuss hold distinct territorial status as a result of multiple colonial histories of occupation and dispossession.

In order to provide historical context that can deepen understandings of contemporary domestic and transnational carceral landscapes (Mountz & Loyd, 2014), we draw on data collected during field research conducted from 2010 to 2013 for a project funded by the National Science Foundation. Qualitative methods proved necessary and appropriate for examination of migration and detention on islands due to the incomplete, dynamic, and often inaccurate reporting of statistics on marine and land interception and detention (Mountz, 2011). The research examined struggles over migration and asylum on islands where the United States, Australia, and Italy

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1061832

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/1061832

<u>Daneshyari.com</u>