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Review essay

The carceral: Beyond, around, through and within prison walls

Carceral geography: Spaces and practices of incarceration, Dominique Moran. Ashgate, Farnham (2015).

Historical geographies of prisons: Unlocking the usable carceral past, Karen M. Morin, Dominique Moran (Eds.). Routledge, London (2015).

Power and resistance in prison: Doing time, doing freedom, Thomas Ugelvik. Palgrave, Basingstoke (2014).

At first glance the prison is inherently static: it is an outcome, an endpoint, an oubliette. Its central role is to constrain movement, to constrain freedom and to separate from society. Indeed, academic studies of the prison, following the work of Goffman (1961), have often understood it as a 'total institution', marked by its enclosure, disconnection from broader society and a formal routinized pattern of life (cf. Moran, 2015: 87–88). The emerging sub-discipline of carceral geography, as well as other recent work on prisons in other disciplines, challenges these totalising visions. The three books under review all contribute to these new debates which involve: a reassessment of the ridged boundary of the prison; an exploration of carceral logics not only as confinement but also as coerced forms of mobility; and an extensive interrogation of the relationship between carceral logics and processes of subjectivisation. Whilst these focus on the carceral, the insights produced also have much to contribute to broader debates in contemporary geography about mobilities and the relationship between space and time. These three key contributions to this nascent sub-field also touch on issues which deserve further interrogation such as, the role of religion within carceral spaces, and how carceral geographies shape and are shaped by processes at the international as well as the national level.

1. The carceral is not bounded by walls

Carceral geography, is not just a fancier name for the geography of prisons. Rather, as Moran lays out there is a focus on the carceral as:

"... something more than merely the spaces in which individuals are confined – rather, that the 'carceral' is a social and psychological construction of relevance both within and outside of carceral spaces." (Moran, 2015: 87)

The carceral, thus conceived, highlights the porous, contested nature of the prison boundary which is a central theme in all of the books (Morin & Moran, 2015: 2; Ugelvik, 2014: 113–114 and Moran, 2015: 87–102). This reassessment goes beyond discussions

about how and when the prison boundary is traversed to encompass the ways in which it is enacted in numerous locales outside the prison walls. Sites of incarceration are then understood not as static, but rather as nodal and networked (Moran, 2015: 110). In the US, for example, public housing schemes have seen surveillance and security architectures – gates, cameras, bars, locks, metal detectors, patrols – becoming familiar within the material spatial environments of poor (mainly Black and Hispanic) communities (Moran, 2015; Shabazz, 2015; Jefferson, 2015). Similarly, Allspach's study of recently released women prisoners in Canada shows how they continue to be heavily monitored and constrained in ways that blur any distinctions between inside and outside (Moran, 2015: 92). Incarceration is thus demarked not only by physically bounded spaces but also on bodies and through carceral practices which occur in spaces considerably removed from facilities of incarceration. Here, Moran (2015: 102) suggests that carceral geography can learn much from the disassociation of the border from territory undertaken by critical border studies, a move which refocuses attention on how the state border is produced in multiple locations, often at a distance from the formal territorial boundary.

This perspective in which a prison is not defined by its' walls is categorically not a dismissal of the materiality of the prison. Materiality is central in various ways to all of the books under consideration here, especially the ways in which this materiality intersects with the corporeal, embodied experience of prison. The theme of embodiment emerges in different ways within the three books including: the centrality of food within in prison (Ugelvik, 2014: 134–155; Moran, 2015: 33–34), the significance of bodily demeanours or a carceral habitus (Ugelvik, 2014: 155–189; Moran, 2015: 38), and other ways in which incarceration is marked on the body in permanent and semi-permanent ways including, fascinatingly, through dental hygiene and tooth loss (Moran, 2015: 34–37). Whilst the architecture of prisons and other carceral spaces plays a key role in shaping embodied experiences, these are also produced by an individual's relation to distance, time and health. Distance is experienced both as distance from family and friends (in terms of travel time, and visit frequency rather than a simple measurement of miles) but also as difference in terms of the unfamiliarity of surroundings, climate and landscape (Moran, 2015: 67). Similarly, those subject to incarceration have an embodied relationship to time through age and infirmity which plays a key role in how the *TimeSpace* of incarceration is experienced (Moran, 2015: 49–50). Carceral logics, when entwined with these material forms, produce corporal experiences of space and time which are not uniform but which are in turn shaped by other processes of subjectivisation (or as Ugelvik following Althusser might prefer, interpellation (2014: 65)) such as gender, race, age(ing) etc. Carceral geography, thus explores the material and discursive practices through which the carceral comes to be marked on racialized, gendered, aged, bodies in particular places and at particular times

(Morin & Moran, 2015).

Key engagements with the carceral outside the prison walls have often, although by no means exclusively (see [Shabazz, 2009](#)), engaged with contexts within the US. This in part due to the concern with 'new punitiveness' in penal policies which has resulted in the doubling of the prison population in the US since the 1990s (Moran, 2015: 64). (A trend also seen in parts of Europe including the UK (Moran, 2015: 105)). This policy approach also led to the considerable expansion of practices such as solitary confinement ([Story, 2015: 34](#)). This 'new punitiveness' is intimately intertwined with broader neo-liberal approaches and policies that have operated to criminalise and incarcerate the poor – a process discussed by Wacquant as 'prisonfare' ([Wacquant, 2009](#)). This examination of how the prison has been used to manage poor populations shows how this penal approach engages carceral logics and applies them to populations understood to be 'problematic', so extending these logics into spaces outside those previously considered carceral. Jefferson's chapter, for example, discusses the ways in which from the mid-1990s New York experienced a shift away from incarceration towards what he refers to as 'hyperpolicing'. This set of policies and approaches involved the modes and functions of the prison being applied to the 'problem people/problem places', discursively produced under the Bloomberg administration ([Jefferson, 2015: 194](#)). These people and places were not only poor but were distinctly 'ethnoracialized' and the hyperpolicing strategy involved "producing and inscribing stigmatized subjectivities" ([Jefferson, 2015: 189](#)). These stigmatized populations and locales were then to be controlled, their boundaries enforced and their mobilities constrained. For example, police officers would stop those entering housing complexes and require them to state their business, produce keys to prove residency and/or provide identification documents ([Jefferson, 2015: 195](#)). Reflecting Foucault's concern with the prison as a panopticon, surveillance was a key part of achieving the desired control of these problem people/problem places. Hyperpolicing in New York therefore involved the deployment of CCTV cameras, licence plate readers and even surveillance towers ([Jefferson, 2015: 196](#)). Carceral logics can then be seen to be at work outside of penal and other incarcerating institutions.

Out of this nascent examination of the ways in which the carceral transcends the prison boundary comes an understanding of the carceral as dynamic and productive. Productive in as much as carceral forms shape spaces and subjectivities within and without of prison walls, and dynamic both in terms of the shifting location and populations which become subject to it, and the variety of ways in which these logics are employed.

2. Freedom and movement

Examining the carceral beyond the prison walls highlights how it is not only a set of logics which confine but a set of logics which relocate and disperse people and resources (both material and political). The focus in carceral geographies is not only on the site of the prison but its siting, not only on the confinement of inmates but on their forced mobility. As Moran (2015: 72–3) highlights, whilst mobility may at first glance seem to be a means to and a symptom of autonomy and freedom, examinations of the carceral frequently encounter forced disciplinary forms of mobility that have little to do with liberty. Her discussion of prison siting shows up some of the key dynamics of how prisons reshape spaces and places, outside as well as within their walls, as well as how they relocate inmates (Moran, 2015: 59–70). In the US, the siting of prisons in poor rural areas has been viewed by some as a development strategy: a route to jobs and economic regeneration which has led to towns and districts campaigning for prisons to be sited

in their area ([Norton, 2015: 168](#); Moran, 2015: 61–63). Prison siting in the 1990s was seen to benefit poor, rural, predominantly White, areas of the US where the prisons were built as it led to resources being directed to these areas rather than to the urban locations from which the mainly Black and Hispanic prisoners were removed. (Moran, 2015: 64–65). Moreover, in the US prisoners are considered resident in the area of their incarceration rather than the area they are from, the siting of a prison can therefore lead to the redrawing of electoral boundaries (Moran, 2015: 64–5). The carceral reshaping of space is then often about re-location and coerced mobility not just confinement.

Whilst forced mobilities continue to be significant contemporarily, their substantial historical role in reshaping global geographies should not be forgotten. Anderson et al.'s chapter discusses the significance of penal transportation as part of wider imperial histories of spatial reorganisation, connection and disconnection, highlighting how these coerced mobilities were central to "the formation of networks of empire" (2015: 161). They show how penal transportation interconnected with other processes and activities of empire including commerce and political control. The distribution of convicts was often governed by colonies' labour requirements and they were frequently shipped along with other goods on established trade routes ([Anderson et al. 2015: 150–7](#)). Convicts were also central to the expansion of empires and were often placed in contested or border territories for political purposes. For example, the British utilised prisoners to establish a presence in Australia and the Andamans, and Russia placed convicts (whilst Japan planned to do so) on the Kuril Islands when the territorial border was not fully established ([Anderson et al. 2015: 149](#)). Penal transportation traced and was part of the architecture of empire not only through utilising convicts for economic and/or political ends but also as part of the production of a racialized global geography. Paton traces the emergence of this imagined racial geography of empire in her discussion of the halting by colonial authorities of the transportation of convicts from the West Indies (who were Black) to Australia, conceived to be White ([Paton, 2008](#)). This ban on transportation of convicts to Australia was also put in place in India but "Europeans born in India were not included in the prohibition" ([Anderson et al. 2015: 154](#)). The patterns of convict transportation were then tied into broader colonial political discourses and practices just as contemporary carceral logics in the US have been seen to be tied to neo-liberal ones.

Movement and mobility have, of course, been central concerns in geography for some time and elements of coercion and discipline are part of these mobilities and immobilities. However, close examinations of practices such as Moran's exploration of prisoner transportation in Russia where women are transported long distances, in appalling conditions, brings "coercion more clearly into view." (Moran, 2015: 73). These carceral forms of mobility complicate the relationship between agency and mobility as the mobilities themselves are part of the attempt to limit and curtail the autonomy of those being made mobile. This is not to say that coerced forms of mobility completely rob those subject to them of agency, for example: Anderson et al. highlight the ways in which convicts and their families played a role in determining the destinations that convicts were sent to (2015: 158–160). Nevertheless, exploring these carceral mobilities highlights how mobility can be an attempt to curtail freedom and how forced mobilities impact not only those subject to them but also departure points, destinations and routes.

3. Agency and subjectivisation

Carceral geographies examine who and where is governed through carceral logics and the precise forms that these take, as well as the subjectivities produced through these processes and

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