

Evolving Spaces of Bodily Control

In my dissertation I explore spatial and technological shifts in American-run military detention dating from the signing of the Geneva Conventions in 1949 to the present day. I describe the historical development of techniques of bodily control as framed by two seemingly irreconcilable goals: one premising security on the confinement of the unruly body and the other seeking to both define and control that body through the management of spaces and technologies of circulation. My work suggests that military detention is a vital and continuously evolving instrument in discourses of security and the geography of violence.

War prison spaces, when not completely absent from discussions about transformations in late-modern war, are often presented as self-evident and unchanging byproducts of the violence of war. The existing historiography of wartime detention thus gives little consideration to the connections that war prisons have with important shifts in the spatiality of power, naturalizing this assumed spatial stasis. In my work, however, I seek to reconsider what we experience as inevitable about the spatial limits of detention. Using an array of military and civilian archives, I build the dissertation around five narratives, each describing distinct spatio-temporal events in the geography of military detention: capture, processing, interrogation, detainment, and release. The period I examine has seen considerable changes in the landscape of global governance, the calculation of risk, and the incorporation of new modes of communications technology into both the military apparatus and the broader, rapidly globalizing civilian realm. Wartime detention, too, has endured a substantial reorientation. My aim is to use military detention as a lens through which to describe the emergence of distinct geographies of bodily control. I argue that the locus of wartime detention practices has moved from institutional and architectural enclosures to the spaces of decentralized circulation beyond the disciplinary wall.

(left: Camp No. 1.: Koje Island, Korea, 1953. ©Joseph Roberts, http://www.rocketroberts.com/korea/images/koje-do_prison_camp1.jpg)
(right: Camp Cropper: Baghdad, Iraq, 2007. ©John Moore, AP)

