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## **Looking at military landscapes: definitions and approaches**

**Professor Rachel Woodward**

**School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University, UK**

### **Abstract**

This chapter explores how military landscapes have been conceptualised and understood. The chapter starts by defining what is meant by the terms 'landscape' and 'military'. The chapter then proceeds with an exploration of a range of examples from a variety of disciplinary origins in order to support the argument that military landscapes constitute a diversity of sites and have a ubiquity of occurrence. Such examples include battlefields and other sites of conflict, the interconnections between landscapes and the pursuit of specific campaigns and conflicts, the issue of environmental impacts of military activities and the interpretation of these with reference to the specificity of landscapes, and landscapes of memory and military memorialization. The chapter then goes on to consider how military landscapes can be viewed, raising questions about the visibility and invisibility of such sites. The chapter concludes with some observations about the imperative for sustained scholarly attention to military landscapes, in order to inform debates about militarism as a social force.

## Introduction

This chapter is about military landscapes and how they might be defined and studied. It is predicated on an concept of landscape that is inclusive of a number of different approaches to the term, and on an understanding of militarism and military activities as far-reaching in terms of how they shape economic, social, cultural and political life across the globe. In this chapter, I review a selection of studies of military landscapes, studies which may or may not have been undertaken with an explicit orientation towards the concept, but which are included here to illustrate the range of ways in which military landscapes can be understood. The variety here extends from explorations of the morphology and interpretation of battlefields, through to accounts of the meanings attached to sites as diverse as military barracks and military memorials. The chapter then considers some issues pertaining to the investigation of military landscapes, particularly those concerning the visibility and invisibility of these sites. The intention here is not to provide a definitive overview of this diverse field, but to bring together diverse literatures to demonstrate how military landscapes can be interpreted from a range of perspectives.

In using the term 'landscape' I refer to three related ideas. The first of these is the idea of landscape in morphological terms. Through this definition we understand landscapes as the material patterning of land brought about through processes that are both natural and human in origin. In referring to landscapes as a focus for study, in the first instance this includes the study of the ways in which features and objects appear in space, and the observation of the distribution of such features and objects (Muir, 1999). The second conceptualisation of landscape is that of the landscape as text (Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988). Long-standing as an approach in much cultural geography, this conceptualisation promotes the reading of a landscape as one would a text, with a view to establishing the social, economic and political relations which cause such landscapes to come into being, and through which we can ascertain the consequences of the establishment of visible manifestations of such processes. When we talk of the representational capacity of landscapes, the ways in which landscapes might be read in terms of how they speak to specific ideas, it is to this conceptualisation of landscapes that we refer. The third idea referred to by the term is of landscapes as sites of experience, locations through which and in which subjectivities are constructed and articulated, which evince emotional and affective responses and which, in turn, are read in ways that are shaped by the responses provoked (Wylie, 2007). In this chapter, I use all three of these ideas about landscapes in order to explore how military landscapes can be understood and studied.

Talking about military landscapes requires us also to define the term 'military'. In this chapter, I refer primarily to landscapes that are military in origin, which is to say that I refer to landscapes which are produced, read and responded to as an outcome of the organized activities of those institutions (armies, navies, air forces, defence ministries) which have been vested by the state with the authority to exercise potentially lethal force and violence.

Military landscapes therefore do not, primarily, refer to landscapes where the imprint of security agendas by non-state actors can be seen, and nor do they refer primarily to landscapes which see the impact of paramilitary activity. In this chapter, I also use two terms quite explicitly. One of these, 'military activities', refers to the activities undertaken by military forces and state defence organizations in both conflict and non-conflict situations, either in direct pursuit of military objectives, or as a by-product or secondary consequence of the pursuit of military objectives. Military activities are thus not just the explicit and overt use of lethal force in combat operations, but also the vast range of planning, preparatory and training activities without which the execution of military force would not be possible and through which realms of defence are constructed and sustained. The other term used is 'militarism' which refers to the extension of military objectives and ideas into non-military realms of social life. Whilst the term may sometimes be used to denote quite extreme examples in historical periods where this process has been understood as quite explicit, my argument here is that militarism is more usefully used as a concept with which to understand the logic and consequences of more mundane, prosaic and everyday experiences. Furthermore, this allows us to see militarism as it operates at a range of scales, from the national right down to that of the individual (see Woodward, 2005).

In this chapter, I argue that military landscapes are, in advanced capitalist economies, ubiquitous. Military landscapes are everywhere. If we take together the three observations made about how we can understand landscapes, and the observation about the need to focus on both military activities and militarism, it becomes possible to start looking at the wide range and variety of sites and spaces which we might denote as military landscapes. I will return to this point in the conclusion, in order to argue for the necessity of sustained academic inquiry into such landscapes and address the question as to why we should look at these things. In the first half of this chapter, though, I want to explore something of this ubiquity. I also want to underscore something of their subtlety. A vignette from my academic life will illustrate this point. One afternoon, a couple of years ago now, I was waiting for a train at Newtown railway station in rural Wales and strolling on the platform with colleagues at the start of the journey home after a conference. I happened to glance at one of a number of doors in a building on the platform. On it, at waist-height, a small sign read 'Thales', lettered according a distinctive corporate visual imagery. The Thales Group is a multinational corporation, French in origin, specialising in information and communications systems for the defence sector. So here was a corporate advertisement for the military-industrial complex in a small railway station. Thales at the time was part of a consortium supplying communications technologies under contract to Network Rail, the company which runs Britain's rail infrastructure. Thales is representative of the ever-increasing economic and political power of private corporations the core purpose of which is assisting with the planning, provisioning and prosecution of armed violence under the neo-liberal regimes which shape our militarized geoeconomic present (see Cowan and

Smith, 2009). The Thales sign at Newtown railway station may not militarise the landscape in ways that are as obvious as a bomb crater or a tank, but that glance at that door confirmed for me something about our need, as researchers of military phenomena, to grasp both the subtlety and ubiquity of military power in shaping the landscapes which surround us, as well as its more obvious, immediate and specific manifestations.

### **The variety of military landscapes**

The most immediately obvious type of landscape which we would recognise as military would be sites which bear the distinct imprint of military action and armed conflict. We often term such sites 'battlefields', although in fact the range of types of sites included here escapes the idea of a single defined rural space involving the direct engagement of opposed, organised armed forces, and would include urban areas as much as it would the more traditionally understood sites of battle such as are still so evident in contemporary Europe. The study of battlefields constitutes a major component of both academic and lay interest in military landscapes. In traditional military geography, for example, the exploration of the interplay between physical geographical and human factors and the consequences of this for the outcome of specific historic battles and campaigns constitutes a long-standing interest (see Doyle and Bennett, 2002; Palka et al, 2005). Examples of specific studies within this approach include Passmore and Harrison's (2009) exploration of the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes, Belgium, in 1944, or Pollard's (2010) reading of the field of the battle of Culloden, fought between Jacobite and Hanoverian forces in 1746 in Scotland, with reference to the terrain on which it was fought and its influence on the battle's outcome.

Viewing military landscapes through a wider lens, we can also consider here the work of environmental historians and the contributions their scholarship makes in providing interpretation of campaigns and conflicts with reference to physical and human geography at the larger scale (see Pearson et al, 2010; Pearson, forthcoming). Examples would include Pearson's research on Vichy France and the role of landscape, discursively and materially, in encounters between German forces and French resistance in the Carmargue (Pearson, 2009), on the unoccupied zone of France in *maquis* areas (Pearson, 2008), and on the role of forestry and foresters (Pearson, 2006, 2007). Although not working within an explicitly environmental historical framework, the work of Peluso and Vandergeest (2011) is complementary here in its explorations of 'political forests' in South East Asia and their material and discursive uses during the regional conflicts precipitated by the Cold War.

Military landscapes can also be considered as sites in which environmental issues and politics are played out in the present. There is long debate within geographical and environmental studies about the consequences and politics of military environmental impacts. Military activities, ranging from active operations through to peacetime training and maintenance activities, are often seen as inherently environmentally destructive (see

Woodward, 2004). Examples include the contamination of soils, air, water, flora and fauna through the use of explosives, heavy metals in munitions, and other chemical pollution, and geomorphological changes as a consequence of bombing, shelling or deliberate earthworks and environmental manipulation which may be environmentally deleterious. Contamination as a result of training, transportation and maintenance activities is also an issue. The military forces of many nation-states, particularly those of advanced capitalist economies, have increasingly been held to account by national governments and by pressure groups and the environmental lobby over environmental impacts, and it is worth noting how external critique has often prompted remedial action. However, and as a number of commentators have noted, the levels of environmental destruction and contamination produced as a consequence of military activities have been of sufficient severity or extent as to merit explanatory strategies and explanations rife with political intent concerning armed forces' self-image (see Havlick, 2007, 2011; Davis, 2005, 2007; Davis et al, 2007). Critiques have moved beyond the simple idea of a 'greenwash' to focus on the complex interplay between defence objectives around the use of landscapes, and defence objectives around the presentation for public consumption of explanations around the uses of such landscapes.

We can also consider military landscapes as sites encountered by both military personnel and civilians alike in the course of daily lives in contexts far removed from armed conflict. Military installations such as bases, dockyards and airfields, communications complexes, barracks, training areas and depots occupy significant amounts of land in many nation-states. An often-quoted estimate by Westing (1988) suggests that at least 1% of the land area of the major industrial powers is used for military purposes. Clearly, if we are looking for reasons to explain the ubiquity of military landscapes, the sheer number of installations and their wide distribution would be key here. Such installations provoke reactions. Landscapes, as sites which are viewed, inhabited and experienced, exert effects on individual subjectivity and emotion. Tivers' account of the landscapes of a major British Army basing complex, Aldershot, in the south of England, explores the different dimensions of such responses by looking at axes of experience. Such landscapes may be simultaneously places of stress and security, of stimulus and ennui, and of status and stigma (Tivers, 1999). Whilst the studies of military basing, whether home or overseas, may focus primarily on the politics of such installations, in landscape terms there is much to be learnt from a consideration of the individual, personal responses these landscapes provoke both amongst civilians who live in proximity, but also amongst the personnel who live or work within them. Accounts of such landscapes and the complexities of the politics they provoke include Higate and Henry's (2011) exploration of the zones of division in Cyprus maintained by UN personnel, or Yamazaki's (2011) exploration of the militarization of space by the US armed forces in Okinawa, Japan.

It is in contexts of active armed conflict that we see most clearly the imprint of military power across landscapes. Studies of the landscapes of conflict are, because of the changing

nature of warfare, focusing increasingly on urban sites where 'war amongst the people' (Smith, 2006) is played out. A key line of inquiry here concerns what Graham (2009, 2010, 2011) terms the 'new military urbanism' which examines the ways in which military imperatives for the domination of space have found new expression due to the demands imposed by the urban context in which active operations and less visible securitization strategies take place. The landscape consequences of urban operations are often the starkest of the military landscapes of armed conflict, given that they shape the very signs and symbols of modern development. These landscapes are utterly different to the battlefields of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Weizman's (2007) exploration of the Israeli armed forces' complex architecture of occupation in the urban areas of Israel/Palestine makes clear.

Military landscapes can also be seen as sites where memorialization of military activities takes place. Although not necessarily immediately evident as locations bearing the imprint of military power in place, in the aftermath of conflict (and quite apart from visible remains of conflict) we can see how militarism extends to physical form, and becomes enmeshed in processes of memorialization at scales from the national to the personal. Acts of preservation of battlefield sites are a significant example of this process in action. Former battlefields can become places for the construction and re-telling of narratives of national identity. The example of the War in the Pacific national historic park on Guam is a case in point, where the landscape of the park invites a reading of Guam which supports a very specific war memory of Guam as a US colony and base, and as a significant site for US forces during the Second World War (Herman, 2008). With reference to Hawai'i, Ferguson and Turnbull's (1998) reading of that island focuses on the imprinting across the landscapes of the island the power of US military forces and the island's construction as a significant outpost in support of US military territorial objectives. The meanings of battlefields, and of the conflicts which produce them, are fluid and unstable, subject to changing social understandings and geopolitical contexts. So, for example, studies of the Culloden battlefield (Masson and Harden, 2009; Pollard, 2009), the Isandlwana site of the battle between British and Zulu forces in South Africa in 1879 (Pollard, 2007) and sites in Dehli involved with the Indian revolt or first war of independence in 1857 (Lahiri, 2003) all show how the meanings and interpretations of such battlefield sites shift over time in response to changing social responses to the conflicts which they remember, and the specific activities that occurred there.

Military landscapes can also be sites of mourning and remembrance, whilst they also simultaneously promote interpretations of specific battles, campaigns and conflicts. The landscapes of the First World War, particularly those of the Western Front, have long intrigued scholars for the way in which the necessity of assertions of identity at national, regional and regimental scales intertwine with the necessity for the remembrance and memorialization of the war dead as individuals. It is also possible that the scale of scholarly interest in such sites reflects the fact that the practices of memorialisation on the Western Front constituted such an extraordinary period of symbolic landscape creation in the early

20<sup>th</sup> century (Bushaway, 1992; Heffernan, 1995). Site-specific assessments of the politics and practices of national and individual memorialisation include studies of the Newfoundland memorial at Beaumont Hammel on the Somme (Gough, 2004), the Canadian national memory at Vimy ridge (Hucker, 2009), the South African memorial at Delville Wood (Foster, 2004), the Passchendaele site on the Somme (Iles, 2003), the Ulster memorial tower on the Somme (Switzer and Graham, 2010), and the British war cemeteries and the ideas mobilised through their design (Morris, 1997). We see in such readings of landscape how the morphology of specific landscapes provides a form of text to be read in order to understand prevailing political ideas and sentiments both during a memorial site's construction.

When considering how military memorial landscapes work as places of remembering, we can also consider how the political imperatives and personal needs of those involved in their construction and maintenance, and of those who live and visit, change over time. The significant body of work on the memorial landscapes of the Second World War in Singapore (Muzaini, 2006; Muzaini and Yeoh, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2007) shows how the readings of memorial landscapes (including museums) demanded of the post-colonial nation, with an emphasis on national and humanitarian readings, have replaced older interpretations that spoke to both individual and personal remembrance, and to assertions of imperial power and memory. Similarly, as Dimitrova (2005) has argued with reference to Bulgaria, individual and local modes of remembering of the Bulgarian dead of the First World War were reworked and developed over time in response to a developing state articulation of this conflict in nationalistic and patriotic terms. Subsequent generational re-interpretations of Second World War dead in Finland, with a more contemporary emphasis on individual memory, overlay older state-sanctioned modes of memorialisation with an emphasis on national identity, established in the immediate aftermath of the conflict by the Finnish state (Raivo, 2004). It is also pertinent to remember that even in the process of their construction, there can be quite distinct differences as to how these memorial landscapes take the form that they do and thus promote certain readings and responses over others. For example, the Broken Hill First World War memorial in this Australian mining town could be read as a snub to the resistance to the war of the unionized labour force by the town's political elites keen to respond to the call to arms made by Britain as the imperial mother country (Rainbird, 2003).

### **Viewing military landscapes**

Military landscapes, then, comprise a diverse array of types of site. An interesting question then follows, as to how we can *know* these sites. There are two elements to this question. The first of these concerns the visibility or otherwise of military landscapes, for whilst claiming their ubiquity and wide distribution, we should also be aware that some are more visible than others, and there are reasons for and consequences of this general visibility

which have knock-on effects on the extent of our knowledge of military landscapes. The second element to this question concerns how we might look at or encounter these sites. This issue goes beyond the simple fact of visibility /invisibility, and considers the methods which we can deploy to establish understanding of the politics and power of these places. In the following section, I consider these two elements of the question of knowing in turn.

It is a truism that some military landscapes will be more visible than others. Localities which are used by military forces for military purposes tend, as a rule, to be subject to security controls which render them more or less visible to passing (or even sustained) civilian interest. This may be true for sites of active operations as well as for the more prosaic and everyday sites of domestic military basing. These are sites where sight is restricted, in terms of observation of the internal operations contained within. So the voluminous literature on military landscapes which focuses in landscapes of memory and memorialisation may, perhaps, be attributable at least in part to the ready access of civilians to such sites, located as they are in public space and constructed with the express intent of prompting civilian access. The relative absence of sustained studies of military landscapes which are locations of operations and preparations may reflect the limitations on public access even to sites of very low or negligible security value. Such sites, as Tivers (1999) and Woodward (2004) make clear, can be intimidating to non-military visitors.

The restricted opportunities for viewing and access are not insurmountable, however. In my own teaching, for example, which includes a module where students are encouraged to conduct personal fieldwork and write an account of the geographies of a military installation, there will be examples every year where an enterprising group or individual has formally requested access to a military installation or base for a briefing on its function and purpose, and this has been granted. We cannot assume, necessarily, that all sites are always off-limits. But many of course are. The work of Trevor Paglen as a geographer interested in these secret sites is instructive here. He details, for example, the lengths to which he and companions have gone to trek through the deserts of Nevada to observe the hidden, secret spaces of military testing in the American south-west (Paglen, 2009).

But there are further elements to this question of visibility. One element concerns public knowledge beyond that which can be gleaned through in-place observation. Are sites mapped? Do they appear on cartographic representations of space produced for civilian purposes? In the UK, the Ordnance Survey map series (itself of 18<sup>th</sup> century military origin) for much of the post-Second World War period famously contained absences – white spaces (literally) where existing military installations thought by government and military forces to be of a sensitive or secret nature were simply not marked. Although visible on the ground, in cartographic terms such sites were rendered invisible. With the development of orbiting satellites for both military and civilian purposes, and the development of technologies for the high-level photographic capture of the earth's surface, and with the expansion into the public domain of such photographic representations through facilities such as Google Earth

and StreetView, such cartographic omissions have become increasingly irrelevant. This is not to say, however, that the representations produced by Google Earth and suchlike offer a ready glimpse of a contemporary reality, for such images are of course famously subject to editing and control in terms of what is shown (Perkins and Dodge, 2009). The point here is that we cannot assume that military landscapes are necessarily knowable, or unknowable – the point, in terms of empirical exploration, is to ascertain visibility and invisibility as a necessary part of investigation. We should also consider the wider, more abstract issue of what it means to see. The focus of much contemporary critical geopolitical inquiry has been precisely this issue of visualisation and the scopic regimes which shape how we understand what we see (see MacDonald et al, 2010). These are pertinent issues for the theorization of military landscapes.

### **Conclusion: the future necessity of studying military landscapes**

Ultimately, there is also a question as to why we should look at military landscapes, and about the questions we should ask of these spaces and places in view of contemporary changes to the organisation and structure of military forces and institutions. For what reasons is there scholarly benefit to the investigation and viewing of such sites? I suggest that there are three specific arguments to be made. The first of these is about visibility. The process of looking, or attempting to look at military landscapes is a process which renders phenomena visible. At its most simple, this entails taking the ordinary, the prosaic and the taken-for-granted and subjecting them to critical gaze. An example here would be Tivers' work (1999) which takes the simple phenomenon of a town dominated by a complex of army facilities, and builds up a complex argument about the range of social responses that mundane sights such as signage and buildings provoke.

The second of these is about accountability. The investigation of military phenomena is an investigation of the accountability of military forces. Whilst this relationship may be more explicit in analysis of issues such as defence expenditure or military personnel strategies, where clear lines of public expenditure can be accounted for or questioned by analysis of the outcomes of such expenditure, the question of military accountability to the civil society on behalf of which it operates is pertinent too to landscape issues. An example here would be the ways in which memorial landscapes, which are so often state-constructed with direct input from military organisations, may (or may not) accord with civilian desires to see the costs of armed conflicts recognised in ways which make such conflicts meaningful to them.

The third argument for sustained critical investigation of military landscapes concerns militarism, and the academic imperative to understand how, and under what circumstances, the extension of military objectives to civilian spheres of social activity occurs. Military landscapes are spaces and places where the marks of military imperatives are manifest in material form, and which can be read in order to understand the workings of such

imperatives. By understanding how militarism operates as a social force across space, we develop the basis for better-informed social debates about the extent to which civil society may wish to express its support, rejection, acquiescence or denial of the military activities undertaken in its name.

These questions of visibility, accountability and civil-military relations are highly pertinent when we consider military activities and militarism not as enduring and monolithic over time, but rather as dynamic, shifting processes. Changing geopolitical configurations, combined with socio-economic and political alterations and differentiations internal to nation states, continue to effect change in the structure, organisation and thus spatial distribution and entrenchment of military forces and activities. One example here would be the changes seen in contemporary European nation states since the end of the Cold War, in terms of the significant reduction in sizes of standing armed forces, the movement in many nation states from a conscripted to an all-volunteer force, and evolutions in the use and capabilities of weapons systems and doctrines of warfare. These are changes which take place – literally – and the consequences of such changes are written upon the landscape. The research agenda suggested by contemporary changes is in part about understanding and thus predicting consequences for spaces and places as a consequence. The return to civilian ownership of redundant military lands would be one example, and the evolution of tighter levels of securitization in specific places as a requirement of secrecy for military industrial development would be another. A further example would be the move towards outsourcing and sub-contracting of formerly military functions to the private sector. Encouraged through the adoption of neo-liberal regimes of economic management, such changes have profound potential consequences for our understanding of what constitutes ‘military’ and thus a ‘military landscape’. The UK practice of outsourcing the management of army training areas to a private sector consortium (Landmark) or the exponential growth in the use of private security contractors who require basing and training facilities quite distinct from those habitually developed by military forces both reflect changes on landscapes which, through their very presence, blur a more traditional distinction between the military and civilian spheres.

Finally, we should consider the agendas suggested by the changing nature of civil-military relations, brought into being by changing structures and functions of armed forces and reflected in shifts in the ways in which civil society responds to its armed forces. New modes of commemoration and mourning emergent during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and prompted by the public repatriation of the bodies of fallen soldiers illustrate this well. As Walklate et al (2011) note, the solemn silent crowds lining the route taken by hearses carrying the bodies of fallen soldiers through the Wiltshire town of Wootton Bassett denotes the emergence of a reconfigured politics of remembrance which is simultaneously appropriate and uncomfortable because of the questions these acts pose for our acceptance (or otherwise) of the legitimacy of conflict. New modes of civilian regulation of activities which impact upon the environment, which require adherence following the outsourcing of

military functions to civilian management, have yet to be investigated, but these too raise difficult questions about public acceptance (or otherwise) of the costs of military activities. Clearly, then, there is scope not just for continued sustained examination of the nature of military activities and institutions and their relationship to the civil societies in which they are based, but also for critique of the consequences of such activities as they are written across the landscape.

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