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## Introduction

The dystopic anthology film *Ten Years*, released in the aftermath of the Occupy Hong Kong movements of 2014, imagines a near-future where local identity, political dissent, and cultural history in Hong Kong are increasingly erased (Hui 2019). In one of the stories, politicians anxious for approval from Central Government conspire with triad gangs to pass a controversial new security law, staging an attack to stimulate public fear. In recent times, life has grimly imitated art. In July 2019, in the wake of a series of mass protests, a brutal assault on protesters was carried out by a masked group of attackers. Wielding metal poles, the group attacked members of the public at random as they travelled home to Yuen Long, in the northern territories of Hong Kong. There is evidence that the attackers were affiliated to local triads, and widespread speculation that the groups were acting as 'thugs-for-hire' (Varese and Wong 2018). In June 2020, despite widespread protest, a new security law was passed that radically curbs free speech and political protest (Amnesty 2020). These events have brought the new politics of law and order in Hong Kong to the centre of international debate. Formerly known as a centre of laissez-faire economics (Chiu and Lui 2009) and low rates of crime (Broadhurst, Lee and Chan 2017), today Hong Kong is increasingly securitised, bounded and confined.<sup>i</sup>

In this paper we interrogate these dynamics of urban confinement in Hong Kong through a detailed examination of the notorious enclave of Kowloon Walled City. The Walled City was a disputed micro-territory in colonial Hong Kong, described as 'one of history's great anomalies' (Sinn 1987: 30). The area remained under Chinese rule throughout the period of British colonialism, with neither jurisdiction wishing to take active responsibility for its municipal administration (Sinn 1987, Wesley-Smith 1973). The area is frequently depicted as the site of a vibrant informal culture formed in the absence of government oversight (Girard and Lambot 2014); a self-governing 'modern pirate utopia' (Mead 2014) formed amid urban density and precarity that acted as a 'haven for illegal immigrants, criminals and vice' (Pullinger 1989: 5). But it is also a unique exemplar of the urban consequences of Hong Kong's history of 'collaborative colonialism' (Law 2009); a story told 'within the narrow gap emergent in-between other grand narratives' (Law 2009: 179) of the UK and Chinese control (Chow 1992). As we will argue, the Walled City stands as a prototypical example of the 'carceral city' (Foucault 1991), with notable resonances with the Hong Kong frontier of Chinese expansionism, as well as broader experiences of urban confinement.

The paper is based on the oral testimonies of twenty-two participants who lived and worked in the area in the period 1960-1991. Drawing on these testimonies alongside documentary and archival sources, we make three primary arguments. First, building on scholarship that engages with carcerality outside the prison wall (Moran 2015; Turner 2016; Moran and Schliehe 2017; Moran, Turner and Schliehe 2018), we locate the Walled City as a *quasi-carceral* space. We argue that this instance of carceral urbanism extends the conceptual range of carceral geography toward accounts of urban surveillance and disciplinary control, while supplying a necessary historical counterweight to more contemporary accounts (Davis 1990/2006; Graham 2010). Second, engaging with recent scholarship on urban exceptionalism and extraterritorial statecraft (Easterling 2016), we argue for the Walled City as an instance of *colonial exceptionalism* that fulfilled a backdoor economic function for the British colonial government, with resonances with the present position of Hong Kong as a zoned exception from Chinese state policy (Ong 2006). Third, we argue for the need to pay close attention to the *cultural afterlife* of the Walled City and draw lessons to inform contemporary analyses of political protest. Despite its demolition in 1993, the Walled City now occupies a unique position in the cultural imaginary, a makeshift identity that reverberates with contemporary social movements. Finally, we draw conclusions from the case-study of the Walled City for carceral, urban and postcolonial scholarship, as well as a portent for the future of Hong Kong.

### **Excavating the Walled City**

In 1898, some fifty years after the violent annexation of Hong Kong as a colony during the Opium Wars (Carroll 2007),<sup>ii</sup> Britain leased a further tract of land from the Chinese Government. This area, which became known as the ‘New Territories’, was intended to improve the sustainability of the territory of Hong Kong and include more arable land. As part of this ‘unequal treaty’ (Wesley-Smith 1998), the Chinese Government included a clause which retained sovereignty over a former garrison known as ‘Kowloon Walled City.’<sup>iii</sup> One year later, in 1899, the British colonial administration reneged on this aspect of the treaty, and asserted their sovereign claim over the territory. However, as Sinn notes, ‘this remained a unilateral revision of the Convention which the Chinese government never recognized’ (Sinn 1987: 37). As a result, this small and unlikely patch of land – approximately 0.1 square miles – emerged as both disputed territory and diplomatic impasse. As Harter argues, the ‘diplomatic status of the Walled City is

unmistakably the product of historical disagreement between Britain and China ... clearly temporal, manufactured, and bilateral' (Harter 2000: 95).

As a result of the historical dispute, from the outset the Walled City was administered differently to the rest of Hong Kong's territory. While the physical 'wall' surrounding the Walled City was removed during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong during World War II, the colonial government continued to use the line of the wall for zoning purposes (Lau, Lawrence and Ho 2018). Demonstrating parallels with Chinese enclaves in Shanghai, the population of the Walled City was not plumbed into the water-supply or electricity grid, public services were minimal, and policing was confined to daily patrols. Despite a legal ruling of *habeas corpus* over the territory in 1959, which established legal sovereignty, this was never recognised by the Chinese government (Tsang 1979: 36). As a spokesman for the Chinese government stated, 'The Kowloon Walled City ... is part of the Chinese territory of Hong Kong and Kowloon and had always been under Chinese jurisdiction' (quoted in Tsang 1979: 37). During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), tens of thousands of Chinese refugees arrived in Hong Kong. This influx of new residents saw the population of the Walled City rise from 10,000 in the early 1960s to an estimated 60,000 by the 1970s, with a population density of 1,255,000 per square km (Chow 1976; see also Davis 1973).

The Walled City represents, in many ways, a miniaturised instance of the political contestation over the territory of Hong Kong. The Walled City, like Hong Kong, was caught in the the push and pull between the powerful influence of the UK and China (Chow 1992). In official, English-language accounts, the Walled City is portrayed as a chaotic space that was tainted by its uncertain legal status. Accounts compete for the most lurid descriptions: from Sir Alexander Grantham's depiction of the Walled City as 'a cesspool of iniquity, with heroin divans, brothels and everything unsavoury' (Sinn 1987: 40) to Lord Kennet's description in the House of Lords in 1974, of a 'city of dreadful night' (quoted in Wesley-Smith 1976: 231). Representations of the Walled City frequently 'pitted clean, dynamic, orderly colonial Hong Kong against the dirty, stagnant, lawless, and above all noncolonial and hence Chinese Walled City' (Harter 2000: 95). Conversely, Chinese-language literature stresses the precolonial history of the Walled City, emphasising a 'return to the motherland' narrative. Depictions stress the shame and scandal of the loss of the larger territory of Hong Kong (Liú, 1994; Rén, 1994), representing the Walled City as an 'impregnable city defence and fortress' that fell to the 'pirates encroachment from the three countries of England, Scotland and Wales' (Wáng

1997).<sup>iv</sup> A Chinese school was set up in the community in the late 19th century to fortify ‘the inhabitants’ moral fibres against Western decadence and materialism’ (Sinn 1987: 32) in a pattern that mirrored the perceived need for a military presence itself.

At several points, the British colonial administration sought to clear the Walled City (Tsang 1979; Ho 1986). Each time, however, resistance from local residents prevented the plans from proceeding. A ‘Kowloon City Anti-Demolition Committee’ was formed (Miners 1983: 180; Wesley-Smith 1973: 74-76), and solidarity protests in mainland China prevented forcible evictions (Miners 1983: 179). In an instance of what Law (2009) terms ‘collaborative colonialism’, a plan was finally struck to demolish the Walled City. A full census and property register were completed, and the residents were rehoused in public housing estates across the city.<sup>v</sup> In 1993, after nearly a decade of negotiations, the Walled City was no more.

### **Walling the city: zones, governance, and non-state space**

In recent years, the physical and metaphoric walls of late modernity have become a central focus for urban scholarship. Around the globe, urban ghettos, gated communities, and fortified enclaves represent concrete manifestations of a new global stratification, in which ‘freedom to move’ is a central metaphor (Bauman 2000). The enclosure of excluded communities into peri-urban peripheries has drawn increasingly sharp parallels between ghettos and prisons (Wacquant 2001; Weegels et al 2020). Such processes of exclusion and stratification have been both amplified and accelerated by contemporary technologies of government (Moran 2015a). In *City of Quartz*, Mike Davis presciently observed the growing significance of police surveillance, security services and defensive domestic architecture in recasting urban space as ‘prison- or fortress-like’ (Ibid: 256); with Los Angeles turned from a bright vision of futuristic urbanism to a dystopic ‘carceral city’ (Davis 1990/2006: 253). These spatial practices have also formed an important strut in the construction of Chinese modernity. As Wang and Wu (2019) have documented, so-called ‘urban villages’ and forms of ‘in-situ marginalisation’ have emerged in the jetstream of large-scale urbanisation projects. These emergent, perfidious zones of urban neglect are both a product of longstanding strategies of ‘enclave urbanism’ (He 2013) and contemporary models of state entrepreneurialism (Wang and Wu 2019: 1643).

It is notable that state retreat from urban space is frequently accompanied by the development of extra-legal forms of control and order (Hagedorn 2008). As Atkinson, Parker and Morales (2017: 445) make clear, there is a connection between such 'elective unburdening of state sovereignty' to nonstate actors and strategies of arms-length containment, surveillance and exploitation. In certain contexts, this involves overt collusion between state and criminal actors, as a means of generating off-the-books income or enforcing political order (Venkatesh 2008). These activities, which have been called state-organised crime, have their 'roots in the ongoing need for capital accumulation of modern nation-states, whether the states be socialist, capitalist, or mixed economies' (Chambliss 1989: 202). In other contexts, the absence of a legitimate state presence in spaces of 'advanced marginality' (Wacquant 2008) – where regularised work has been replaced by increasingly precarious, flexible work – criminal entrepreneurs provide a quasi-legitimate order, in time-honoured fashion (Hobbs 1989). In this context criminal groups can occupy an ambiguous space as a 'major form of association, work and identity', with local residents 'partly feeling able to relate to the gang society better than to mainstream institutions' (Castells 2010: 67). Neuwirth terms such areas 'shadow cities', emphasising that 'such areas may be marked by a form of social order ... a form of social order that is established as the state withdraws from providing security' (Neuwirth 2006: 57).

The function of contemporary technologies of urban walling was presaged in some ways in Michel Foucault's *Discipline & Punish* (1991). Concluding a discussion of the 'great carceral continuum' (1991: 299) – extending from the prison-gate to schools, factories, work-houses, and beyond – Foucault offers a brief sketch of what he terms the 'carceral city'. Building on previous depictions of carcerality as a 'net' or 'network' (pp.299-300), the 'carceral city' denotes a coextensive web of disciplinary technologies through which citizens are shaped and surveilled. As with the later notions of governmentality and biopower, power is not concentrated centrally but diffused through institutions and the body politic. As Foucault notes, in the carceral city 'there is, not the "centre of power", not a network of forces, but a multiple network of diverse elements - walls, space, institutions, rules, discourse' (Foucault 1991: 307). For Foucault, the disciplinary technologies developed in the prison – involving strict regulation of time, space, and human interaction – were also writ large in the urban fabric. The result is that there is no 'outside', just an 'inside' to the disciplinary system (Foucault 1991: 301). The 'carceral city' is therefore a concretised instance of the disciplined society, in bricks and

mortar, and provides an image for the power of 'normalisation' of the carceral in urban space.

With notable exceptions (Davis 1990/2006), the notion of the 'carceral city' has not yet achieved great currency in urban or criminological scholarship. This is due, no doubt, to the radical shifts in urban governance toward 'systems of (attempted) electronic control ... [which] increasingly supplant, without completely replacing, the confined architectures or "disciplinary spaces" ... noted by Michel Foucault' (Graham 2010: 63). Nonetheless, as several scholars have noted, there are close parallels in techniques of government between prisons and urban ghettos that suggest a continuing 'carceral mesh' that extends to urban areas defined by mass imprisonment, surveillance and supervision (Wacquant 2001). Conceiving of confinement 'beyond site' is therefore 'not as much containment in impermeable structures as it is a central expression of a relationship between the state and the incarcerated citizen across bordered, porous sites' (Weegels et al 2020: 6). Indeed, as carceral geographers have demonstrated, recent years have seen an increasing 'seepage of carceral techniques and technologies' (Moran and Schliehe 2017: 5) beyond the prison wall, with 'carceral' techniques of surveillance, maintenance and control applied in a range of settings (Rannila and Repo 2017; Author B 2016; Van Blerk 2017). The Walled City emphasises the significance of 'diffuse' forms of carcerality which operate through lived and felt to as 'a mobile and embodied carcerality' (Moran, Turner and Schliehe 2018: 670; Coaffee 2015), emerging at the intersection of colonial order and experiential harm (Foucault 1991; Moran, Turner and Schliehe 2018). These forms of disciplinary control stretch from individual experiences, identity and selfhood to labour conditions, housing and enmeshed social and criminal justice responses.

In our analysis of the Walled City, we seek to build on this argument to open new territories of exploration where 'closed space' (Author B 2016) is instead conceptualized as a space that contains elements of physical and moral closure – not only by the state but through nonstate agents.<sup>vi</sup>

## **Methods and data**

While there have been a number of historical studies of the development of the enclave (Sinn 1987; Wesley-Smith 1973), scholarly accounts have to date been based on archival research. This study sought rather to engage directly with lived experience through oral history, which seeks to engage with experiences and narratives that might otherwise have

been 'hidden from history' (Perks and Thomson 2006: 1). Twenty-two oral history interviews were conducted with residents, police officers, and other visitors. Nine participants were former residents of the Walled City; eight of whom lived there for more than ten years, and five for more than thirty. Several also identified as ex-members of triad societies in the Walled City and had been involved in the management and maintenance of vice industries during this period. Six interviews were completed with police officers who were stationed in the Walled City from 1963-1983, and a further seven were completed with social workers, researchers, and government officials who spent time in the Walled City from 1975-1993. Though the time-span of experiences runs from 1951-1993, the focus for our analysis is the 1960s and 1970s when the operation of the Walled City's vice industry was at its peak.

Interviewees were accessed through a combination of personal contacts, web-based referrals, and snowball sampling. Interviews were semi-structured in format with all interviewees asked the same key questions but with sufficient space given for interviewees to recount their own narratives. Interviews were carried out in person (with the exception of three police interviews, which used Skype), mostly in individual homes throughout Hong Kong. Conversations took place in English or Cantonese depending on the interviewee's preference, and were transcribed into English. Analysis was conducted iteratively, using both open and axial coding, and triangulated through a detailed review of Chinese and English language literature on the Walled City, including autobiographical, photographic and popular accounts (Pullinger 1989; Lambot and Girard 2014). Detailed ethical protocols for the provision of informed consent, avoidance of harm, and confidentiality were approved by the University of Hong Kong.

Though the sample of participants is seemingly small and partial, relative to the total population of the Walled City, the stories gathered were rich and evocative. Storytelling and narrative have become increasingly prominent in the fields of urban geography (e.g. de Leeuw et al 2017) and criminology (e.g. McNeill 2019, Presser and Sandberg 2016), and in this paper we seek to excavate memories of the Walled City through what Lorimer (2003) calls 'small stories', which bring into question the notion of story as fully representational. However, we also want to recognise these small stories as a potential for what O'Neill describes as an 'unearth[-ing of] the subjugated knowledge of those groups (...) who have been condemned to historical and political silence (under socialism no less than capitalism)' (1986: 44).

## The Walled City as a quasi-carceral space

The Walled city was, curiously, both a space of enclosure, with symbolic 'walls' delimiting its circumference, and an area in which the geographies of law and order appeared to be temporarily rewritten. The 'walled' city, similar to a 'walled' prison, was both a closed and open space – cut off both legally and morally, but with a permeable membrane that was cross-cut on a daily basis. In interviews, confinement and closure were articulated as a felt, experiential sensation. Residents' recollections of life in the Walled City reflected a sense of overcrowding, confinement and lack of personal space. As there was little planning or regulation in force, buildings in the Walled City were constructed in close proximity to one another, leaving little space between. At street level, this resulted in a 'maze of dark filthy narrow alleys with open drains' (Sinn 1987: 30). As one resident recalled, 'if you walk some of the little alleyways, if you walked down and then didn't turn sideways, you couldn't get through, they were no more than 2–3 feet wide, so two people coming face to face would have to shimmy past each other' (see Fig.1, below). Tourism literature reported on 'dripping pipes' and unsanitary conditions, comparing the Walled City with the rat-infested gambling dens of Chinatowns in cities like San Francisco (Harter 2000: 95, 99). We suggest that the Walled City can be best viewed as a sort of 'carceral "fix"' (Moran, Turner and Schliehe 2018: 1) that enacted a moral and spatial closure, both physically cut off from the surrounding areas with clear judicial status, and morally cut off as a space that is described as lawless and criminal.

Fig.1. Image of a street, Kowloon Walled City



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Housing was constructed in a makeshift, do-it-yourself fashion, quickly and cheaply, with a large squatter settlement mushrooming out from the main inhabitation. For one interviewee, recalling his arrival in 1951, it had the feeling of a frontier:

I knew the KWC was unoccupied (冇王嘢/ mo wong kung, lit. without the king's control); people could just claim the land and set up some rows of stakes. No tax or rent. There was a well near my home. Water is the most important right? We could live without electricity or kerosene, but couldn't without water. There was a deep well with endless water supply. There were only 10 something houses when we first moved there. It was easy to set up a shop or make a living in the KWC.

As there was little planning or regulation in force, buildings in the Walled City developed in a do-it-yourself manner, with buildings criss-crossed with walkways above street-level. Several residents commented that the quickest way between buildings was over the rooftops. One visitor to the Walled City described the resulting structure as a 'beehive': 'from the outside, of course, it was hard to see as independent buildings cos all these buildings basically were built up against each other. One of my images of it was like a beehive...you know, like a solid construction but it's all of these independent hexagonal cubes, in this case rectangle, but they were more or less a solid mass' (see Fig.2. below). Between these walls, residents recalled the existence of a subsistence economy. As one recounts, 'basically if you opened a window, you could see what the people in the near-by building were cooking ... if they didn't have enough salt or oil, they could borrow from you through the windows.' These so-called 'handshake' buildings – in which living spaces are so close together it is literally possible to shake hands with neighbours through a window or door – created forms of interdependence that are reminiscent of the social life in more traditional carceral spaces, with little or no individual privacy.

Fig.2. Kowloon Walled City, viewed from South-East corner



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Though the 'wall' enclosing the Walled City was ultimately removed during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong during World War II, the boundary remained. This demarcation represented not only a symbolic divide but also a 'moral' boundary. Inhabitants were contained in subtle ways by its ambiguous status, as well as economic precarity and legal norms. However, being part of the KWC society also meant being part of an intensely social and interdependent environment that entailed 'both commitment and attachment' (Goffman 1991: 159) and despite its exceptional administrative status, interviewees also stressed the mundane, everyday nature of informality in the Walled City. Some underlined that it was a neighbourhood in which life was not unlike other squatter settlements or high-rise blocks elsewhere in Hong Kong (Chan 2001; Lui 2014), areas that have been linked to a broader programme of social control during British colonialism (Smart 2006).

Both in form and operation, there are similarities in the processes of 'underlife'<sup>vii</sup> (Goffman 1991) between different zones of confinement. In the Walled City, as in other carceral sites, residents suffered from a lack of personal space and privacy, running water, and natural light (e.g. see Turner and Moran 2018). From the alley-ways between buildings, the sky was obscured by pipes and electric wires. One resident recalled that he 'always felt dizzy' and 'got sick frequently' because the 'living condition was so bad ... the buildings were so close'. Natural light would only begin to filter in on the sixth or seventh floor:

If you are on the fourth floor, it is total darkness; if you're on the tenth floor, you will see some sunshine. So, it takes more effort to walk up, but that means your environment is also a little bit better. The lower you go, the worse the air quality—it never moved actually.

Problems associated with drug addiction featured prominently in testimonies of life in the Walled City. Several residents recalled witnessing dead or dying bodies in public areas, and police officers commented on the desperation of older addicts. As one resident recalled, 'when the [drug] stalls were moved, the rats also died. They were addicted too.'<sup>viii</sup>

We suggest that the forms of density and enclosure that constituted life in the Walled City can be described as a form of carcerality in which an urban environment is *experienced* as a space of confinement. As one resident recalls:

When I was small, I didn't have any way to contact my classmates. We lived in a very complex place. Except those who lived very close to me, I didn't have contact of other people. Because in the Walled City, those who lived in it were being labeled... people think you are "complicated" [triad-associated]

This form of moral closure and the feeling of being 'other' produces carcerality and separateness that does not depend on a physical wall. Like the prison boundary, continually traversed by staff, visitors, and commodities (Turner 2016), the perimeter of the Walled City was a porous border that was crossed on a daily basis, imprinting what Moran, Turner and Schliehe (2018: 670) have termed 'a mobile and embodied carcerality'. In the Walled City these elements of the 'carceral city' produce a form of disciplinary control with a distinct imprint. Residents described a close control of space and personal movement, but also an underwriting of discipline in the workplace reminiscent of Goffman's (1991) definition of 'total' institution. As O'Neill (1986: 45) describes, the body is the 'ultimate text upon which the power of the state [or non-state actors] and the economy is inscribed'.

### **The Walled City as exception**

The tension between the exceptional legal status of the Walled City, and the mundane nature of everyday life, represents a miniaturised form of the territory of Hong Kong during the period of British colonialism (Siu 2011); a territorial exception that foreshadowed Hong Kong's exceptional status as a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China (Ong 2006). Lui describes the Walled City as 'triply neglected', as 'neither the colonial administration of Hong Kong nor the PRC and British Governments could intervene or administer it in a conspicuous way' (2014: 221). Mirroring the situation in the wider territory, the Walled City was maintained by a corrupt political-criminal nexus between police and triad groups<sup>ix</sup> (Lo 1993, 1999) upholding certain kinds of carceral techniques and technologies to control this urban environment. The social ecosystem of the Walled City was buttressed by a form of negotiated order in which bribery and corruption were central. As one resident commented: 'Who is to decide an affair in the Walled City? Hong Kong government, Chinese government in the Mainland or Taiwan, or the head of gangsters, is uncertain and it depends on the nature of the issue' (quoted in Tsang 1979: 43). This amounted to the 'seepage of carceral techniques and technologies' (Moran and Schliehe 2017: 5) from

the colonial prison and police system into the urban space, including informal modes of surveillance.

One particularly insidious form of urban governance is that of the 'zone' (Easterling 2016). Growing from historical antecedents of free-ports and export processing zones (EPZs), zones are non-national or extra-national territorial regions in which state regulations are suspended or augmented to allow unfettered trade; operating as a shadow twin to the neoliberal economy. Easterling draws on the example of Jeju, a Chinese island that 'sheltered all those programs or illicit activities that do not fit into the logics of the mainland' (Easterline 2016: 55). Such exceptions, as Ong notes, 'exclude populations and places from neoliberal calculations and choices' (Ong 2006: 4) whilst extracting maximum profit from exploited labour. The Walled City, in this sense, represented a backdoor zoning function for the control of vice in the territory, as well as a site of significant off-the-books economic activity (Atkinson, Parker and Morales 2017). Residents and police officers spoke frankly of the constitutive role of triad-controlled industry within the social ecology of the Walled City in the 1960s. During this time the Walled City became a focal point for a range of illicit goods and services; a freestanding grey economy with illicit markets involving everything from gambling to drug-divans, prostitution to illegal dentistry.

One of the phrases used to describe the space was that of a 'no man's land' (三不管 lit. non-governing zone of three regimes). A resident commented, 'many things that didn't exist in the outside world, they could be found in the Walled City', while another compared the area to 'Shanghai Tang [department store] with all kind of business including prostitute, gambling and drugs'. During the late 1960s, police estimated there to be some fifty 'vice dens' within the area of the Walled City (Tsang 1979: 41). As one police officer recalls:

You could see queues—queues and queues of addicts. I mean the queues will start at the central point where the distribution was going on right out to the end of the Walled City. There would be hundreds of people in the queue—hundreds, two- or three-hundred people.

There was sufficient diversity in operations at this time to enable the cooperation of several triad organisations. One former triad member recalled that 'opium smoke, porno movies (三和), brothels, white powder (heroin), gambling dens were run by specific groups of triads in specific areas. For example, they ran that den and we ran this gambling den.' In a pattern similar to studies of gang-controlled drug markets elsewhere

(Venkatesh 2008), triad leaders and police officers conspired to regulate, control and profit from illicit industries. One resident commented that 'it was really dark inside the police force. Everybody was involved in such bribery in the past.' Bribery was sufficiently endemic that there were specific roles allocated to enable collection of bribes from various industries (㊗㊗. lit. bloke who collects rent) and the passing of the bribes to police (㊗㊗ lit. stirring family). Former triads estimated the total bribe collection at \$50,000 per day, which would then be divided between envelopes and left in the drawer of local police. Former police officers gave a similar account. One former officer described the situation as involving a (limited) choice that shows how discipline was internalised in line with the overarching disciplinary system: 'You could run alongside the bus or you can jump on the bus but don't stand in front of the bus.'

You go in one morning and open your top drawer and there would be a white envelope containing cash. It could be in your kit locker when you went to get your uniform. So, you didn't know who handed over the money, you didn't know where it come from. No idea. All you knew was: don't cause trouble ... It wasn't a white-black situation, there were only shades of grey and it was very difficult for people to stay out of it completely.

It is important to note that this system of bribery and corruption was by no means confined to the Walled City, even if it was particularly accentuated there. This system is based on diffuse but palpable discipline, extensive surveillance (in order to bribe and control the right people, you need to have extensive knowledge of their life) and control of this enclosed space of the Walled City. Lo (1999) has argued that the concentration of power in the hands of a small number of elite colonial officials rendered the system uniquely open to corrupt practices. In this context, civil servants were 'not accountable ...[and] had the power to manipulate their positions for private gain, whereas criminals used money in exchange for protection and administrative fixes' (Lo 1999: 76). The system of bribery in the Walled City was therefore indicative of the wider systemic corruption within the colonial police force that continued until the institution of the anti-corruption agency in Hong Kong (ICAC), in 1973. Up until this point, police and triads in Hong Kong, 'collaborated and reaped huge benefits from narcotic and vice rackets' (Chan 1979: 91).

While this structured system of bribery took place away from public view, it also required some public instances of law enforcement. One notable instance that emerged

from interviews was the practice of 'big drama' (大龍鳳 lit. big dragon and phoenix), or 'staged' arrests. In the following excerpt, two former triad members discuss the practice:

RES 4: We told the cops, 'Okay you will come to raid our opium dens. We give you four people. We will arrange everything and just came to raid the den next Monday.' Then we found four elderlies ... we just gave them brooms faking as opium pipes. So the cops successfully 'raided' a den and caught people. Then the elderlies told the judge that they started smoking opium in late Qing when British shipped opium to China and they just could not quit it. Then the judge would just fine them and release them.

RES 5: It was all staged and arranged in advance. Those old men were paid to be caught.

The structural arrangements that existed around the Walled City at this time was therefore one of symbiosis. As one officer commented, 'it was a society where there was a kind of balance. Everybody kind of knew what their part was.' As opposed to a 'thin blue line' separating police order and criminal disorder, the Walled City dealt in shades of grey. As one resident commented, 'cops weren't good guys. They were merely 'legal' hooligans...back in the old days, gangsters liked cops.' This structured system of bribery represents a microcosm of the broader system of 'collaborative colonialism' (Law 2009).

The importance of informal rules, negotiated order and informality is also reminiscent of the so-called 'prisoner society' (Crewe 2009). While Moran (2015a: 130) describes spaces of incarceration as places that are explicitly intended to promote 'values of the state and its dominant ideologies of justice and punitivity', the negotiation of order within these spaces is often complex and ambiguous. As Sparks et al point out, one of the central tasks of any prison administration is to maintain order, but 'achieving this goal is by no means unproblematic, and both the *means* and the *conception of order* sought, or imposed can vary significantly' (1996: 2; emphasis in original). In the United States, for example, prison gangs represent a central organising force inside the prison walls, and administrators must factor gang affiliation into their allocation of space (Skarbek 2014). As carceral geographers have demonstrated, order is intertwined with state power and directives as much as with informality, 'staged' control and alternative forms of order (Dirsuweit 1999; Martin & Mitchelson 2009; Sibley & van Hoven 2009). Here, we understand the 'carceral city' exhibiting similar tropes of underlying order that is based on diffuse but clearly understood discipline.

### **The Walled City as cultural afterlife**

In a powerful piece of political symbolism, a garden in the style of 6th century Qing now occupies the land that formerly housed the Walled City (Harter 2000). A small open-air museum stands alongside an original piece of the wall and a three-dimensional model. In opening the new park, former Governor of Hong Kong, Chris Patten applauded the 'fantastic transformation' of the Walled City from 'a black spot to a beauty spot that all can treasure' and 'an oasis of leisure' (Flint 1995). The role of triads and corruption are conspicuously absent. Rather than a site of urban contest, it has become a symbol of the Hong Kong 'success story' moulding a new postcolonial identity which airbrushes out the contested politics of the Walled City. Nonetheless, the affective imprint of the Walled City has made its way firmly into the cultural imaginary of Hong Kong through photo books, movies, documentaries, science fiction, manga, anime and video games (Fraser and Li 2017). Like prisons that have reopened as museums or cultural centres (Turner and Peters 2015), the Walled City 'has continued to capture the imagination of successive generations across Asia' (Fraser and Li 2017: 217).

In *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (1997), Ackbar Abbas deals with the unique subjectivities that have emerged from Hong Kong's particular socio-political history. Abbas draws on the notion of 'disappearance' to capture the distinctive rhythms of cultural life in Hong Kong. As an identity continually subjugated to a colonial power, for Abbas culture in Hong Kong holds a particular immanence that has emerged from an uncertainty over the future. In the lead-up to 1997, when Hong Kong reverted to Chinese sovereignty, the 'imminence of its disappearance ... was what precipitated an intense and unprecedented interest in Hong Kong culture' (Abbas 1997: 7). The demolition of the Walled City in 1993 occurred against this backdrop, with a government official reporting that 'it had to be done before 1997' due to embarrassment 'if this dreadful high-rise slum had been allowed to stay and fester'. Although the Walled City was demolished, and residents rehoused, the imprint of these embodied experiences remained. Reminiscent of the experience of leaving a prison, one resident notes, 'we thought that was what life should be – that was why when we moved out, the world was like up-side-down.'

For interviewees, the Walled City had come to occupy a position of nostalgia and a strong commonality. As one interviewee recalls, 'when we still lived in the Walled City, we felt so close. (...) The sense of bonding in the Walled City was really strong. People took care of and protected each other'. Residents spoke fondly of the sense of community that emerged within such straitened circumstances. For one, life in the Walled City was defined by 'normal people in a normal community and a normal life'; for

another 'life went on as normal. People were treated no different.' Life in the Walled City mirrored everyday life in a traditional Chinese village (He 2013), with new migrants from rural China bringing a sense of kinship and social structure to their new environment. As one resident commented:

Although our houses were not big, to my knowledge they were only 200 square foot each. We had a small place on the ground floor for family gathering, making festive food etc. It was such a great time. We didn't have phone at that time, so to contact people we just yelled from the ground, for example, to tell the uncle to come down. It was a kinship family.

Indeed, for interviewees, the dense, makeshift nature of social life in the Walled City was part of its appeal. As one resident recalled, local gangsters were involved in the interdependent economy, buying milk powder for his baby daughter – a form of intimate knowledge that shows the dissolution of public and private boundaries. Criminalised activities and other forms of off-the-books economic activity were not easily disentangled. Everyday necessities were made available through illicit hacking of water and electricity supplies. One resident recalled the 'black market for water and electricity' in which industrious residents 'altered the design of water pipes'. As Neuwirth notes, '[a]lternative economies in marginalised areas are not always easily demarcated as criminal' (Neuwirth 2006: 57).

For Roy (2009), the modes of informality that emerge from urban spaces outside of the metropolitan centres of the United States and Europe constitute a wellspring for 'a mode of subjectivity' that is distinct and significant. In so-called 'pirate towns' (Simone 2004) in which 'infrastructure must be understood not as steel and concrete but rather as fields of action and social networks' (Roy 2009: 826), makeshift economic practices prevail. One police officer described the industry in the Walled City as 'life in the raw': 'people struggling to make a living...they will look to find a little niche that they could do, [...] everyone was there and they had very little and they were trying to get more and they were just dealing with all the difficulties.' One recurring theme in interviews was the existence of illegal dentists and doctors in the outer perimeters of the Walled City. As one resident recalls 'the Hong Kong government didn't recognize their professional qualifications obtained in China. That's why they had to work in the Walled City.' – underlining its position of moral closure. Like social life and housing, the forms of economic activity that emerged within the Walled City were of an improvised nature. In the following excerpt, a group of ex-residents discuss the range informal economic

activities that flourished in this environment and led to extreme working conditions – reminiscent of discipline within workhouses (see Foucault 1991) – often carried out in the sphere of the home or makeshift factories:

RES 4: There were people who collected excrement...

RES 1: Many people made cakes. Such as sugar cake, chicken biscuits, Chinese cookies and Chinese pancake...

RES 2: Fish balls.

RES 3: Factories that made watch straps. There were weaving mills too.

RES 2: Glass factory

RES 4: Rattan factory...plastic factory that made shoes.

RES 5: And we started making wig, sewing clothes...Many families made plastic flowers....the pay was minimal... Just for a few dollars the whole family worked for the whole nights. Every household made a few bags of plastic flower

The coming together of poverty, close-knit social life, and informality in this diffusely disciplined society meant that everyday life was based on getting on with business ventures and mundane everyday acts, but the precarity of the place was never far away (Matthews 2011). This description of extremely precarity shows how control of the work and wage system can easily be part of discipline and control of the space inside the Walled City.

Chiu and Lui (2009) argue that it was in part the flexible adaptation and work ethic of Hong Kong residents that underpinned its subsequent growth into a ‘Chinese global city’, but it also has distinct echoes with the improvised, do-it-yourself ethic that have inhered in Hong Kong’s recent protest movements. The Occupy encampments of 2014, also forms of spatial enclosure where order was temporarily suspended (Fraser and Matthews 2019), were composed of makeshift furniture, tents, found objects, shopping trolleys and street art that exhibited a comparable do-it-yourself ethic to that found in the Walled City. Participants ‘grew vegetables and flowers, practiced public arts ... built temporary temples, churches, self-study areas, and mobile classrooms’ (Lee 2015: 335). It is perhaps for this reason that the cultural afterlife of the Walled City has come to occupy such a prominent position in the memory of Hong Kong, as an authentic historical artefact that contains trace elements of resistance and DIY culture. As one interviewee concludes: ‘our longing of an anarchistic society through the Walled City is a reaction to the ‘free’ market and laissez-faire policy....We are now living in an interesting era – do we need a government? What should our government be?’

## **Conclusion: Urban confinement and fluid contestation**

In this paper, we have sought to excavate first-hand accounts of the texture of social life in the Walled City as a means of interrogating the felt sensation of *carceral urbanism*. This embodied sense of bracketed enclosure – combining material, symbolic and embodied forms of confinement – forms an experiential web with more institutional forms of confinement, extending the carceral ‘web’ beyond the prison wall. The everyday adaptations to poverty, density and scarcity that were writ large in these accounts bear a marked similarity to accounts of prison life. In their sensate accounts of makeshift survivalism, however, they form a distinct register of carceral experience from those focused on the so-called ‘carceral continuum’ (Foucault 1991) of state control and the disciplinary society. Uniquely, the Walled City was enveloped within a forcefield of state and non-state power, an almost accidental web of surveillance and control. As such, the contribution of the paper is not only to recent contributions to urban and carceral scholarship, but also to debate in human geography pertaining to urban precarity. The concept of on-edginess is described by Philo, Parr and Soderstrom (2019: 153) represents both a geographical and psychological state-of-being which mixes ‘being "on edge", as a feeling, with living ‘on the edge’ - thereby conjoining social, the spatial and the psychic to suggest an emergent geography of ‘precarious urbanisms’ that recognises the social consequences of spatial separation. We hope further that the notion of the ‘carceral city’ might act as an analytic key to urban confinement ‘beyond site’ in the context of municipal lockdowns brought on by the global pandemic.

In constructing this analysis, we have sought to emphasise the co-constitutive role of colonialism, crime and corruption in formulating the conditions of life within the Walled City. As distinct from deliberate strategies of land expropriation or state disinvestment (Wang and Wu 2019), the Walled City represented a miniaturised version of the forces of backdoor politics at play in the wider territory of Hong Kong (Lo 1999). As Chan argues, although 'at a formal, publicly symbolic level the police must create the impression that it as a symbolic upholder of the law is dedicated to the eradication of the triad societies ... in reality the police and the Triads, at a subterranean, circumspective level, have co-existed in a symbiotic fashion' (Chan 1979: 91). This spatialised ‘zone’ of exception (Easterling 2016) operated as a backdoor illicit economy, a shadow twin that sustained and supported burgeoning legitimate trade in the territory. Until recently, Hong

Kong could be considered as fulfilling a comparable function in the Chinese economy, acting as a neoliberal ‘exception’ where economic activities that would not be possible in the mainland could be zoned (Ong 2006).

Looking at the emergence and everyday life in the Walled City, with its diffuse but palpable discipline and aspects of surveillance, control and closure making it an important example of a ‘carceral city, can help us understand and put into perspective more recent developments in Hong Kong. The recent introduction of stringent security laws have prompted a new chapter in UK-China relations, with Hong Kong citizens once more confined by diplomatic and legal dispute. As Law notes, Hong Kong represents ‘an exceptional case within a long colonial history that featured brutal domination and fierce resistance’ (Law 2009: 3). In the case-study of the Walled City, we have a helpful reminder of how entangled closure, power and political wrestling over autonomy do not occur as single movements but are historically embedded in the urban fabric of which the Walled City is a part. The Umbrella Movement of 2015, and subsequent protests of 2019, embody a defiant, do-it-yourself ethic with distinct resonances with life in the Walled City enclosure. Just as carcerality can be conceived as ‘mobile and embodied’ (Moran, Turner and Schliehe 2018: 670), recent protest movements have increasingly adopted the maxim ‘be water’ (Holbig 2020), envisaging protest as a mobile and fluid state of being. We have argued for a reading of the Walled City as containing a seed of resilient, makeshift survivalism that remain an intrinsic element in Hong Kong’s political culture. As one interviewee put it: ‘KWC is the most concentrated essence of Hong Kong... there are always forces of resistance’.

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<sup>i</sup> During the colonial period 1841-1997, UK legal institutions and instruments were imposed. Since 1997, when Hong Kong was returned to Chinese sovereignty, a mini-constitution has guaranteed the autonomy of Hong Kong's political, legal and administrative systems.

<sup>ii</sup> In the so-called ‘Opium Wars’ of the 19th century, Britain exerted its naval strength to force China to secede a port, and allow the import of opium and the export of tea. Hong Kong was established as a British treaty port in 1842, while Canton, Xia’men and Shanghai were sliced up between a number of European nations.

<sup>iii</sup> Wesley-Smith (1973: 81-82) argues that the original clause ‘almost entirely a matter of saving “face”’ and that was never intended to be honoured.

<sup>iv</sup> Translations by Eugenia Lo.

<sup>v</sup> For further historical documentation of the Walled City and its demolition, see Wesley-Smith (1976).

<sup>vi</sup> A prominent example of this form of ‘anarchic urbanism’ is that of Freetown Christiania, Copenhagen. Christiania was designed explicitly ‘to create a self-governing society whereby each and every individual holds themselves responsible for the wellbeing of the entire community’ (Charter of Christiania, quoted in Vanolo 2013: 1789). The local, craft-based economy incorporates the selling of cannabis and marijuana, but also community dispute-resolution and collective responsibility. Other examples can be found in the

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‘Tower of David’ in Caracas, Hulme Crescents in Manchester, and the Grande Hotel Beira in Mozambique.

vii While life in an urban enclave is not exactly like life in a total institution, many descriptions by Goffman ring true from individual’s engrossment in joint values, some form of incentive/privilege scheme and potential cooperation by threats of punishment or penalty. While the ‘discipline of activity’ and ‘discipline of being’ are more subtle than in a closed organizational structure like a prison, they are nonetheless detectable (Goffman 1991: 157ff).

viii On human-animal interaction in prison spaces, see Moran 2015b.

ix Triad societies originally formed in the 18th century as underground political movements and grew substantially in the late 19th century, acting as a form of extra-legal governance (Chu 2000). By 1960, during the high-point of the Walled City's reputation for vice, it was estimated that there were 600,000 triad-members in Hong Kong - one in every seven of the Hong Kong Chinese population of 6 million (Lo 1999).