

## Stephen Graham: Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism

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◆ Goethe's "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" could well have been on the mind of Stephen Graham when he wrote this book. It examines how the on-going sophistication of surveillance technologies in the everyday spaces of globalization (airports, global cities' financial heartlands) and military interventions in cities such as Baghdad or Kabul are connected. Graham's "Cities Under Siege" analyzes the "New Military Urbanism", a discourse, doctrine and reality all at once. It unfolds via advanced technological interventions of population-oriented total surveillance thereby continuing the violent colonial wars fought out in the cities of Europe's fringes until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It locates the new transnational battlefields in the wars on terror, drugs and oil taking place in globally networked cities. Frontiers, Graham emphasizes in the beginning of his book, fragment the modern city – a thesis he reformulates in line with Mike Davis, Zygmunt Baumann and Loic Wacquant. The old frontiers of International Relations, those between militarized states, are constantly relocated, so the argument goes, via a complex political, cultural, technical and financial transnational network of state and non-state actors. The geography of this new urbanism is characterized by a returning of violence from cities of US/European imperialism and colonialism to the urban

headquarters of military intervention. The result is a growing polarization in London, Toronto, New York and Los Angeles, and a loss of cosmopolitan values in the urban world.

The book's scientific scope connects two academic disciplines: International Relations and its interest on growing urban militarization; and cultural geography and anthropology which investigate the effects those processes have on urban politics and urban life. That division contradicts the reality of urban life worlds, which for Graham are connected via discourses and practices of militarization, and its surveillance technologies.

In his earlier book "Splintering Urbanism" (2001) co-author Graham had defined the urban on the basis of its multifaceted networks of communication and exchanged resources. Graham, whose background is geography, today is Professor in Urbanism and Society of Technology at Newcastle University, England. It is of no wonder that he now focuses on the globalization of surveillance technologies as Western states increasingly pursue the double aim of controlling and protecting human movement and society. Undermining their sovereignty they have become the target of terrorist assaults from 9/11 on. Taking a "Boomerang effect" in a Foucauldian sense,

where the “colonial periphery” becomes a field of experimentation, the lessons learned during two decades of US/UK bombings in the Middle East now shape the security policies in the metropolis.

Three conceptual chapters unite global cities, military-police relations, military theory and urban violence to lay out the theoretical background of the periphery-centre transfer of militarization and urbanization. Examples of the coming-home of political violence follow. “Ubiquitous Borders” reviews surveillance techniques from gated-communities in the UK, via favelas in Brazil, to “green zones for living” for US-Army members in Baghdad; “Robowar Dreams” explains technological advances in the de-humanization of futuristic wars; “Theme Park Archipelago” discusses computer games in trainee programmes for US-soldiers; in “Switching Cities Off” military tactics to disconnect informational flows by the US-army are explained. And yes, what is innovative are the connections Graham evidences – the spirits that “we”, the US/UK, called, those little technological helpers, now return to their inventors. The ubiquitous presence of war and danger in media and political discourse effectuates fear and a lust for being observed among – Graham’s “centres” of military politics are clear – Londoners and New Yorkers. Thus these centres in their war cry for liberty have become post-modern Panopticons.

Well researched, albeit quite fatalistic in rhetoric and tone, the volume widens any readers’ horizon of urbanized wars and militarized cities. Yet a reader conscious of postcolonial critiques to core-periphery geographies will wonder about the author’s strong focus on the world’s contemporary hegemonic powers as agents of the urban

wars. That Graham ends his book with a chapter on resistance movements could be read as a pre-emptive strike against this critique. The “countergeographies” (349) of artists and political activists reclaim values of modern urbanism and political action to subvert the “circuits and logics of new military urbanism”. Yet, Graham places the military interventions of the UK and the US army in the new millennium as emblematic for the death of the values of urban modernism (free movement, public spaces, democracy). This move forgets the deeper postcolonial roots of social inequality in the city and its spatial effects in fragmentation and segregation in most North American and European metropoli: Have there ever been cosmopolitan values in Europe’s violent colonial history that could now justify calling this military urbanism “new”? Today’s urban cleavages are – applying Foucault’s boomerang effect – architectural and social outcomes of colonial divisions in cities such as Mexico, Delhi or Johannesburg that, not only since 9/11 but in several historical waves, date back to the 18th century and that actually mark urban landscapes in Paris, Los Angeles or Sao Paolo. But even where Graham locates colonial frontiers inside of northern welfare nations of advanced capitalism, he fails to develop categories and to induce patterns of social hierarchies that sustain the spatialized practices of exclusion, stigmatization and marginalization. The densely written book turns into an encyclopaedia of militarization tactics but tells relatively little about social effects in– as Graham explains in the beginning – an evermore polarized world.

Thus, although in Graham’s view, post-Westphalia’s military geography has melded into intra-country and -city frontiers, other

trajectories of urban inequalities and fragmentation are beyond the historical limits of “Cities Under Siege”. The outcome is that Graham’s “boomerang effect” over-emphasizes technology. But wars also differentiate the subjects of their armies: in which part of the city the majority of US-troops are born? In the urban margins, the violent counterinsurgency in Bolivia’s urban centres against an indigenous population that antagonised the exploitation of natural resources by transnational firms and their private armies; or the skyrocketed presence of the Mexican army on the urbanized Mexican-US border that acts in a field of gendered violence – explanations of these forms of violence demand for an examination of entanglements of neoliberal policies, colonized bodies, and rights-deprived subjects as targets of militarization that go beyond the dichotomy of a Western “I” and a Non-Western “Spirit” dividing the Cities Under Siege. ♦