

Book Review

Graham, Steven (ed). 2004. *Cities, War, and Terrorism: Towards an Urban Geopolitics*. Oxford: Blackwell.

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Cities, War, and Terrorism seeks to overcome what it asserts are two key failings in the social sciences: first, a neglect within critical urban studies of the deliberate destruction of cities; and second, the predominant focus on the nation-state rather than subnational and particularly urban scales within international relations and political science traditions (p. 24). To that end, *Cities, War and Terrorism* brings together a wide range of critical essays from urbanists, economic geographers, sociologists, historians, and military scholars to address one key question: “how do urban areas and organized, military conflict shape each other in these post-Cold War, post-9/11 times?” (p. 24-25).

The volume begins with an introductory chapter by the editor which loosely sets out a number of key contemporary developments that thrust cities onto the agenda for geopolitical analysis: the increasing concentration of the globe’s population in urban or semi-urban centers and corridors, the breakdown of the Cold War balance of power that put a check on nationalist and ethnic hatreds, the weakening or outright dissolution of multi-ethnic states, and the globalization of the arms trade are cited (amongst others) as factors accentuating the geopolitical importance of cities. While the volume’s contributions splinter off in numerous analytical trajectories, the overall starting point is this: violence in and against cities, while far from new, is “saturating our world” (p. 3). “Warfare,” claims the editor, “like everything else, is being *urbanized*” (p. 4), thus demanding a rethinking of the “umbilical connections” between war, terrorism, and cities that have heretofore been regarded as “taboo” (p. 23) within established political science, international relations, and urban studies traditions. *Cities, War, and Terrorism* seeks to meet this demand.

Cities, War, and Terrorism is divided into three parts, each with a “scene-setting” introduction by the editor. Part I, *Cities, War, and Terrorism in History and Theory*, examines the “conceptual and historical transformations” (p. 25) involved in the transition from Cold War to post-Cold War urbanism. Part II, *Urbicide and the Urbanization of Warfare*, examines the concept of urbicide, which is intended to denote the deliberate destruction of cities and their inhabitants (p. 165). Part III, *Exposed Cities: Urban Impacts of Terrorism and the ‘War on Terror’*, examines the urban effects of counter-terrorism efforts, particularly in the realms of urban economic geography (Marcuse), security governance (Coaffee), and surveillance technologies (Lyon).

The concept of urbicide is at the heart of the urban geopolitics project this volume seeks to extend, and the most substantial contributions are those that speak directly to this theme. The debate between Coward and Shaw marks the most sustained attempt at refining what ‘urbicide’ means, each of whom anchor their arguments in the mid-1990s Bosnian civil war. Coward argues that urbicide is a process of destroying urban form in order to destroy the material expression of ethnic and cultural mixing. Urbicide, he argues, is essentially about laying waste to urban heterogeneity, and as such overlaps, but is not coterminal, with genocide. Shaw’s counter-argument situates urbicide as one element of genocidal war, but an element that is only superficially distinguishable from other elements. According to Shaw, “it does not make sense to

separate urbicide... from genocide, or genocide from war, in genocidal war. [...] Urbicide is a form of genocide” (p. 153). Dissolving the inherent difference of ‘the urban’ as conceptualized in this context clearly has implications for an academic venture that depends crucially on separating out a distinctive subject matter – namely, ‘the urban.’ Nonetheless, the idea of urbicide as the deliberate destruction of cities figures large throughout the volume, if in a less conceptual and more empirically-demonstrated way. Bishop and Clancy’s and Farish’s discussion of the targeting of cities during the Cold War, for example, and Herold’s analysis of the US bombing of Afghanistan each offer interesting perspectives on how the actual or potential destruction of cities figure in plans of war. Two of the more interesting discussions of urbicide highlight the more benign but nonetheless destructive tools of urban design in effecting urbicide. Graham notes in his first substantive chapter that urban design in colonial cities often “amounts to little but the planned devastation and bulldozing of indigenous cities to underpin the strategic and social control of the occupiers and settlers” (p. 35). Likewise, the respective contributions of Graham and Weizman each detail how Israel exerts control over Palestinian populations through the forcible deconstruction of the urban infrastructures necessary to support Palestinian settlements in what Graham refers to as a process of “forced demodernization” (p. 199). These contributions are significant for the insight that cities are not only the targets and backdrops for war but that urbanization itself can be a medium of war. To paraphrase Clausewitz, (de)urbanization is, in these cases, the continuation of war by other means.

The militarization of cities vis-à-vis counter-terrorism efforts constitutes a second dominant theme of this volume, and on this point Coaffee, Warren, and Lyon’s contributions stand out. A common starting point for these commentators is that September 11th accelerated and intensified certain already-identifiable features of the security and surveillance landscape. Through an analysis of globalization demonstrations and urban mega-events, Warren shows how September 11th has led to the further militarization of urban spaces by expanding the scope of events to which the application of military technologies is deemed both appropriate and necessary. Similarly, Coaffee traces the development of London’s ‘rings of steel’ response to terrorism from their origins in the IRA bombings of Belfast through to their transposition to London’s city center, and Lyon discusses a number of trends in surveillance technologies intensified by September 11th that readers of *Surveillance and Society* will already be familiar with. A number of common conclusions result from these analyses: an overwhelming faith in political and popular discourses in the power of technology to prevent terrorism (Lyon, Coaffee); that counter-terrorism efforts often lead to the fragmentation of urban centers into zones of global connectivity and local dislocation (Coaffee, Marcuse); and a critical concern that the militarization of urban spaces undermines the potential of cities as crucibles of democratic action (Warren, Lyon).

The book is – by its own definition – a success. The contributions collected here deliver as promised: to “place the intersections of war, terrorism, and subnational – specifically urban – spaces at the center, rather than periphery, of analysis” (p. 24). It is questionable that the second aim of the book – “to force an interdisciplinary opening” between international relations and political science (p. 24) – has been achieved, however. The contributions to this volume certainly *suggest* such an opening, but it remains implicit rather than made explicit. As such, a direct and critical engagement with existing geopolitical frameworks in order to contextualize the volume’s contributions would have greatly assisted the volume in meeting its second aim. Simply arraying data, now matter how extensive, cannot alone leverage the interdisciplinary space that the volume promises, even if the material that follows has the potential to fill that space, and neither can frequent repetition of the view that urbicide is a neglected or even ‘taboo’ topic within certain academic traditions. Without providing a solid anchor for the contributions to follow, the reader is left with a blizzard of causes, effects, and theoretical pronouncements from a huge variety of positions that undeniably have the common denominator of ‘cities, war, and terrorism’ but which lack a guiding framework to organize it all. Furthermore, it is ironic that of the few chapters in the volume that do work toward conceptual refinement (Shaw and Hills) argue *against* separating ‘the urban’ from other forms/types of conflict, an argument that is clearly problematic for a line of inquiry that stakes its claim on differentiating ‘urban geopolitics’, ‘urban warfare’, and ‘urbicide’ from their more general categorical parents. This leaves the idea of urban geopolitics in a bind very similar to that of urban sociology after

Castells' intervention in the 1970s with *The Urban Question*: an academic field without a clear grasp of its central subject matter, destined to include anything and everything even tangentially connected. This is reflected, I think, in some of the more quixotic chapters of the volume (Bauman and Sorkin), contributions that, while interesting, which left me wondering just how much closer to an urban geopolitics we have come. I do not advocate for the generation and application of rigid conceptual frameworks, nor do I question the veracity of the events documented in this volume. I merely flag the above reservation given what the volume promised and based on the view that if this literature is to develop beyond the description of a certain facet of a larger phenomenon – i.e. the urban effects of traditional state-centered geopolitics – then it must stake out some conceptual boundaries of what, if anything, urban geopolitics is to constitute.

This volume is widely accessible and will be of great interest to anyone interested in the contemporary nature of war, conflict and cities. And, in the final analysis, the above conceptual problem is not fatal to the success of *Cities, War, and Terrorism* since the contributions collected here are ultimately about highlighting what are very real and pressing issues for the inhabitants of cities crushed between the global geopolitical posturing of nations, the forcible imposition of neo-liberal 'freedoms', and ideological fear-mongering by hawkish leaders, whom are not concerned with conceptual quibbles, and to that end the book is a success.

References

Castells, M. 1977. *The Urban Question*. London: E. Arnold.