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Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism

By Stephen Graham

Verso, 2010

Reviewed by Ilaria Giglioli

In the fall of 2011, global media were characterized by strikingly similar images of the repression of urban citizen movements throughout the world. Similar military tactics were used to dislodge protesters from Tahrir square in Egypt and Occupy encampments in the U.S., among other examples, raising the question of whether security forces in these different cities do indeed collaborate, and to what extent. In his latest work, *Cities Under Siege*, Stephen Graham—co-author of the classic *Splintering Urbanism*—provides a probing insight into this interrogative. The multi-thematic, 400-page-plus book revolves around one main argument: experiments in urban warfare in cities of the global south have led to the increasing militarization of North American and European cities, in a classic example of Foucault's 'boomerang effect.' Drawing on historical examples of the transfer of models of urban planning and surveillance from the space of the colony to that of the metropole (see Ross 1996), Graham understands a similar transfer of techniques to be occurring in the present. By juxtaposing the proliferation of security within cities of the Global North, the 'urbicide' of Palestinian and Iraqi cities, the militaristic undertones of U.S. car culture, and the world-wide proliferation of U.S. military bases, he aims to show "...how resurgent imperialism and colonial geographies characteristic of the contemporary era umbilically connect cities within metropolitan cores and colonial peripheries." (p. xxvii). The result of this process he calls "the new military urbanism."

The initial section of the book lays out the theoretical framework that will be used to analyze the subsequent case studies in the latter part of the book. The first three chapters touch on the broad themes of the militarization of cities of the global south and parts of cities of the global north, and the ideological binaries (Manichean geographies) that legitimize this militarization. Graham discusses the multiple ways in which the 'new military urbanism' is manifested, including a multiplication and militarization of borders, an increased collaboration between police and military, a creep in function between neoliberal and security infrastructure, and a tendency to conflate internal urban minorities with external enemies. On this basis, the book then delves into a series of thematic chapters dealing with the proliferation of borders and surveillance within urban settings, ranging from the increased technologization and depersonalization of war,

to 'urbicide' and targeting of urban infrastructure in military operations. Graham discusses the role of the U.S., from the simultaneous proliferation of urban military bases abroad and domestic urban training centers to the spread of large militaristic SUVs in U.S. cities. The book closes with a focus on urban counter-geographies.

A few minor shortfalls characterize *Cities Under Siege*. First, the final chapter, 'Counter-geographies,' is considerably shorter and less developed than the other sections of the book, and reads as an appendage somewhat at odds with the rich analytical detail of the rest of Graham's account. The second shortfall concerns the author's methodology. Graham criticizes the birds-eye view of cities that lies at the basis of the 'new military urbanism,' whereby cities are depicted as lifeless, dehumanized spaces which can thus be targeted with little concern for the loss of human lives or physical and social infrastructure. While Graham criticizes this vision of cities, his account also adopts a birds-eye view, and does not descend to the level of the lived experience of people within cities targeted by the 'new military urbanism'—a limit which he himself does acknowledge.

While Graham does not provide substantial new empirical material (the more empirically based chapters are largely based on his previous work) or theoretical breakthroughs, he does develop a meticulous and extensive literature review which places *Cities Under Siege* in dialogue with a broad and disparate range of contemporary literature dealing with militarism and securitization in general, and particularly the militarization and securitization of urban space. In this respect, the book could form a solid companion to titles on similar issues, such as Wendy Brown's 2010 analysis of border securitization in *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, Trevor Paglen's 2009 investigation of the undercover sites of the U.S. military-industrial complex in *Blank Spots on the Map*, or geographer Derek Gregory's corpus of work on urban militarism. Graham's account also provides multiple empirical examples that complement theoretical attempts to connect the marginalization and policing of minority neighborhoods within Western Europe and North America to histories of colonial urbanism and current targeting of cities of the Global South (see, for instance, Balibar's 2007 *Uprising in the Banlieues* or Kipfer and Goonewardena's 2005 *Colonization and the New Imperialism: On the Meaning of Urbicide Today*).

Read in tandem with these books and articles, *Cities Under Siege* would be extremely useful for someone seeking to analyze global policy networks that allow for the militarization and securitization of cities, and particularly the development of repressive responses to the claiming of cities as a political arena. Read alone, the book provides an excellent introduction to key contemporary authors dealing with these themes.

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