

The contemporary technology of war cultural studies essay



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The concept that a city itself can become part of the arsenal of warfare can be said to be a concept that is becoming increasingly apparent in today's conflict, within urban areas. Moreover, as cities are becoming seen as a "technology of war", prescribed by Sassen (2010), it can be debated whether such a usage of a city is becoming a global occurrence. The position and role to which a city may hold can give differing views. Graham (2004a) perceives an urban area, as being a source of threat. It can be used strategically as a form of weaponry. Conversely, Sassen (2010) argues that cities are a threat to some; simultaneously it can be a highly vulnerable place for others, especially those not involved directly in the conflicts. A city can be subjected to a series of conflictive challenges, with a diverse range of factors, which can catalyze these clashes. Within the context of the city being used as an arena for warring, the concentration of this essay will focus on the insinuation of violence that occurs in cities. Additionally exploring the partition of society in some cities that leads to this asymmetric warfare and urban violence (Sassen, 2010). The political implications as well as the social implications can be seen as a synapse that link and create struggles in the urban settings. Furthermore, the essay will explore how the utilisation of urban space is seen as a pivotal tool in urban warfare, a case that is particularly true for asymmetric conflicts. The use of such a space can also have other consequences, as it can be argued that the employment of this urban space is a critical psychological weapon in modern warfare. The demolition of cities can implant anxiety as well as emotionally intimidate the respective nations (Sassen, 2010). It can then be important to look at the use of cities as a technology of war in past and present urban struggles. The examples that will be illustrated in this essay will provide a better analysis as <https://assignbuster.com/the-contemporary-technology-of-war-cultural-studies-essay/>

to whether the concept and the use of cities in this sense is irrelevant or whether it is a theory that is becoming evidential as each conflict persists. Finally, the links between the politics and space can be seen as a deep-rooted conflict that is deemed as a perpetrator in the production of urban battles. Sassen (2010), advocates that cities can position themselves as a weapon, which can effectively be used in a conflictive situation. The context that can elevate the role of a city as part of a conflict can be mainly true in situations like asymmetric war and urban violence (Sassen, 2010).

Nonetheless, she argues that this may be of greater beneficiary to that of a lesser force, such as that of a non-state entity when faced with more advanced oppositions. The non-state insurgents can use a city as an advantageous ground when other more powerful opponents may not be in a position to dictate how much force it can use. The traditional technological superior weaponry (such as tanks and fighter planes), cannot be used within a city to such an extent, especially if international laws and implications are in place (Graham, 2004b). Therefore, asymmetric warfare situating in an urban space is becoming strife in a modern context (Coward, 2007). Cities are a place where everyday life is situated, as Sassen (2010) exemplifies as a being an area of immunity for the insurgents of such conflicts. Those of a state sanctioned force will have to be extremely mindful of who the targets and opponents are. Taking the example of Baghdad, in regards to state forces, such actors cannot go in and wage war in a highly built up area with all their might (Graham, 2004c). Moreover, such asymmetric warfare that takes place in the city can be a powerful psychological tool. Graham (2004b), sees the importance of the city as being a high value chip in such conflict.

The city itself can become a dangerous force when combined with intuition.
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Linking back to the city as being a psychological tool, it can be said that the status and use of a city can instil fear to those that cannot penetrate and struggle with such situations (Sassen, 2010). Firstly, with the case of the ongoing ' War on Terror', a situation of this sort is becoming more evident. For the opposing groups to that of the official army, cities are becoming a hiding place, a breeding place for terrorism (Graham, 2004c). The action of urbicide is one of the main themes of the debate of cities being a contemporary technology of war. Urbicides can be intended as the " deliberate killing of the city" Graham, 2004c, p. 25). Coward (2007) believes that this form of urban destruction can often than not, position itself as a distinctive form of political violence. "...assault on urbanity and thus a phenomenon in its own right," (Coward, 2007). The concept of destroying of the city was demonstrated by Coward with the case of the disbanding of Yugoslavia in the 1990's. The fabric of the cities, such as that of buildings and streets were used as a fortress as well as creating divisive areas. This example had the implication of being a deep-rooted political violence; it is also conflicts that clearly intertwine with the spatial aspect of the urban forms. It can be viewed that the urban spatial aspects in a conflicting situation can take differing roles; it can be a place for political statement, an arena for ideological divergence and a physical entity. This last concept in turn is used as an armoury as well as an inflicative tool, in pushing through the outcome of the two former notions. Therefore, the occurrences of urbicides are less likely to take place if there are no foundations for which it can spawn. For such brutality to occur in a city, there has to be a mechanism for which each conflict can implode. A cause for such conflicts can also have of social, cultural, political and religious reasoning. Fregonese (2009), uses <https://assignbuster.com/the-contemporary-technology-of-war-cultural-studies-essay/>

the case of urbicide in Beirut as a circumstance in which a city becomes an arena for dispute due to the four reasons listed. The two-year war in Lebanon (1975-1976) was an accumulation of the above factors. The opposing groups (with over a dozen) some more prominent than others were fighting for a city. This city was the capital; this stance was seen as a potentially pivotal acquisition that can in turn produce a radical change. The role of Beirut as the frontier for urban warfare was seen as a " part in the tactics and strategies used to bifurcate – physically and ideologically- this urban environment" (Fregonese, 2009). The role of spatiality was therefore imminent, as those located in the demarcated areas, in a sense had a different socio-political instilment, which subsequently polarised the Beirut urban society. When the different groups had established the territories within the urban spaces; this had in turn transformed the lives of normal citizens, as society and the urban framework of Beirut was inevitably engulfed in the chaos. One of the posing problems with city being a fearful weapon is that those who are not directly involved with such conflicts are drawn into it. With Israel's 'Operation Defensive Shield', there is a level of discontent for those involved. Graham (2004) argues that the Israel government especially, during Sharon's reign, highlighted cities as being a space that could instil this fear into the insurgents, more than that of armed conflict. "...I know the Arabs...for them there is nothing more important than their house...under me you will not see a child shot next to his father..."(Graham, 2004a p. 225) The extreme case of Sharon's action of bulldozing urban areas, can as a result lead to a conflict on an entirely different level. This as proposed by Graham (2002), is what he calls asymmetric urbicide. It is an act of denying each other the right to the city, <https://assignbuster.com/the-contemporary-technology-of-war-cultural-studies-essay/>

denying those rights to that of the occupants who are dependant on the urban space. The annihilation of such urban spaces can turn this destruction of a city into a measured construction of a spatial area that will be socially and politically displaced. Graham (2002), also notes that the strategies employed by the Israeli's on Palestinian cities were reciprocated by the United States, " Israeli Strategies...are being directly imported into the U. S practice as the U. S military addresses the Islamic cities that it sees as its main targets in its global war on terror." (Graham, 2004a, p. 220)The attack of such manner can also be seen as a part of geopolitical strategies that may keep opponents such as the Palestinians at a developmental disadvantage. It is discouraging the growth of an already fractured urban society of Palestine, thus the methodical destruction of the cities is engrained with political interests (Graham, 2004b). Consequently, the advancement of the Palestinian society and economy can be argued to be a threat. The expansion of urban settlements can "...undermine Israeli military omnipotence, and hence geopolitical power, in the region." (Graham, 2004a, p219). Conversely, Eitam, (in 2002, a Minister of National Infrastructure) does not see cities and its foundation as merely " weapons of geopolitical occupation," (quoted in Graham, 2004a) due to the position that a city can take, it can be valuable in the combatting against the usually effectual conventional military strategies. Thus, Eitam like Coward (2006) sees cities as its own object, this being the weapons of war. It can then be further argued, that an urban area is perceived as a place of power, the Israeli tactics to uricide Palestinian towns and cities is as a result of this fearfulness for the role of a city as a technology of war. The city is used and employed by Palestinian fighters effectively; this contests Israel's supremacy

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at the military front. Moreover, rejecting the urbanity to take place can be seen as fitting with the assumption of fulfilling ones own geopolitical interests (Flint, 2012), which in turn keeps the position of the Israeli control over this region. It can be argued that conflicts in urban locations may actually give rise to resentments that are already in place (Mcgreal, 2003), which can then create a greater threat. Those who may not associate with this kind of conflicts may become more aligned to being part of it. (Graham, 2004), agrees with this notion of growth in resentment amongst normal citizens, he notes that there is a looming and intense anger from those citizens who are do not partake in such conflicts. Graham, (2004) points out that with the case of the urban struggles in Baghdad that " the inevitable messy carnage and mass killing is always going to fuel the deep hatreds and resentments, even when a brutal dictator is deposed" (Graham 2004c, p17-18). Nonetheless, it can be said to be creating bitterness for both parties, as those involved at the lower level of the hierarchy of such decisions do not agree with this stance. Mcgreal (2003) points out that Ya'alon (at the time the Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces) disputes that such tactics are not benefiting Israel's strategic interests but it is instead bolstering the terrorists, creating an atmosphere where there is a density of tensions. Subsequently, this can create a cycle of vengeance, which can increase in intensity at each turn. The use of the city as a weapon can be seen to take place in different contextualisation, the employment of cities as being a place of political and social discontent is a trend that seems to grow as much as that of the population of urban areas. Nonetheless, the concept of city as a contemporary technology of war is not something that is a recent concept as first prescribed by Sassen (2010). The Beirut example illustrates the point

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that the occupation of a city for the purpose of war is not a case of the city being a 'modern' urban conflict, which is often associated in recent time with the 'War on Terror'. Fragonese (2009), highlights with regards to the assessment urbicide as being "a context-specific physical and epistemological rearrangement of contested urban territories, rather than as an overarching label for post-cold war geopolitical trends." Thus, the trend and engagement of a city has to some respect be apparent before the September attacks, which ignited the 'War on Terror.' A geopolitical trend can be seen as a result of the global attacks, which occurs due to terrorism (Sassen, 2010). A matter of which can be linked back to the protection of a country's own political interests, this being known as the geopolitical code (Flint, 2012). The recurring theme throughout this essay is the role of politics in the creation of diverging urban arenas; nonetheless, it can be seen as two subjects that emerge with one another in a city setting. The cities can then be observed as "lightning conductor for the world's political violence" (Graham, 2004c, p4). If this is the case, then it is inevitable that a high number of the major cities are increasing their prominence as a coliseum of urban violence. Sassen (2010) commentates that many cities in the world are becoming part of this cycle of asymmetric warfare, analysing the terrorist attacks on cities such as London, Madrid, Bali and Mumbai. The cause of such outcome stemming from the 'War on Terror', this then leads back to the statement by Sassen that cities are under a level of vulnerability. The city cannot be seen in the same perspective; the role of a city constantly changes with each situation. Therefore, considering that cities are solely a weapon of contemporary urban warfare, the role can be seen as dismissive when only seen in this perception. Marcuse (2002) interprets that even those

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cities that are not part of urban warfare are incorporated in this circle of fear. The citizens of such respective cities are in turn restricted to move freely, and cannot populate urban areas in the same way. Thus, the concept of urbanity is one that gets restrained under the conflicts that takes place (Coward, 2006). Consequently, the spatial implication for cities as the pivot of urban warfare can be seen as a space where political claims can be made (Sassen, 2010). The examples highlighted above give an insight into this theory that cities are built environments that are part of the encompassing role of geopolitics. Cities are spaces, which radiate and hold power, this is a concept that is recognisable when looking at the destruction of cities in the examples made. To conclude, the view that cities are part of this technology of war is methodologically and systematically part of all parties involved in the engagements that occurs in the cities mentioned. Moreover, there are varying approaches and uses of the cities for all the diverse parties involved. Whereas some see cities as a major threat to their power, others seek and use it as an opportunity to compensate the lack of technological power and military infrastructure. The entailment that cities are a resource for political and social conflicts is taking centre stage when any types of battles are occurring in the contemporary world. The occurrence of urbicide, urban warfare and urban violence has become a tendency that is rising, thus it can then be seen more apparently as a technology of war. Coward, M. (2007) 'Urbicide' Reconsidered. *Theory & Event*, 10 (2), Available at: http://muse.jhu.edu.ezproxy01.rhul.ac.uk/journals/theory_and_event/v010/10.2coward.html [Accessed: 10 Feb 2013]. Coward, M. (2006) Against anthropocentrism: the destruction of the built environment as a distinct form of political violence. *Review of International Studies*, 32 (3), p. 419-437. Flint, <https://assignbuster.com/the-contemporary-technology-of-war-cultural-studies-essay/>

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