

The New Military Urbanism

Above all, [the United States' new low-intensity war culture] is self-perpetuating and self-replicating; it normalizes and naturalizes a state of war. Peace is not the end of war culture. At its core, war culture seeks a postponement of peacetime 'for the duration'; it seeks an adjustment to a state of permanent war.¹

At the core of this book's argument is the idea that new military ideologies of permanent and boundless war are radically intensifying the militarization of urban life. The process is far from new: it simply adds contemporary twists to continual transformations – political, cultural and economic – which together serve to normalize war itself as well as the preparations for war.² Indeed, in many cases, the transformations associated with the new military urbanism merely extend and revivify the urban militarization, securitization, Manichaean thinking, and fear-mongering that were a central feature of, notably, the Cold War but also of earlier wars.

Military sociologists broadly categorize such processes as 'militarization'. Michael Geyer defines it as 'the contradictory and tense social process in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence'.³ Such a process, inevitably, is complex and multidimensional, though its components are as old as war itself. As we saw in the previous chapter, these invariably involve the social construction of a conceptual division between the inside and the outside of a nation or other geographic area, and the orchestrated demonization of enemies and enemy places beyond the boundaries of inside. Militarization also involve the normalization of military paradigms of thought, action and policy; efforts at the aggressive disciplining of bodies, places and identities deemed not to befit masculinized (and interconnected) notions of nation, citizenship or body; and the deployment of a wide range of propaganda which romanticizes or sanitizes violence as a means of righteous revenge or the achievement of some God-given purpose. Above all, militarization and war organizes

the 'creative destruction' of inherited geographies, political economies, technologies and cultures.

So, what exactly is new about the 'new military urbanism'? How is it different from the intense militarization experienced by the cities of, say, the Cold War or total war? I shall point to seven related trends which, I argue, introduce palpably new dimensions to the contemporary militarization of urban life.

RURAL SOLDIERS, URBAN WAR

First, new relationships are emerging between nations, soldiers and citizens, which have major implications for the contemporary urbanization of warfare. Deborah Cowen has pointed out that the professionalized, high-tech militaries of the West are now often 'made up overwhelmingly of rural soldiers'.⁴ Drawing on Gramsci, she argues that this 'suggests that a political-geographic rift had emerged between urbanism and cosmopolitanism on the one hand, and ruralism and nationalism on the other'.

Thus, writes Cowen, 'rural areas have become the heartland of militarism and "authentic" patriotism' in many Western nations. Grounded in the long-standing naturalization of nations which appeal to 'a kind of bucolic territorial authenticity' based on whiteness, the conservative politics of rural areas are, as we have seen, frequently based on hatred of or suspicion towards the perceived horrors or the racial, cosmopolitan and multicultural impurities and threats posed by cities. In both the US and Canada, Cowen argues, a 'powerful cultural discourse of the rural ideal identifies the rural as the authentic space of patriotic militarism'. The rural is thus widely understood by military recruiters 'to have both the economic motivations for mass enlistment coupled with small-town culture of patriotic nationalism'. Indeed, despite the US being one of the most urbanized nations on Earth, rural soldiers now dominate its military. Between 2003 and 2004, '47.6 per cent of all soldiers killed in action during Operation Enduring Freedom and 44.3 per cent of those killed in action during Operation Iraqi Freedom through February 5, 2004, were from communities with populations under 20,000'.⁵

Yet these largely ruralized Western militaries must now deploy primarily to cities, both domestic and foreign. Given that right-wing media, especially in

1 Deer, 'The Ends of War', 1.

2 Rachel Woodward, 'From Military Geography to Militarism's Geographies: Disciplinary Engagements with the Geographies of Militarism and Military Activities', *Progress in Human Geography* 29: 6, 2005, 718–40.

3 Michael Geyer, 'The Militarization of Europe, 1914–1945', in John Gillis, ed., *The Militarization of the Western World*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989, 79.

4 Deborah Cowen, 'National Soldiers and the War on Cities', *Theory and Event* 10: 2, 2007.

