



**You have downloaded a document from
RE-BUŚ
repository of the University of Silesia in Katowice**

Title: Urbicide - when the city becomes a target

Author: Karolina Wojtasik

Citation style: Wojtasik Karolina. (2015). Urbicide - when the city becomes a target. W: M. S. Szczepański, G. Gawron, B. Lewicka (red.), "Urbanism as a way of life : trying to rediscover" (S. 109-118). Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.



Uznanie autorstwa - Użycie niekomercyjne - Bez utworów zależnych Polska - Licencja ta zezwala na rozpowszechnianie, przedstawianie i wykonywanie utworu jedynie w celach niekomercyjnych oraz pod warunkiem zachowania go w oryginalnej postaci (nie tworzenia utworów zależnych).



UNIwersytet ŚLĄSKI
W KATOWICACH



Biblioteka
Uniwersytetu Śląskiego



Ministerstwo Nauki
i Szkolnictwa Wyższego

Karolina Wojtasik

Urbicide¹ — when the city becomes a target

Using every available weapon, the aggressor perpetrated a planned cultural genocide and urbicide systematically destroying all aspects of urban life, which symbolized our coexisting communities.²

Introduction

For thousands of years, conflicts over the control of people, goods and places have reshaped the organization of collective human life. There are few phenomena that — as much as war — do not only violate the territorial integrity and a sense of security, but also destroy social structures — normative structures, structures of power and sense of identity. Armed conflicts disrupt the processes of socialization and identification. They hit the foundations of social order. Most wars have resulted in significant loss of life, along with destruction of infrastructure and resources, which may lead to famine, disease, and death in civilian population. War is a complex phenomenon that stirs societies and completely transforms them depriving people of their sense of tranquility. War is defined as an organized and often prolonged conflict that is carried out by states or non-state actors and generally characterized by extreme violence, social disruption and an attempt at economic destruction. While some scholars explain warfare as an inescapable and integral aspect of human nature, others claim that it is only inevitable one under certain socio-cultural or geographical circumstances.

¹ The concept of “urbicide” was first used by the writer Michael Moorocka, then repeated by Kenishka Goonewardena and Stefan Kipfer, who thus determined the policy pursued by Israeli planned and systematic destruction using bulldozers against Palestinian homes and settlements.

² It is how Association of Sarajevo Architects described the pervasive urban violence against Mostar.

For some, the practice of war is not linked to any single type of political organization or society (Borgatta 2000: 3242—3243). The significance of war as a socio-political phenomenon has made the analyses of its causes a central concern of scholars for over two millennia. Although the essential questions about war were asked by Thucydides in the 5th century BC, “the vast amount of work on the topic since that time has produced ongoing debates instead of generally accepted answers” (ibid.: 3241). The author of the first “modern” martial arts manual, Carl von Clausewitz, stated clearly that war is “the act of relations between people” (Clausewitz 2006: 98). As a social phenomenon, a war becomes domain of sociologists. That is why the Peace, War, and Social Conflict Section of the American Sociological Association for over 20 years has dealt with war and warfare to encourage the application of sociological methods, theories, and perspectives to the study of peace and war. Interests of Section members include diverse subjects such as: causes and dynamics of war, conflict resolution, peace movements, military institutions, non-violence, race and ethnic conflict, gender and violence, war refugees³. War, however, affects the fabric of society as badly as causes damage to the fabric of the city — buildings, edifices, monuments, and thus may be subject to reflection of urban sociology and architecture. In the 20th century cities become the major site of destruction and death in war, along with the invention of long-range aerial bombing in the Second World War. This has involved a shift of warfare from battlefields to the use of the city and civilian population as strategic targets (Charlesworth 2006: 35). “War no longer is something abnormal. The subject of war and the city and the various combinations possible between the two terms, war against the city, the city at war with the rest, the city at war with itself, risk — becoming mere academic disciplines and fields of speculation”, argues P. Somma (Somma 2002: 1).

“New threats require new thinking”⁴

In the 20th century the theatre of war moved from the battlefield to urban areas. Death in war has ceased to be the domain of professional soldiers becoming a daily routine for civilians. Although textbooks in the field of military still make the distinction between civilians and soldiers, statistics show distinctly that 74% of the victims of armed conflicts are civilians (Charlesworth 2006: 9). Another indicator most often quoted is the number of destroyed, damaged and bombed

³ <http://www.asanet.org/sectionpwsc/index.cfm> [access: 29.01.2015].

⁴ This is the title of president George W. Bush’s June 1, 2002 speech to the graduating class at US Military Academy at West Point, where he laid out his vision of taking pre-emptive action to protect America’s security.

cities. This significant change in the attitude towards hostilities somehow enforces sociological reflection on the social impacts of war in the perspective of urban sociology. While analysing the changes of armed conflicts, the *Encyclopedia of sociology* ignores the issue of participation and death of civilians in modern wars, as well as changes in urban areas affected by conflicts (Borgatta 2000: 3242—3243). The scientific papers devoted to armed conflicts, wars and civil wars clearly emphasize that in today's wars there are the civilians who are mostly killed. Battles move to the largest population centres — the cities — and as the front lines are not clearly defined the most fierce fighting concentrates on gaining control of the individual cities (Derouen, Heo 2007: 4).

A method of warfare is changing. The term “war of the third wave” was used in the publication entitled *War and Anti-war* by Alvin and Heidi Toffler (Toffler, Toffler 1993) to describe the war carried out by coalition forces in the Gulf War (1990—1991). The Gulf War was a showcase for a new generation of intelligent weaponry that promises to minimize if not eliminate the significance of brute-force firepower and set-piece battles. Alvin and Heidi Toffler pointed to the massive changes in using the warfare focused on precision in determining the goal and the means of achieving it to minimize the loss. Knowledge, information, data are beginning to compete with the weapon. The authors suggest a number of parallels between the characteristics of the new economic order and the characteristics of warfare. Knowledge has become today a key factor in the production of economic value, and the transformation of the economic and social order has also made an impact on the military. Alvin and Heidi Toffler argued that the end of the Cold War is a symptom of great historic change not only in the warfare but also in the sphere of international relations. The coexistence of three waves may reduce the risk of nuclear war between two superpowers, but it has heightened the threat of small, hot wars between states trying to safeguard their vital interests. Religious fanaticism, economic and ethnic rivalries, political demagoguery, as well as the erosion of nation-states' sovereignty are likely to produce more, not less, armed conflicts in the coming years. They claimed that “a true revolution in military thinking” is taking place in response to contemporary changing economic and technological conditions (*ibid.*). The means of war and ways of conducting armed conflicts begin to reflect the “third wave” paradigm. Wars will become increasingly dominated by “knowledge strategy” using high-tech weaponry such as remote piloted aircrafts, omniscient surveillance satellites, battlefield robots and sonic systems capable of disabling enemy troops without killing them.

Fear in the city

The 21st century started and will expire under another kind of threat. Though currently conventional wars still dominate, today first of all we are experiencing the asymmetric threats, including the most serious one — terrorism. The terrorism as a socio-political phenomenon belongs to a group of the biggest global challenges faced by Western countries. Terrorism should be perceived as one of the many phenomena in the whole chain of change and transformation of social, economic and spatial impacts resulting from our contemporary processes of modernization and globalization. Phenomenon of terrorism is extremely complex and difficult to analyze. For postmodern terrorism, most often the religiously motivated violence becomes an end in itself, and its main prey is unarmed civilians. For several years we have witnessed the ruthless acts of terror blasts in crowded train railways, subway stations, schools and public buildings. Defense against terrorism engaging the military and police agents leads devastating wars. Citizens are subjected to control and supervision. Cities transform their public space. Spatial effects of terrorism can be observed both in the urban structure of modern cities, as well as in the architecture of the most strategic buildings in the city that are strengthened and fortified (Jasiński 2013: 9—26).

Contemporary threats have significant influence on urban space. As has been said before, urban areas, crowded public spaces and large buildings often serve as the targets of terrorist activities. The threat of terrorism not only affects the actions of governments, law regulations and social behaviour, but it also causes significant changes in the way of functioning and development of urban organisms, especially the largest ones — global metropolises — frequently becoming the targets of attacks. This is so because their importance as the political, economic and social centres is greater than ever. They are centres of power, the headquarters of international organizations and multinational corporations. They are the nodes in a global network of information flow and capital. Metropolitan centres are the clusters of buildings, public facilities and crowds of people, concentrated on a small area. As Manuel Castells pointed out, metropolises rule the world and, consequently, they become the target of terrorist activities (Castells 1998: 461).

In his *Architecture in times of terrorism*, Artur Jasiński has collected an extensive material to answer the question if terrorism has impact on shaping the modern urban environment. To fulfill the task, he examines the dependence between the contemporary wave of international terrorism and the development of postmodern cities. The spatial effects of terrorist attacks may be direct or indirect ones. The former include physical destruction of buildings or parts of cities which reconstruction changes their shape (Oklahoma, London, New York), while the latter comprise the effects resulting in implementation of a variety of

security and defence tactics aimed at hindering or limiting the risks of potential attacks. Processes planning and execution of construction projects are usually tedious and time-consuming. Now we can observe significant changes in urbanized environment resulting from still growing terrorist threat and, in particular, after the attack of September 2001. The terrorist threat appears as one of the essential conditions for determining contemporary design decisions regarding the procedure as a whole. It applies to designing of the bank headquarters, especially their centres. The same refers to designing and building of the most of metropolitan objects with symbolic meaning, as well as government and administrative buildings, railway stations, airports and other public infrastructure of crucial importance. The existing buildings, like the seats of strategic offices and institutions, are subjected to preventive measures, included fencing off the whole streets or quarters of the cities. Aimed at fight against terrorism (as the Israeli officials emphasize), specific spatial form consisted of dams, walls, tunnels and barriers has been arisen by the Israeli forces to create a giant three-dimensional structure separating the two nations living on the same land. The author asked research questions paying special attention to the relation between the urban and the counter-terrorism issues of urban space. Among them were the following ones: What are the consequences for fundamental features and values symbolized by traditional city posed by the threat of terrorism? What are the consequences for cities and their residents caused by widely implemented anti-terrorist security measures? How to protect effectively the city, its public space and buildings against terrorist attacks? What defence strategies should be undertaken which, on the one hand, will not restrict citizens' rights, and, on the other, will not spread fear? How to combat terrorism not strengthening at the same time its devastating message and keeping balance between freedom and security? (Jasiński 2013: 10). "New threats require new thinking"...

War and the city

The concept of the city ravaged by war has at least two meanings. On the one hand, it highlights destructive impact of spatial divisions caused primarily by economic differences, i.e. the differences in social class (and status) which can be easily transformed into the racial, ethnic or religious divisions. It seems to be equally the problem for both European (e.g. Paris) and American (e.g. Los Angeles, New York) cities. In second sense of the meaning, it is the city affected or destroyed by war (Charlesworth 2006: 12). Nowadays, special attention is paid to the cities which were the scene of ethnic divisions and civil wars — Baghdad, Kabul and many others. The differences between the urban

devastation caused by formation of spatial divisions and the ones resulting from military actions are clearly evident. There are currently three sets of reasons leading to armed conflicts in urban space (ibid.). Firstly, the nature of motivation of the ethnic or religious group. Inglorious career makes the idea of “cleared space”, i.e. the “uniform space” in terms of ethnicity which means arising city walls and fenced enclaves — ghettos. Military actions are in a number of cases aimed at the systematic elimination of a particular ethnic group in the city, or the country, and take the form of ethnic cleansing. Secondly, this is the case of the city wounded by armed conflict in which significant cosmopolitan centers, often the capitals, turn into *de facto* a battlefield. Easier access to weapons and the emergence of a number of armed groups or even small private armies make the cities become the victims of violence, especially in civil wars. Thirdly, the conflict (including the use of violence) between the holders of wealth and “have-nots”. In this group there are the conflicts breaking out due to ignoring the needs of minorities demanding privileges or better treatment (ibid.).

War in urban areas is primarily a loss of life, escape, migration and refuge. In addition to physical destruction of buildings and public spaces, sociologists pay attention to other, intangible, but very important consequences of war in the city. There are the removal and/or destruction of the elements of collective memory as the places that make up the national identity, associated with shared memory and symbolic universe. Another consequence is the political chaos accompanied by lack of management of the administrative apparatus and losing control over the urban infrastructure. They are followed by lack of supply, absence of security providers, education and health service. People suffer noise, uncertainty, insecurity, disintegration, degradation. People who have experienced war over the years will deal with trauma and sense of loss. There are the architects — more often than sociologists — who wonder how the city should be rebuilt. The question of reconstruction of the city affected by war, conflict or disaster was posed by Esther Charlesworth (Charlesworth 2006: 115—133). She stressed the importance of planning and reconstruction not only in reducing the post-war trauma, but also in rebuilding one’s sense of safety and relationships. Rebuilding social structures, those (like buildings and constructions) partly affected and those entirely destroyed in war. The processes of Beirut, Nicosia and Mostar reconstruction belong to the case studies showing how to design city space in such a way as not to remind inhabitants their trauma of war and, simultaneously, preserve the elements of space which shape their identity and collective memory. Therefore, the necessity of integrated effort undertaken by specialists representing a range of different fields, like architecture, sociology etc. seems unavoidable.

Urbicide — deliberate and systematic destruction of cities

Within the strategic and deliberate destruction of memory, many writers on the subject of war and architecture see the proliferation of civil conflict as signaling a negation of civil relationships and identity. Thus, many architectural theorists [...] describe the process of destroying iconic buildings, monuments and streetscapes as using “nostalgia as a lethal weapon”.

(ibid.: 34)

Serbian philosopher Darko Tanaskovic argues that the aim of contemporary war is not to destroy biological life, but also memory. Famous Croatian architect, Bogdan Bogdanovich, who is a specialist in designing war memorials, uses the term “ritual massacre of the cities”. Susan Sontag describes the “homicide of memory” in the former Yugoslavia, claiming that Guernica is our Vukovar. The group of Bosnian architects define the systematic process of Serbian violence upon urban areas in the former Yugoslavia as “urbicide” and “culturicide”. However, the concept of “urbicide” was first used by the writer Michael Moorocka, followed then by Kenishka Goonewardena and Stefan Kipfer, who thus defined the Israeli policy of planned and systematic destruction making use of the bulldozers against Palestinian homes and settlements.

In April 2002, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) bulldozers levelled 40,000 square meters in the centre of Jenin refugee camp on the northern West Bank (Graham 2003: 63—77). According to the UN report, 52 Palestinians were killed, half of them civilians. Organization Human Rights Watch proved that some civilians, including the disabled, were crushed in their homes because their families were prevented from delivering aid — the Israelis used Palestinians as human shields. The operation “Defensive Shield” resulted in destruction of 140 multi-family homes and caused damage to 1,500 of them what rendered 4,000 people — more than a quarter of the population — homeless. Houses in Nablus, Hebron and Ramallah were also destroyed then. This undermines the official Israeli claim that the IDF operation was aimed at the destruction of “terrorist infrastructure” for Palestinian suicide attacks. The real purpose was to use the context of the American war on terror to destroy the base of the proto-urban Palestinian state. As noted by Dov Tamari, IDF analyst, Israel made use of the lesson of the 1980s Lebanese campaign aimed at “social infrastructure” from which the militants grow and their families depend on. Adequate definition of this strategy is what the Bosnian architects captivated as “urbicide”, i.e. “the deliberate killing or destruction of the city” (Association of Sarajevo Architects 2006: 12). IDF armoured bulldozers using the 60 ton D-9 Caterpillars were provided with reinforced steel plates, small cabin with bulletproof windows, special blades for destroying the buildings (Graham 2003: 63—64).

Urbicide carried out by using bulldozers is one of the four elements of geopolitical and military strategy (ibid.: 63—77). Firstly, the destruction of homes and cities is combined with broader transformation of the territory, which is expected to reduce vulnerability to Palestinians attacks in the growing archipelago of Jewish settlements and highways. This process is enhanced by construction of the 110-kilometre barrier, the Mediterranean version of the Berlin Wall on Palestinian land. On the east side, there is a several kilometers buffer zone, devoid of the Palestinian people. Secondly, forced demodernization of the Palestinian population is accompanied by the expansion of Jewish settlements in strategic military locations in Gaza and the West Bank. They are connected with modern roads, water networks, energy. Thirdly, the Palestinians crack down economically, socially and culturally, imprisoned by tightening combination of curfews, raids, walls, sieges, roadblocks and surveillance systems, which is to increase the lack of their [the Palestinians] mobility. Panoptical supervision increases with the Israel's occupation of land and the sea. Fourthly, using bulldozers as a strategy for urbicide is accompanied by discriminatory planning and forming regulations claiming all new Palestinian buildings as "illegal". They are seen by Israeli politicians as a "barbaric terrorist nest". Billions of dollars have been spent to create the "facts on the ground" — 160 strategic Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, while the Palestinian population is getting poorer and poorer. To May 2002 up to 70% of the Palestinians were living on less than \$ 2 a day, 30% of the Palestinian children are chronically malnourished. For May 2002 the UN harboured a half million Palestinians, protecting them from hunger.

Crushing the ground as part of military strategy is nothing new in the history of the IDF. Bulldozers have been used as an ethnic and territorial reconfiguration agent since Israel gained independence in 1948. Since 1967 until the end of the 1990s there were about 7,000 Palestinian homes destroyed in the occupied territories — all of them on the pretext they were built illegally. In order to facilitate monitoring by the IDF the Palestinian space, create buffer zones around Jewish settlements and roads and punish the Palestinians for the acts of resistance, many houses were destroyed in the acts of war crimes. For a long time nicknamed the "Bulldozer" — Ariel Sharon — explained his position in the newspaper *Haaretz* of 26 January 2001. He was asked what he would do if the Palestinians fired at a new Jewish settlement Gilo, located next to the settlement of Beit Jela (south of Jerusalem). He replied that he would knock the first row of houses down in Beit Jela; if the fire continued, the next rows of houses would have been destroyed. Sharon said he knew the Arabs — helicopters and rockets do not make an impression on them. The most important for them is the house. In May 2001, the Israeli Minister of Labour said that the destruction of Palestinian roads, facilities and cultural institutions, was done in order to "make life hell for Palestinians". The operation "Defensive Shield" embodied

that attitude. Water tanks were riddled, devices of electronic communication were bombed, electronic transformers were destroyed, computers were spoiled and hard drives were stolen. Financial infrastructure losses valued at \$ 360 million. Medical facilities were also bombed during the operation. IDF barred entry to ambulances condemning many people to a slow death from bleeding. At least five people of the medical personnel were killed. In January 2002, Josep Pique, the head of the EU Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, complained that Israel repeatedly bombed the airport and the coast of Gaza. Among other damages, there was destroyed the Palestinian broadcasting radio and television stations with provided by the European Union — the equipment worth 20 million euros. Simultaneously, IDF destroyed numbers of olive trees, plants and greenhouses.

Instead of conclusion

In 1999 the organization Architects Without Frontiers was founded to perform and promote the architectural solutions which taking into account social, historical and political conditions aim at rebuilding, on the one hand, cities destroyed in wars and conflicts, and relationships, structures, networks of people from the conflict-stricken regions, on the other⁵. In the English papers there is a concept of “urban trauma”, meaning the state of disaster, conflict, or other incident that affects the city, its social structures and networks (Lahoud, Rice, Burke 2010: 5). Nowadays the uncertainty and risk created by society (Ulrich Beck) make the issue as crucial as impossible to ignore. Since next to globalization and civil war, the “urban trauma” appears a sign of the times that we live in.

References

- Association of Sarajevo Architects (2006). *War Architecture. Magazine for Architecture, Town Planning and Design*. Sarajevo. Cit. after E. Charlesworth, *Architects without Frontiers. War, Reconstruction and Design Responsibility*. Amsterdam—Boston—Heidelberg—London—New York—Oxford—Paris—San Diego—San Francisco—Singapore—Sidney—Tokyo: Architectural Press.
- Borgatta E.F. (Editor in chief) (2000). *Gale Encyclopedia of Sociology*. Vol. 5. New York—Detroit—San Francisco—London—Boston—Woodbridge—CT: Macmillan Reference.
- Castells M. (1998). *Société en réseau. L'ère de l'information*. Paris: Fayard.

⁵ <http://www.architectswithoutfrontiers.com.au/site/about.html>

- Clausewitz von C. (2006). *O wojnie*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Mireki.
- Charlesworth E. (2006). *Architects without Frontiers. War, Reconstruction and Design Responsibility*. Amsterdam—Boston—Heidelberg—London—New York—Oxford—Paris—San Diego—San Francisco—Singapore—Sidney—Tokyo: Architectural Press.
- Derouen K., Heo U. (2007). *Civil Wars of the World. Major Conflicts since World War II*. Vol. 1. Santa Barbara—California—Denver—Colorado—Oxford: ABC CLIO.
- Graham S. (2003). Lessons in Urbicide. *New Left Review* 19(1).
- Jasiński A. (2013). *Architektura w czasach terroryzmu: miasto, przestrzeń publiczna, budynek*. Warszawa: Lex a Wolters Kluwer business.
- Lahoud A., Rice Ch., Burke A. (Eds.) (2010). Post-Traumatic Urbanism. *Architectural Design* 80(5).
- Somma P. (2002). War and Cities. *Open House International* 27(4).
- Toffler A., Toffler H. (1993). *War and Anti-war. Survival at the Dawn of the 21st Century*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

Miastobójstwo — kiedy miasto staje się celem

Streszczenie

Artykuł podejmuje tematykę zmian, jakie dokonują się w przestrzeni miejskiej w wyniku konfliktów zbrojnych — wojen, terroryzmu czy praktyk tzw. miastobójstwa (*urbicide*). W wyniku zmiany sposobu prowadzenia działań zbrojnych, rozwoju technologii, globalizacji i pojawienia się tzw. zagrożeń asymetrycznych, konflikty zbrojne przeniosły się z pola bitwy do przestrzeni miejskiej. O miasta się walczy, miasta się przejmują, czyni się je sferą wpływów, gdy trzeba zdobywać budynek po budynku (np. II bitwa o al-Falludżę). Zniszczenie tkanki miasta to zniszczenie poczucia bezpieczeństwa, tożsamości struktur społecznych. W rezultacie — to zniszczenie narodu. Tę praktykę stosuje się jako element tzw. czystek etnicznych (przypadek byłej Jugosławii), element działań wojennych (bombardowania miast), czy długotrwałej strategii osłabiania wroga (Palestyna / Izrael). Metropolie są areną innego rodzaju „zmagania”. Gmachy publiczne, siedziby międzynarodowych organizacji, hotele i placówki dyplomatyczne, a także zatłoczone dworce, lotniska, stacje metra stają się celem działań terrorystycznych powodując nie tylko skutki polityczne i społeczne, ale także istotne zmiany w strukturze przestrzennej miast europejskich i amerykańskich.

Słowa kluczowe: terroryzm, antyterroryzm, architektura, miastobójstwo, współczesne konflikty zbrojne