“In my talk I propose to look into rat control discourse as a model of cultural exclusion. I investigate linguistic and visual patterns present in policies aimed at extermination of lives (human and non-human) which are perceived as a political or/and sanitary hazard. My hypothesis is that the way sewer rats are presented and perceived is strictly inscribed into warfare logic. Narratives describing this species as an embodiment of illness, dirt and morbidity, creatures devoid of any moral and ecological meaning, follow patterns of exclusion observed in genocidal practices, where unwanted groups of people are perceived as ‘wasted lives’ (Bauman, 2003). The extermination of rat populations thereby becomes a form of ‘cleaning’ a particular area of the undesirable element, which by analogy to ethnic cleansing I describe as species cleansing (Franklin, 2011). I look into the metaphors of invasion and colonization, thanks to which animals we do not like (rats in this case) can be perceived as an enemy, pillaging the property of humans, endangering their health or even life. The narrative defining this species as a havoc-wreaking eternal enemy of Homo sapiens has a certain basis in the ecology of our relations since we have competed for resources for centuries. However, the war rhetoric has a strong performative potential, especially when it defines and justifies ruthless methods of rat extermination used by humans. Urban rat populations can thus provide a proper model for investigating how cultural policies of ‘othering’ work and what kind of persuasive strategies they may follow. At the same time, I propose that we re-imagine relations between humans and urban rats as two collectives living alongside each other in a state of conflict.”