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# Between realism and the 'New Right': geopolitics in Germany in the 1990s

Mark Bassin

This essay explores the connections between geopolitics and political conservatism. The introductory argument is that geopolitics historically has been appealing and useful for two very different expressions of conservatism: one which aims to preserve the political geography of the existing international status quo and one which seeks to transcend it and establish a new international order. Through an examination of the 'renaissance' of a conservative geopolitics in Germany, the essay considers how this particular pattern is reproduced in the present day. Although this conservative geopolitics operates for the most part at the fringes of political discourses in Germany, it does have a more specific significance for nationalist-conservative perspectives and those of the 'New Right', both in Germany and elsewhere.

**key words** Germany geopolitics political geography conservatism realism *Lebensraum*

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Geopolitics . . . is a problematic concept and raises serious misgivings, especially when it is used in connection with Germany. (Lacoste 1990, 14)

The precepts and the rhetoric of geopolitics have consistently exercised their most powerful appeal at the conservative end of the political spectrum. The legacy of 'classical' geopoliticians such as Ratzel, Mackinder, Mahan, Kjellén, Spykman and others provides rich evidence for this bias, as do the more contemporary examples of Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski in the United States or Aleksandr Dugin and Vladimir Zhirinovskii in post-Soviet Russia. This is not to suggest that the purview of geopolitics is exclusively conservative, for the left, and even the far left have demonstrated a strong interest as well. There was significant interest in geopolitics on the part of the international communist movement in the 1920s and 1930s, for example (Wittfogel 1929; Ó Tuathail 1994; Bassin 1996a), and Yves Lacoste's *géopolitique* has its roots in the anti-Vietnam War movement in France in the 1960s and early 1970s (Claval 2000). In our own days, an explicitly 'critical' geopolitics has been elaborated to re- and then deconstruct the

geographical mythologies informing and supporting the exercise of political power (Ó Tuathail 1996; also O'Loughlin and Heske 1991, 37). All indications would suggest, however, that beyond the orbit of academic political geography the traditional associations remain firmly in place. In the real-world discourses of national politics, international relations and international security, that is to say, there is little question that the term geopolitics continues to resonate most powerfully among, and to be most clearly connected with, actors, perspectives and policies on the right wing.

The implications of this conservative bias in geopolitics, however, are far from straightforward. 'Conservatism' after all is not so much a single cohesive *Weltanschauung* as a diverse spectrum. It encompasses a broad range of political perspectives and agendas, and these vary significantly between national contexts. A variety of these perspectives and agendas may find geopolitics appealing, but they do so in different ways, on the basis of different assumptions, and toward what are commonly very different political ends. Indeed, that fact that geopolitics can sustain such a diverse

appeal betrays a versatility and flexibility that is little short of remarkable. By virtue of it, geopolitics is able to respond to multiple expressions of interest from multiple directions, and to be many things to just as many different orientations and outlooks.

A clear expression of this diversity can be seen in the bifurcation of geopolitics between two foundational perspectives through which it has been articulated from the very outset. These perspectives are distinguished by their respective attitudes toward the existing international status quo of state structures, boundaries and power relations. Very broadly speaking, one perspective is basically positive and supportive of this status quo, and sees its task in defending it against anything seeking to disrupt and transform it. Thus for all of their differences, Mackinder's heartland theory, the Kennan/Truman doctrine of containment and Henry Kissinger's 'triangulation' of global balances of power all share a common preoccupation with preserving an existing status quo by preventing the emergence or extension of power centres which could pose significant challenges to it. Such a perspective might be called 'defensive' or, perhaps better, 'status quo' conservatism. The alternative perspective takes a more negative view toward the existing status quo, which it does not recognize as necessarily representing the best interests of the nation or state for which it speaks. Accordingly, this perspective aims not at the conservation of political structures as currently configured but rather at their transformation into a new, and assumedly better political-geographical order of the future. The powerful *Raum*-ideologies of interwar German *Geopolitik* – whether in the form of Friedrich Ratzel's *Lebensraum* or Carl Schmitt's *Grossraum* – were conceived in this spirit, as was the doctrine of 'organic' (i.e. adjustable or fluid) boundaries promulgated in the same period. This second tendency may be called 'radical' conservatism. Over the entire course of its troubled history, geopolitics has oscillated between these two camps; in important instances – most notably that of Haushofer himself – this oscillation was apparent in the thinking of a single individual.

In this essay, I will argue that this bifurcation is clearly manifested in the renaissance of interest in *Geopolitik* in Germany after reunification in 1990 (Sandner 1993; Sandner 1994; Heske 1995; Fassler *et al.* 1996; Bach and Peters 2002; Reuber and Wolkersdorfer 2002). Following the journalist Alfred Zänker, I will refer to this revival as the *neue*

*Geopolitik* or 'new geopolitics' (Zänker 1998), but the term is used here conditionally. To begin with, the proponents of the *neue Geopolitik* do not identify or present themselves as such. They represent moreover a heterogeneous composite with its own internal political gradients, and there is no question that the considerable variety of ideas and positions discussed in this essay would not be equally endorsed or accepted by all. At the same time, however, there is a rough coherence to these ideas, which I believe justifies the grouping, despite all internal variation. These proponents come from a variety of backgrounds, including academics, journalism, business and the military. Practically none of them, however, come from the field of professional geography. For the purposes of this essay, I will refer to them as 'geopoliticians', because in one way or another they explicitly endorse geopolitics and make a significant contribution to the larger discourse, but they would not necessarily identify themselves in this manner. Finally – and importantly – I do not suggest that they exercise any practical influence in national politics in Germany today. Quite to the contrary, much or most of the new *Geopolitik* remains on the political margins, well away from the mainstream. At the same time, it does figure significantly in certain right-wing discourses.

### **Geopolitics, realism and *mittellage***

The new *Geopolitik* begins by reaffirming its commitment to a 'realist' approach to international politics. The intention is to signal a clear break with the mind-set of the Cold War, when policy formation at the national level in Germany was heavily influenced by imperatives that were largely ideological. Prominent among these were atonement for the Second World War, anti-communism and human rights. The collapse of the Soviet order and the political transformation of Europe, however, represent a watershed and make a new orientation necessary. What the new geopolitics calls for now is precisely to turn away from the subjectivism of the past in favour of a clear-sighted focus upon the objective factors which are conditioning and shaping global relations. In an essay entitled 'The Renaissance of Geopolitics', Alfred Zänker argued soon after reunification that it was no longer adequate to be guided by a simple-minded moralism capable of nothing more than dividing the world into 'good guys and bad guys'. The point, rather,

was to deliver hard-headed and non-ideological analyses of political patterns across the globe in their specific implications for German national interests (Zänker 1991a, 46; also see Buck 1992, 84; Schüsslburner 1992, 227; Weber 1992, 31; Jebens 1994, 251).

The realism of the new *Geopolitik* is apparent in its endorsement of many of the familiar precepts commonly associated with this perspective (Morgenthau 1978; Waltz 1979). Thus, the most important actors in international affairs are understood to be sovereign states or nation-states, and it is these entities that provide – or should provide – the real momentum and direction for international politics. The more-or-less absolute integrity of their sovereignty is a *conditio sine qua non* for their existence (Buck 1992, 129; Brill 1994, 36; Lohausen 2001, 228). Moreover, and despite all appearances, the policies which these sovereign states pursue toward each other are shaped in the final analysis not by ideology or idealism, but rather by carefully calibrated calculations of the respective state's own self-interest (Zänker 1992, 188; Brill 1994, 41). Indeed, the absolute priority of national interest is a sort of mantra for the new geopolitics. One geopolitical study, for example, opens with an epigram from Tallyrand – 'States do not have friends/States have interests' – and lest the reader lose sight of this deeper message as he or she makes their way through the detail of the book, the book concludes by repeating the very same words (Detlefs 1998, 6, 222). Relations between these states, no matter how friendly or well-intentioned they may be, always remain at root competitive, and the degree and nature of this competition is strictly determined by the *Macht* or power which individual states are able to bring to bear in pursuing their international aims (Brill 1994, 20, 63; Ebeling 1997, 75).

As an intrinsic part of this insistence on the nation-state, the identification of a state with a respective cultural or ethnic nation is reaffirmed. This identification lies at the very core of the nation-state concept, accepted since the nineteenth century as the organizing principle of the European state system and since the mid-twentieth century as a foundational principle of global politics (Buck 1996, 7; Breitenstein 1996, 92):

Membership in a nation is existential, it is a necessary commitment for humankind as a political animal, and the dimensions of the nation provide the corresponding dimensions (*Bezugsgrösse*) of the modern state. ... (Weissmann 1992, 185)

For the new *Geopolitik*, the significance of the political transformations of the late 1980s is precisely that through them Europe, and Germany in particular, has returned to this principle after the disruptions of the Cold War and superpower hegemony. In this spirit, a newly reunified Germany is understood as having once again become a nation-state in the traditional, one may even say the nineteenth-century sense of the term. It is in other words a sovereign entity that provides a political structure for the German nation (or most of it, at least) in Europe. It is moreover an entity powerful in its potentialities – economic and demographic, if not military – and autonomous in its domestic and international agendas. The sense of continuity, of a return to an enduring tradition comes across unmistakably in the 'direct reconnection with the tradition of Bismarck' that the new *Geopolitik* recognizes in Germany after 1990 (Detlefs 1998, 48; Schmidt 2000, 91, 95).

The prospect of a return to a sort of quasi-Bismarckian status is not limited to those professing the new *Geopolitik* (Thies 1993, 524; Wilds 2000), and indeed a general 'realist' perspective has a broad resonance in reunified Germany (Schöllgen 1993, 101–23 1994; Bach 1999, 43–92; von Bredow 2000). Within this context, the new *Geopolitik* seeks to distinguish itself in the same manner that geopolitics has always distinguished itself in the past, namely through an emphasis on the fundamental importance of factors of geography and spatial relationships for the realist calculus overall. Even this emphasis, however, cannot immediately claim distinction as 'geopolitical', insofar as the study of politics in Germany in the 1990s has been strongly marked by a new appreciation of the salience of spatial connections (*Raumgebundenheit*) and of 'geographical realities' for political affairs in general (Zänker 1992, 12; Hacke 1996, 5; Görtemaker 2000, 33, 35). The new *Geopolitik*, however, is substantially more radical. On the one hand, it prioritizes the importance of environmental factors for the political life of the nation, and on the other it characterizes these factors in distinctly more powerful terms as determining influences. Indeed, the new geopolitics unmistakably echoes classical geopolitics by defining itself most fundamentally in terms of environmental or geographical determinism. Thus, geopolitics is 'the study of the influence of geographical space on the politics of a state' (Brill 1994, 21 1998, 205), states are not merely 'active in space' (*Raumwirksam*), but explicitly 'dependent'

upon it (*Raumabhängig*), and it is the special challenge of geopolitics to explore and explain this causal relationship (Palaschweski 1992, 6–8; Buck 1996, 8). To be sure, the new geopoliticians are careful to circumscribe the determining influences of the environment, most commonly by acknowledging the autonomy of human free will which may operate outside of geographical determination (Breitenstein 1996, 84–5; Buck 1996, 68; Brill 2000). What such a qualification actually amounts to, however, is well conveyed in the following passage. ‘Geography is not our destiny, but it can however become our doom, if we do not evaluate our geographical position (*Lage*) and its alternatives correctly’ (Zänker 1991a, 46). We are free, in other words to recognize the determinations inscribed in our environment and act in accordance with them, hoping thereby to prevail, or conversely we may ignore them and be certain of failure.

These environmentalist principles are set forth with a specific explanatory agenda in mind, for which the reference to *Lage* in the preceding citation provides a critical hint. It is Germany’s relative geographical location, rather than its climate, physiography, natural resource endowment, or any other geographical quality that the new *Geopolitik* identifies as decisive in shaping its destiny (Leiteritz 1994, 172; Lohausen 1994, 21; Weissmann 1994, 763, 755). And for Germany, *Lage* means above all *Mittellage*, that is to say the peculiarly central position relative to the other powers of the European continent that it has occupied across the centuries. This *Mittellage* was the decisive geographical factor that shaped the country’s *Schicksal*, or destiny, in the past, and it remains so still today. ‘Geographical circumstances indicate that Germany’s position is its destiny. You can spin and turn the country however you like, Germany remains the center of Europe’ (Buck 1992, 83). This condition, needless to say, was suspended over the past half-century by the Cold War bifurcation of the European continent. With the collapse of the Soviet block and reunification, however, the country’s history suddenly caught up with it, and immediately – ‘in a veritable world-political second’ – it shifted back to ‘its traditional geographical *Mittellage*’ (Weber 1992, 31; Zänker 1991b, 42; Brill 1998, 204). Thus the return to a traditional nation-state structure and the Bismarckian tradition noted above is at the same time an explicit geographical return to Europe’s centre (Zänker 1992, 188; Weissmann 1994, 760). ‘Germans are increasingly becoming

aware that their interests are defined, and their options for action determined, . . . by geographical factors, above all the *Schicksal* of *Mittellage*’ (Zitelmann *et al.* 1993b, 12–13; Buck 1992, 83).

### ‘Die Zukunft Liegt im Osten’

The principal preoccupation of the new *Geopolitik* in Germany is with foreign rather than domestic policy. Throughout the period of the Cold War, Germany’s international orientation rested above all on the policy of so-called *Westbindung*, in other words the far-reaching integration of the Bundesrepublik with the countries of Western Europe and North America, most importantly through the networks of an emerging European Union and NATO. By fostering the development of a democratic culture in German politics, *Westbindung* had a highly significant domestic influence as well, and it was supported by all tendencies of the political mainstream. In the early 1990s, however, there was considerable sentiment that, with the end of the Cold War and Germany’s reconsolidation as a fully sovereign nation-state, the basic assumptions of *Westbindung* stood in need of reexamination (Zitelmann *et al.* 1993a; Schwilk and Schacht 1994; Wehler 1995b). This was not a rejection of the original policy, but rather an argument that the implications of *Westbindung* had changed, and insofar as Germany’s foreign policy now had a certain room for manoeuvre that it did not have before, new and critical scrutiny was called for. The new *Geopolitik* shared these sentiments fully, and saw its tasks precisely in the geopolitical analysis of all available options for new political alliances and new ‘space-power configurations’ in a post-Cold War context (Brill 1993, 270 1994, 42 1998, 205; Crome 1994, 179; Magenheimer 1994, 403; Weigel 1998b; Mennel 1999, 14–15). Once again, all aspects of Germany’s international relations are analysed in terms of the return to *Mittellage* at the centre of Europe, and scrutiny is accordingly split geographically between relations to the West and to the East.

Existing relations with the West, in turn, are further differentiated between Western Europe on the one hand and the trans-Atlantic connection on the other. In regard to the United States, the conclusions of the new *Geopolitik* are mixed, but distinctly less than enthusiastic. The Cold War axiom that Germany needs the United States and its nuclear umbrella has not entirely lost its force, to be sure,

and there is some sense that as the sole remaining superpower the US should continue to exercise global leadership (Zänker 1991b, 45 1992, 14, 16, 35–6). At the same time, however, there is a malaise in regard to Germany's partner across the Atlantic that is palpable. Germany's 'dependency' as a 'protectorate' of the United States is castigated (Brill 1994, 36; Buck 1996, 254, 255, 257–8, 260), as is the prospect of a 'New World Order' which amounts to nothing more than an imperialist 'American World Order' (Jebens 1994; Detlefs 1998, 206–9; Lohausen 2001, 251). On the whole, however, the critical tone is restrained, and most effort is spent on defining how the genuine national interests of the United States and Germany neither conflict nor coincide but rather simply lead in distinctly different directions, toward South America, the Pacific and South-Asian regions in the case of the United States, and toward the Mediterranean, the Near East, Africa and Eurasia for Germany and Europe (Buck 1996, 265).

The inclinations of the new *Geopolitik* are divided in regard to Germany's relations with its West European neighbours as well. On the one hand, the tendency toward deeper political integration within the European Union is viewed as a threat to the sovereign integrity of the existing nation-states. The geopoliticians are incredulous that a united or federalized Europe could ever create the 'inner spiritual basis' needed to act as a 'genuine source of identity' for the populations concerned, and the clear preference is for the vision of a *Europe des patries* of the sort elaborated by Charles de Gaulle in the 1950s (Buck 1996, 115–16; Detlefs 1998, 199–200, 47). Indeed, the existential threat to German interests posed by European integration is depicted in terms that are dire (if occasionally comically so), such as the characterization of the 1991 Maastricht agreement to create a single European currency as *Versailles ohne Krieg*, or a 'Treaty of Versailles without the war' (Weissmann 1994, 760; Lohausen 2001, 251; also Brill 1994, 100). The real economic and political benefits of a common market and customs zone are unassailable, however, and thus there is general support for Germany's continued membership in the EU (Buck 1992, 91, 130–1; Zänker 1992, 33). In much the same spirit, the new geopolitics has definite reservations regarding the benefits of NATO membership for Germany, and the definition of the alliance's aims offered by its first Secretary-General Lord Ismay in the 1950s – 'to keep the Americans in, the Russians out, and the

Germans down' – is regularly invoked as a justification for this scepticism (Schüsslburner 1992, 230; Zänker 1992, 31; Lohausen 2001, 251). At the same time, however, the basic value and necessity of the alliance is not really called into question, and the need for Germany's continued participation in it is broadly affirmed (Zänker 1992, 188; Buck 1996, 92; Detlefs 1998, 212; Schiedel 1998, 5–6).

Thus the attitude of the new *Geopolitik* toward the Cold War legacy of European integration and trans-Atlantic alliance is ambivalent, and the hard scrutiny to which *Westbindung* is subjected does not lead in the event to the calls for *Entwestlichung* or 'de-Westernization', which it seemed to anticipate (Magenheimer 1994, 400). This in turn belies the characterization of reunified Germany as a *Bismarckstaat* reconstituted on the model of a nineteenth-century nation-state, in appreciation of which it is modified by some observers into a rather more nuanced vision of reunified Germany as a mixture or amalgam of the traditions of Bismarck and Konrad Adenauer. Adenauer, Germany's first postwar chancellor, was the architect of *Westbindung* (Hahn 1994, 328). The fact remains, however, that these traditions rest upon principles that are not merely different but positively antithetical, and any attempt at a marriage of the two is likely to produce an unhappy union.

In regard to one point at least, the attitude of the new *Geopolitik* toward the West is clear and unambiguous: it is not here at all, but rather in the East that Germany will find its *Zukunftsaufgabe*, or its real task for the future. With its shift to the centre or 'hub' of Europe, the geopoliticians point out, Germany has moved back into its 'intermediary balancing position' between the different parts of the continent, and it is consequently charged with the role of mediator and 'bridge builder' between East and West (Zänker 1992, 163–4, 169). The stakes, however, are significantly higher than this. Effectively, East and West are seen to represent discrete, and to a large extent mutually exclusive alternatives for German attention and energy, and the return of *Mittellage* thus confronts the country with an existential geographical or geopolitical choice. Indeed, in the same sense that *Mittellage* is seen to represent Germany's *Schicksalslage* or 'location of destiny', so Eastern Europe becomes its *Schicksalsseite* or 'direction of destiny' (Weissmann 1994, 762; Zänker 1992, 16, 29–30; Wilds 2000, 89). This is not moreover 'merely a question of acting as a bridge, as Germany's task is so eagerly represented. This is

too little. A correct understanding of our history and our capabilities indicates that we carry the obligation to cooperate – with full awareness of our responsibility – in shaping the future’ of the regions of the former Soviet empire (Buck 1992, 93). Germany’s own future, so the title of a lengthy geopolitical treatise on the subject confidently assures potential readers, ‘lies in the East’ (Zänker 1995).

This combined necessity and inevitability of German engagement in the East comes from a number of sources. On the one hand, the social unrest that has afflicted Eastern Europe since the late 1980s makes German intervention – active and proactive – into a strategic imperative which simply has no parallel in the West. Beyond this, the peoples of these regions have definite ‘expectations’ that Germany will intervene decisively to support the reform and regeneration of their shattered political structures and economic systems, and these must not be disappointed (Weissmann 1992, 133; Magenheimer 1994, 402, 404). On a more positive note, the imperative for German attention to the East comes from its own self-interest, for once these regions have been stabilized and begin to function more or less normally, their potential for development will be considerable, and Germany will be in a position to reap enormous benefits. For all these reasons, and despite the acknowledged importance of Western Europe and the United States, the geopoliticians argue that Germany’s best prospects are to be found in ‘Eastern Europe and the broad spaces of Eurasia’ (Zänker 1992, 31, 8–9; Lohausen 2001, 191).

These exhortations for an enhanced German role in Eastern Europe are often framed in a broader vision of enhanced German hegemony over the region. Germany is not, it is pointed out, merely ‘one country among many’ (Weber 1992, 32), for its national power and its geographical location give it a natural *Führungsrolle* or leadership role ‘unmatched by any other country’ in Europe (Zänker 1992, 14). The expectation is that Germany can be a sort of ‘anchor’ for the East, which will act to stabilize and indeed ‘establish order’ (*ordnend wirken*) in the countries there (Magenheimer 1994, 399–400). This supervisory function is well conveyed in the observation that, ‘in its particular geographical position’, Germany must now overtake a ‘watch on the Oder’ (*Wacht an der Oder*) – a distinctly provocative rephrasing of the title of the aggressively patriotic folksong *Die Wacht am Rhein* or ‘The Watch on the

Rhine’ (much loved by the Nazis, among others) (Weissmann 1992, 174). Some see this as part of a broader division of the greater European continent into what would effectively be spheres of influence, in which German authority in the East is balanced by French (and possibly Italian and Spanish) leadership in the Mediterranean region and North Africa (Zänker 1992, 31–4; Buck 1992, 131–2 1996, 250, 271). Alternatively, Germany’s central position combines with its status as Europe’s most populous and economically powerful country to make it into the ‘most important player between Washington and Moscow’ (Magenheimer 1994, 400).

Of all the Eastern European countries, the geopoliticians reckon that Russia offers the greatest potential for German interests, and they predict that over the next 20–30 years this one-sixth of the earth’s surface may well become ‘the decisive region on the globe’ (Zänker 1992, 8–9). The prioritization of its significance is supported with the argument that Germany has traditionally had a closer relationship to Russia than to Western Europe, and that for their part the Russians themselves see their interests ‘better represented by Germany than by France . . . or insular England’ (Zänker 1992, 32; Buck 1992, 95). More compelling, however, is the insistence on the unique complementarity between the two countries in terms of what they have to offer each other, a sort of potential mutual benefit entirely unlike Germany’s relationship with any of its ‘developed’ neighbours to the West. Russia is quite simply Germany’s ‘ideal’ or ‘dream partner’, and the challenge of realizing this special partnership must be Germany’s ‘task of the next century’ (*Jahrhundertaufgabe*) (Buck 1996, 274–5). The complementarity between the two countries is material, of course, but it is moral as well. Their ‘differing geographical, historical, economic, and not least spiritual (*geistige*) conditions’ provide the basis for far-reaching mutual enhancement, indeed they open the possibility of a

symbiosis such as is only rarely seen in international politics. The natural resources of Russia, the imagination and passion (*Emotionalität*) of the Russians, combined with German technology and organizational power, yield an enormous combination of forces which enhance each other exponentially. (Detlefs 1998, 96, 92, 72, 219)

This outspoken enthusiasm for Russia has a remarkable resonance with the perspectives developed by classical geopolitics before 1945, and indeed in a number of different connections. The

belief in the need for an alliance between Russia and Germany against the states of Western Europe and North America was a foundational principle for Karl Haushofer, although it was to bring the suspicion and eventual hostility of the National Socialists down upon him and his *Geopolitik* (Haushofer 1941; Hauner 1992, 171–9). The geopoliticians of reunified Germany, for their part, have a very clear sense of continuity with the legacy of the interwar period. This is demonstrated in the explicit resurrection of Haushofer's vision of a tri-partite alliance along the 'geopolitical axis Berlin–Moscow–Tokyo', which today is heralded as having the potential to become 'the decisive economic initiative of the early 21st century' (Zänker 1992, 30; Weissmann 1994, 762). A rather different indication of the deliberate link back to the legacy of pre-war geopolitics is the reaffirmation of the relevance of Halford Mackinder's heartland theory for Germany's prospects today. Precisely like Karl Haushofer some 70 years ago, so today as well the German geopoliticians understand that their own vision of a Russian–German partnership – now finally fully 'within grasp' – is essentially a reaffirmation of Mackinder's conclusion that such a union would produce a potentially irresistible nexus of power (Weissmann 1992, 175; Zänker 1992, 23–7).

### The spirit of Weimar

These new space–power constellations rest as we have indicated on 'realist' principles of foreign relations, and they accept the existing political geography of the international state system as the point of departure. At the same time, however, the new *Geopolitik* takes inspiration from a very different source, namely a sort of integral-organicist, or what in Germany is called 'volkisch' nationalism. This nationalism is chauvinist and exclusionary, and essentializes the nation as a racial or biological entity that draws its basic sustenance from the dual qualities of *Blut* and *Boden* (Mosse 1964; Hermand 1992; Puschner 2002). Volkisch nationalism was powerful in Germany during the interwar period, when it provided inspiration for a wide variety of radical–conservative movements and tendencies, among them National Socialism and – to some extent at least – classical *Geopolitik*. It is thus unsurprising that the reengagement with geopolitics after 1990 should begin with an effort to revise the prevailing and over-

whelmingly negative views of this interwar legacy (e.g. Kost 1988; Korinman 1990; Hipler 1996; Sprengel 1996; Herwig 1999; Diner 2000; Wolkersdorfer 2000). The revisionist case is set forth most comprehensively in Ebeling's dense monograph on Haushofer (Ebeling 1994; Crome 1994, 180), but its basic arguments are echoed across most of the literature we are considering.

The new geopolitics depicts Haushofer as a gifted, if eccentric scholar, whose efforts in developing an applied science of political geography were driven solely by a patriotic commitment to Germany's welfare and a desire to help the country move from the disastrous experience of the First World War and the Versailles settlement on toward a brighter and more secure future (Brill 1994, 22; Weber 2000). *Geopolitik* did have a darker side in this period, it is readily admitted, but this had nothing – or only very little – to do with Haushofer himself. Rather, the problems arose through the 'perversion' and the 'propagandistic misuse' of Haushofer's geopolitical teachings by the Nazi state for the illegitimate purposes of their own 'aggressive foreign policy' (Breitenstein 1996, 15, 79; Brill 1994, 20; Schöllgen 1993, 106–7; Zänker 1991a, 42). Insisting on the doctrinal and ideological differences separating *Geopolitik* from National Socialism (distinctions which had been analysed already in the 1970s and 1980s (Jacobsen 1979; Bassin 1987a)), the new *Geopolitik* offers a picture of Haushofer as yet another unfortunate victim, in the first instance of the Nazis, and then of the occupying powers after Germany's defeat, who through their insistence that he had somehow played a major role as an advisor to Hitler 'drove' him to commit suicide (Weber 1992, 33; Jebens 1994, 251–2).

The most important point, however, is not ultimately with the person of Haushofer, but rather with the concepts and principles of his *Geopolitik*, a legacy which the new geopolitics clearly believes is still relevant for Germany's predicaments in the present day. Precisely where this relevance is to be identified, however, is disputed. A sort of minimalist position can be identified, which concedes that many of his ideas were mistaken, but nonetheless affirms the continuing general 'suitability' (*Tauglichkeit*) and 'validity' of the basic geopolitical categories he developed (Hahn 1994, 332; Schöllgen 1993, 107; Buck 1996, 65). Other proponents of the new *Geopolitik* go rather further, however, and endorse more or less the entirety of his work. Thus,

Haushofer's teachings *in toto* remain 'unrefuted', and the corpus of his *Geopolitik* stands today as an 'unredeemed legacy' (*uneingelöstes Vermächtnis*) for the German people (Buck 1996, 68–9; Weber 2000). The implication is that to the extent that geopolitics itself continues to retain its relevance and importance, it should continue to operate along these general lines and toward these same ends.

The most striking indication of this continuity with the Haushoferian tradition can be seen in the return of some geopoliticians after 1990 to the concepts and, to some extent, the language itself of Social Darwinism. The belief that political phenomena and processes can be explained essentially in terms of the same natural laws and principles which govern the operation of the organic world was axiomatic for classical *Geopolitik*, as it was for much of social science internationally in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For the geographical study of politics, this naturalism was expressed most importantly in the identification of the political state as *bodenständiger Organismus* or an 'organism rooted in the soil'. Friedrich Ratzel elaborated this point in the opening pages of his *Politische Geographie*, and much of his scholarly effort was devoted to working out those naturalistic 'laws' that governed the growth and behaviour of the state organism (Ratzel 1896 1923, 1–16; Bassin 1987b, 477–8 1987c, 125–8). This organismic perspective was then taken over by Rudolf Kjellén and Karl Haushofer and formalized into the familiar doctrines of *Geopolitik* (Haushofer *et al.* 1928; Springenschmid 1933; Kost 1988, 297–314; Sprengel 1996, 133–51; Weigel 1998a, 39–41).

In a notably more understated form, the same natural-organic perspective carries over into new *Geopolitik*. To be sure, this is not a simple rehabilitation of an older *Weltanschauung*, for the subject of the organismic metaphor is today more commonly identified as the *Volk* or nation rather than as the state *per se*. The nation is essentialized as an organic *Gemeinschaft*, a naturally existing collectivity whose members are fused together into a sort of transcendent unity that assumes an identity and distinct individuality of its own (Buck 1996, 266). In the writings of some geopoliticians, the flavour of the biologism of the earlier period comes across very distinctly. 'Across the millennia, nations are the great enduring, unmistakable and immutable units of world history and world politics'. In contrast to political states, they are the product not of 'artificial manufacture' but of 'natural growth'.

Nations belong just as organically to those portions of the earth's surface that they cover as 'the roots, trunks, and crowns of trees' belong to the forest. 'They are simply irreplaceable' (Lohausen 2001, 8).

This new biologism is apparent as well in the renewed popularity of the infamous notion of *Lebensraum*, or living space. Faithfully following Ratzel's own explication (Ratzel 1901; Smith 1980; Faber 1982; Fassler *et al.* 1996, 6), Buck for example presents *Lebensraum* as a bio-geographical concept connoting the space which a plant or animal organism requires in order to survive. And insofar as nations are akin to organisms, they as well have *Lebensraum* requirements that are existential.

We must make the basic assumption that each living creature (*Lebewesen*) is allotted a certain *Lebensraum*, and that people as well must be granted the right to an appropriate *Lebensraum*. (Buck 1996, 78)

The problem with the latter point, of course, is that for a variety of reasons – most importantly the basic fact of population growth – a nation's living-space requirements are constantly shifting and growing, and this circumstance in turn opens the possibility for competition and conflict.

The striving of tribes and nations for more suitable regions to secure their existence, a striving associated with struggle, conquest, banishment, enslavement, or annihilation, runs throughout all of human history. (Buck 1996, 79)

Given this acceptance of the *Lebensraum* concept, it is only logical that the new geopolitics should argue for the legitimacy of Haushofer's energetic dissemination of the term in interwar Germany. In view of the injustices inflicted upon Germany through the Treaty of Versailles – most notably the 'incisions into the foundations of its existence', or territorial losses – it is 'entirely understandable (*selbstverständlich*)' that Germany should have sought to reclaim an 'adequate and secure *Lebensraum*'. Only the 'excessive' territorial demands of the Nazis, together with the attempt under Hitler to achieve them through a chain of conquests 'inspired by a destructive will', led eventually to the 'defamation of and the total taboo on the concept *Lebensraum*'. As a consequence, Buck notes with obvious consternation, there is a today palpable reluctance 'even to let the word cross one's lips' (*das Wort 'Lebensraum' in den Mund zu nehmen*). Despite this, the conviction is obvious that *Lebensraum* continues to represent an important issue for German national life. 'The key questions (for today) remain,

to what extent a claim to a particular *Lebensraum* can be justified, how suitable it is, in what manner and to what extent it can be delimited, and under what conditions it can be realized' (Buck 1996, 80).

These views of the nation as a dynamic organism with ever-evolving needs for living space leads to a radicalization of the 'realist' perspectives on international relations. The characterization of relations between states as inherently competitive, with each individual state formulating and pursuing policies that correspond primarily to its own perceived self-interest, is no longer sufficient to capture the intense pressures and existential stakes of the international arena. International relations can be better described as a sort of inescapable zero-sum rivalry in which the welfare and prosperity of one state entity can only be secured at the expense of another. Indeed, some proponents of the new *Geopolitik* depict these relations in classically Social-Darwinistic terms as a sort of 'eternal struggle for power' among states (Schüsslburner 1992). 'Wherever states and nations are in conflict, there is a struggle for existence' (Weber 1992, 32; Schüsslburner 1992, 226). With the end of the Cold War, moreover, the international situation is bound to degenerate into ever-greater hostility between states. The 'struggle for power and influence over geographical spaces and resources' will become progressively more intensive, both within Europe as well as globally (Zänker 1991b, 34–5). On the global scale, this intensification is already apparent in the rapid expansion of migration between the different regions of the earth, a process in which

peoples who are poor but have high birth rates pour out (*ausschwärmen*) [of their native homelands] searching for new *Lebensräume* in their struggle for existence. (Zänker 1992, 189)

(However unintended, the resonance of Zänker's imagery with Ratzel's (1876) *habilitation* dissertation – in which out-migration from China in the nineteenth century is likened to fermented honey running over the lid of its jar – is striking).

It is Germany's uncertain ability to respond to this menacing situation, however, which poses the greatest danger. After decades of *Westbindung*, during which time the Germans exchanged their freedom of independent action for strategic security and material prosperity, the fear is that the nation has simply lost its capacity for responsible decisionmaking, decisiveness and collective sacrifice. 'What a crass contradiction,' notes Zänker ruefully,

'between the gigantic challenges awaiting the "Land of the Middle" and its flaccid psychological-political condition, its "normal" citizens (*Normalbürger*), and its uncertain politicians, who resist personal responsibility' (Zänker 1992, 162). 'Normalcy' is a popular word in reunified Germany, and usually carries positive connotations of overcoming the abnormalities of Cold-War division. In the sense used here, however, it has a distinctly negative quality. It suggests a sort of smug narcissism and a preoccupation with material well-being, which leaves the country incapable of reacting to or indeed even recognizing the imperatives for resolute national action. The image of obesity, with the attendant associations of sluggishness and lassitude, is invoked repeatedly. Germans after unification are likened to 'ruffled and fat soup chickens', whom 'long fat years of prosperity' have become 'lazy, addicted to making demands and reluctant to take risks' (Weber 1992, 31; Zänker 1992, 9). As an antidote to this dire condition, the new geopoliticians fall back once again on the organicist language and imagery of an earlier period, and call upon Germany to develop a *Selbstbehauptungswille*, or will for self-assertion. This will involve an active recognition on the part of the nation of its identity as a collective unit with shared interests, which must be able to respond collectively and vigorously to the challenges and dangers that confront it from outside (Weber 1992, 32).

### The radicalism of the new geopolitics

The galvanizing appeal of classical *Geopolitik* in Germany came largely from its success in mobilizing the sorts of organicist and naturalist premises just examined into a radical political perspective that could effectively challenge the rearrangement of European political space after 1918. Although the political realities of the situation following unification in 1990 cannot in any meaningful way be construed to resemble the circumstances of the earlier period, some geopoliticians attempt nonetheless to formulate a similar sort of challenge to the political status quo in Europe after 1989. One important source of this challenge comes from the option noted above to assign the organicist metaphor to the nation rather than to the state. It is the nation that is now prioritized as a transcendent natural entity, to which the state can be contrasted as an historically situated, contingent and ultimately

arbitrary political construct. Indeed, the state becomes a sort of servant to the nation, and its sole purpose is to provide the latter with an organized political-territorial framework in which to secure and maintain its self-determination. From this standpoint, the legitimacy of any existing nation-state depends entirely upon whether or not the state is successful in accomplishing its mission with respect to the nation.

But what, exactly, constitutes a nation? There are tendencies in the new *Geopolitik* which insist, along with much of the European New Right, that most or indeed all distinct and spatially coalesced ethnic communities should be able to claim recognition as full and equal nations. Such a perspective means that 'nation-states' such as France, Spain or Britain are not actually nations at all but rather exclusively political conglomerates of ethnic-national sub-units such as Bretons and Corsicans, Catalans and Basques or Scottish and Welsh. The fact that all these constituent groups are indiscriminately subsumed by unitary state structures means that their national aspirations are frustrated and suppressed rather than enhanced, and this in turn negates the legitimacy of the state structures themselves (Schüsslburner 1992, 203; Lohausen 2001, 35, 39, 95–6, 191).

This perspective corresponds to what has become known in the debate on European integration as 'regionalism', in other words, the identification of multiple nations at a regional level within existing nation-states (e.g. Hatzenbichler and Mölzer 1993; Ruge 2001). In order to emphasize the territorial dimension of this distinction, the term *Lebensraum* is used by some geopoliticians in the rather special sense of 'national homeland', in other words the traditional historical-geographical space of genuine nations as opposed to the conglomerate territories of states that call themselves nations but are in fact nothing of the kind (Hatzenbichler 1993, 10; Schiedel 1998, 3; Lohausen 2001, 191). This amounts to a direct challenge to the status quo of existing European nation-states, paradoxically, in the name of the nation-state principle itself. Together with this, the new *Geopolitik* vigorously disputes the notion that there can be anything 'natural' or 'objective' about boundaries. Very much to the contrary, boundaries are now explicitly characterized as impermanent and *zeitbedingt* or 'contingent' formations. Citing the authority of Nicholas Spykman, Zänker maintains that boundaries are 'a "product of constellations of power," which are

always shifting'. Indeed, boundaries 'have no value in an absolute sense' at all, and in specific regard to the present day their volatility is virtually inevitable. 'In a world without superpowers, boundaries must change' (Zänker 1992, 20–1; Ebeling 1997, 73–4, 81).

This insistence on the transitory nature of boundaries suggests that the territorial spaces of existing states – at least in some parts of Europe – are similarly impermanent and ultimately malleable. The most significant articulation of this perspective is the rehabilitation of the concept of *Zwischeneuropa*, a difficult-to-translate term which may be rendered roughly as 'in-between Europe'. Coined in the mid-1920s by Albrecht Penck, *Zwischeneuropa* refers to those spaces in Eastern Europe from the Baltic to the Adriatic, which lie between the respective power penumbrae of Germany and Russia and which were a region of intense political-geographical transformation in the aftermath of World War I (Schultz 1990, 59–60). *Zwischeneuropa* has been used in a number of different ways (Magenheimer 1994, 392, 403), but one powerful implication is that the existing state structures of this region are somehow tentative and provisional, and that the process of political – and political-geographical – formation here has never been completed. It is in this sense that the term has its greatest appeal for the new *Geopolitik*. 'The inner as well as the outer boundaries of *Zwischeneuropa* are fluid', observes Lohausen, and he draws a direct connection between the present-day situation and the political instability which characterized this area from 1918 down to 1945. For him, *Zwischeneuropa* is the 'epitome of something which has only been attempted, which is unfinished, failed, and unredeemed', a point he emphasizes with a vaguely chilling characterization of *Zwischeneuropa*'s various regions as *herumliegende Bausteine* or scattered building blocks, 'destined for rearrangement in the future' (Lohausen 2001, 244; Schiedel 1998).

It could seem in all of this that the new German geopoliticians have merely absorbed the obvious lessons of that dramatic and eventful slice of recent history through which they lived. After all, the breakup of the Soviet Union, the division of Czechoslovakia into two states, and the wars of secession in the Balkans and post-Soviet Russia demonstrate nothing if not the impermanence of political boundaries and the ultimate malleability of state territories. Their intention, however, is to mobilize

these geopolitical truisms into the service of a political agenda. The sorts of items that might be on this agenda, moreover, are flagged already in Lohausen's reference to the countries of Eastern Europe as *Bausteine*, for it is unimaginable that the jarring echo of *Bausteine zur Geopolitik (The Foundations of Geopolitics)* – the title of an important collection of essays published by Haushofer and others in the 1920s – was anything other than deliberate (Haushofer *et al.* 1928). Like Haushofer and his colleagues, the proponents of the new *Geopolitik* are concerned above all with indicating precisely how the geopolitical principles which they identify can be used or 'applied' in the current situation in order to secure the maximum national advantage for Germany. Toward this end, it becomes apparent that at least for some of them, the principled critique of existing state structures in Europe, together with the insistence on the evanescent nature boundaries and on the impermanence of the political-geographical arrangement of *Zwischeneuropa*, all combine to provide a theoretical foundation of sorts for challenging the legitimacy of reunified Germany's existing international boundaries.

We have already noted the new *Geopolitik's* endorsement of the *Lebensraum* concept as a response to the iniquitous national predicament in which the German nation found itself after 1919. In view of the territorial 'amputations' (*Amputationen*) which Germany had suffered through the 'Diktat of Versailles', it is suggested, attempts after 1933 to secure an adequate territorial 'basis for the existence of the German peoples' were 'justified' (Buck 1996, 60, 22; Detlefs 1998, 22; Weber 2000). This justified quest was of course thwarted yet once again with Germany's defeat in 1945, and once again the political-geographical arrangements imposed upon the country were profoundly unjust; indeed, they amounted to a second round of 'geographical mutilation' (*Verstümmelung*) (Lohausen 2001, 191). There was to be sure a measure of justice in this territorial 'revenge and retribution' for 'crimes' committed by the Hitlerian regime, but this must be balanced against the 'geopolitical opportunism' on the part of the victorious allied forces, who presented the Soviet Union, Poland and Czechoslovakia with a 'macabre gift' of conquered geographical space (Detlefs 1998, 84–5). This fateful *Schfumpfung* or shrinkage of Germany's national space was further aggravated by the division of the country into two. Finally, even eventual reunification left the situation unrectified, for the resulting state entity is

effectively a *Restdeutschland* or a sort of territorial 'rump Germany', far more miniscule than anything from Germany's past (Weissmann 1994, 760, 762; Detlefs 1998, 85).

As part of its reconsideration of Germany's new international position and options, there is some sentiment in the new *Geopolitik* that the country should begin seriously to consider possibilities of territorial rearrangement through the readjustment of its international boundaries. The specific objectives put forward for such a rearrangement, and the specific forms it might take, diverge considerably. The most extreme alternative corresponds to a sort of neo-pan-Germanism, which insists that a proper German nation-state should include essentially all German-speaking populations in Europe. A pan-German perspective of this sort was first articulated in the aftermath of Germany's original unification in 1871, by those who rejected the *Reich* which Bismarck had created as a *kleindeutsch* or 'little German' state which – because it excluded large German populations in Austria, Switzerland and elsewhere – could never make good on its pretension to act as the political embodiment of the German nation. The resurrection of the term *kleindeutsch* to characterize reunified Germany after 1989 indicates that this view still has some currency. (Detlefs 1998, 21; Schiedel 1998; Schüsslburner 1992, 230; Lohausen 2001, 39, 97).

The appeal of such airy visions would seem to be limited, however. The expansionist thinking of the new *Geopolitik* is for the most part focused on a fantasy of a rather different nature, namely a return to the *status quo ante* 1939, and is thus concerned primarily with those German territories lost at the end of the war. The revanchism of the new *Geopolitik* is expressed most substantially through the issue of the repatriation of German populations banished in 1945 (or their descendants) back to their respective native regions, together with restitution of confiscated property. Indeed, until the recent formal agreements on the accession of these East European countries into the EU, it was even suggested that the entire issue might be linked to the question of EU membership for the Czech Republic and Poland (Buck 1992, 114). Yet more explicitly, the formal 'relinquishment' or 'transfer back' (*Rückabtretung*) to Germany of 'unlawfully acquired regions' is openly demanded, and the prospect of their eventual inclusion as part of a 'renewed German *Reich*' is optimistically forecast (Schüsslburner 1992, 229; Lohausen 2001, 237). And although at

one point Alfred Zänker warns against the simple-minded assumption that territorial growth necessarily enhances a state's power and welfare, such circumspection does not inform his views on the issue at hand. 'In view of the new relationship of forces' in Europe after 1989, he affirmed two years after reunification, 'the current boundaries in the East – the Oder-Neisse line (Germany's boundary with Poland) as well as boundaries within Eastern and Southeastern Europe – cannot be permanent' (Zänker 1992, 22, 47). And lest there be any question about exactly what he means, the following statement can leave no doubt.

Germany will grow to the east, social instability and the decline of welfare on the other side of the Oder-Neisse line will insure that this happens. This does not necessarily mean the outright return of formerly German regions. The crisis in the East could also lead to a regime of shared administration, in the form of 'condominiums.' Will Königsberg, Stettin, and Breslau once again become German? . . . The realist (i.e. geopolitician) must be prepared for this in the long run, not because we want it, but because geography and economy are driving (*treiben*) developments in this direction. (Zänker 1992, 188–9)

## Conclusion

How are we to evaluate the significance of the *neue Geopolitik*? We may begin by noting the considerable contrast with the experience of geopolitics between the wars. At that time, *Geopolitik* was a phenomenon of major importance in Germany. Its exponents were politically influential and after 1933 stood close to the Nazi leadership, its activities had significant institutional representation and its scholarly organ – the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* – was a widely read journal which made a important contribution toward shaping public attitudes. None of this can be seen today. The geopoliticians examined in this essay are small in number, and they are in no sense organized along either ideological or political lines. It is safe to say that for public opinion at the broadest national level, their influence is at best highly limited; indeed some of the perspectives discussed in this essay would only be found at the extremist fringe. At the same time, however, the new *Geopolitik* is a phenomenon of definite importance, and without question merits our critical attention.

To begin with, the new *Geopolitik* forms an intrinsic part of conservative-nationalist political discourse

in Germany. On the whole, conservatism in Germany after 1990 has been keen to acknowledge geopolitics at least in principle as an important constitutive element (Wehler 1995a 1995b; Elsässer 1994, 134). This became apparent immediately following reunification, in a series of influential works that began to chart out the contours of the new post-reunification conservatism. All of these works expressed similar regret at the 'taboo' that had been imposed on the term *Geopolitik* after 1945, and they all emphasized the new need for reintroducing precisely this sort of perspective (Baring 1991, 24; Brill 1993; Schöllgen 1993, 106–7; Zitelmann *et al.* 1993b, 12–3; Schwilk and Schacht 1994; Hahn 1994; also Kremp 1994, 83). This general interest in geopolitics has been sustained down to the present day, if on a rather more muted level. Major geopolitical texts continue to appear, and at least some degree of public receptivity and interest may be seen in the fact that two of the writers scrutinized in this essay are regular contributors to the influential conservative national newspaper *Die Welt*. Here they continue to expound upon the importance of *Geopolitik* and to exhort their compatriots to recognize the importance of 'the spaces of Eurasia' for Germany's future (e.g. Zänker 1998; Brill 2000).

No less significant in this regard is a more specific connection between geopolitics and the politics of the far right (Dahl 1999, 95–8). This connection can be traced back to the very origins of classical *Geopolitik*, which emerged out of the same hyper-conservative interwar ferment that spawned the so-called Conservative Revolution and National Socialism in Germany and Mussolini's fascism in Italy. The point, however, is not merely one of historical lineage. As elements of these doctrines began to be rehabilitated in the 1960s by the *Nouvelle Droite* in France and across Europe, geopolitics continued to figure prominently. Academic political geography would appear not to have picked up on this notable development; indeed Yves Lacoste has even maintained that the movements of the radical right are inclined to 'avoid the term geopolitics' (Lacoste 1990, 16). His observation is remarkably off-target, and not only in light of the material presented in this essay. Important gurus of the *Nouvelle Droite* such as Alain de Benoist in France or the Belgian Robert Steuckers have been outspoken for decades about the importance of geopolitics in their own thinking (e.g. Benoist 1979; Steuckers 1992a 1992b 1992c 1992d 1996), and our consideration

of the new *Geopolitik* in Germany can leave little doubt that proponents such as Weissmann, Detlefs, Buck or Lohausen are writing very much in the same extremist spirit. Indeed, the immediate connection to the European New Right was unmistakably demonstrated through the presence of Steuckers himself at a 1994 symposium in Hannover devoted to the renaissance of geopolitics in Germany (Crome 1994, 179). This link between the international renaissance of geopolitics and the extreme right deserves fuller investigation, and its significance can only be heightened by the electoral advances in recent years of Jörg Haider in Austria, Le Pen in France and the Pym Fortuyn party in Holland.

This affinity between geopolitics and the New Right is exemplified perhaps best of all in post-Soviet Russia, where *geopolitika* has achieved a public resonance that is remarkable (Bassin 1996b 2001). The most prolific of its proponents is Aleksandr Dugin, a geopolitician, crypto-fascist ideologue, and increasingly influential political adviser who makes no secret of his deep commitment to the principles of the German *Konservative Revolution* (Dugin 2000). Dugin actively promotes links with the European New Right, and has invited Benoist, Steuckers and other European theoreticians to visit Russia and share their ideas, which he then actively integrates into his own analyses of Russia's current situation (Laqueur 1993; Shenfield 2001). No less significantly, *geopolitika* is embraced by leading politicians on the extreme right in Russia, notably the infamous Vladimir Zhirinovskii and the leader of the Russian neo-communists Gennadii Ziuganov. Both have written lengthy books affirming the importance of geopolitics for Russia today (Zhirinovskii 1998; Ziuganov 1998).

The most revealing affinity, however, runs in a very different direction, and involves the work of the most celebrated and influential of all those involved in the renaissance of geopolitics internationally over the past two decades, namely the French geographer Yves Lacoste. In the course of the political transformations in Europe in the late 1980s, Lacoste took a particular interest in Germany. In 1990, he brought out a special German-language collection of his writings, and some years later participated in a major conference in Bonn devoted to geopolitical analysis (Lacoste 1990; Sprengel 1994). Although Lacoste seems not to appreciate the extent to which geopolitics figures more broadly in the theoretical

discourses of the New Right, he has a definite appreciation of the extremism of the new *Geopolitik* in Germany, which he has dismissed as 'dangerous' and from which he explicitly distanced himself (Sprengel 1994, 182). He is moreover a perennial enemy of the sort of environmentalism that the new *Geopolitik* has reembraced (Lacoste 1994, 21).

At the same time, however, there is a resonance between at least some of the ideas examined in this essay and Lacoste's own project. On the most basic level, Lacoste's geopolitics are similarly founded on a 'realist' understanding of relations between states, and he repeatedly defines geopolitics as the 'analysis of rivalries between different power centers (*Machtinstanzen*) over territory' (Lacoste 1994, 24). Lacoste recognizes that this rivalry operates at various spatial levels, but he accepts the nation-state in its present configuration as the most fundamental and important of these (Lacoste 1990, 15 2000). The empathy with the new *Geopolitik* is underscored by Lacoste's affirmation that nationhood and national cohesion provide the essential framework for the state, a belief expressed quite unmistakably in the title of his 1997 monograph *Vive la Nation* and subsequently reaffirmed for a German audience (Lacoste 1997 2001). Lacoste's view of the nation, as Paul Claval has recently shown, is cosmopolitan and liberal, and has nothing in common with the *volkisch* nationalism of the German geopoliticians (Claval 2000, 255–8). For the latter, however, his general affirmation of the nation as 'the fundamental geopolitical concept' (Hepple 2000, 287) is more important than any divergences in interpretation (Zänker 1998).

This resonance with the new *Geopolitik* is not entirely passive, moreover, for Lacoste displayed considerable prescience in anticipating the sorts of themes around which a reemergent geopolitics in Germany was to crystallize. Writing in 1990, he pointed out how the reunification of the two Germanys was resolving one geopolitical dilemma only to open another, namely the question of Germany's proper boundaries. Using the same provocative terminology as the Germans we have examined, he noted that because German territory had been 'amputated' (*amputieren*) after each of the two world wars, there is a palpable uncertainty today as to where the true geographical limits of the country actually are. He focused specific attention on the issue of the regions from which the German population had been summarily expelled

at the end of the Second World War in 1945. 'Still unresolved for the Germans is the problem – above all symbolic – of those territories in which they no longer live but which historically formed a part of Germany.' This, he concludes, is an issue of immense 'geopolitical significance' (Lacoste 1990, 14, 19). In view of the manner in which *Geopolitik* in Germany actually did reemerge over the ensuing decade, Lacoste's comments take on a rather bizarre echo. Clearly – and despite his ill-advised use of the participle 'amputated' – we may assume that he has no sympathy for the revanchist sentiments we have considered above. At the same time, however, he clearly confirms the geopolitical relevance of these issues. And in so doing, he simultaneously confirms his own acceptance of political boundaries as flexible or fluid, which in turn suggests a link in his own *géopolitique* back to the Haushoferian tradition of classical *Geopolitik*. However this may be, the geopoliticians of the New Right gratefully recognize in Lacoste a sort of kindred soul. Robert Steuckers, for example, makes no secret of his admiration (Steuckers 1996), and many of the German geopoliticians we have examined speak most emphatically about their own inspirational debt to him (Brill 1994, 21; Hahn 1994, 329; Breitenstein 1996, 15, 81; Buck 1996, 65–8; Ebeling 1997, 78).

Finally, the example of the new *Geopolitik* in Germany suggests that political geographers everywhere would be well advised to exercise greater lexical care, and pay more attention to how we name what we do. *Pace* Karl Haushofer, the term geopolitics is not politically neutral, and cannot moreover be neutralized. It cannot be, for the simple reason that it has a rich and problematic history, in the course of which it has been loaded and overloaded with a bewilderingly complex and indeed contradictory array of geographical significations and political passions. This is not to say that the term is necessarily inappropriate and unusable for the present day. It does mean, however, that it will always carry with it a good deal of old baggage, and that in reviving, redefining and reusing it for our own contemporary purposes we merely add yet another sedimentary layer of meaning to this accretion. The label geopolitics might appear to suit our own purposes very well, but we must bear in mind that we are not always going to be able to control, or even be aware of, the particular semantic layer on which our audience will chose to engage with us.

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