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Forum

Is there a politics to geopolitics?

Organizing editor: Alexander B. Murphy

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Abstract: The term geopolitics is understood and used in a variety of ways. Political geographers typically invoke the term with reference to the geographical assumptions and understandings that influence world politics. Outside of the academy, geopolitics often connotes a conservative or right-wing political-territorial calculus associated with the strategic designs of Henry Kissinger, Aleksandr Dugin, and followers of the new *Geopolitik* in Germany. This forum considers the nature and significance of the gap in the ways that the term geopolitics is understood and deployed. Four eminent contributors to the literature in political geography offer their thoughts on the meanings associated with the term and potential confusions that arise from its different uses.

Key words: geopolitics, political geography, political ideology, representations of space, discursive practice.

I Introduction

The editors of *Progress in Human Geography* have decided to begin publishing periodic forums focused on issues of importance for the development of research and theory in human geography. These forums will consist of contributions from three or four scholars, each offering a perspective on a particular topic or debate. This first forum addresses controversies surrounding the meaning of the term geopolitics.

It is well appreciated that geopolitics is understood and used in a wide variety of ways. Political geographers deploying the term have tended to focus on the geographical assumptions and understandings that influence world politics – implying that the term can encompass a wide variety of political perspectives. Outside of the academic sphere, however, geopolitics often takes on a more particular political cast. Geopolitics as pursued by Henry Kissinger or Zbigniew Brzezinski, the *geopolitika* of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy or Aleksandr Dugin in Russia, the new *Geopolitik* in Germany, and to some extent even the *géopolitique* of Yves Lacoste all have immediate and specific political associations. As a result, ‘real-world’ geopolitical discourses are

often identified with 'conservative' perspectives on the right wing of the political spectrum.

The purpose of this forum is to consider the nature and significance of the different political connotations attached to geopolitics within and outside academic discourse. What challenges are presented by these different connotations? Does 'geopolitics' continue to have a clear political resonance for the public at large? To what extent has academic geography sought to depoliticize this traditionally hyperpoliticized term and redeploy it for its own rather special purposes (e.g., to critique the political status quo from the left)? What are the advantages and pitfalls of an academic effort to wrest geopolitics away from its past political associations?

Mark Bassin (University College London) initially suggested the idea for a forum on the meaning of geopolitics. He has written an opening essay that stakes out the terrain, particularly as it relates to the gap between academic and political uses of the term. A set of comments by David Newman (Ben Gurion University of the Negev) and Paul Reuber (University of Muenster) then offers contrasting views of how academics should engage with geopolitics, Newman arguing that scholars must grapple with the practical and ideological dimensions of geopolitics if they are to contribute to an understanding of 'real-world' problems, and Reuber contending that geopolitics is a discursive formation that can only be understood in those terms. John Agnew (University of California, Los Angeles) closes out the forum with a plea for scholars to stake out a claim to the meaning of geopolitics that is not insular or backward-looking, but that directly addresses the geographical ideas and assumptions that underlie the practice of modern politics.

As noted by all of the contributors to this forum, the term geopolitics has come into vogue in both scholarly and political circles. If human geographers are not to stumble forward blindly, it is important to understand the range of uses of the term and to think carefully about how we deploy it in our work. The essays in this forum provide background and context for that undertaking.

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II The two faces of contemporary geopolitics

The much acclaimed 'renaissance of geopolitics' is full of paradoxes. It is not, for example, a renaissance at all, at least not in the form that most political geographers have engaged with it. Driven by the fracturing of the geostrategic balances of the cold war – and of the dominant ideological discourses that had legitimated them – it identifies itself rather as a broadly framed 'rethinking', and what it offers is indeed not a resurrection but a radical recasting of the spirit and purpose of geopolitics. Paradigms that had characterized geopolitics in its classical (pre-1945) and cold war phases are pointedly rejected as 'mummified remains' (ÓTuathail and Dalby, 1998: 2), and an entirely new perspective has been articulated, inspired by a postmodern concern for the construction and manipulation of meaning in all forms of social discourse. This new or 'critical' geopolitics is devoted to the study of how geographical space is represented and signified by political agents as a part of a larger project of accruing, managing and aggrandizing power. Within the new perspective, geographical space has largely relinquished its status as an objective and real-existing

entity, and is now understood in the very different sense as a 'cultural complex of practices and representations'. Effectively, space becomes a discursive subject, and whatever meaning or significance it may possess is not inherent or a priori, but rather is projected onto it – in a ceaselessly revolving kaleidoscope of signification – by political or geopolitical discourses. It is these discourses themselves, consequently, which become the proper object of critical-geopolitical analysis. 'The *facts* of territory were re-presented [by the new geopolitics] as moot *claims* made concerning the location and horizons of political space, anchored by practices of statecraft' (Coleman, 2003: 87). Like the rest of the postmodernist project, critical geopolitics takes a distanced and sceptical view of the political status quo whose rhetoric of power it seeks to deconstruct, and its political resonances tend decidedly to the left wing of the political spectrum.

At the same time, however, the renaissance of geopolitics has involved an alternative dimension. This dimension is not unrecognized within academic political geography – the fact that it was anticipated by figures such as Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski makes it quite impossible to overlook – but it is fair to say that it remains unexplored and unappreciated. Like critical geopolitics, this dimension emerged out of the geostrategic and ideological-epistemological fragmentation of our *fin de siècle*, but it developed in an entirely different direction. Unlike critical geopolitics, moreover, this alternative dimension represents much more of a genuine renaissance, in the sense that it involves an explicit return to the original conceptual categories of classical geopolitics. In other words, it has re-engaged with precisely those 'mummified' theories that critical geopolitics has so outspokenly left behind. For this alternative perspective, geographical space represents neither a discursive subject nor a malleable vision that is constructed and signified by political actors for their own purposes of power acquisition and management. It is rather the real-existing, natural- and physical-geographical world itself. The materiality of this world is assumed to be objective, and as such it is located beyond the reach of any sort of human intentionality, including that involved in the negotiation of political power. Rather, space is understood to represent an existential *pre*-condition for all politics, impacting – variously but always decisively – on the political process, for which reason it must serve as the point of departure for all political analysis and policy formulation. Meaning is not projected onto a geographical subject-world, but rather inheres in it as an essential quality, and the task of geopolitics is precisely to identify and analyse it. In stark contrast to the progressive and left-leaning inclinations of critical geopolitics, the resonances of this alternative geopolitical perspective are with a 'realist' view of international relations which prioritizes the principles of national power and 'national interests', and is anchored securely on the right. Here it oscillates between conservative perspectives that are mainstream and those that are radical or extreme. With these resonances, this alternative perspective displays a genuine continuity with the classical geopolitical tradition (Haslam, 2002), for which reason it may be termed 'neoclassical geopolitics'.

The emergence of neoclassical geopolitics dates from the public rehabilitation of the term itself. Since 1945, geopolitics had languished under an effective taboo brought on by its intimate interwar associations with National Socialism. This taboo began to break down in the early 1980s, in association with a significant shift in geostrategic policy within the NATO alliance. This shift, which in retrospect

clearly foreshadowed the wholesale strategic realignments that would come at the end of the decade, took the form of a new approach to the so-called 'security umbrella' that American nuclear superiority had provided for the western allies since 1945. A more substantial and more proactive European role in providing for its own defence needs was mandated, toward which end the highly controversial decision was taken within NATO to deploy middle-range nuclear warheads across western Europe, notably in Germany. In Europe, this policy had two quite different effects. On the one hand, it subtly began to encourage the 'nationalization' of strategic policy thinking in those countries which now would possess at least some significant degree of defence capability and responsibility within their own boundaries. Of more immediate import, however, was the fact that the policy was resolutely opposed by large sections of the populations concerned, who felt that it would bring Europe in a much more direct and potentially dangerous confrontation with the Soviet Union. Broad movements took shape in Germany and France advocating a sort of third way that would involve parallel disengagement from both superpower camps.

These 'pacifist' sentiments of disengagement in turn stirred a vociferous conservative pro-NATO reaction, and it was as part of this reaction that the term 'geopolitics' first found its way back into public political discourse. It was resurrected at this time as a sort of secure conceptual bastion out of which this pernicious 'isolationism' could be resisted and the transatlantic cold war status quo defended. The term reappeared first of all in France, where in 1982 an 'International Institute of Geopolitics' was established with substantial transatlantic cooperation. In the words of its president Marie-France Garaud, the goal of the organization was to struggle against the 'neutralization' and disembodiment of the Atlantic alliance that was threatening western Europe. '[T]here is today a faceless conqueror – communism – extending its hold over Europe and the rest of the world. And [like German fascism], the aim is to snuff out democracy's bright and delicate flame' (Garaud, 1983: 4). The Institute was founded on a lavish scale, with considerable resources at its disposal, offices in Paris and Washington, and a journal *Géopolitique* published in parallel French- and English-language editions. Its founding members included leading figures from the upper governmental and military circles in France, who were joined by such leading representatives of American conservatism as William Buckley, Samuel Huntington, Norman Podhoretz and Brzezinski himself. 'La géopolitique' quickly re-entered the lexicon of popular political discourse in France, in reference to the imperatives and constraints for political action and behaviour that inhered in some aspect of the configuration of the natural-geographical world (Gallois, 1990).

The appreciation of the salience of the connection back to the legacy of prewar geopolitics was indicated quite unmistakably by the appearance at this time of the first major French translations of the work of Ratzel and Haushofer (Haushofer, 1986; Ratzel, 1988). Precisely these connections, moreover, served as the focus for an international NATO seminar organized by the French political scientist Charles Zorgbibe, the proceedings of which were published under the title *On geopolitics: classical and nuclear* (Zoppo and Zorgbibe, 1985). A measure of the general popularity of the term geopolitics can be seen in the decision of Yves Lacoste – by no means a sympathizer with the perspectives of the International Institute of Geopolitics – to embellish his own geographical journal *Hérodote* in 1983 with the new subtitle *Revue de géographie et de géopolitique* (Claval, 2000).

In Germany as well, where the 'third way' spirit had long enjoyed a sort of semi-formal status in the policy of *Ostpolitik*, the new anti-NATO and anti-American sentiments were similarly resisted by conservatives with a recourse to the assumptions and explanatory categories of classical geopolitics. The German example differed from France, however, in that the arena for this re-engagement was a major academic debate around the interpretation of modern German history – the so-called *Historikerstreit* – that galvanized the educated public over several years in mid-decade. A group of conservative historians resurrected prewar geopolitical theories about the determining significance of Germany's *Mittellage*, in other words its geographical location at the very centre of the European state system, for the country's historical development and its current situation. Their insistence on the historical significance of this geographical juxtaposition was then coupled (not always very logically) to arguments for the need to maintain the existing structure of strategic alliances (e.g., Schulze, 1982; Stürmer, 1986). A further difference with France was that the German historians, mindful of the special sensitivities that still attached to the subject of geopolitics in Germany, were extremely careful to avoid the term. It did become part of the public discourse of the *Historikerstreit*, however, for the political and ideological opponents of *Mittellage* – notably the philosopher Jürgen Habermas – immediately recognized and publicized the conceptual reconnection back to the notorious prewar doctrines of *Geopolitik* (Bassin, 1996b).

The most dramatic manifestations of the geopolitical renaissance in Germany, however, came with the crumbling of the Soviet bloc. In the wake of German reunification, the word geopolitics was finally freed from the taboo that had kept it out of mainstream political discourse (at least in its positive signification), and it was eagerly taken up by those seeking to mark out the parameters of a new, post-cold-war German conservatism. The determining significance of the factor of geographical location continued to be stressed, but the implications of *Mittellage* for postcommunist Europe in the 1990s were understood rather differently. Now the *Mittellage* imperative pointed not to fidelity and obedience within the western defence alliance, but rather to the need for Germany to exercise its newly won national sovereignty and freedom of political action. Out of the plethora of books and essays on the renewed relevance of the topic, a *neue Geopolitik*, or new geopolitics, began to take shape (Bassin, 2003), calling for a nationalist politics conceived primarily if not exclusively in the interests of the German nation, and which would put the security and welfare of Germany above all else (Brill, 1994; Buck, 1996; Detlefs, 1998). There is a direct re-engagement of the new geopolitics with the tradition of classical geopolitics in Germany, with some proponents going so far as to rehabilitate the figure of Karl Haushofer himself (Ebeling, 1994). More significantly, prewar ideas about *Lebensraum* and the contingent and impermanent nature of international boundaries are given a fresh airing and imbued with a contemporary significance for the twenty first century. Particularly ominous is the revival of Haushofer's teachings about 'moveable boundaries' (*bewegliche Grenzen*), which is linked to the issue of the legitimacy of Germany's boundaries in the east as they were drawn after 1945 and finally agreed upon in 1989.

Post-Soviet Russia, unlike Germany, did not inherit an indigenous tradition of geopolitics – on the contrary, geopolitics was always rejected in the Soviet Union as an 'imperialist false science'. Nevertheless, *geopolitika* has developed robustly there since the early 1990s (Gadzhiev, 1998; Tikhonravov, 2000; Nartov, 2003). Indeed,

the castigation of the Soviet period actually works in its favour, for this has allowed it to remain ideologically unassociated with and thus unsullied by the now-discredited doctrines of Marxism-Leninism. Russian geopolitics in fact draws very heavily on the German tradition – Haushofer has now been finally translated into Russian as well (Khauskhofer, 2001) – but at the same time the teachings of Halford Mackinder are strongly emphasized. As in Germany, geopolitics in Russia is embraced almost exclusively by conservative-nationalist interests, which respond eagerly to its promise to be able to deduce the impending ‘geopolitical destiny’ of the Russian nation on the basis of the imperatives of physical geography and to indicate the best policies to insure national security and welfare (Bassin, 2001). *Geopolitika* commonly crosses lines with the ideology of Eurasianism, a popular perspective in post-Soviet Russia that argues for the unity of traditional Russian-imperial civilization on the basis of the geographical unity of the Eurasian spaces which this civilization historically occupied (Bassin, 1996a; Orlova, 1998). In the political-geographical context of the breakup of the USSR, the revanchist and imperialist implications of Eurasianism are clear, and geopolitics is perceived as an important conceptual-scientific tool in the effort to resurrect a neo-Soviet political entity.

On a more purely conceptual level, finally, geopolitics has been an important element in the radical-conservative thinking of the so-called New Right, which emerged in France in the 1960s and 1970s and spread quickly across Europe (Dahl, 1999: 95–98ff). The belief that geographical space and the natural world in general possess an inherently conservative bias because they are ultimately immutable figured importantly in European radical-conservative thinking already in the 1920s and 1930s. This included classical geopolitics, but was by no means limited to it. Indeed, one of the most influential manifestoes of the Conservative Revolution in Germany – Artur Moeller van der Bruck’s *The Third Reich* – argued this perspective with considerable force. Moeller van der Bruck prioritized the significance of space, and insisted that it had to be a *conditio sine qua non* for all political perspectives that were genuinely conservative. ‘Conservative thinking’, he asserted, ‘can be understood only on the basis of space . . . Space precedes and is a precondition of time, which emerges only out of space. Space is sovereign; it is divine. Time, by contrast, is dependent . . . Conservative thinking is thinking entirely in political space . . . Space “remains” while time “flows away” . . . In time, we are able to conceive of “progress”, which precisely because it is temporal, is transitory . . . Space, however, remains . . .’ (Moeller van der Bruck, 1931: 180). In its day, this notion was inspirational for nascent National Socialism; subsequently it has offered considerable appeal for the New Right as the latter re-engaged with the legacy of interwar conservatism. The most important theoretician of this re-engagement, Alain de Benoist, has for decades emphasized the importance of geopolitics for the larger neoconservative project (de Benoist, 1979), and this connection is stressed even more emphatically in the more recent work of cryptofascist ideologues such as Robert Steuckers (de Benoist, 1979; Steuckers, 1992a; 1992b; 1992c). The formal revival of geopolitics in Germany and Russia in the 1990s described above draws directly and heavily on these theoretical formulations.

Thus the ‘two faces’ of contemporary geopolitics are clear. The renaissance of geopolitics has involved a return to the traditional models and spirit of classical geopolitics, paradoxically at the very same time that it has produced a radically different alternative to them in the form of ‘critical’ geopolitics. What, we may ask, are the

implications of all this for the use of the term in contemporary political geography? Obviously, no one possesses or can possess a patent on the term geopolitics, and thus, provided that political geographers make very clear what they mean when they use the term, a degree of semantic pluralism and ambiguity will simply have to be tolerated. I would argue, however, that the stakes in this issue are high, and that, beyond simply recognizing the existence of an alternative perspective on geopolitics today, it is imperative for political geographers to confront and try to explain it. This imperative comes first of all from the fact that, beyond the orbits of academic political geography and certain sections of cognate disciplines such as political science and international relations, the neoclassical perspective is decidedly the more prevalent. In the real-world discourses of national politics, international relations and international security, the term geopolitics continues to resonate most powerfully among, and to be most clearly connected with, actors, perspectives and policies on the right wing. Indeed, it was precisely the neoclassical revival of the 1980s and early 1990s that sanitized and popularized the term to the extent that it became available for the very different purposes of 'critical' geopolitics in the first place.

Beyond this, we should recognize and appreciate the extent to which neoclassical geopolitics operates in proximity to agents of real political power. In this, it again resembles both the ambitions as well as the achievements of geopolitics before the war, as exemplified by Friedrich Ratzel, Halford Mackinder, Alfred Mahan and others. The more recent examples of Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski are entirely indicative in this regard. In France in the 1980s, proponents of *la géopolitique* came from the highest political and military circles. While the new *Geopolitik* in post-unification Germany has remained largely on the extremist fringe, geopolitics has come very much to dominate conservative-nationalist discourse in Russia. Leaders of at least two highly influential political parties on the far right – Gennadii Ziuganov, the leader of the neocommunist KPRF (Russia's largest political party), and the notorious Vladimir Zhirinovskii, head of the so-called Liberal Democrats – both have written lengthy books about geopolitics which insist on its existential relevance for Russia today (Clark, 1995; Mitrofanov, 1997; Zhirinovskii, 1997; Zhirinovskii, 1998; Ziuganov, 1998). Moreover, the principal theoretician of geopolitics in Russia, Aleksandr Dugin, is an enthusiastic acolyte of the European New Right. He has invited co-thinkers from western Europe such as de Benoist and Steuckers to Russia, and eagerly assimilated their ideas into his own work. Dugin's numerous books on geopolitics, together with his geopolitical journal *Elementy*, were all widely read throughout the 1990s (Dugin, 2000), and more recently he has become an influential political consultant to conservative members of the Russian Parliament. In 2002 he ceremoniously founded a formal Eurasian political movement and party, which has already become an appreciable electoral force, and he clearly nurses ambitions of influencing Russian politics on the very highest level. There is some indication that his geopolitics and his Eurasianism have attracted the attention of Vladimir Putin himself.

This unsettling state of affairs raises a series of difficult questions, and I would argue that political geographers have no choice but to begin to confront them. These involve important conceptual-theoretical issues, above all the notion that a primordial stasis inheres in the very nature of geographical space, a stasis which inexorably resists change (and by association political reform and revolution) and works

toward the preservation of tradition. It is not quite enough, I would suggest, merely to reject this proposition, as most political geographers certainly will; rather, given its enduring appeal it should be seriously scrutinized and its particular role in various ideological configurations of conservatism revealed. The same is true for the related assumption that geographical space and the natural-geographical world represent objective phenomena which work to constrain and determine the flow of political events. Political geography in our day is universally, one might say constitutionally, hostile to any suggestion of environmental determinism. This principled rejection, however, must not prevent us from recognizing that a geodeterminist logic continues to be very popular and indeed influential in political discourses virtually across the globe. The success of neoclassical geopolitics, which in one expression or another embraces precisely this sort of environmentalist perspective, offers the best evidence of this. Indeed, there is a logical problem here, for if we dismiss the proposition that geographical factors figure in some way as an objective element in the political process – if, for example, we stress instead their exclusive status as the subject of ideological construction and cultural representation – then it ceases to be clear exactly what the geographical element is supposed to mean for the larger calculation. It is not enough merely to insist that geography and space ‘matter’ to the political process. The real challenge for political geographers is to explain in meaningful detail *how* it matters. This is what those studying political processes will want to learn from us, and it is consequently what political geography must seek to elaborate. As part of this, it will have to deal with the alternative offered by neoclassical geopolitics.

Most practically, the dramatic political advances of extremist conservatism in recent years – the electoral successes of Haider, Le Pen and numerous others in Europe, the ever-greater pervasiveness and intensity of rightwing nationalist sentiment in post-Soviet Russia, and most recently the aggressive (and popular) neoconservatism of the Bush government in Washington – all seem to indicate that the New Right is in an ascendant phase. We may well anticipate that neoclassical geopolitics will ascend along with it. In view of this, it becomes all the more important to understand precisely how analytical geopolitics forms a part of their ideological preoccupations. Geopolitics means many things to many people, and we should recognize that the term is encumbered with a broad spectrum of contrasting significations and implications. This pluralism does not necessarily render the term geopolitics unusable, but it does make it imperative to explore and digest its different meanings, in order to be able to deploy it more accurately and to control its various resonances more effectively.

Mark Bassin

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III An informed and proactive geopolitics

Geopolitics as an academic discipline has come of age again. It is now possible to hold centenary conferences in which we reanalyse the writings of Ratzel and Mackinder without automatically associating them with all of the ills of the Haushoferian school of German Geopolitik. Focusing on the state in the ever-changing dynamics of the world political map, geographers view geopolitics as a

subset of political geography, whereas scholars from other disciplines, especially international relations (IR), and geopolitical practitioners view it simply as a way of understanding global political change. The blackballing of the discipline which took place during the three to four decades following the second world war was much more pronounced among the geographic community than it was among the scholars of international relations particularly as it related to the analysis of contemporary geostrategic policy on the part of the world's superpowers and, as a result, geographers distanced themselves from the evolving debate in the field of international relations.

The geopolitical renaissance can be put down to two recent trends: one relating to the real-world changes which have taken place, the other to the theoretical paradigms which have been constructed as part of postmodern critiques. In the real world, the changes in the global map, not least the collapse of the Soviet Union and the resulting political and territorial changes in Europe, left most geographers unprepared. At the most, they were able to focus on the hard territorial changes taking place within and between states, the problems of ethnoterritorial empowerment and the construction of new borders and the associated territorial reconfigurations of power (Williams, 1993; Kolossov, 1998; Demko and Wood, 1999). Yet it took a few more years for geographers to say something significant about the nature of interstate relations, the 'geo' dimension of global power relations, and, judging from the limited amount of geography-focused literature which appears on the pages of IR journals, the impact has been marginal.

The second trend impacting the geopolitical rehabilitation among geographers has been the use of theoretical and conceptual frameworks, some of which are rooted in the postmodern 'turn' of the past 15 years. Crossing disciplinary boundaries into the territory of neighbouring and related disciplines has become more acceptable. Political scientists and IR scholars have become more interested in the significance of the 'geo' and the territorial (Albert *et al.*, 2001), while geographers have shown a renewed interest in the wider relations affecting the world political map as a system undergoing dynamic and continuous change, rather than as a static outcome of decision-making by political and international elites (Agnew and Corbridge, 1995; Agnew, 1998). Geopolitical narratives of evolving events, the deconstruction of speeches and texts – what we now call 'critical' geopolitics – has given us new insights into the way the rest of the world view or understand the 'geo' in international relations (Toal, 1996; Ó Tauthail, 2004).

To what extent, however, does the contemporary geopolitics literature deal with the 'real world out there'? A content analysis of the papers which have been published during the past six years in the journal *Geopolitics*, gives some indication of the topics which are considered 'geopolitical' by a diverse range of authors. Topics range from the real-world political change in Europe, Asia and the Middle East to conceptual grappling with notions of 'deterritorialization', 'borderless worlds' and globalization. Peacekeeping (Duffy, 2001) and global finance (Helleiner, 2002) are seen as being no less legitimate topics of analysis than are the 'traditional' themes of borders, state territories and contested spaces. This meeting place of disciplines has created a shared space where we have begun to read the geopolitical narratives of the 'other', but this space remains sufficiently diverse and fragmented for us to argue that (with apologies to Richard Hartshorne) geopolitics is pretty much what geopolitical scholars and geopolitical practitioners do. There is no one geopolitics,

nor is there any need for such a rigid framework. What political geographers and IR scholars are currently writing under the name of geopolitics continues to display a chasm in terms of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks and semantics that are being used.

What we 'do' must include dealing with the real-world problems and changes that are taking place. Geopolitics is not a discipline for 'ivory tower' academics who have no real understanding of, or impact on, the rapidly changing world political map. Critique of contemporary global change, be it inspired by left- or rightwing governments, needs to be strongly rooted in an informed geopolitical discourse, even in the face of those who would berate policy-orientated scholars for interfering in the political process, or for having used our research to legitimate and lend authority to a particular position. This critique, experienced by all those social scientists who make their voices heard as part of the public discourse, resonates particularly strongly when directed at those speaking in the name of geopolitical analysis. Somehow we still cannot seem to totally rid ourselves of associations of the past, with the fear that we will be seen as the contemporary equivalent of a Haushoffer, drawing on geopolitical theory and concepts to actively influence government policies in global affairs.

Becoming part of an involved geopolitical debate does not mean the creation of a new school of 'applied geopolitics'. Yet it does require geopolitical scholars to contribute towards the real-world debate in an informed fashion, one which seeks to educate and to provide a broader perspective for decision-making, instead of the shallow understanding of world events which have brought about kneejerk reactions on the part of so many governments in the sphere of foreign policy and/or warmaking.

One only needs to analyse the post-9/11 events to understand just how uninformed much of the geopolitical debate has been in government and strategic circles. Geopolitical flashpoints have become automatically transformed into a generalized 'clash of civilizations' between west and east, between 'civilized' and primitive, between Christianity and Islam. The lack of knowledge among those who make the global decisions affecting the lives of so many has, in the past two years, been out there on the table, in the tabloids and on the television screens, for all to see. The rehabilitation of the Huntington thesis has become an important part of this geopolitical discourse. In the mid-1990s it was impossible to go into an international relations or political science seminar without Huntington's *Clash of civilizations* being mentioned within the first 10 minutes (Huntington, 1998). As new fads took its place, Huntington was gently pushed aside until he came back into fashion as a result of the events of 11 September. It has been an 'I told you so' geopolitics which has dictated US policy in the post-9/11 period, with the 'good' western Christian world threatened by the 'bad' world of Islamic terrorism.

Prior to 9/11, real-world geopolitics was creating a new peace discourse, but this has once again been pushed aside in favour of a (re)newed securitization and threat discourse. Borders have been re-established to protect us from the 'outsider', foreign immigrants who were beginning to be part of a new melting-pot culture are once again suspected of disseminating the evil cultures of the 'other', while the 'us' and 'them' syndrome forms the foundations of what is now seen as the new foreign policy-making. States have to be defended, aliens have to be kept out, security has to be maintained – this is the geopolitical discourse of the new millennium.

Ethnoterritorial conflicts provide live laboratories for the study of geopolitics (Murphy, 2002; Newman, 2004a; 2004b; Yiftachel, 2001; 2002). Take, for example, the real live geopolitical laboratory of the Israel – Palestine conflict (Newman, 2002). It is not only about the ‘harder’-core political geographical issues concerning the demarcation of a boundary, the establishment of settlements and the fierce contestation for a very scarce and valuable territorial resource. It is equally about the geopolitical positioning and location of each of the two national groups as they continue to struggle for legitimation and recognition within their respective regions, and within the wider sphere of global international relations. What, for instance, is Israel? Is it, should it be, part of the Middle East? Perhaps in a postconflict era Israel will continue to prefer its global positioning as a geographic and cultural extension of Europe, or as the 51st state of the United States? Then again, perhaps Israel is a state without borders, at least as far as the global Jewish community is concerned, who feel an affiliation with this ‘homeland’ territory (Newman, 2000). How much of this contrasting geopolitical reasoning becomes part of the real-world debate and influences Israeli government policies? How much of it explains EU, NATO or US policies in respect to this shatterbelt region? Without a solid and reasoned analysis of the geopolitical alternatives facing the region, it is difficult to see how statesmen and diplomats can come to terms with the structural processes of conflict resolution, over and beyond the simplistic (but critical) desire to stop violence.

Real-world geopolitical decision-making needs to be more informed. This is where scholars of geopolitics – be they geographers, political scientists or others – have an important role to play. They need to fill in the huge gaps which exist between practitioner and academic. In doing so, they cannot shy away from asserting political positions which are grounded in broader understandings of interstate relationships, political history and cultural narratives.

We simply do not know enough about the impact of past geopolitical traditions on contemporary statecraft and global positioning (Dodds and Atkinson, 2000). Geopolitical narrative cannot be detached from its past. As globalization impacts the traditional territorial structure of the state and its interstate relations, it has to come to grips with the past geopolitical images and self-locations which dictated its foreign-policy positions in the past. These images are closely tied up with national identities and, as such, changing geopolitical visions are often resisted by a majority of the population (Dijkink, 1996). Notions of global change are all too often limited to the political and academic elites as citizens retain strong notions of national exclusivity, even in the emerging Europe of regions, or in the so-called ‘borderless’ world, where borders nevertheless remain so important to social and global ordering processes.

Nor do we know enough about the geopolitical traditions of the non-western, non-globalizing world. Submissions to the journal *Geopolitics* remain heavily focused on western and European traditions (Levy, 2000; Kolossov, 2001; O’Loughlin, 2001; Bach and Peters, 2002). Our knowledge of Asian, African or Middle Eastern geopolitical traditions are severely lacking. Regions to whom we attribute global notions of deterritorialization have not yet fully come to grips with the previous geopolitical notions of fixed territoriality and nation states. Cultures to whom our practitioners attribute collective guilt and finger-pointing have largely been invisible to our elite groups of decision-makers. In geopolitics, as in every form of analysis, invisibility breeds ignorance, and ignorance breeds fear. When we are afraid, we revert to those

instincts which we know best – secure the borders, defend the homeland, go on the offensive.

One of the challenges facing geopolitics is to link the academic and the practitioner into a related framework, enabling one to learn from the other. Practitioners in the guise of statesmen, diplomats and foreign-affairs specialists supply us with our raw data for analysis. But it should not continue to be a one-way process. Critiquing the way in which foreign-policy decisions were made through analysis of text and narrative is important, but it is not enough. If we believe that we understand the complex processes of structural change which are taking place in global relations, we should not shy away from taking a proactive stance on a range of geopolitical issues, from EU enlargement and its relations with non-EU countries, to US hegemonic policies and intervention in foreign places, and to ways forward in resolving the Middle East conflict – to name but a few relevant areas of geopolitical expertise. We no longer need to be worried that we will be tainted with the brush of Haushofer – it is time to show that our geopolitics can extend beyond the realms of the ivory tower and even make an impact where it counts.

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IV The political representation of space after the cold war and in the new millennium

There is some evidence that a renaissance of geopolitics is under way. Soon after the end of the cold war, Russia's 'postcommunist' Minister of Foreign Affairs Kossyrev signalled this when he noted that the Russian administration 'had comprehended quite fast that geopolitics is taking the place of ideology'. The former cold war blocs were falling apart and new patterns of regional fragmentation prompted politicians and their advisers to depict the world as a 'grand chessboard' (Brzezinski, 1997). More recently, geopolitical narratives like the 'clash of civilizations' or the 'axis of evil' have become the focus of attention in foreign-policy circles.

In commentaries within the scientific community, as well as in the media, recent representations of the global order are often interpreted as something new or perhaps as something new-old: a renewed geopolitics replacing prior narratives of ideological difference and bloc formation. However, the conclusion that space has once again become more powerful in the arena of political discourse and conflict does not adequately capture what is going on – at least when viewed from an ontological perspective. From that perspective, the spatial dimension has always played a role at all political levels. It is the *discourse* about space and territory that has changed – in the process creating new fault lines in the social construction of society.

Seen in this light, the new attention to 'geo'politics is not due to a general strengthening of the 'geo' element in politics, but to the fact that we seem to be living in a period in which – with deference to Foucault – there are more and more signs of change in the formation of global representations. Until 1989 notions of bloc confrontations, domino theories, substitute wars and Iron Curtains were at the core of the hegemonic geopolitical narrative (Dodds, 2003). The self and the other seemed to be spatially fixed in a way that was taken for granted, nondisputable and absolutely definite; geopolitics was therefore rendered virtually invisible in politics, the media and public opinion. However, the cold war was never a period without geopolitics;

on the contrary, the world had almost never seen a more clear-cut opposition between two mutually hostile blocs. In that context, there was never any doubt in which direction rockets were to be pointed and from what direction hostile attacks were to be expected.

When this geopolitical master frame fell apart in 1989, a new global metanarrative was needed. The fact that the old geopolitical framing almost completely disintegrated within one decade made the change in the discursive formation quite visible. There was a demand for new interpretations, for new geopolitical story-lines framing the massive transformations that took place on the world stage in the 1990s and at the beginning of the new millennium.

Against this backdrop it is not surprising that, already in the early 1990s, a series of new geopolitical narratives began to appear. All of them claimed to offer plausible discursive framings for changing global constellations of power. They arose not only from the classical field of IR sciences (see, for example, the more prominent conceptions of Fukuyama and Huntington) but also from other discursive formations (see Ó Tuathail *et al.*, 1998). Among them were, for example, geo-ecological narratives, which the politicians of western industrial nations and transnational organizations sometimes used to frame neocolonial policy (see Dalby, 1998). However, those kinds of arguments still did not lead to a stand-alone geopolitical regionalization¹ on a global scale. A similarly implicit kind of global geopolitics came at the beginning of the 1990s in the form of an effort to substitute 'geo-economics' for geopolitics. According to Luttwak (1990), political conflicts were more and more fought with economic weapons in this era of increasing (mainly economic) globalization. Visions of a network society, including new forms of global governance (Higgott and Payne, 2000; Soyez, 2000), were challenging the traditional relationship of politics and space (e.g., Ossenbruegge, 1998), especially the role of the nation state in international relations.

The deployment of such alternative discourses changed due to the conflicts and wars of the last decade, at the latest in the wake of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. Since then geopolitical framings have been on such an upswing that it might well be called a 'discursive event' (in the sense of Jäger, 2001). One reason for that may be that, before any concrete military reaction from the US government could be executed, it was indispensable to rhetorically transform 'the enemy' from a spatially diffuse terrorist network that was acting internationally to a territorial project (see, for example, Smith, 2001a; 2001b). Shortly after the attacks the media already began to talk about an 'attack on America' (CNN), which quickly led to discussions of 'America at war'. As one of Bush's first speeches in the congress after 9/11 showed, the next step was to discursively spatialize the reactions, i.e., to transform the fight against terrorism into a war against countries that accommodated and supported terrorists. This seemed to be necessary because 'the modern geopolitical reasoning . . . operate(s) in terms of a political ontology of states' (Dalby, 2003a: 64).

The geopolitical framings and mappings necessary for this transformation are anything but novel. As Foucault outlined in his various archaeologies of discursive change, there tends to be a selective updating of representations that have existed for quite a long time. In this case the representations do not only go back to concepts developed in the 1990s (e.g., like Huntington's 'clash of civilizations'); they are deeper reflections of socially constructed 'geographical imaginations' (Gregory, 1998) of

the self and the other in the grand spatial narratives of western modernity. To bring the recent master frames of these 'politics of geopolitics' into some kind of perspective, one might work out three lines of argumentation that can be separated only for academic purposes and that interact in the current geopolitical discourses in various ways:

- (1) the geopolitics of cultural difference;
- (2) the geopolitics of universalism and hegemonic superpower;
- (3) the geopolitics of new bloc formation.

As the first two of these have already been discussed in various contexts, I will only outline their main points. I will then focus attention on the geopolitical narratives of new bloc formation – drawing on some conclusions from an ongoing research project dealing with 'the geopolitical representations of Europe'.

1 The geopolitics of cultural difference

In the aftermath of 11 September the discourse of a 'clash of civilizations', which had already been promulgated by Huntington (1998) since the early 1990s,² appeared ubiquitously in the media and public opinion. Even though many politicians sought to emphasize repeatedly that the events did not represent a clash of civilizations, they still reified the basic idea of a geopolitics of cultural difference (Reuber and Wolkersdorfer, 2003). Huntington was not solely responsible for this. He only gave new life to an underlying discourse of cultural difference that had developed over more than two centuries. Huntington updated the discursive mapping of the self and the other from the perspective of the 'modern' west. These representations had their roots in historic geographical imaginations of power such as Ritter's 'Gang der Kulturen über die Erde', Kolb's 'Kulturerdteile', and the orientalism discourse, which has been a central focus of western thought at least since the era of colonialism (see Said, 1979). The attacks on New York and Washington formed the 'discursive event' in the face of which the clash of civilizations discourse rose to prominence. This observation not only applied to those who were the target of the attack. The underlying narrative of a geopolitical conflict of cultural difference was used by all parties to the conflict – from Bush to Bin Laden. Hence, Agnew (2001) is right when he represents Osama Bin Laden as the 'Huntington of the Arab world'.

2 The geopolitics of universalism and hegemonic superpower

The second major geopolitical narrative of the post-cold-war era serves the imagination of a new hegemon, the 'only superpower USA' (Brzezinski, 1997): Francis Fukuyama's thesis of 'the end of history' at first glance does not seem to aim for a geopolitical segmentation of the world after the cold war. Nonetheless, it still has distinct geopolitical implications. Fukuyama believes that we are entering an era characterized by 'the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government' (Fukuyama, 1989). Fukuyama or 'George W. Bush's Aristotle' (a headline of the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*) represents the USA as the ultimate democratic state. His ideas are informed by a reductionist interpretation of Hegel's idealistic philosophy of the end of history. This construction, in all its simplicity, marks the beginning of a geopolitical narrative that helps to pave the way for a new discourse of US-American hegemony after the

end of the cold war. Even if 'the end of history thesis does not mark the beginning of geography in geopolitical discourse' (Ó Tuathail *et al.*, 1998: 195) it still contains an underlying geopolitical narrative which is only a short step away from the Bush (senior) doctrine in the first Gulf War, and still continues in the geopolitical representations and mappings of US foreign policy after 9/11.

3 The geopolitics of new bloc formations

The development of a hegemonic geopolitical metanarrative for the global power constellation of the twenty-first century has recently encouraged the development of a further discourse in international relations that decisively claims itself to be geopolitical: the initiation of a discussion about new power blocs beyond the constellations that have been established since the end of the second world war. Since the lead-up to the war on Iraq there are, for example, once again signs of a more autonomous geopolitical positioning of the EU, that is, for instance, reflected in the discussions about creating an EU ministry of foreign affairs or common armed forces. At present, of course, such hints are far from being interpreted as the starting point of a new bloc narrative. There are differences in attitude towards such an enterprise – not only from state to state (e.g., see the very different standpoints of Great Britain as well as Germany and France in the time before the second war on Iraq) but domestically from party to party and sometimes from politician to politician. Yet the intensity of the discussions and their frequent appearance in politics and the media suggest at least the possibility of a new bloc narrative. In an ongoing research project about 'Geopolitical Representations of Europe' (Reuber and Wolkersdorfer, 2002), one thing became very clear: in the face of US-American reactions to the 'fight against terror', EU politicians show some sympathy for a more independent position of the EU in the global geopolitical arena. Some politicians even go as far as to speak of a new 'transatlantic trench', simultaneously reactivating discourses of geopolitical cooperation going back very far in European history (e.g., with Russia).

Framing the global conflicts of the new millennium the different geopolitical narratives outlined above in some cases seem to be combining. Even if the clash of civilizations may have been the major public discourse, elements of other currently circulating (conceptually only partly compatible) representations had an effect at the political level of reasoning – for example, in the effort to legitimize diplomatic stances and military actions. Discussions of the Iraq conflict that suggest that it is 'fundamentally about geopolitics' and 'represents a significant shift in the global geopolitical landscape' (Murphy, 2003: 55) are good examples of the subtle interference and interaction of different geopolitical narratives in the early twenty-first century. In this case, Fukuyama's universalistic narratives of the 'truly good' and the 'right values' serve politicians of 'the only superpower' (Brzezinski, 1997) in their effort to proclaim the invasion of Iraq as a 'morally correct' crusade beyond their own interests. Huntington's visions delivered the framing for the identification of the region where the currently decisive 'enemy' was to be located. Going back to Klare's rogue states doctrine, (Klare, 1995) certain countries within this region then became the target. More recently, geopolitical representations seek to discursively establish and map new regions of political instability. An example is Thomas Barnett's strategic map, which depicts (on a global scale) putatively less secure 'gap' regions as zones of conflicts (see Dalby, 2003b: 11).

4 Some conclusions

I have tried to point out that, from a conceptual perspective, there is no politics without geopolitics. There may be times in which geopolitical representations are more stable and therefore seem to have a more implicit impact on the whole discourse of politics, but when such hegemonic discourses break down it becomes evident what role 'geo' plays in the field of politics, as the renaissance of a variety of geopolitical narratives within the last decade has shown. In this sense, the paper does follow Foucault (1999), who has argued that politics – maybe especially geopolitics – is the continuation of war by different means (reversing the famous von Clausewitz saying), and that politics at its core is always geopolitics, since it is a discourse about the spatial division of 'us' and 'them' in global society.

From the perspective of political geography, the critical deconstruction of geopolitical narratives, representations and mappings can vary according to one's underlying theoretical and normative positioning. From a poststructuralist perspective, discourses are *the* basis of any social structuring. From that perspective *different* insights into the politics of geopolitics are possible. A discursive approach not only deconstructs geopolitical narratives, but can also focus our attention on how they have developed in the long run. This approach offers analytical insights, especially in the context of the dissolution of hegemonic narratives and the beginning of new metanarratives. A focus on discourse also puts the concept of individual political actors in a different light. They are not comprehended as ontological 'realities', but as discursive constructions that have become so essential to 'modern' thinking that they are taken for granted, even in many of the social theories of the current epoch. From such a perspective the statements and reasonings of people like George W. Bush or Osama Bin Laden are not mainly the product of individual characters but are structured by geopolitical narratives, representations and mappings that have emerged over a long period. It is not actions that determine discourse; the critical issue is the power of discursive formations rooted in existing geographical and geopolitical imaginations to determine patterns of action.

The poststructuralist approach does not leave normative questions untouched. Postcolonial criticism has shown repeatedly that even taken-for-granted values of western modernity must be seen more as hegemonic discursive positionings than as essentialist values of the *conditio humana*. Deconstruction, however, does not lead to an 'anything goes' perspective. As Stuart Hall, for example, has outlined with his concept of 'strategic essentialism' (1999) it can well meet a normative relocation (Lossau, 2002). Yet this kind of repositioning is always aware of the fact that there cannot be a neutral position 'outside' discourse that can provide insight into the politics of geopolitics.

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V Is 'geopolitics' a word that should be endowed only with the meaning it acquired in the early twentieth century?

Over the past 15 years or so, some political geographers have revived an interest in what they are calling 'geopolitics'. This revival obviously bears some relation to the disruptions of world politics that have followed from, *inter alia*, the collapse of the

Soviet Union and the end of the cold war, the increased political-economic heterogeneity of countries in the so-called third world, and the rise of presumed new threats to world order such as the disintegration of states and the rise of global terrorist networks. The perspectives brought to bear on this emerging world politics, however, differ profoundly from the 'old' disciplinary use of the term, associated as it was with the directly determining effects of physical geography and relative location on world politics. Self-consciously critical of such usage in a contemporary world where old definitions of statehood, political boundaries and world regions are very much in question, the new approaches tend to emphasize, for example, how features of physical geography are selectively expropriated to inform foreign policies, how implicit geographical assumptions about state territories and global geopolitics enter into conventional thinking about world politics, and how these processes jointly give rise to reified views of the world in which its intrinsic variety is suppressed in favour of simplified geographical labels (Agnew, 2000).

'Critical' geopolitics is thus something quite distinctive from that of the 'original' disciplinary understanding conveyed by the word 'geopolitics'. It frequently does imply the possibility of thinking about a world in which geopolitics no longer visits its disasters on the world. There is often a strong sense in much of this literature that thinking and acting geopolitically (as they understand it) is sinful and criminal. In fact the precise political consequences are anything but always very clear. If 'classical' geopolitics invariably involved arguing for this or that 'national interest,' critical and other contemporary forms of geopolitics do not speak with a single voice. Though they do repeatedly tend to implicate US governments as singular villains in contemporary world politics, they do so typically after pointing out that powerful states have a unique capacity to engage in villainy not available to others. Yet the general critical orientation is different and possibly disturbing to those who still live in the world of the national romance or who want to whisper in the ear of the Prince.

The question inevitably arises as to whether using an old word in a new way is inevitably problematic. Should not those proposing the new usage simply come up with a new word (even 'geopolitics' might do) so that the old one can be left alone with its old meaning thus reducing the possibility of confusion particularly when attempting to communicate with popular audiences? I think this would be a mistake. I would argue in favour of actively expropriating the word rather than searching for an alternative. I have three reasons for doing so, each one leading logically to the next. The first is that popular usage is vacuous rather than redolent of old-style disciplinary geopolitics and thus open to conversion to new meanings. The second is that the history of disciplines is the history of the struggle for control over the meanings ascribed to key terms, so why should dispute over the meanings given to 'geopolitics' a century after the term first appeared in German and Swedish seem especially improper or subversive? It is simply academic business as usual. The third is that the understandings and practices of modern political elites have long taken a 'geopolitical' cast, in the sense of evolving sets of geographical assumptions about and orientations to how the world 'works' politically. In this construction, disciplinary geopolitics such as that conveyed by the old meaning of the word 'geopolitics' is simply the formalized rendition of ideas and practices about world politics *c.* 1900 that are today largely redundant, even if at one time they did capture something of the outlook of the then Great Powers.

In the first place, the old disciplinary usage is not the one that typically appears in the European and North American popular media when words such as 'geopolitics' and its derivatives are employed. Given the looseness with which the terms are used in popular sources, the new academic usage can be thought of as simply firming up meaning for intellectual purposes. It is not as if the old disciplinary meaning is somehow in wide circulation with the new usage coming along to confuse everyone. Since the revival of the terms 'geopolitics' and 'geopolitical' in the 1970s, largely at the behest of Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon in their pursuit of a multipolar alternative to the cold war's bipolarity, the words pop up frequently. Usually, however, they appear as shorthand for placing a particular foreign-policy problem in its geographical context, *not* as terms in any way synonymous with the models and ideas purveyed by such disciplinary figures as Ratzel, Mackinder and Haushofer.

By way of example, the middlebrow magazine *Harvard Business Review* (August 2003) has three uses of the term 'geopolitical'. The first is in a sign in a cartoon (on p. 20) that refers to 'sensitive geopolitical issues' (implying in the context of the cartoon foreign-policy disputes and national-identity squabbles such as those between the USA and France). The second is in an article on 'The new world disorder' (p. 75) in which a sentence reads as follows: 'In coming to grips with the new world disorder, a business leader must first develop a detailed sense of the geopolitical outlook for the company's future strategic horizon.' All this means is the connection between global patterns of political stability and the investment possibilities of the firm. Finally, a third reference is in a second cartoon (p. 79) where a shopper is choosing among greetings cards in categories of 'Get Well', 'Condolence' and 'Branch Office in Geopolitically Unstable Country'. Though this could be construed as having a loose connection to, say, Mackinder's Heartland Model, I think that would be quite a stretch, and not one that could be made by most of the readers given that they have probably never heard of Mackinder or of his model. Mackinder, of course, never used the word geopolitics so it also not evident that even if anyone knew of Mackinder (or of his model) that they would tie either to the word 'geopolitics'.

I would not want to claim, however, that terms can be invested with just any meaning irrespective of their origins. Casual assignment of meaning is one thing, but the bold move of evacuating a word of its old meaning and redefining it as something else is different again. The word 'geopolitics' necessarily should have some reference to both the geographical and the political. However, as long as a coherent and theoretically defensible definition is provided, I see no reason why it should conform to a singular timeless one. Indeed, the history of concepts in science, political theory and geography can be seen as the history of different academic generations expropriating concepts for their own use both to define who they are (in a declaration of independence from their forebears) and because of changing times (to adapt the concepts to new times), yet retaining the words associated with the concepts in order to legitimize themselves in a disciplinary tradition. The approach to intellectual history pioneered by Reinhart Koselleck and others is entirely about this historical process of taking old words and imbuing them with new meanings (e.g., Koselleck, 1985; Richter, 1990; Agnew *et al.*, 1996). The recently published *A companion to political geography* (Agnew *et al.*, 2003) has an entire section devoted to the disputed nature of the meaning of key concepts such as boundary, place, power and territory as an alternative account of the field than supposed philosophical schools or ideological frameworks. The danger of confusion only arises

when the meanings ascribed to terms by forebears are not sufficiently distinguished from new ones. By way of example, Michel Foucault has recently been taken to task for insufficiently distinguishing the meaning he ascribes to the term 'genealogy' from that of Friedrich Nietzsche (Stevens, 2003: 581). Although Foucault claims to stand with Nietzsche, he is criticized for actually denying the word the evolutionary connotation that Nietzsche explicitly gave it. The problem is not with the meaning Foucault gives to 'genealogy', but with his failure to note its novelty.

Following on from the claim that disputes over the meanings of concepts are central to academic activity, I want to argue for giving a particular meaning to the term 'geopolitics'. This is not one, by the way, that all advocates of a 'new' or 'critical' geopolitics would share. There are significant theoretical differences between those who focus specifically on the critical geopolitics of contemporary events and those, among whom I count myself, who desire to enframe geopolitical practices historically. There is hardly some simple political or theoretical consensus massed against the old disciplinary position or 'traditional' views of the geopolitical. In fact, even a relatively new journal carrying the contentious word in its very title, *Geopolitics*, invites and publishes contributions that cross the entire range of research and writing invoking the dreaded term. What does distinguish much recent usage on the whole from the old is the sense of the academic as a critical scholar rather than as a servant of a particular state claiming the 'facts of nature' for the pursuit of this or that nation's foreign policy (Agnew, 1984). I particularly object to tying 'geopolitics' to a singular disciplinary definition in early twentieth-century Europe and North America because this thereby misses the long-term practices and thinking that the word can be used to convey beyond the historical context in which the word itself first came into use. I am not particularly interested in the disciplinary history of geopolitics, except in so far as it reveals something about the making of world politics in the early twentieth century. I am much more interested in how geographical designations and assumptions have entered into the making of world politics over the past 500 years. In other words, the main reason for wanting to expropriate the word geopolitics is to show how what the word conveys about the dependence of world politics on geographical assumptions and orientations is at the heart of modern practices of world politics, particularly with respect to Great Power politics. It makes no sense to me to restrict such an evocative word to a relatively minor and uninfluential disciplinary movement (the geopolitics movement) in early twentieth-century geography.

From my theoretical perspective, thinking and acting 'geopolitically' is a fundamental feature of modernity (Agnew, 2003). To restrict definition of a redolent word to a narrow disciplinary frame of reference that seems to have little or no resonance in the larger world is to retreat from active engagement in new ways of thinking about world politics by expropriating the word geopolitics to represent them and to give them a heredity. Yet it is also to endorse a linguistic nominalism that does not bear close examination when confronted with the actual history of disciplines as necessarily involving the deep and frequently implacable struggle for the expropriation of meaning of key terms. That geopolitics is one of them perhaps indicates that there is some intellectual life left in a part of political geography that, frankly, had almost totally decayed between the mid- and late twentieth century!

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Notes

1. This particular discourse rather goes along with established dichotomies with roots in colonial history and the debate on developing countries, i.e., spatial dichotomies such as 'North versus South' or 'developed versus less developed countries', etc.
2. And immediately used by himself to discursively frame the Balkan Wars.

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