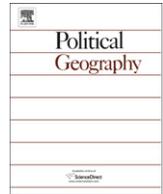




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

# Political Geography

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/polgeo](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/polgeo)

## Recontextualising violence, power and nature: The next twenty years of critical geopolitics?

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### A B S T R A C T

#### Keywords:

Critical geopolitics  
War  
Environment  
Non-violence  
Culture

Twenty years ago the intellectual projects that have become known as critical geopolitics emerged at the end of the cold war as a series of critiques of geopolitical reasoning. Drawing heavily on Edward Said's formulations of Orientalism the critical analyses probed the dense cultural productions of danger, the rationalisations for intervention and the logics of "Western" foreign policies. The geographical specifications of the world in the political discourses used to justify numerous imperial actions, and the rationales for the provision of security came under sustained scrutiny. Now two decades later despite the supposed end of history and endless invocations of globalization, the themes of empire and Orientalism remain at the heart of the Western geopolitical imaginary, explicitly structuring how the security intellectuals of our time plan for war and justify the construction of their military machines. Given the continuing dangers of warfare in a biosphere that is being radically destabilized by the modes of economy and violence these geopolitical texts legitimize, the necessity for critique remains compelling. But given the proliferation of uses of the term critical geopolitics, and the numerous disciplinary concerns encompassed by it, perhaps the time has come to narrow its focus once again to its core themes which involve confronting and challenging the geographical reasoning used in the legitimizations of contemporary warfare.

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War also mobilizes the highly charged and dangerous dialectic of place attachment: the perceived antithesis of 'our' places and homeland and 'theirs'. Sustained in latent if not overt forms in peacetime, this polarization has produced unbridled sentimentalizing of one's own while dehumanizing the enemy's people and land. That seems an essential step in cultivating readiness to destroy the latter and bear with progressive devastation at home.

Hewitt (1983:253)

Critical geopolitics is distinguished by its problematization of the **logocentric infrastructures that make "geopolitics" or any spatialization of the global political scene possible**. It problematizes the "is" of "geography" and "geopolitics," their status as **self evident, natural, foundational, and eminently knowable realities**. ... In contrast to the strategic **ambition of imperial geopolitics (which is about the establishment of place or proper locus)**, critical geopolitics is a tactical form of knowledge. It works within the conceptual infrastructures that make the

geopolitical tradition possible and borrows from it the resources necessary for its deconstruction.

Ó Tuathail (1996:68)

### The first(?) twenty years

In the two decades since critical geopolitics first emerged, as the moniker for the writings of a loose assemblage of political geographers concerned to challenge the taken for **granted geographical specifications of politics on the large scale**, much has been written on the theme. The number of contributors to the discussion has increased greatly as has the variety of intellectual tasks undertaken. The theoretical resources available to be brought to bear on political matters in the discipline have expanded dramatically too with the turn to social theory and the **extension into feminism, popular culture, and most recently, affect and emotional geographies** (Ingram & Dodds, 2009; Pain, 2009; Pain & Smith 2008). The themes under the rubric critical geopolitics continue to appear in the disciplinary journals and elsewhere; critical geopolitics is clearly flourishing even if there is nothing close to a consensus on what the term designates or how these matters are to be studied. It may now only be, as Ó Tuathail (in press) suggests, a convenient

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fiction; in Mamadouh's (in press) phrasing, it certainly has an identity problem.

The geopolitical circumstances have also changed in the last two decades (Dalby, 2008a). In the aftermath of the cold war first, and more recently in the aftermath of the events still simply called 9/11, the political world is no longer divided into geopolitical blocs in the sense understood from the late 1940s until the late 1980s. War has apparently morphed into something "new" and the geographies of violence are now apparently very different as human insecurities spill over traditional boundaries. Yet, as Gregory (2004) has so eloquently shown, drawing on Edward Said's work (Said, 1978), the Orientalist concerns with imperial visions and the imaginative geographies at the heart of contemporary architectures of enmity have reappeared again in contemporary Western narratives about the Middle East in particular.

Through the early days of "critical geopolitics" a tension between scholarly practices and political commitments was obvious. The initial provocation implicit in the term critical geopolitics is now in danger of proliferating to such an extent that the term simply becomes a synonym for contemporary political geography. Challenging the mappings of danger used to legitimate political power remains a scholarly task worth doing just as it was in the 1990s (Campbell, 1998); whatever else might now fly under the label "critical geopolitics" the argument in this paper asserts that, if it is to have any coherence within the discipline, it is still about trying to challenge militarist mappings of global space and to help render Yves Lacoste's much cited statement "La Géographie, ça sert, d'abord, à faire la guerre" no longer the case.

However, as the texts and analyses have proliferated in recent years, the focus on critique, deconstruction and strategic discourses, summarised in the epigraph from Gerard Toal's key book above, has been diluted and stretched as the label "critical geopolitics" has been applied to numerous matters of war, politics, culture, representation, identity, economy, resources, resistance, gender, development, fear, emotional geographies and related matters. In the process the function of critical geopolitics specifically as critique of the geographical discourses used in legitimizing violence, foreign policy and military strategy, whether in the formal texts, or the more practical and popular forms that Hewitt (1983) highlights above, frequently gets lost. The proliferation of scholarly research on numerous things loosely related to identity, war, militarisation and fear attests to a healthy disciplinary concern with many pressing human priorities, but, as the intense discussion of all this at the University of Durham conference on "Critical Geopolitics at 20" in September 2008 attests, how all of this might be understood specifically as critical geopolitics, isn't necessarily clear. In light of this discussion the rest of this paper offers a series of reflections on the debate loosely clustered around three themes.

First, pondering the scope of the term critical geopolitics the paper looks back briefly over twenty years of scholarship reflecting on the shifting agendas of critical geopolitics. Key to the argument is the simple but unavoidable point that critical geopolitics is about challenging how contexts are constructed to justify violence. But, with the recent revival of concerns with war and peace across the discipline recently, it is now useful to be more precise about the scope and purpose of critique applied to geopolitics specifically, if not to militarism and war generally. This coupled to Sparke's (2005, 2007) problematization of geography, and his suggestions that post-foundational themes are key to ethical scholarship, an argument that builds in part on the earlier insights of the critical geopolitics literature, implies that most of the discipline should have a similar critical ethos. This is especially clear in discussions of war and non-violence. Specifying a distinct sub field of critical geopolitics, and putting it in the context of both the discipline and the larger changing context of global politics is ever more difficult it

seems, but the reasons for critique remain compelling even as social science agendas change.

Second, following on from this point, and from Jones and Sage's (in press) discussion, self-reflection on our own identities as academic geographers, the practical matters we turn our scholarly attention to, and the wider audiences beyond the discipline we seek to address, all need attention. Where geopolitics happens, and who participates in its practices is not necessarily as self evident as it might seem. Militarization and the proliferation of security discourses since 9/11 has made many daily practices within state bureaucracies and elsewhere part of geopolitics. But to focus only on these practices is always in danger of diverting attention from military matters, grand strategy and the geographies of resistance from peripheral places in what is now frequently called asymmetric warfare. Focusing on the geography of such violence could greatly facilitate dialogue with critical security studies in particular and larger academic debates about war and strategy more generally.

Finally, thinking about the future, and what critique might have to offer, this paper suggests that the links between global environmental change and security now offer a framework that links the discipline's traditional concerns with nature much more directly to the "spatial" tradition which has been the focus in most of the critical geopolitics literature. Here critical work on environment and development links to the future tasks of critical geopolitics, a synthesis that is much more pressingly urgent now, than when the environmental security discussion appeared in the early 1990s (Dalby, 1992; Detratz & Betsill, 2009). But in so far as these things are now articulated in the terms of climate security, or the security threats from migrations and weather events, these too often reprise earlier Malthusian discourses of imperial administration. Now, however these explicitly connect violence to the key issues of which societies threaten what where, and how such threats are once again represented in geopolitical tropes in the Anthropocene.

### Critique in context

The initial editorial formulations of the co-edited publications on critical geopolitics in the 1990s (Dalby & Ó Tuathail, 1996; Ó Tuathail & Dalby, 1998, 1994) deliberately tried to encourage political and methodological pluralism to open up new ways of thinking about the geo in politics and the politics of geography. From the beginning there were concerns about disrupting the hegemonic practices of statecraft, challenging the taken for granted specifications of the world in various mappings by elites and by academics (Dalby, 1990; Ó Tuathail, 1986; Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992). The political purpose of all this was initially a challenge to American power and the military use of it in the cold war. The identities mobilised in that struggle were a key focus for analysis (Sharp, 2000). But critical geopolitics also looked to the geographical knowledges invoked in how places were specified as having certain characteristics either making them amenable to certain modes of governance, or in some cases "requiring" certain of modes of conduct, in such places as Antarctica (Dodds, 1997).

After the cold war critical geopolitics flourished in the 1990s when the geopolitical divides were fluid and the binary logics of nuclear strategy and fears of a "central war" were no longer so obviously relevant to many situations. The metropolitan debates about global security shifted the focus of danger from the Soviet Union to matters of development and insecurity in the fringes of the global political economy. New insecurities were posited as dangerous and discourses of wild zones and failed states intruded on the discussions of security in many policy-making bureaucracies (Ó Tuathail & Luke, 1994). These formulations were suddenly very much more urgent on September 12th 2001. Mapping dangerous

places once again got the attention of military cartographers. Now these places were known through satellite surveillance systems and coded with GIS coordinates which all too easily turn into target sets just as soon as social relations are rendered a matter of war (Galgano, 2006). The whole planet is potentially a battlefield in the “global” war on terror, and hence a target set as Gregory (2006a) and Graham (2004, 2010a, 2010b) in particular have repeatedly reminded us of late.

Simultaneously critical geopolitics proliferated into discussions of Iraq and Bosnia (Ó Tuathail, 2003, 2005), cultures and the identities constructed in the discourses of geopolitics (Dittmer, 2005; Hannah, 2006; Sharp, 2000), the historical dimension of geopolitical traditions (Dodds & Atkinson, 2000), into movie criticism (Dodds, 2003; Power & Crampton, 2007), and crucially into how gender matters in all these things (Hyndman, 2001, 2004). The recent appearance once again of geographical publications relating to war and militarism (Cowen & Gilbert, 2008; Flint, 2005; Graham, 2004; Gregory & Pred, 2007; Kobayashi 2009; Woodward, 2004) raises questions about the specificity of critical geopolitics in this larger scholarship. Of late Agnew’s (2003, 2009a) work in particular might be understood to be critical geopolitics but he doesn’t usually situate his work as such. Recently he has also noted that there are various precursors to the literature of the last two decades, which with the benefit of hindsight might now too be termed critical geopolitics (Agnew, 2009b)! Using critical geopolitics as a label to encompass so many things has, it seems, in the last few years, led to a distracting dilution of its original purpose concerning the writing of global space, and a lack of clarity as to how to proceed.

The debate about in what sense all this is “critical” loosely parallels debates within the wider geography discipline (Blomley, 2007) as well as in larger intellectual discussions concerning the place of the academy in a globalised neo-liberal world in light of contemporary social theory which explicitly problematizes foundations. This is especially interesting given that the larger discussions of critical geographies often simply ignore the geopolitics altogether (see Bauder & Engel-Di Mauro, 2008). How all this contributes to geography for peace rather than for war (Kobayashi, 2009; O’Loughlin & Heske, 1991), is, well, complicated.

From very different perspectives Megoran (2008) and Kelly (2006) have posed pointed questions about critical geopolitics’ ethico-political purpose in general and more specifically the questions of non-violence and possibilities of emancipation. The newer literature has also pointedly raised the issue of the scholarly limitations that come with a narrow focus on foreign policy discourse, and likewise raised the questions of the connections between critique and political activism (Koopman, 2008). Now too the geopolitical gaze in Western capitals has once again turned its attention to matters of environment and discussions of the security implications of environmental disruptions, and climate change in particular (Busby, 2008). The human costs of disruption, and the possible political dislocations of mass migration and other coming disruptions are on the agenda posing new agendas of danger, and mappings of fear that are worthy of the attention of a new generation of geographers. The links between geopolitics and human insecurity, traced by feminist analysts of the violence written on women’s bodies (Hyndman, 2001, 2004), are now directly linked to the issues of borders and migration and the possibilities of escape in the face of imminent danger (Franke, 2009).

This focus on how geopolitics plays out in particular places links to Thrift’s (2000) frequently cited argument that critical geopolitics leaves out “the little things”. Thrift had two criticisms of critical geopolitics. First, critical geopolitics is apparently mesmerized by texts to the exclusion of the sociology of power. Which leads to the second apparent problem – the failure of critical geopolitics to deal with matters of embodiment and the actual functions of the clerks

and secretaries, the functionaries of foreign ministries and defence departments who actually make foreign and military agencies operate. In suggesting that texts are merely texts, rather than discourses embedded in the practices of security with all their multitudinous representations of places as sources of threats requiring military action and practices of security, Thrift misrepresents the purpose of the critique. Thrift wants critical geopolitics to do all sorts of things, but not it seems, engage in the critique of the reasoning practices of intellectuals of statecraft, whether in terms of formal geopolitical reasoning, or the more practical versions in media and political discourse.

In diverting attention from the political purpose of critique to the practical lived experiences of people in bureaucracies and the non-representational aspects of text and identity production, Thrift also facilitates the traditional modes of doing geography, field work, ethnography, interviews and giving voice to many who are not usually heard. But in doing so the engagement with the rationalisations of military power and the practices of mapping that legitimize military action, are abandoned. This may be an engagement with geopolitics very loosely understood, but it is not the “tactical” form of knowledge that challenges and deconstructs the imperial justifications of violence that Gerard Toal discusses in the epigraph to this paper. While Thrift (2000) may have no interest in tackling the conceptual infrastructure of military violence, in abandoning this critical edge his suggested agenda eviscerates the political purpose of critical geopolitics precisely as Macdonald (in press) suggests by leaving out the “big things”.

### Violence, war, critique

But it was a “big thing” that got much of this discussion started in the first place in the 1980s. War and the cultures of imperialism that legitimated foreign “interventions” were Gerard Toal’s starting point (Ó Tuathail, 1986), and a theme that Megoran (2008) has raised again in terms of the relationships of geographical critique to the morality of warfare. In the process he has issued what amounts to an invitation to discuss much more explicitly the crucial question of violence and how those of us who write critical geopolitics situate ourselves in this regard. Focusing on Gerard Toal’s discussion of Iraq (Ó Tuathail, 2003) and Bosnia (Ó Tuathail, 2005) he effectively poses the question of whether Toal is, to use the phrasing from his first paper (Ó Tuathail, 1986), “practicing geopolitics” rather than “exposing” its violence.

The suggestion Megoran (2008) makes is that Toal effectively operates within the categories of just war theory and as such falls prey to the logics of state violence implicit in the theory. But if one is to venture into practical politics and take stands on particular instances of state violence these pitfalls await all practitioners. In so far as the world is divided into spatial entities competing for power, and willing to use violence or the threat thereof to gain their ends, such logics play out. Of course as Megoran makes clear, spatial entities don’t compete. Functionaries and politicians within bureaucracies do and the reification of their actions in spatial tropes remains a powerful geographical sleight of hand that requires continuous critical commentary from us all.

What Megoran (2008) doesn’t do in his pointed raising of the possibilities of non-violence is push his analysis of realism to the conclusion that operating within an ontology of structural anarchy, of rival spatial units arbitrated ultimately by violence, is doomed to the tragedy of the eternal return of war. The logic of clashing rival autonomous entities arbitrated by violence runs through the neo-realist approach to international relations just as much as it runs through the cultural logic of the National Rifle Association in the United States. The “neo-realist approach” to international relations and the National Rifle Association share more than the acronym

NRA; they share an ontological presupposition of competitive and potentially antagonistic autonomy combined with technological force as the solution to political difficulties. In the world of nuclear superpowers it was quite clear two decades ago that this wasn't "realistic" as a long-term mode of security for anyone on the planet.

The 1980s discussions of nuclear winter (Greene, Percival, & Ridge, 1985), and the immediate climate change that a central nuclear war would create, got attention in many places; coupled to the Chernobyl disaster it was part of the shakeup of the Soviet system in the 1980s. The Gorbachev innovations in "new thinking" concerning security recognized that the nuclear standoff was far too dangerous a game to play and set out to defuse the confrontation and manage international rivalries in a manner designed to remove the danger of crisis escalation (McCwire, 1991). The tragedy is that American foreign policy makers, wedded to the ontology of clashing entities, interpreted the subsequent implosion of the Soviet Union as a victory and a confirmation of their superiority and ideological rectitude. In the process the wisdom showed by the Soviet leaders in recognising the necessity of defusing an impossible standoff, and thinking anew about security in a fragile biosphere, was swept aside. Numerous possibilities of a politics of international cooperation were precluded in the West as the financial shocks of neo-liberalism humbled and humiliated former Warsaw Pact rivals (Wedel, 1998), and lead to the reinvention of numerous political identities in Eastern Europe (Kuus, 2007).

The possibility of other political games, other modes of living together is what the non-violence argument is about and it is tied directly into challenging the assumption of clashing autonomies as the ontological condition of our times. More specifically it is precisely about disputing the assumptions of war as necessarily the ultimate arbiter of these rivalries with all the violence that goes with that assumption; this is the cartographic specification of a pervasive architecture of enmity that underlies international relations thinking and many Orientalist tropes too as Gregory (2004) reminds us. Geographical sensitivities are an especially good way into these discussions and critical geopolitics has to be about these arguments if it is to tackle the legitimations of violence that explicitly concern Megoran (2008), and at least implicitly concern the rest of us. All this becomes even more complicated when the logic of just war thinking is extended into discussions of humanitarian intervention and international terrorism; the spatial categories of which simply don't fit into neat Westphalian boxes (Williams, 2008).

Much of the contemporary discussion is difficult precisely because neither the Westphalian geographical imaginary, nor the assumptions that it is possible to draw distinctions between combatants and civilians, the logic of much of the Geneva convention system and the rules of warfare, apply to interventions or counter-insurgency struggles. As Gregory (2006a, 2006b) shows us in detail, the military logics used in training high-technology contemporary militaries evacuate people for the landscapes, reducing terrain to target sets. In doing so it seems to me essential to take the geographical formulations in these arguments seriously and use these as the starting points for analyzing how these discursive formations work. It also seems important to understand how these discussions play out in popular culture, in particular how moral spaces are formulated in the imperial logics of warrior identities (Dalby, 2008b). It is also important to understand the practical geopolitical reasoning of policy makers and the writings of the journalists who legitimize these practices.

Geopolitics works in all these places and hence is worth tackling in many genres; this is precisely what the proliferation of critical geopolitical analyses have been doing in this decade, and in that sense at least, this critical work has become the normal way of doing geographical scholarship. All this is premised on the

assumption that war as either a tool of policy or a permanent social relation is unethical, that in the long run in a small biosphere that humanity is rapidly destabilizing, nuclear weapons and strategies to use them are untenable. In Burke's (2007) terms we all need to start from formulations of an ethical peace rather than from assumptions that war is in some senses and circumstances just. Doing so requires tackling the big hard questions about violence, questions which were made more pressing of late by the insistence by the Bush Administration that the most powerful state on the planet is at war, in an aggressive "long war" as part of its struggle to end tyranny on the planet (Dalby, 2009a; Rogers, 2008). While officially that language of war was abandoned by the new administration in Washington in 2009, many of its practices are very persistent, especially in Afghanistan.

### Emotional geopolitics and popular culture

War is about fear, revenge, violence, and as Hewitt (1983) put it, "the dangerous dialectic of place attachment". These themes are back in the discussion again, but this time with the added theoretical impetus of new work from various disciplines (see Protevi, 2009) on affect and emotion (Pain, 2009). The focus on affect and the emotions of violence (Ó Tuathail, 2003) link numerous disciplines to the logic of political discourse, considerably enriching the earlier discussions of identity in popular geopolitics. The recent extensive analysis of militarism with its multiple mappings of war and danger in popular culture (Cowen & Gilbert, 2008; Dittmer, 2005; Gregory & Pred, 2007; Hannah, 2006; Ingram & Dodds 2009; Pain & Smith, 2008) have lead to a focus on popular geopolitics that runs in parallel with the literature that explicitly engages cinema and contemporary practices of violence (Shapiro, 2009) and also leads to analyses of movies and the geopolitical settings invoked in popular entertainment (Dittmer, 2005; Power & Crampton, 2007; Sharp, 2000). But it is frequently not exactly clear how this engagement with fear, and the lived experiences of people in various dangerous contexts, necessarily connects to the problematization of the discourses used to legitimate the practices of violence that concern "emotional" geographies, only some of which appear to be about big scale geopolitics.

Most recently these textual themes have been complemented by looking at the reception of key movies, examining online movie databases where movies are ranked by audiences and discussed at length on line (Dodds, 2006; Dittmer & Dodds, 2008). The Internet also facilitates cross-cultural comparisons where the locations of contributors are known and allows analysis of the links to a range of geopolitical representations, as Adams (2007) has shown in analysing French responses to recent American elections. Here the popular understandings of geopolitics do seem to play into political decisions. This concern is also one of the reasons for the recent focus on fictional representations of apocalyptic religious themes of prophecy and widespread American beliefs that the world is entering the "end times" and will soon see warfare and tribulation predicted in various biblical texts (Dalby, 2010a; Dittmer, 2009). This matters in so far as it facilitates particular American foreign policies justified by religious rather than geopolitical calculation (Dittmer & Sturm, 2010; Sturm, 2006).

Such contemporary popular formulations frequently rely on geographical oversimplifications and repetition of simple story lines and shocking media images to construct what Debrix (2008) calls "tabloid geopolitics". "Tabloid geopolitics is the form taken by the medium and its discourse, particularly in the United States, in the early twenty-first in matters regarding national security, the survival of the state (the United States first and foremost), war, and global terror (Debrix, 2008: 5). Simple morality tales combined with perpetual fear about all manner of things play out in television

talk shows and documentaries as well as fiction. They are reprised chillingly in the 2009 South African movie “District 9”. Such themes have also led to some of the most famous parodies and spoofs of danger and its responses in popular culture in the Zombie genre where entertainment is, as in the movie “Fido”, sometimes also profound commentary on geopolitics and the practices of “security” (Molloy, 2009).

The current discussion of audience reception, fandom and how readers and viewers interpret movies and texts extends the analysis of critical geopolitics further in another useful direction, and offers considerable possibilities for critical engagement with the framing of larger political debates (Dittmer & Dodds, 2008; Dodds, 2006). The particular forms of violence that plague our planet are legitimated by numerous narratives, but the geographical specifications of insecurity remain key to understanding how others are rendered threatening and how “the dangerous dialectic of place attachment” is used to facilitate sacrifice at home and destruction abroad to once again use Hewitt’s (1983) terms. Here the links between the current discussions of popular geopolitics and the larger discussions of politics and discourse come into play. Geographers are called to tell other stories, the possibilities of re-crafting narratives of identity to facilitate cooperation rather than perpetuating the neo-colonial architectures of enmity (Gregory, 2004). It is about much more than texts; securitization is also very much about tele-visual images and the larger cultural productions of danger (Williams, 2003).

Thus, as numerous writers have recently begun exploring, danger works in numerous cultural contexts, and resisting the seductions of security discourse are not easy, especially where questions of violence within states, families and work places are directly engaged (Pain & Smith, 2008). What is especially difficult is to link the common perceptions of danger, their emotive aspects and political expressions with the larger matters of geopolitics and grand strategy. Foreign policy discourse is both obviously a part of popular culture, when the tabloid realist morality tales are scripted in terms of safe places and dangerous places, but also in the form of formal geopolitics, an apparently arcane discourse distant from the lived lives and experienced realities of those not directly involved in its production and circulation (Morrissey, 2010). But understanding how this arcane discourse reproduces worlds requiring violence, and maps them using geographical formulations, was key to the initial impetus of critical geopolitics.

Neither the analysis of popular culture, nor the critique of strategic discourse offers an immediate set of political strategies to protestors on the streets, although many protestors against the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 understood the importance of geographical critique by writing the question “How did our oil get under their sands?” on their placards. Analysing the strategies of protestors, and the practices of numerous resistance movements, is also a matter of geographical analysis these days (Cumbers, Routledge, & Nativel, 2008; Koopman, 2008), but how this connects to the finer points of geographical representation in strategic discourse remains difficult to portray. But there is no good reason to suggest that geopolitical critique only operates in the streets. As Klein (1994) suggested clearly, challenging the logic of war, deterrence theory and geopolitical practices of violence is also a matter of challenging the hegemonic knowledge codified in security studies and in the logics of strategic discourse.

Much remains to be done here; the critical geopolitics arguments are not taken up widely in international relations (Mamadouh, *in press*) where the contemporary critical thinking there mostly ignores the geographical literature (Dalby, 2009b), even when it explicitly thinks about contextualisation as key to security culture (Williams, 2007). Critical security studies is one very obvious venue for further interdisciplinary engagement (Booth, 2005; Dalby, 2010b). These themes have all become more pressing

as the world finally takes note of the potential disruptions of climate change and links questions of security explicitly to environmental concerns and to matters of infrastructure and the increasingly artificial contexts of urban vulnerabilities (Dalby, 2009c; Graham, 2010a).

Culture is unavoidably about the construction of the “we” who are rendered insecure and focusing on this is essential to understanding the contexts which are invoked in discourses of danger that vehiculate strategic studies and invocations of endangered entities requiring violence to secure them (Williams, 2007). The point of such excursions into the realms of “culture” is to reiterate the importance of understanding the assumptions that structure the identities in play in contemporary geopolitical discourse. It emphasizes the urban liberal consumer as the writer of environmentalist tracts and of social science and the necessity of directly engaging this culture in discussions of the future (Hulme, 2008, 2009).

Understanding this “positionality” of social scientists as urban residents is key to reimagining the possibilities of acting ethically in a biosphere where security is usually understood in spatial tropes, despite the fact that it is frequently about circulations of various kinds (see Foucault, 2007), and where the assumption of nature as external to humanity structures political discussions. Critical geopolitics has much more yet to do in imagining future ecological possibilities, challenging the contemporary imagination to think in terms of dwelling sensibly in a small biosphere, rather than appropriating an external earth to perpetuate international rivalries (Carmody & Owusu, 2007; Klare, 2008). Thus in this formulation the geo in geopolitics becomes a changing biosphere, not a series of cartographic designations of competing rival states. This requires a strategy that is very different from classical geopolitics and the assumptions that eternal enmity is the fate of humanity (Kearns, 2009). Thomas Hobbes and John Locke have dominated the geographical imagination for far too long.

### Grand strategy and geopolitics

Heroism is now, in the aftermath of 9/11, being rearticulated in terms of combat, violence and various codes of the warrior (Dalby, 2008b). But, and this is a key point, in the discussion of human security and resistance to contemporary imperial violence, it is also being rearticulated in terms of civil society activists, peacemakers and protestors of various political affiliations (Kaldor, 2007a). Many of these co-exist uneasily with development workers, neo-liberal projects of economic incorporation into the circuits of capital, the extension of the rule of particular forms of modernity, United Nations relief efforts, the proliferation of medical initiatives and much else, but the geography is very much more complicated than the simplistic formulations of the great divide between community in sovereign spaces and potentially violent relations between states that has structured so much international relations thinking and the discourses of security for so long (Duffield, 2007).

As Kaldor (2007b) suggests, in part what has been happening over the last couple of decades is that the geography of warfare has been changing. The discussions of just war theory are complicated by the fact that the rules were devised mostly for inter-state warfare of the European post-Westphalian variety, a geopolitical context that has in many ways been superseded by a more complex series of geographical connections within and across the boundaries of states and the identities of nation that are supposedly contained by state borders. Where this complicated geography is reduced to a matter of warfare understood in terms of the high-technology kinetic action that has shaped American military doctrine in particular in the last few decades, the kind of violence that Gregory (2006a, 2006b) has repeatedly condemned in recent essays, is the result. This is clearly a reinvention of many aspects of

imperial warfare but it is crucial to note that this is being conducted by forces designed to combat other conventionally organised professional military organizations rather than a military designed for counter-insurgency efforts (Dalby, 2009a).

Ironically, as Beier (2006) notes, it is precisely the supposed accuracy of the new generations of “smart” weapons, with their ability to precisely target individuals, which has made “surgical” strikes a tool of statecraft for America. The earlier area bombing and widespread collateral damage that would result from using nuclear or large scale carpet bombing, Second World War style (Hewitt, 1983) or Vietnam style, clearly suggested a disproportionality to the violence which made a repeat of the destruction of Hanoi or Cambodia, unlikely as a political strategy. But the supposed benefit of the new smart bombs is that they could be used as a precision counter force weapons, or even more directly as a political decapitation strategy, as the failed attempt to kill Saddam Hussein in the prelude to the invasion in March 2003 suggested.

In terms of imperial pacification the removal of opposition, whether heads of states in Belgrade or Baghdad, or al Qaeda operatives in villages in Somalia, Yemen or Afghanistan, or on a highway in the fictional version in the movie *Syriana*, by the use of airborne munitions, offers a series of technical practices that change the notion of warfare implicit in the logics of just war theory. They do so in part because the technology of global surveillance and capabilities of smart weapons requires a geography that isn't a matter of state boundaries, sovereignty and violence between organized armies on both sides. War and policing have merged in a violent mode of security that no longer makes distinctions between inside and outside, policing inside, and war outside, states (Hardt & Negri, 2004).

Much of the difficulty of specifying the war on terror, and subsequently the long war has arisen precisely from the inadequate geographical vocabulary available to describe contemporary asymmetric warfare (Thornton, 2007). Combined with the obviously inappropriate military structure and doctrines that long before abandoned teaching counter-insurgency warfare, the war on terror once again emphasises the problems of fighting the last war. The reasons why the war on terror was specified as war are a complex cultural and political phenomenon, but once it was so specified the knowledge practices brought to bear were ones of targets, battle spaces and regime change, rather than international diplomacy, criminal investigations, arrests, trials and the exercise of justice (Elden, 2007). Revenge narratives fed neatly into scripts of fear, and the imprecise geographies of danger have subsequently led to all the pernicious social pathologies of wiretaps, prison camps, extraordinary rendition and the remilitarization of international politics. The reduction of the complexity of the situation to a few verities is part of the story (Kaplan, 2008), but so too is the appropriation of quasi-religious themes to attempt to remake the Middle East (Gray, 2008).

All these matters need much more attention from critical geopolitics; they will be all the more efficacious in so far as these investigations explicitly link geopolitics to grand strategy. This is in many ways closer to Kelly's (2006) rearticulation of what he calls the classical understanding of geopolitics in terms of the viewpoints of foreign policy makers concerning other states than some of the critical literature acknowledges. In Dueck's (2004: 512) terms “grand strategy” involves a self-conscious identification and prioritization of foreign policy goals; an identification of existing and potential resources; and a selection of a plan which uses these resources to meet those goals.” All of this is done in terms of the context for particular states and it is here that geopolitics provides the discursive context for grand strategy. In so far as the geographic designations of the context for policy remain at the heart of the intellectual exercise of geopolitics, it remains necessary to link this

to the strategic arguments if the critique of contemporary foreign policies is to be effective (Morrissey, 2010).

But it will, it seems, do so in the context of a changing cartography of danger that cannot rely on blocs, fronts and regions to specify dangers. As MacDonald (2007, in press) shows clearly it will have to think about the macro context of military affairs and the militarization of orbital space just as much as it thinks about the local topographies of Southern slums and urban battlefields (Graham, 2010b). But none of this will be effective as a contribution to thinking about peaceful geographies if it doesn't directly tackle the assumptions of war as “the permanent social relation” of our times to use Hardt and Negri's (2004: 12) phrasing. The specification of the world as a terrain “in need” of violence is directly related to the invocation of war as the appropriate policy option. If geography is to be a discipline for peace, thinking through the politics of non-violence and the ethics of security, these points will need constant attention in the next twenty years, whether the scholars who do these things choose to label their work “critical geopolitics” or not.

### Anthropocene geopolitics

As climate change and numerous other ecological themes refocus attention on the biospheric context of humanity, and become part of the discourse of international politics once again, but this time with a focus on “climate security” it seems that if we are to take Sparke's (2007) arguments about a post-foundational ethic seriously as geographers, we do need to tie his concerns not only to matters of identities and spaces, but to the other major traditional theme of geography too, matters of nature, environment and the biosphere as the home of humanity. While much of the discussion of social nature, of hybrids and cyborgs, commodity chains and animal geographies has updated these themes, at the largest scale, that of the geopolitical, matters that concern us here, much more work remains to be done on these themes. Little in this theoretical literature has engaged the current discussions of earth system science specifically, or the larger discussion of global environmental change more generally. Where sovereign power and biopower meet directly, security is intensely contested (de Larrinaga & Doucet, 2008), but the geopolitical dimensions of this remain underdeveloped. Even the discussions of biopolitics and war have yet to explicitly engage climate change and modes of life in that context (Dillon & Reid, 2009).

How such things are rendered in culture, broadly understood, could link the critical geopolitics agenda directly to the discussion of the central themes of the discipline (Hulme, 2008). This is relevant not least because, as in the small-scale analyses of hybrids, animals and cyborgs, at the biggest scale of the biosphere we are obviously now in a situation where because of global changes wrought by industrial humanity the biosphere itself is now in many ways a hybrid entity. The first casualty of earth system science (Steffan et al., 2004) is the assumption, which so frequently underlies environmentalist thinking, that some notion of untouched, because unpolluted, nature is the basis for an “environmental” ethics. The assumptions that structure “deep ecology”, those of pristine nature as intrinsically valuable and the source of ethical conduct, are radically challenged by the ontologies of interconnection that contemporary ecology has now made unavoidable. Marxists (Smith, 2008) have long understood these points in general, but the new holistic literature on earth systems adds compelling arguments to understanding nature as produced.

The premises of eco-feminism, of women as the givers of life with consequent intrinsic connections to nature (Salleh, 2009), are frequently belied these days by the modes of consumption that structure the automobile based modes of suburban homemaking, or the justifications for purchasing large gas guzzling SUVs in terms of

security and safety (Campbell, 2005). The problem here is, in part, with the frequent aestheticization of environmental sensibility and its incorporation into discourses of hygiene, modes of practice that are so frequently very violent operations of cleansing, the use of biocides and radical moves of separation in tropes of quarantine. Likewise, with the appropriation of virtue to suburban domesticity, while forgetting the consequences of the modes of consumption that make such “lifestyles” possible, political connections are obscured (Paterson & Dalby, 2009). The lengthy commodity chains, at the heart of the trading patterns of contemporary empire that make these modes of being possible, are essential to urban existence (Dauvergne, 2008). As noted above it is precisely that urban life which produces academic texts about international relations and global rivalries based on liberal assumptions of autonomy and rights. Now these are getting connected once again to Malthusian tropes of threats from migrants, and the need to secure modernity from the disruptions of climate change and numerous biological threats (Hartmann, Subramaniam, & Zerner, 2005).

Instead of our long disciplinary history of providing the tools of colonization, the surveys, grids, and mappings of enclosure and expropriation (Blomley, 2003), we as geographers might take Sparke's (2005, 2007) **post-foundational ethic** as our guiding principle and collectively challenge the taken for grantedness of these practices in a critique that grapples with the violence and transformations we have unloosed in the biosphere. This is especially important in the circumstances of our increasingly artificial existence in the urbanized world of the **Anthropocene** where we are collectively remaking our fate in ways that render traditional notions of a separate nature or an external environment untenable premises for discussing the earth as humanity's home (Dalby, 2009c). Linking the spatial and natural themes in the discipline puts the most basic questions of politics at the heart of geographical considerations. Are we then to understand ourselves as on earth, squabbling over control of discrete territories and threatening massive violence to our putative rivals in other sovereign spaces, or are we to understand our fate as increasingly a matter of reorganizing a dynamic biosphere in which we all dwell?

A critical geopolitics focused on how geographical representations work as legitimization strategies for violence in the Anthropocene cannot provide a superior, correct, or truthful knowledge that answers these political questions once and for all. As Ó Tuathail's (1996) prose used as one of the epigraphs for this paper above suggests, critique can very usefully disrupt and challenge the taken for granted formulations of geopolitics. Recent disciplinary discussions imply that critical geopolitics understood in this sense is not enough; it cannot promise a better world, provide detailed plans for more peaceful, sustainable or humane modes of rule. Kearns (2008) suggests the need for a “progressive geopolitics” in part to encompass some of these themes; Koopman (2008) prefers an alter-geopolitics; Hyndman (2004) makes the case for feminist geopolitics, and an embodied politics of shared fate (Hyndman, *in press*). Mercille (*in press*) calls for a radical geopolitics that looks a lot like political economy.

All these other things undoubtedly need doing, but perhaps the time has come to recognise that **“critical geopolitics” is simply too loose a catchall category** to be of much use if it incorporates all this. Many of these things might now be more usefully done under such other rubrics. As the 2009 special issue of the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (Kobayashi, 2009) eloquently illustrates, making a more peaceful world requires much more from geographers than what has so far flown under the label of “critical geopolitics”. **Nonetheless the narrower focus on the geostrategic knowledges used to legitimize warfare, and more generally security, remains a task for geographers interested in how geography is used “for war” and how this might be changed.**

Why such tasks continue to matter is made clear once again in the June 2009 issue of *Foreign Policy* magazine where Kaplan (2009) invokes Halford Mackinder's formulations to supposedly offer a guide to the future, and in particular to what he assumes will be geopolitical rivalries in Asia. Ignoring most contemporary geographical scholarship, which is apparently irrelevant to understanding the eternal verities of war and violence, Kaplan once again provides legitimation for focusing on the past, and on rivalry and potentials for war, rather than on the pressing needs for diplomatic initiatives, cooperative ventures for regional peacemaking, not to mention collaborative efforts to deal with the inevitable consequences of such things as the disappearing glaciers in the region. This time such journalistic provocations have not gone unchallenged by geographers, as the online forum on *Foreign Policy's* website shows. Many more such interventions are clearly needed to bring the critique of geopolitics to larger audiences and challenge the geographical tropes of war. Alas, to return to the Gerard Toal's language from the epigraph above, it seems that critical geopolitics will continue to be needed for some time yet to problematize “self evident, natural, foundational, and eminently knowable realities” such as Kaplan's (2009), with all their widely read rationalisations of contemporary violence.

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