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Jason Dittmer^a; Klaus Dodds^b

^a Department of Geography, University College London, UK ^b Department of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, Surrey, UK

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Popular Geopolitics Past and Future: Fandom, Identities and Audiences

JASON DITTMER

Department of Geography, University College London, UK

KLAUS DODDS

*Department of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London,
Egham, Surrey, UK*

This short and hopefully provocative paper serves as both a retrospective of the past twenty years of critical work on so-called popular geopolitics and also an impetus for a more theoretical connection to related areas within cultural studies, such as fan studies. An overarching theme of the history of popular geopolitics has been a concern over geopolitical representation and discourse, which is only now beginning to shift towards audience interpretation, consumption and attachment. This shift in focus parallels a similar move in cultural studies made several years prior. Therefore, this paper advocates combining theories from cultural studies with empirical studies of concern to popular geopolitics to further our understanding. Specifically outlined as a possibility in this paper is the viewing of nationalism and religion as forms of fan-based identities, in that both can be understood as adherence to serial narratives. This perspective carries several corollaries regarding methodology and object of study, most notably a concern with the making of geopolitical meaning by audiences as they consume popular culture and related texts.

INTRODUCTION

Since its formal inception in the 1890s, the term geopolitics has been widely cited and circulated in Europe, North America, Latin America, East

Address correspondence to Jason Dittmer, Department of Geography, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT, UK. E-mail: j.dittmer@ucl.ac.uk

Asia and elsewhere. As readers of newspapers and popular magazines such as *Newsweek* and *Time* know, journalists and strategic analysts frequently refer to the 'geopolitics of resources', the 'geopolitics of finance' and the 'geopolitics of immigration'. In each case, even if there is little apparent awareness of an intellectual history, geopolitics is accorded recognition as a discursive resource, able to generate insights into the geographical and resource dimensions of world politics.¹ *Newsweek*, for example, devoted a special issue in December 2006 to the 'new geopolitics of oil' and commissioned six articles examining the growing power of suppliers such as Iran, Venezuela and Russia to shape and even determine the behaviour of other states such as China and the United States. Large states are perceived to be particularly vulnerable due not only to their expanding fuel-based economies but also to diminishing domestic supplies of oil, natural gas and coal.² Strikingly, none of the *Newsweek* contributors devoted any time to defining the term 'geopolitics'. In effect, it is assumed to refer to the 'fixed' geographies of the earth including the distribution of so-called natural resources.³

In assessing the power of this discourse that is frequently taken for granted by the media and punditry, the privileged status of geopolitical language among the intelligentsia remains instructive. As Gearóid Ó Tuathail has helpfully noted, the appeal of geopolitical discourse is not hard to discern for several reasons.⁴ First, geopolitics, for journalists and editors associated with media such as *Newsweek*, is concerned with the 'big picture' of power and danger within world politics, and related issues therein. Second, the geopolitical explanations that follow are often framed in simple geographical and political terms. It provides a straightforward explanatory framework that links, for instance, the rising energy needs of the United States with intrigue over access to Caspian Sea oil and natural gas resources and accompanying competition with China and Russia. Geographical framing is an essential element of this form of geopolitical discourse and has arguably become more so following 9/11, as the world is divided into zones (for instance, the axis of evil) and dangers identified and located therein. Those acts of identification and location contribute more generally to the production of identity/difference and help secure particular national identities. As Mat Coleman has noted in the context of the reaction of the United States government to the 9/11 attacks, "The naming of 'terrorism' provides an alien other against and through which the shape and substance of the state is clarified and subsequently barricaded, thereby targeting a clearly defined enemy rather than the state's complicity in creating the conditions for violent non-state global politicking in the first place."⁵ Finally, geopolitics is often associated with futurology and is used to predict future global schisms, whether concerned with energy competition, ideological clashes or conflicts over civilisations.⁶

For many critical writers, the power of geopolitical discourse has been considered all the more remarkable in the light of the September 11th 2001 attacks on the United States. Judith Butler has warned, with reference to American public culture, that forms of dissent are being systematically excluded in an attempt to maintain a 'climate of fear' following those airborne assaults on Washington DC and New York. As she noted, "The public sphere is constituted in part by what can appear, and the regulation of the sphere of appearance is one way to establish what will count as reality, and what will not."⁷ Echoing earlier fears of communism in the midst of the Cold War, a supine media has both readily reproduced discourses of fear and danger and encouraged US-based talk show pundits such as Bill O'Reilly to ensure that domestic citizens are educated and informed about the dangers confronting the United States.⁸ In *The O'Reilly Factor*, as François Debrix has reflected, an aggressive form of 'tabloid geopolitics' ensures that television viewers are bombarded with 'facts' about the dangers confronting the United States. O'Reilly identifies anyone daring to resist such depictions as 'subversive' and 'un-American', such as the anti-war campaigners fighting the decision to invade and occupy Iraq from March 2003 onwards.⁹ Tabloid geopolitics, in Debrix's terms, is a resourceful discursive formation and has proven well able to mutate to cover unexpected events such as the failure to find weapons of mass destruction and the ongoing bloodshed in Iraq. As O'Reilly has informed his viewers, the apparent lack of progress in Iraq should not be blamed on the Bush administration; rather it is indicative of further intrigue in the Middle East, particularly on the part of the Iranians and Syrians. So in order for Americans to feel safe, it is necessary to continue the conflict and defeat America's enemies wherever they may be located. As such, Americans are expected, if not required, to support their 'warriors' in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere.

Tabloid geopolitics is perhaps the latest manifestation of a growing interest in the role of public/popular culture in informing and shaping debates about global politics and the role of countries such as the United States. The more generic term, 'popular geopolitics' has been an object of much intellectual interest and this paper is concerned to not only review that endeavour but also to speculate on future research directions, which are now routinely represented in academic journals, textbooks and popular magazines. Unlike those contributors to *Newsweek*, however, these academic contributors are often only too aware of the intellectual history of geopolitics and the associated accusations that geopolitics aided and abetted authoritarian and fascist regimes from pre-1945 Nazi Germany to post-1945 Latin America. The enduring appeal of geopolitics, identified earlier by Ó Tuathail, should be treated with caution, as it has been apparent that public representations of power and danger have had grave consequences for those targeted as undesirable,

radical or subversive. Bill O'Reilly's relentless targeting of the anti-war campaigner Cindy Sheehan (who established a camp outside President Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas) is indicative of the power of 'tabloid geopolitics.' O'Reilly used his show and his website to mock and revile Sheehan as not only unpatriotic but also as encouraging further dissent from the 'internationalist left' against America.

This paper is intended, therefore, to be a sympathetic review of a field that has grown apace over the last two decades. The first section addresses the development of popular geopolitics with an investigation of writers such as John Agnew, Gearóid Ó Tuathail and Joanne Sharp who did much to initiate an interest in the field and later writers in political geography and the neighbouring discipline of International Relations such as Eiki Berg, François Debrix and Virginie Mamadouh who have expanded its remit with a particular focus on the popular geopolitics of the post-September 11th era.¹⁰ Second, we consider some of the outstanding lacunae and challenges confronting popular geopolitics and place specific emphasis on audiences and emotional investments. In short, it is contended that much of the literature has been unduly preoccupied with geographical representations within all kinds of popular magazines, newspapers, comics, cartoons and films while being at the same time inattentive to reception and the kind of ways in which audiences engage and make sense, for example, of media. In the second half of the paper, we suggest some future research directions, which could provide popular geopolitics with renewed impetus and long-term intellectual relevance. These research directions will advance our understanding of the roles of individual consumers in geopolitical narratives, for instance those associated with nationalist and religious geopolitics, by appropriating insights from the study of fandom by scholars of cultural studies.

POPULAR GEOPOLITICS: INSTITUTIONS, MEDIA AND REPRESENTATION

Popular geopolitics is an essential element of a broader literature associated with critical geopolitics, which has become increasingly prevalent within the sub-discipline of political geography. While we should not over-romanticise about the number of scholars working within the field of critical geopolitics, a group of mainly European and North American-based scholars was instrumental in its creation.¹¹ As two key writers, Ó Tuathail and Dalby, noted in their edited collection, *Rethinking Geopolitics*:

Geopolitics saturates the everyday life of states and nations. Its sites of production are multiple and pervasive, both 'high' (like a national security memorandum) and 'low' (like the headline of a tabloid newspaper),

visual (like the images that move states to act) and discursive (like the speeches that justify military actions), traditional (like religious motifs in foreign policy discourse) and postmodern (like information management and cyberwar).¹²

This intellectual move was predicated on a belief that existing studies of geopolitics, especially those carried out within the academy, had been insufficiently attentive to how geopolitical discourses 'saturate' popular cultures. Writing initially in the midst of the Reagan administration and the 'Second Cold War', this seemed all the more remarkable as the then President of the United States self-consciously used the language and imagery of Hollywood to project an image of the Soviet Union as a hostile power dedicated to global domination. As he told the British House of Commons in June 1982, the Soviet Union was an 'evil empire' intent on challenging the values and practices associated with the West, including the United States. Uttered in the aftermath of several Star Wars films, the reference to the 'evil empire' was not accidental and media commentators were swift to connect the Soviets to Darth Vader and his 'dark side'. Later, as Joanne Sharp noted, Reagan cited the cinematic figure of Rambo to explain what he might do in the future with regard to US foreign policy and thus demonstrate that the categories 'formal', 'practical' and 'popular' were capable of being blurred by elites and publics alike.¹³

By identifying (however cautiously) formal, practical and popular varieties of geopolitics, these pioneering writers were eager to demonstrate that a richer understanding of the subject would follow.¹⁴ In this context, formal geopolitics referred to the production and circulation of geopolitical theories and perspectives produced by so-called intellectuals of statecraft. Practical geopolitics refers to the geographical vocabularies used by political leaders in addresses to help their citizens make sense of the world. Popular geopolitics refers to various manifestations to be found within the visual media, news magazines, radio, novels and the Internet. And as the brief reference to Reagan suggested, these categories were always intended to be permeable in the sense that geopolitics 'saturated' and 'leaked' into and beyond the formal sphere of government.

Critical geopolitics aimed to question and even subvert the taken-for-granted geographical reasoning underlying those formal, practical and popular varieties. Early studies focused attention on what Ó Tuathail called 'geo-graphing' (earth-writing) and the manner in which the geographies of global politics were represented and interpreted.¹⁵ Geopolitics should as a consequence be seen for what it is – a discourse and a practice engaging in the creation of geographical relationships and orders so that global space becomes divided into simplistic categories such as good/evil, threatening/safe and civilised/barbaric. Other writers such as Simon Dalby showed how

the representation of danger in the external arena was intimately related to the disciplining of domestic political activity, which led him to concentrate on the discourses and practices of members of the highly influential Committee on the Present Danger (CPD) in the United States.¹⁶ Created in 1950, the CPD remains an active force in US domestic politics and some of its members were later to become identified with a group of neo-conservative intellectuals who have been widely credited with informing and influencing the current Bush administration. As the contemporary mission statement for the CPD notes:

Twice before in American history, The Committee on the Present Danger has risen to this challenge. It emerged in 1950 as a bipartisan education and advocacy organization dedicated to building a national consensus for the Truman Administration's policy aimed at "containment" of Soviet expansionism. In 1976, the Committee on the Present Danger reemerged, with leadership from the labor movement, bipartisan representatives of the foreign policy community and academia, all of them concerned about strategic drift in U.S. security policy and determined to support policies intended to bring the Cold War to a successful conclusion.

In both previous periods, the Committee's mission was clear: raise awareness to the threat to American safety; communicate the risk inherent in appeasing totalitarianism; and build support for an assertive policy to promote the security of the United States and its allies and friends.

With victory in the Cold War, the mission of the Committee on the Present Danger was considered complete and consequently it was deactivated.

Today, radical Islamists threaten the safety of the American people and millions of others who prize liberty. The threat is global. The radicals operate from cells in a number of countries. Rogue regimes seek power by making common cause with terrorist groups. The prospect that this deadly collusion may include weapons of mass murder is at hand.

Like the Cold War, securing our freedom against organized terrorism is a long-term struggle. The road to victory begins with clear identification of the shifting threat and vigorous pursuit of policies to contain and defeat it.¹⁷

Some of the very best work to be found within popular geopolitics explored how those geographies of danger and identity circulated through popular cultures. Joanne Sharp's study of the American magazine *Reader's*

Digest echo well those parameters identified above.¹⁸ In a series of papers and a monograph, Sharp showed how this popular magazine represented the geographies of the Cold War to American readers. It contributed to hegemonic reproductions of national identity, which meant that the United States was perceived to be an important foil against Soviet communism and its plans for global domination. Given the scale of the Cold War confrontation, *Reader's Digest* was careful to publish stories that not only reaffirmed the United States as a beacon of democracy, liberty and market capitalism but also ensured that the Soviet Union was understood as a place of repression and totalitarianism. Sharp also, as part of this investigation into the connections between geopolitics and identity, demonstrated how *Reader's Digest* was physically produced and the manner in which certain stories were chosen for inclusion in the monthly editions.

Popular geopolitics became increasingly widespread within the geographical literature in the 1990s and replicated interest in other academic disciplines in, for instance, banal nationalism.¹⁹ The narratives and representations of world politics were identified and studied in a variety of institutional and visual contexts including cinema, newspapers, cartoons, comic strips and formal architecture such as memorials and statues. One rich area of research has been in the field of cartoons and comic strips in a variety of national contexts including Britain, Denmark, Estonia, the United States and the Arabic-speaking world.²⁰ In each case, the visual and rhetorical imagery associated with the cartoon and the comic strip has been carefully analysed so that it became possible to discern how certain geographical understandings of regional and global politics were mobilised. In the case of cartoons published in the Arabic-speaking world, Falah and his colleagues showed how cartoonists used a variety of symbols and metaphors to critically expose imperialist intent, arrogance of power, realist power politics, double standards regarding the United Nations and the rule of law as well as the close relationship between the United States and Israel. These kinds of visual representations are important not only in their own right but also in the way that they contribute and challenge elite and popular geographical imaginations in the Arabic-speaking world.²¹ This includes, for example, a widespread interest in forms of conspiracy theorising, and concordant beliefs that the United States and Israel planned and executed the September 11th attacks and are determined to subjugate the Arabic-speaking world for the purpose of exploiting its natural resources.

Geographical framing and associated ideas about power, danger and identity are embedded within what would come to be called geopolitical cultures. Ó Tuathail defined the latter as follows:

All states, as recognized territorial institutions within an international system of states, have a geopolitical culture, namely a culture of conceptualizing their state and its unique identity, position and role in the

world. Geopolitical culture emerges from a state's encounter with the world. It is conditioned by a series of factors: a state's geographic position, historical formation, and bureaucratic organization, discourses of national identity and traditions of theorizing its relationship to the wider world, and the networks that operate within the state.²²

This broader conception was important because one of the implicit dangers of studying a particular institution or media form is that one is either inattentive to broader public cultures or to longer historical and geographical traditions, which are profoundly important in shaping discourses and representations of national identity and global politics. American geopolitical culture is, for example, as intensely shaped by the anti-colonial revolt against the British in the eighteenth century as it was by exposure to two World Wars and the Cold War in the twentieth century. Likewise, geographical and ideological conceptions of the United States as part of a 'New World' separated from Europe and Asia by large bodies of water unquestionably contribute to discourses and practices associated with a distinct sense of national identity and national mission. This is a point that recent analysts have made, such as Robert Kagan in his book, *Paradise and Power*.²³ Indeed, if we have a concern about some of the writing relating to post-9/11 popular or tabloid geopolitics, it stems from a neglect of longer popular geopolitical traditions, which have unquestionably influenced contemporary debates about whether the United States is an 'imperial power'. As Michael Cox has recalled:

The concept of Empire in the United States was of course first deployed by the Founding Fathers to describe a political mission linked to a geographical aspiration, in which liberty and continental expansion were intimately connected. Thus the conquest of America required a people yearning to be free, while freedom – as Frederick Jackson Turner later noted . . . demanded an ever-expanding frontier. This influential, and very American notion, combined in turn with another equally powerful set of ideas about American exceptionalism, a condition which described the obvious fact (at least obvious to most Americans) that the United States was both distinctive and superior to other nations.²⁴

In short, popular geopolitics has deepened and widened the critical geopolitical corpus even if this literature has developed unevenly. Three lacunae might be identified. First, the question of audiences is critical and there has been an acknowledgement that popular geopolitical studies have still to demonstrate in detail how and in what manner certain films, magazines and the Internet are indeed consumed. Second, there has been an over-emphasis on questions of representation at the expense of what Nigel Thrift once called 'the little things'. As Thrift recorded, "I want to suggest

that those working in geopolitics have, perhaps, taken this definition [geopolitics as a discourse] a little too literally, producing the world as discursive construction in a way which has problematic consequences for understanding *how* (and therefore why) geo-power is actually practiced. In particular, I want to suggest that this exercise in literal transcription leaves out a lot of the 'little things' – 'mundane' objects like files, 'mundane' people like clerks and mundane words like 'the' – which are crucial to how the geopolitical is translated into being.²⁵ In other words, everyday practices such as the consumption of news media and serialised popular culture need to be connected to our interest in the representational qualities of maps and other geopolitical objects.²⁶ Finally, new media associated with the Internet deserve greater scrutiny and need to be tied to the popular geopolitical corpus in the light of the growing importance of activities such as blurbs, blogging and threads using online platforms and other sites such as the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) around the world. Paul Adams's work is a really important exception here and his recent book, *Atlantic Reverberations*, is a fine study of US-French geopolitical relations, which demonstrates how:

The diffusion of electronic communication technologies ranging from the radio to the Internet has supplemented the virtual places created by books and their audiences, helping (along with international capital flows, migration and trade) to make nations leaky containers. Geopolitical discourses now reverberate in a multitude of communication spaces stretched between nations via a range of media, exacerbating tensions between national populations with different interests and worldviews but also forming ephemeral supranational communities that dissipate tension.²⁷

Most existing research has been concentrated on sources produced and consumed in Europe and North America but this is changing as new writers elsewhere engage with the Anglophone critical geopolitics literature.²⁸ We should also acknowledge the contribution of Anglophone scholars such as Nick Megoran, who has greatly enhanced understanding of Central Asia and the popular geopolitical cultures of countries such as Uzbekistan.²⁹ These three lacunae are linked through their concern with individuals, either as consumers of geopolitical texts, as practitioners of everyday life, or as producers of their own geopolitical texts. The remainder of this paper is concerned with pushing forward our theorisations of the first two lacunae, which are linked through their engagement with theories, developed in cultural studies, of audiences as the sites at which meaning is associated with geopolitical texts or practices. The third lacunae will be addressed in another paper, which explores in further detail the popular geopolitics of multimedia.

INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES, PERFORMATIVITY, AND GEOPOLITICAL IMAGINATIONS

While audiences are, in the more audience-focused formulation described above, the location of 'meaning making,' they are not infinitely empowered agents who can stretch the text³⁰ endlessly. It is useful here to turn to Fish's concept of interpretive communities³¹ as a means of theorising the process through which communication occurs. Interpretive communities refer to social collectivities that imbue similar meanings to texts, largely because they have "acquire[d] specific cultural competencies as a consequence of their particular social location. Similar readings are produced . . . because similarly located readers learn a similar set of reading strategies and interpretive codes which they bring to bear upon the texts they encounter."³² However, Fish intended this concept to refer only to divisions among academic literary critics, and not to larger collectivities. Thus, the idea of interpretive communities requires additional theorisation before it can be operationalised and applied to fandom,³³ for instance.

Livingstone has taken Fish's concept of interpretive communities and placed it in geographic context³⁴: "[I am] arguing for the fundamental importance of the spaces where reading literally *takes place*, for knowledge is produced in moments of textual encounter." Drawing from Said and others, Livingstone argues that as theory (the specific subject of his article) is mediated over distance, the range of meanings imputed to it increases. He refers to the resulting patterns as "cartographies of textual reception,"³⁵ and although mostly concerned with scientific discourse, his point is applicable to a broad range of texts. It is worth noting that these cartographies of textual reception are, like Fish's interpretive communities, very close to reifying cultural groups and treating them as static categories. However, Livingstone gives nuance to his theorisation by arguing for a "cultural geography of reading,"³⁶ which explicates the manner in which local geographic context, in the form of class, religion, politics, way of life, etc., provides the basis for variations within the larger cartographies of textual reception. Here we have edged closer to postmodern understandings of the subject as composed of multiple intersecting identities, or in this case, multiple intersecting interpretive communities: "To the extent that interpretive communities occupy material or metaphorical spaces, they fall within the arc of the cultural geography of reading."³⁷ In this sense, cartographies of textual reception can be seen as stemming from the historical creation of imagined communities³⁸ as a result of the technologies associated with print capitalism. Crosscutting cultural geographies of reading, inflected by various aspects of identity, then splinter these cartographies into various metaphorical and material spaces in which the act of reading and meaning making is undertaken.

Reading is often understood as a private act of interpretation even if new media technologies such as blogging have made it easier than ever to share one's views on a particular text. However, if readers' identities are key to their interpretive frames, then cultural geographies of reading should be viewed through the current theorisations of culture as performance³⁹ rather than as characteristic. The performance of textual consumption is itself consumed by those who witness the act or later learn of it, and this is increasingly prevalent with ever-expanding online opportunities and new media practices, such as blogging. One need only think of an academic ostentatiously proclaiming the current book on his or her bedside table, or an *American Idol* fan discussing the show at the water cooler, to see how cultural consumption is performative of culture and identity. This collapse of cultural production and consumption is particularly salient in recent theorisations of popular culture fandom, such as the work of Matt Hills on performative consumption: "My interest in the term 'performative consumption' is that it seems to hold open the matter of agency; it does not dismiss fans as dupes whose belief in their own agency is mistaken . . . , but neither does it reduce fandom to an iterated and repeated discourse in which the fan agent vanishes altogether."⁴⁰ This would seem to be an insight relevant to popular geopolitics, as geopolitical discourse toys with similar questions of agency and structure. Both cultural studies and popular geopolitics have confronted this question: how is meaning made/conveyed in the act of textual consumption?

Geopolitical imaginations are the results of subjects' attempts to make sense of the world by associating political values with various parts of that map.⁴¹ They can also be spoken of in the collective sense, in which a group of people can be said to have similar (if ultimately unique) visions of the world. These collective geopolitical imaginations (or geopolitical cultures as Ó Tuathail has termed it) are related to the cartographies of textual reception described by Livingstone in that they are the product of people who respond similarly to textual stimuli (whether literature, popular culture or world news). Just as Livingstone's cartographies of textual reception are complicated by the cultural geography of reading, attempts to identify large-scale geopolitical imaginations are destined to founder on the 'rocks' of local contexts. Indeed, consumers of geopolitical texts in their interpretive act can always choose from multiple intersecting discourses associated with various aspects of their identity.

Here the performative consumption described by Hills becomes relevant to popular geopolitics, in that it frees theorists from arguing that either subjects always consciously perform their preferred identity or that their preferred identity is performative, that is, something acted out entirely because of exposure to media and other structuring agents. Hills's "non-volitional volition"⁴² describes fan agency as a claim made by the subject at some, but not all, times. Consider the following

statement by Hills about fans of particular strands of popular culture (i.e., Elvis Presley, Star Trek, etc.)⁴³:

The 'problem' for performative theory is that fans display a type of 'non-volitional volition', which disrupts [Judith] Butler's poststructuralist separation of voluntarist 'agency' and 'power/knowledge'. Fans are 'self-absent' to the extent that that they are unable to account, finally, for the emergence of their fandom, but they are also highly self-reflexive and willfully/volitionally committed to their objects of fandom.

Accounts of Elvis impersonators and Star Trek conventions may seem distant from questions of geopolitics. However, we would argue that there is geopolitical insight to be gained from the field of fan studies. For instance, Hills points out the reversal of Butlerian performativity that can be seen in fan cultures⁴⁴:

These doubled fan claims [to non-volition and volition, in that temporal order] also seem to reverse Butler's view of the 'performative' and 'performance'; fans are 'performative' (i.e., lack voluntarism) when they describe the beginnings of their fandoms. But these beginnings are precisely points of non-iteration which *precede* any iterable fan identity. Fan voluntarism and choice is therefore not disrupted *tout court*, only in relation to specific moments of non-iteration. And when fans occupy a more comfortable iterable space of fan cultural identity, they seem able (and willing!) to claim fan agency and thus volitionally 'perform' and express their (now communal) fandom.

These insights are highly pertinent to the future development of popular geopolitics and more sophisticated understandings of audiences including fan cultures. In the case of James Bond fans, for instance, the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com) provides a rich arena for further research as to how viewers consume, discuss and dissect the twenty-one film canon.⁴⁵ It is clear that the emotional investments and dispositions displayed towards James Bond vary as some fans remain content to discuss the so-called 'Bond formula' based on exotic locations, gadgets and glamorous women while others engage in more detailed readings of the changing geopolitical storylines of the films. Despite their disagreements (and these are often publicly recorded via particular threads and on other sites officially or unofficially linked to the producers Eon Productions), one feature that unites these fans is their devotional interest in the James Bond film series. This in itself is worth further reflection and popular geopolitical studies need to better understand those fan cultures and the social, cultural and political consequences that follow therein.

FAN IDENTITIES AND THE POPULAR GEOPOLITICS OF NATIONALISM

The reversal of Butlerian performativity described earlier is useful as a hypothesis regarding the construction of individuals' national identity. Similar to fans of popular culture, most citizens cannot remember a conscious decision to be national subjects, but rather one day find themselves acting in a national manner (that is, acting performatively, such as supporting their national team during major sporting events either in person or via the television). Later, however, they actively claim that identity and consciously project it, taking pride in it after they "occupy a comfortable iterable space of [national] cultural identity."⁴⁶ This has key implications for the ways in which research is conducted on the impact of popular culture on nationalism. First, it indicates that research on audiences must necessarily be ethnographic as well, discovering the positioning of each textual consumer surveyed vis-à-vis nationalism *prior* to the experiencing of the text. While this requires a great deal of effort, the researcher will be richly rewarded not only with a deeply contextualised analysis, but also a theoretical perspective that incorporates Hills's "non-volitional volition."

The second implication of performative consumption is that, as per Livingstone, we must be more aware of the cultural geography of reading. The agency of the audience is, in many ways, structured by the space(s) in which texts are read. Thus, the audience is constrained by its social location to interpret a text using only the cultural meanings available in that location. Further, we must be aware that there are often social consequences for those who interpret texts in ways that are not locally acceptable. This attention to the cultural geography of reading is an excellent way to move theoretically into the gap between the "effects"⁴⁷ tradition and the "active audience"⁴⁸ tradition within cultural studies, and also provide a uniquely geographic niche for our scholarship within cultural studies and the humanities. It is also useful as a rebuke to the tradition in popular geopolitics, resulting from the field's political goal of liberating geographic imaginations, where geopolitical boundaries are generally seen as a negative phenomenon. Rather, we should remember that cartographies of textual reception and cultural geographies of reading are necessary resources for readers to enable their acts of interpretation. Much of the popular geopolitics literature has been focused on deconstructing texts in an effort to theorise the geopolitical imagination.⁴⁹ Perhaps a more comparative approach could begin to assess macro-scale cartographies of textual reception as well as micro-scale cultural geographies of reading. How do differently located people interpret the same text? How does local context fragment the meanings associated with a text? How do geopolitical imaginations differ as a result of these positionings?

This theoretical infusion of performative consumption and non-volitional volition from fan studies is useful as a way of broadening the horizon of popular geopolitics especially in the context of positing audience and consumption in an active and engaged sense. However, there are key differences between fan identities and national identities. Fan identities are generally viewed as degraded in society, with popular culture itself seen as entertainment that should not be taken seriously (the same perspective has, until recently, also reigned in academia). Therefore, while all but high society elites generally participate in at least one form of popular culture, actually admitting to intense pleasure gained through participation in a popular culture experience is deemed taboo. This taboo is expressed geographically, with popular culture kept at an emotional distance from the self. When someone embodies popular culture, either metaphorically through ‘excessive’ interest in some form of popular culture (e.g., quitting your job and following the Grateful Dead on tour) or through literal embodiment (i.e., impersonating characters, as in *Star Trek* conventions), that person is marginalised in society as deviant.

This is recognised in communities of fandom, which both serve as a refuge for these “deviants” to express their pleasure in popular culture and also inculcate community standards in fans regarding their public representation. For instance, Elvis impersonators are told by veterans that the best impersonators do not strive for literalism, but rather use Elvis as a cultural reference point through which to express their own personality.⁵⁰ Thus, fandom does not resort to (or desire to be) subordinate mimicry, nor is it entirely unstructured, with no cultural reference. Rather, it is performative consumption, drawing on a text but providing exogenous meaning. This stands in contrast to nationalism, which is a hegemonic collective identity and is generally not perceived as degraded by society. Indeed, it is in many places a social norm to be aspired to rather than, as in popular culture fandom, a perceived deviancy. Thus, whereas popular culture fans go to great lengths to illustrate their unique subjectivity rather than collapsing their identity into that of popular culture, nationalists perceive themselves as succeeding in their role to the extent that they embody and illustrate collective values.

Despite these differences, the conflation of fandom and nationalism can provide critical insights. By recasting the nation as a narrative⁵¹ that subjects identify with rather than a group of people who are either included or excluded, we can use concepts from serialised popular culture to interpret the processes by which national narratives are sculpted, changed, and embodied to reflect the agendas of current political actors at the expense of marginalised contemporary actors, past actors, and sometimes, historical coherence. For example, the comic book fandom term “retcon” (retroactive change in continuity) can usefully be used to describe efforts by political

actors to shape national narratives after the fact, either in micro-scale (as in the George W. Bush Administration's attempts to change the goals of the 2003 Iraq invasion from weapons of mass destruction to humanitarian concerns and the introduction of democratic governance) or in the macro-scale (as in the attempt by the editorial staff of *Captain America* comic books to excise a decade of Red-baiting episodes from the hero's past, and therefore metaphorically, from America's past⁵²). By using terminology and concepts already constructed by fans who have been analysing serial narratives such as that of the nation far longer than scholars of popular geopolitics, we can rapidly become more adept at analysing the process of national narration.

FAN IDENTITIES AND THE POPULAR GEOPOLITICS OF PREMILLENNIAL CHRISTIANITY

There has been extensive consideration in cultural studies of the notion that fandom is a form of religion,⁵³ but the question has never been reversed: is religion a form of fandom? If the question seems sacrilegious, we must direct our critical perspective to the notion described above, that popular culture is itself othered by society and debased. If the question seems ludicrous, we must direct our critical perspective to the assumption that religion is 'natural', and therefore predates popular culture fandom. Rather, if religion is instead defined as human communities built around common devotion to 'sacred' texts and figures, then perhaps we can begin to conceive of religion as early (and contemporary as well) manifestation of the phenomenon now known as fandom.

A further extension of Livingstone's cartographies of textual reception and cultural geographies of reading can be made into the realm of religious geopolitics.⁵⁴ If we examine the interpretive practices of a (heterogeneous, assuredly) group such as American premillennial Christians, we find a common cartography of textual reception (American), but a unique cultural geography of reading in that many premillennial Christians view their religious community as more important in their framing of a text than their national perspective.⁵⁵ Of course, it is unlikely that a textual consumer would be able to isolate and ignore their national perspective entirely (given the hegemony and subtlety of processes of nationalism⁵⁶), but it is certainly possible to frame the interpretive process primarily through the lens of religious belief. Geopolitical imaginations structured by this interpretive frame can be expected to vastly differ from those generated in a secular perspective. How can scholars of popular geopolitics use concepts from fandom to examine religious eschatology and its consequent geopolitical visions?⁵⁷ In terms of answering this question, we acknowledge the innovative work of Tristan Strum who noted that "if we are interested in making sense of geopolitics, we must attend to all of its influencing factors such as

how it is affected by religion and, reciprocally, how geopolitics has pervaded religion With pre-millennialism's pervading influence in American evangelical Christianity, this analysis of its geopolitical foundations is both timely and relevant considering the influence evangelical Christians have within American politics."⁵⁸

Like fandom itself, religion complicates Livingstone's framework by constituting a networked geography of information flows and exchanges rather than vast territorial cartographies of textual reception. Fandom and premillennial Christians have both harnessed the Internet to increase the scope of community which has led to a great participation in the community by less-empowered actors. In fandom this can be seen in the proliferation of fan websites and discussion lists, and for premillennial Christians it can be seen in US-based websites and discussion boards such as Rapture Ready and the Left Behind Prophecy Club. This process of time-space compression led to a further democratisation of religion,⁵⁹ as personal study (historically a priority in the evangelical community) and interpretation of the Bible now have an outlet into the broader social community.

This conflation of popular culture and religion can also be seen in the growing role of performative consumption in premillennial forms of Christianity. Indeed, the Internet has given marketers the capacity to sell goods to the large, but dispersed, Christian market segment. This has led to a movement within Christian churches to support these efforts through consumption, viewing the marketplace as one more way to evangelise. Further, the performance of consumption is seen as a ritual of commonality, with 'acceptable' popular culture passed around from parishioner to parishioner. As an example, the *Left Behind* book series⁶⁰ circulates among groups of believers, with those who do not enjoy the books still reading them as a sign of inclusion in the community.⁶¹ A key difference between premillennial Christianity and fandom (as well as between premillennial Christianity and nationalism) is that premillennial Christianity seems to follow traditional Butlerian performativity. That is, most (but not all) premillennial Christians actively remember their moment of being "born again," and perceive that as an active choice. Whereas most fans of popular culture were performative of their fandom before they performed it, premillennial Christians performed their fandom prior to internalising it and having their beliefs become performative. Still, the conceptual overlap between fandom and premillennial Christianity can provide analytical tools to help scholars of popular geopolitics understand geopolitical imaginations.

It is through the performative consumption of texts (both sacred, like the Bible, and merely 'Biblically-inspired', such as *Left Behind*) that geopolitical imaginations are sculpted. Within premillennial communities (either virtual or local) the cultural geography of reading is critical – texts are consumed in a context where meaning is disciplined and structured by the community. For premillennial Christians, as for the nationalists

described in the preceding section, it is critical for cultural artifacts to fit in with a serial narrative. If the Bible is deemed to be the unfiltered word of God (a usual belief for premillennialists), and the Bible contains an accurate description of the beginning and the end of the world (the traditional fundamentalist view of the Book of Genesis and Revelation, respectively), then a teleological narrative of humanity's origins and future is found in the Bible.

Just as nationalism can be conceptualised within popular geopolitics as a collective narrative that audiences actively participate in interpreting and performing, premillennial Christianity, because of its devotion to sacred texts as God's definitive word, can also be conceptualised as a narrative of humanity that adherents actively construct through their interpretation of sacred and 'Bible-inspired' texts. The contestation over narrative interpretation can be witnessed in contemporary debates over whether the current war in Iraq is a repeat of the Vietnam chapter in American history, as well as in debates among fundamentalists over the role of the current Iraq war in terms of shaping the probable return of Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSIONS

The above helps to show an avenue out of the methodological cul-de-sac associated with the analysis of representation. As per Nigel Thrift, scholars of popular geopolitics should complement an interest in the discursive analysis of representations with a concern for audiences and the meanings that they construct out of popular culture and related texts. In the case of nationalism, it is useful to conceptualise nations as narratives which subjects actively identify with. As such, insights from cultural studies can help us to analyse the processes by which audiences create meaning in those narratives. In particular, a comparative approach studying the differing meanings attached to similar narratives across macro-scale cartographies of textual reception could prove very fruitful. Similarly, the ethnography of consumers (both religious and secular) of religious-themed texts can provide insights into the interpretive process, allowing analysis of the impact of cultural geographies of reading on textual meaning. In this case, however, a micro-scale analysis could prove more fruitful because of the emphasis among premillennial Christians on the universalism of their texts and beliefs, which theoretically cross political boundaries (even if in reality they are inflected by national perspective). Here cultural geographies of reading are hypothesised to be more important in the construction of meaning given the communal and performative nature of consumption in this context.

The beginning of the third decade of popular geopolitics as an academic endeavour provides an opportunity to look back on what has been accomplished and to look forward to what can be done. As can be

seen, the accomplishments are many and varied; the future will surely be as dynamic. The introduction of concepts from fan studies to our analyses of nationalism and religious geopolitics, as outlined above, is intended to open up new ways of conceptualising geopolitical imaginations by shifting our analyses from questions of representation to the serial narrativity inherent to both national mythology/mission and religious prophecy. Each of these narratives provides cultural resources from which audiences construct meaning in their lives, and from which they base geopolitical decisions both large and small. Still, these research directions should be seen as two possible avenues of many; if anything can be learned from the past two decades of popular geopolitics, it is that the opportunities are wide open.

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NOTES

1. On the contested intellectual history of geopolitics and its varied national and cross-national manifestations see K. Dodds and D. Atkinson (eds.), *Geopolitical Traditions* (London: Routledge 2000).

2. *Newsweek*, 'Special Edition: Issues 2007' (Dec. 2006–Feb. 2007).

3. There is a long scholarly tradition of conceptualising geopolitics as the relationship between geographical forms such as mountains, climate and location and political structures such as states and national communities. See, for example, N. Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics* (New York: Harcourt Brace 1942).

4. See, for example, his short essay 'Geopolitics' in D. Atkinson, P. Jackson, D. Sibley, and N. Washbourne (eds.), *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts* (London: I B Tauris 2005) pp. 65–71.

5. M. Coleman, 'The Naming of 'Terrorism' and Evil 'Outlaws': Geopolitical Place Making after 11 September', *Geopolitics* 8/3 (2003) pp. 87–104.

6. For example, T. Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map* (New York: Putnam 2003) and his latest book *Blue Print for Action* (New York: Putnam 2005). For a brief if critical engagement with Barnett's futurology see G. Ó Tuathail, S. Dalby, and P. Routledge (eds.), *The Geopolitics Reader* (London: Routledge 2006) pp. 117–119 and for a longer response see S. Dalby, 'The Pentagon's New Imperial Cartography: Tabloid Realism and the War on Terror', in D. Gregory and A. Pred (eds.), *Violent Geographies* (London, Routledge 2007).

7. J. Butler, *Precarious Life* (London: Verso 2004) p. xx.

8. Bill O'Reilly is the host of *The O'Reilly Factor*, which is transmitted on the Fox News Channel. See his personal website at <<http://www.billoreilly.com/>> accessed 12 July 2007.

9. F. Debrix, *Tabloid Terror* (London: Routledge 2007).

10. It is also worth noting the helpful reviews of popular geopolitical research carried out by Virginie Mamadouh alongside her own work, for instance, on September 11th and the politics of the Internet. See V. Mamadouh, 'Geopolitics in the Nineties: One Flag, Many Meanings', *Geojournal* 46 (1998) pp. 237–253; 'Reclaiming Geopolitics: Geographers Strike Back', *Geopolitics* 4 (1999) pp. 118–138;

and '11th September and Popular Geopolitics: Websites Run For and By Dutch Moroccans', *Geopolitics* 8 (2003) p. 191–216.

11. There is still a real need for these mainly Anglophone political geographers to further connect up with other scholars in the non-West in order to ensure that this sub-field develops beyond its comfortable seats/sites. Thanks to one of the referees for reinforcing this point.

12. G. Ó Tuathail and S. Dalby, 'Introduction' in *Rethinking Geopolitics* (London: Routledge 1998) p. 5.

13. J. Sharp, 'Reel Geopolitics' in G. Ó Tuathail and S. Dalby (eds.), *Rethinking Geopolitics* (London: Routledge 1998) pp. 152–169.

14. For further overview of how this framework theoretically developed see, for instance, J. Agnew, *Geopolitics* (London: Routledge 2006).

15. G. Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics* (London: Routledge 1996).

16. S. Dalby, *Creating the Second Cold War* (London: Pinter 1990).

17. The website for the CPD including the mission statement can be found at <<http://www.fightingterror.org//mission/index.cfm>> accessed 10 July 2007.

18. The three main pieces by Joanne Sharp on the *Reader's Digest* are: 'Publishing American Identity: Popular Geopolitics, Myth and the Reader's Digest', *Political Geography* 12 (1993) pp. 491–503; 'Hegemony, Popular Culture and Geopolitics: Construction of Danger', *Political Geography* 15 (1996) pp. 557–570; and *Condensing the Cold War: Reader's Digest and American Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2000).

19. The classic text in this regard is still M. Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage 1995). Subsequently a number of political geographers have explored the notion of a 'banal geopolitics' and 'banal militarism'. See K. Dodds, 'Political Geography II: Some Thoughts on Banality, New Wars and the Geopolitical Tradition', *Progress in Human Geography* 24 (2000) pp. 119–129; J. Sidaway, 'Iraq/Yugoslavia: Banal Geopolitics', *Antipode* 32 (2001) pp. 601–609; M. Kuus, 'Love, Peace and NATO: Imperial Subject Making in Central Europe', *Antipode* 39 (2007) pp. 269–290.

20. In terms of cartoons and comics see the following three papers for an illustrative sample. E. Berg, 'Some Unintended Consequences of Geopolitical Reasoning in Post-Soviet Estonia: Texts and Policy Streams, Maps and Cartoons', *Geopolitics* 8 (2003) pp. 101–120; J. Dittmer, 'Captain America's Empire: Reflections on Identity, Popular Culture and Post 9/11 Geopolitics', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95 (2005) pp. 626–643; and K. Dodds, 'Steve Bell's Eye: Cartoons, Popular Geopolitics and the Visualisation of the War on Terror', *Security Dialogue* 38 (2007) pp. 157–178. In terms of the popular geopolitics of cinema see the collection of essays contained within M. Power and A. Crampton (eds.), *Cinema and Popular Geo-politics* (London: Routledge 2007). On the popular geopolitics of September 11th 2001 see S. Brunn (ed.), *September 11th and its Aftermath* (London: Routledge 2004). Important essays on popular geopolitics and newspapers include T. McFarlane and I. Hay, 'The Battle for Seattle: Protest and Popular Geopolitics in *The Australian Newspaper*', *Political Geography* 22 (2003) pp. 211–232. On popular geopolitics and music see C. Gibson, 'We Sing Our Home, We Dance Our Land: Indigenous Self-Determination and Contemporary Geopolitics in Australian Popular Music', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 16 (1998) pp. 163–184. On popular geopolitics and radio see A. Pinkerton, *Radio Geopolitics: BBC World Service and Britain's 'Voice around the World'*, unpublished PhD thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, UK, 2007.

21. G. Falah, C. Flint, and V. Mamadouh, 'Just War and Extra-Territoriality: The Popular Geopolitics of the United States' War on Iraq as Reflected in Newspapers of the Arab World', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96 (2006) pp. 142–164.

22. G. Ó Tuathail, 'General Introduction: Thinking Critically about Geopolitics', in G. Ó Tuathail et al., *The Geopolitics Reader* (London: Routledge 2006) p. 7. See also his summary of 'Geopolitics', in D. Atkinson et al. (eds.), *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts* (London: I B Tauris 2005) pp. 65–71.

23. R. Kagan, *Paradise and Power* (New York: Metropolitan Books 2003).

24. M. Cox, 'The Empire's Back in Town: Or America's Imperial Temptation – Again', *Millennium* 32 (2007) pp. 1–27. The quote is taken from page 8. See also the work on 'Imperial America' by Simon Dalby such as 'The Pentagon's New Imperial Cartography: Tabloid Realism and the War on Terror', in D. Gregory and A. Pred (eds.), *Violent Geographies: Fear, Terror and Political Violence* (New York: Routledge 2007) pp. 295–308.

25. N. Thrift, 'It's the Little Things', in K. Dodds and D. Atkinson (eds.), *Geopolitical Traditions* (London: Routledge 2000) pp. 380–387.

26. K. Dodds, *Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007) Chapter 6.
27. P. Adams, *Atlantic Reverberations* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2007) p. 2 and also his earlier work, for instance, P. Adams, 'Protest and the Scale Politics of Telecommunication', *Political Geography* 15/5 (1996) pp. 419–441. See also the paper by B. Warf and J. Grimes, 'Counter-Hegemonic Discourses and the Internet', *Geographical Review* 87/2 (1997) pp. 259–274.
28. For example, V. Mamadouh, '11 September And Popular Geopolitics: A Study of Websites Run for and by Dutch Moroccans', *Geopolitics* 8 (2003) pp. 191–216. .
29. See, for example, N. Megoran, 'The Critical Geopolitics of Danger in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23 (2005) pp. 565–580.
30. Here, and in the rest of the paper, 'text' is intended primarily to refer to material artifacts of popular culture, but also secondarily to practices.
31. S. Fish, 'Interpreting the *Variorum*', *Critical Inquiry* 2/3 (1976) pp. 465–85.
32. J. Radway, *Reading the Romance* (London: Verso 1987) p. 8.
33. Fandom is the term for collective identities derived from a common affinity for a specific type of popular culture, the iconic example being *Star Trek* fandom. For a perspective from the discipline of International Relations (IR) see J. Weldes, 'Going Cultural: Star Trek, State Action and Popular Culture', *Millennium* 28 (1999) pp. 117–134 and more recently J. Weldes (ed.), *To Seek Out New Worlds: Science Fiction and World Politics* (New York: Palgrave 2003). However, IR studies of popular culture and media forms such as *Star Trek* have given less specific attention to fandom and fan cultures.
34. D. Livingstone, 'Science, Text, And Space: Thoughts on the Geography of Reading', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30/4 (2005) p. 392.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 394.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 394.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 395.
38. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso 1991).
39. J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge 1990).
40. M. Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York and London: Routledge 2002) p. 159.
41. Following from D. Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Oxford: Blackwell 1994).
42. Hills attributes this concept to H. Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1988)
43. M. Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York and London: Routledge 2002) p. 159.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
45. K. Dodds, 'Popular Geopolitics and Audience Dispositions: James Bond and the Internet Movie Database', *Transactions of the Institute of the British Geographers* 31 (2006) pp. 116–130.
46. Adapted from *ibid.*
47. For example, T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso 1979).
48. For example, M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2002).
49. For instance, J. Sharp, *Condensing the Cold War: Reader's Digest and American Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2000) and J. Dittmer, 'NATO, the EU and Central Europe: Differing Symbolic Shapes in Newspaper Accounts of Enlargement', *Geopolitics* 10/1 (2005) pp. 76–98.
50. W. Henderson, *I, Elvis: Confessions of a Counterfeit King* (New York: Boulevard Books 1997).
51. H. Bhabha, 'Introduction: Narrating the Nation', in H. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge 1990) p. 1–7.
52. J. Dittmer, 'Retconning America: *Captain America* in the Wake of WWII and the McCarthy Hearings', in T. Wandtke (ed.), *The Amazing Transforming Superhero! Essays on the Revision of Characters in Comic Books, Film and Television* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishing 2007) pp. 35–51.
53. See, for instance, M. Jindra, 'Star Trek Fandom as a Religious Phenomenon', *Sociology of Religion* 55 (1994) pp. 27–51.
54. See J. Agnew, 'Religion and Geopolitics', *Geopolitics* 11 (2006) pp. 183–191 and T. Sturm, 'Prophetic Eyes: The Theatricality of Mark Hitchcock's Pre-Millennial Geopolitics', *Geopolitics* 11 (2006) pp. 231–255.
55. A. Frykholm, *Rapture Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004).

56. M. Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications 1995).

57. The remainder of this section will continue to discuss premillennial Christians, as this group has a common eschatology with important geopolitical elements, especially the belief in an apocalyptic battle to be fought (it is generally thought) in the area of the modern state of Israel; see for instance Sturm (note 54). However, the authors assert that the theoretical and methodological directions asserted in this paper could be usefully applied to any religion interested in textual interpretation and meaning.

58. Sturm (note 54) p. 232. On the influence of Evangelicals on the current Bush administration see, for instance, E. Kaplan, *With God on Their Side* (New York: New Press 2004) and D. Domke, *God Willing?* (London: Pluto Press 2004).

59. The democratisation of Christianity is an unfolding process, ostensibly begun centuries ago by Luther.

60. The *Left Behind* series has been published since 1996, and it chronicles the adventures of a group of Christians who came to the religion following the Rapture. The Rapture is what evangelical Christians call the prophesied escape of believers to heaven prior to the seven-year time of Tribulation, a series of disasters preceding the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of a millennium of peace. The books have been phenomenally successful, selling over 60 million copies and spawning prequels, children's editions, and graphic novels.

61. See A. Frykholm, *Rapture Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004).