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Empirical Verve, Conceptual Doubts: Looking from the Outside in at Critical Geopolitics

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When critical geopolitics entered German political geography, its empirical verve helped crank up a discipline which had diminished into an academic backwater. Soon, however, conceptual doubts began to supersede the initial enthusiasm with which critical geopolitics had been welcomed into political geography. Critical voices in German geography highlight the conceptual heterogeneity of critical geopolitics which engenders clashes between different, partly incommensurable epistemologies. Our paper traces the empirical and conceptual trajectory of critical geopolitics and the multifarious critique of it in German geography, before venturing to take a fresh look at poststructuralist, postcolonialist and systems theoretical approaches which, in the German context, are discussed as conceptual avenues that might usefully inform the further development of critical geopolitics.

INTRODUCTION

In German geography it was not until the end of the 1990s that the first contributions of authors taking up the critical geopolitics approach started to appear. Notwithstanding its somewhat belated reception, its critical thrust made it a most welcome vehicle for exploring a wide spectrum of themes in the field of political geography, ranging from ‘banal nationalism’ and the linguistic regionalisation of East and West in the aftermath of the

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German reunification to the analysis of representations of an increasingly malleable 'Europe' in political speeches or the media. While empirically critical geopolitics fell on fertile ground, the past few years have shown growing unease with the conceptual foundations of critical geopolitics among German geographers. The majority of publications in which this unease has been voiced are still in German. While this fact does not compromise their pertinence, they remain inaccessible to a mostly English-speaking audience.

In this short paper we would like to review the German reception of critical geopolitics and highlight central lines of the German critique for an international audience. We depart from an assessment of the empirical impact of critical geopolitics on German political geography and subsequently focus on major critiques of conceptual inconsistencies and incommensurabilities of epistemologies as they appear in critical geopolitics writing. Building on this critique, we map out three main conceptual paths which have gained prominence in the German scientific community as potential avenues for further theoretical development of the concept of critical geopolitics: poststructuralism, postcolonialism and systems theory.¹

EMPIRICAL VERVE: THE REINVIGORATION OF GERMAN POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

As late as in 1997, the situation of German political geography was assessed in bleak terms: political geographers painted a picture of the academic atrophy of a discipline which was empirically and conceptually discredited and had been reduced to a state of insignificance.² Although listed as one of the principal sub-disciplines of human geography in numerous systematisations of human geography,³ political geography had become the poor cousin of human geography after World War II. It was especially the stigma of geopolitics which loomed large as a historical burden for political geography. This stigma manifested itself in caveats to using the term 'geopolitics', or German *Geopolitik*, which, even in the English literature, had come to be associated with the academic rubber-stamping or even legitimisation of war-mongering in Nazi Germany.⁴

In view of this delicate historical baggage, German political geographers had long been reluctant to engage with anything redolent of geopolitics. This reluctance especially applied to the analysis of processes at the global scale and resulted in the unwillingness to deal with anything political in the critical sense of the term, accompanied by an indulgence into what Michel Foucault could have called 'happy positivism'.⁵ Within this positivist paradigm, German political geography had been dissociated and purged from geopolitical reminiscences and an artificial dividing line had been drawn

between an unscientific, ideological geopolitics and a supposedly scientific, objective political geography.⁶

It was not until the 1980s that a group of young German geographers began to engage critically with the establishment and the role of German-language political geography in the context of colonialism, imperialism and National Socialism, thereby paving the ground for a revitalisation of political geographical inquiry which could overcome the trappings of the positivist paradigm. While not being critical in the exact sense of critical geopolitics, these early works of authors like Henning Heske, Mechthild Rössler and Hans-Dietrich Schultz latently drew on elements of a constructivist epistemology to unravel political geography, its geo-deterministic thinking and *Volk-und-Raum* rhetoric as a historically contingent discipline with specific discursive framings. Examining political geographical publications stemming from the time of National Socialism, authors highlighted the extent to which protagonists achieved the linguistic coupling of 'Volk und Raum' in what would only later become known as 'writing space' in critical geopolitics.⁷ A second current emerged from conflict-oriented political geographical research as it was prominently proposed by Jürgen Oßenbrügge.⁸ Linking up with actor and agency theories, conflict-oriented approaches moved to incorporate the geographical imaginations and representations of political actors into the reconstruction of spatial conflicts from a social constructionist perspective.⁹ It was this second current which drew close to many key tenets of critical geopolitics and, by and large, prepared the academic stage for its entry into German political geography.

When the stigmatisation of geopolitics in German political geography eventually began to crumble in the early 1990s, the search for a 'new' or 'alternative' geopolitics was initially propelled by what was perceived as incisive changes affecting space-time. These new realities necessitated a different geopolitics – a geopolitics with a new empirical focus on promoting peace and global justice. Methodologically, this new geopolitics resembled the Anglophone critical geopolitics in its focus on actors and its intent to unmask how geopolitical arguments serve as the legitimisation of political aims.¹⁰ It was only at the end of the 1990s, however, that critical geopolitics started to be dealt with in an explicit fashion by a younger generation of German geographers and finally kicked in to break the deadlock political geography had been caught in.¹¹ Its constructivist cut provided a wholly new way of looking at a previously outlawed discipline and triggered a wave of contributions setting out to critically interrogate the social construction of space and the political effects associated with it. While not explicitly referencing the intellectual antecedents of the 1980s and early 1990s, it was only through this initial groundwork that critical geopolitics found a fertile discursive environment in which its key ideas were able to thrive.

Empirically, critical geopolitics proved to be highly attractive. This is evidenced by the large number of publications which quoted critical geopolitics

as a major conceptual influence and dealt with themes like the oriental representation of Turkey in German foreign policy and the inscription of occidental exclusion and geopolitical superiority through hegemonic discourse,¹² or the plans for peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina in which narratives of national territories were spun mainly along ethnic lines, thus excluding alternative ways of imagining nations.¹³ Authors have pondered over the construction of geopolitical imaginations of different shapes of Europe in Germany and the emergence of geopolitical *Leitbilder* (visions) in the context of the EU enlargement debate.¹⁴ A themed issue of *Geographische Rundschau*, the German equivalent to the *Journal of Geography*, made accessible the core ideas of critical geopolitics to a broad audience, with empirical examples ranging from the clash of civilisations after 9/11 to geographical imaginations of the Balkans.¹⁵ In the same vein, critical geopolitics continued the tradition of critical engagement with key figures in the history of German geopolitics like Karl Haushofer.¹⁶

While critical geopolitics has always been embraced with open arms empirically, recent years have seen rising dissatisfaction with some of its conceptual foundations. Critique has primarily been articulated along conceptual fault lines that have gained prominence in theoretical debates within German human geography but less so in Anglophone human geography and thus follows a rather unique trajectory. Since the advent of critical geopolitics coincided with a conceptual push towards action and agency orientation in German human geography,¹⁷ critical geopolitics was sucked into the maelstrom of debates unfurling around the contraposition of agency versus structuralist and poststructuralist approaches. These conceptual arguments provide the backdrop and frame within which critiques of the critical geopolitics approach have developed.¹⁸ In the following sections we would like to introduce this critique and point out how different authors have attempted to overcome the perceived conceptual shortcomings of critical geopolitics.

CONCEPTUAL DOUBTS: THEORETICAL INCONSISTENCIES IN THE CRITICAL GEOPOLITICS APPROACH

The conceptual heterogeneity of critical geopolitics is one of the key issues that have triggered debates in the German-speaking context. This heterogeneity is perceived as engendering several theoretical inconsistencies.¹⁹ Critics highlight

- that critical geopolitics amalgamates elements of different epistemological approaches to social theory,
- that due to the different basic assumptions of these approaches the elements taken from them are only partially commensurable and, in fact, prove to be contradictory in some areas,

- that key terms of these epistemological approaches have been diluted in the course of their import into critical geopolitics and are therefore used in an incoherent way,
- and that in general there is a certain prevalence of empirical case studies at the expense of a conceptual reflection of major theoretical assumptions, inconsistencies and paradoxes in critical geopolitics.

A central argument of this critique focuses on the kind of problems that arise from the combination of modern and postmodern theoretical approaches. Several programmatic publications in the early to mid-1990s distinguish (among other things) between two conceptual perspectives of critical geopolitics: for one thing they attempt to understand the role of geopolitical actors and for another they look at the significance of geographical and/or geopolitical representations in the narratives of these actors. Implicitly underlying the first perspective are conceptual approaches which deal with individual and/or collective agency, whereas the second perspective aims at a deconstruction of geopolitical representations, imaginations and 'discourses' by drawing on the more linguistic, poststructuralist approaches of Foucault or Derrida. This, now, results in several complications.

In many of the writings of critical geopolitics, the concept of the actor, be it as 'political elites' or 'intellectuals of statecraft', is not explicitly explored and theorised. When talking of actors that exercise power in the field of geopolitics and pursue certain strategies by deploying geopolitical representations, this sometimes implicates a rather essentialist concept of political agency not dissimilar to certain concepts found in political science. Other studies employ a concept of agency much in the sense of methodological individualism, which is propagated by modern agency theories. This is the case when critical geopolitical analysis focuses on actors of high historic or contemporary significance in the field of geopolitics and discusses their geopolitical imaginations. Even though this latter kind of reconstruction is far more indebted to a constructivist paradigm than the former, both of them have in common that they do not question the acting subject and its structural constraints as a major conceptual building block.

Framing actors in this particular way has certainly contributed significantly to the success of critical geopolitics, for it allows an approach to the scientific reconstruction of conflicts about space and power that is close to the everyday meta-narrative of the crucial role of 'individuals (e.g., as key actors) in a democratic society' which permeates late modern society. The actor orientation of such kinds of writing within critical geopolitics, for example in the form of the much-cited 'intellectuals of statecraft', offers an analytical frame which, implicitly, is compatible with the storylines of strategic acting in foreign politics that have come to dominate public media and public opinion. Some authors, for example, highlight discourses as strategic rhetorical resources which can be 'capitalised on' in the pursuit of certain

goals and in this context distinguish between more and less conducive discourses.²⁰ Others ask how narratives which rendered sugar supply an issue of national security were employed by elites to further their interests in providing support to Florida's sugar-producing industry²¹ or examine how the speech acts of elites constitute security problems in the first place.²²

This compatibility with societal self-representation, however, suffers from a crucial drawback: it projects the societal blind spot right into the eye of the academic beholder. Actors who act according to principles of some 'bounded rationality' are pre-given as constitutive elements of society in this kind of scientific reconstruction and while the assumption that they are driven by a maximisation of their utility constitutes a plausible convention, it is nothing more than that: a normative assumption which epistemologically defies verification.

Another aspect further adds to this epistemological confusion: in the recourse on discourse theoretical elements, critical geopolitics introduces a concept of the actor/subject which, owing much to the work of Foucault, has little in common with the concepts of agency theories. This confusion arises from the fact that critical geopolitics not only aims at reconstructing the strategic goals and interests of actors but also focuses on the analysis of the geopolitical representations employed to this end. In so doing it draws on fragments of a discourse analysis inspired by poststructuralist theories which collides with classic actor and agency concepts. In Foucault's work we find a completely different, more linguistic concept, not of the self-identical actor, whose *a priori* existence is rejected, but of a subject dissolved into multiple discursive positions. This fundamental ontological and epistemological differentiation becomes rather blurred in a considerable number of writings in critical geopolitics. In pieces that see their mission as deconstructing the ways in which political elites have depicted and represented places in their exercise of power,²³ the classic agency perspective constitutes the conceptual backbone on which the deconstruction of geopolitical representations has been superimposed to a certain degree. Against this background the concern that 'empirical propinquity to the everyday (*empirische Anschlussfähigkeit*) . . . is preferred over terminological accuracy (*Tiefenschärfe*)'²⁴ might be seen as holding true for a number of studies which figure under the label of critical geopolitics.

A final critical issue is intimately connected to the wider context of the genesis and development of critical geopolitics. Especially the early works at the beginning of the 1990s can be subsumed under the broader heading of critical theory or social constructionism. Consequently, the majority of critical geopolitics writing, at least implicitly, has adopted a political standpoint: it is based on a leftist, critical position. This kind of positioning conflicts with the epistemological and normative assumptions of a poststructuralist concept of deconstruction as it was pioneered by Derrida.²⁵ Deconstruction in its intrinsic sense precludes positioning of any kind; instead, it advocates

a mode of thinking in differences which postulates contradictions and unconditional openness as constitutive elements of societal processes of communication and structuration. If judged against this radical conceptual origin, critical geopolitics employs a rather diluted, eclectic concept of deconstruction which often stands in for the analytical process of unravelling or disclosing the geopolitical scripts and imaginations of certain actors.²⁶

For the sake of conceptual consistency, the majority of studies should therefore more adequately be called (interpretative-hermeneutic) *reconstructions* which (often implicitly) happen from a specific, fixed position.²⁷ While these reconstructions would, on the one hand, constitute a critique of geopolitics, they are, at the same time, just a different form of what they try to criticise – geopolitics. In his doctoral dissertation on critical geopolitics and spatial semantics Redepenning therefore concludes that

critical geopolitics is caught in a conceptual dilemma. It is faced with the impossibility (*Unentscheidbarkeit*) to reconcile the theoretical pretence at avoiding closure with the factual, empirical closure which lies at the heart of the programmatic core of critical geopolitics. This impossibility, however, is veiled and rendered invisible through the terminological obfuscation²⁸ of epistemological approaches and the recourse on ethics.²⁹

For Redepenning these two strategies, obfuscation and re-introduction of ethics, are employed to gloss over the fundamental paradox upon which critical geopolitics theory is built and which prompts it to perpetually oscillate between competing demands without being able to fulfil any of them.

WAYS FORWARD? CONCEPTUAL PATHWAYS FROM A GERMAN PERSPECTIVE

In the German-speaking academic community, several of the critiques presented in the previous section have sparked discussions on the perspectives for the further development of the conceptual and methodological frame of critical geopolitics. Three main avenues have been opened up which, while sharing similar concerns, differ in their theoretical approach to critical geopolitics: poststructuralism, postcolonialism and sociological systems theory. In the following we would like to briefly and, inevitably, in a simplified fashion sketch the key propositions voiced in these debates.

Poststructuralism: Re-Thinking the Actor/Subject

Further conceptual alignment with poststructuralist ideas has been identified as one of the most promising paths for critical geopolitics theory-building.³⁰ Although critical geopolitics has been addressed as a poststructuralist enterprise

from the beginning,³¹ many German geographers would probably find some truth in Neil Smith's dictum that 'reduced to formulaic propositions, it is ironic that poststructuralism actually tempts a reformed positivism'.³² Much of the German conceptual engagement hinges on the concepts of discourse and discourse analysis and departs from readings of authors like Foucault which differ from those readings commonly found in Anglophone critical geopolitics.

The position of the actor/subject in discourses is a question that has attracted significant attention. Drawing mainly on the early work of Foucault's archaeology, German authors have sought to foreground the structuralist tinges of Foucault's work in deliberate contrast to the actor-based approach in critical geopolitics. Poststructuralism concurs with structuralism in that the subject is produced through discourse and does not stand outside of it; subjectivity is not a condition but an effect of discourse.³³ Thus, Foucault sees subjects as products, not as producers of discourses proposing that man is 'erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea'.³⁴ In this perspective, discourses cannot be appropriated as strategic resources by actors pursuing certain aims. Rather, they constitute the structuring elements of our thinking on the basis of which we act, on the basis of which agency can be conceptualised in the first place.³⁵

The move away from the actor and towards the subject must have implications for the methodology of critical geopolitics. So far, critical geopolitics has been the domain of interpretative-hermeneutic methods as they are applied in qualitative social research. The firm conviction that the analysis of discourse can not be done with interpretative-hermeneutic approaches alone but necessitates new methodological approaches has prompted German geographers to explore a set of methodologies which move away from traditional textual analysis to various new forms of post-structuralist discourse analysis which concentrate on the development, change and competition in discursive structures. Poststructuralist analysis highlights the processes and mechanisms of the construction and alteration of meaning rather than meaning itself, the heterogeneity and contingency of discourses and their instability.³⁶

While the analytical focus on processes and mechanisms sidesteps individual agency as regards the content of analysis, it is important to note that the individual is almost necessarily re-introduced as the interpreting mind in the process of analysis. Attempts to do away with the interpreting researcher have resulted in methods such as lexicometrical statistics, developed by Michel Pêcheux at St. Cloud, which through the use of computers and mathematical modelling sought to construct a non-interpretative methodology.³⁷ This method, based on corpus linguistics, was emulated in a recent study of geopolitical discourses in German print-media post-9/11 in which a numeric count of the temporal occurrence of keywords such as 'geopolitics', 'clash of civilisations' or 'rogue state' was carried out. While

such an approach seemed to reflect some of the key tenets of a Foucauldian discourse analysis particularly well, it showed serious limitations when text samples were analysed individually: it seemed obvious to the interpreting researcher that some samples epitomised a certain discourse despite the absence of pertinent keywords which had been assigned as key signifiers to this discourse.³⁸ Future years will see the completion of a number of research projects devoted to this line of inquiry, which attempt to further address the methodological challenges posed by a poststructuralist epistemology.³⁹

Postcolonialism: Positionality and Normativity

A second prominent line marries the radical impetus of critical geopolitics with that of postcolonialism. The postcolonial critique of critical geopolitics as it has been articulated in Germany concentrates on three aspects: First, it opposes the certainty and superiority with which some critical geopolitical deconstruction work proceeds to expose the hidden geographical assumptions of geopolitical discourses replacing old meta-narratives with new ones. Second, and as consequence of the first aspect, it argues for the introduction of positionality and thus for the explicit acknowledgement of the political nature of doing geography. Finally, it affirms that critical geopolitics must be a multi-scalar discipline and as such would be ill-advised to concentrate on global processes while neglecting the situatedness of geopolitical identities at the local level.⁴⁰

In this vein, postcolonialism is not only tightly wedded to poststructuralism, it also fuses with feminism and Marxism. In a postcolonialist approach, the drawing of boundaries between own space and other space is regarded as the decisive moment of geopolitical discourse. Not dissimilar to the tenets of structuralist thought, a postcolonial geopolitics would interrogate the binary oppositions and closures upon which geopolitical identities are built and seek to examine the disciplining and regulatory effects of these closures.⁴¹ The aim of a postcolonial geopolitics consists not only in identifying the neocolonial codifications undergirding geopolitical imaginations but also in vigorously opposing dichotomous thinking. It makes the attempt to substitute the homogeneous 'us' with a stance that accepts difference instead of collapsing it. Julia Lossau cautions, however, against privileging this universalistic, abstract pretence at promoting difference over the concrete pinpointing of marginality. She argues that it is only by grounding critical geopolitical analysis in the politically and culturally situated narratives of subaltern identities that a postcolonial geopolitics can live up to its ambitions. In so doing, a postcolonial geopolitics must strive to constantly question its own inevitable closures by acknowledging and problematising the speaker position from which it renders its analysis.⁴²

Systems Theory: The Function of Spatial Semantics

Primarily drawing on Niklas Luhmann's systems theoretical thinking and on its specific terminology, Marc Redepenning proposes the concept of spatial semantics to accommodate several of the inconsistencies addressed in the previous section.⁴³ He conceptualises space as the distinction between *here* and *there*, as a certain mode of observation which, through processes of constant reiteration in society, is transformed into a kind of semantics or naturalised object that has been cut off from its societal and, therefore, relational origins. Instead of focussing on the content and on unravelling the arbitrariness of these fixations, as has been one of the mainstays of critical geopolitics, a systems theoretical approach concentrates on the social and societal *function* of the closures achieved through spatial semantics. Redepenning maintains that spatial semantics serves as a taken-for-granted coping strategy in the face of permanently increased levels of uncertainty in society. Spatial representations are thus involved in inevitable processes of closure which fulfil a vital function by providing coherence, certainty and 'clarity' to the social sphere since they are a means of reducing social complexity. They are, in contrast to mainstream critical geopolitics reasoning, only rendered objectionable by enclosing the logics and ethics of the particular social systems take, for example, the different and sometimes contradictory spatial representations and spatial visions of the mass media, economics (e.g., network spaces), law (e.g., the territory as container), politics, art, etc.

As a consequence, one possible approach within critical geopolitics should centre on the deconstruction of the transformation of uncertainty into certainty through discourses and situations of 'closing' within a matrix of power and knowledge. It then simply observes observers. For us, 'closings' limit or cut the contingencies of the world by the particular rationalities of a particular social system. 'Closings' are only plausible and only make sense within the system's own rationality.⁴⁴

For this systems theoretical perspective to remain coherent, however, it has to refrain from making political judgements on the desirability or undesirability of certain processes of closure in the first instance – at least for as long as it situates itself within 'scientific' communication. Every criticism of politics, to put it shortly, has to be launched within the inner workings of 'political' communication or otherwise would make it necessary to 'cross a communicative boundary which would lead us into completely different system rationalities'.⁴⁵ Understanding itself as a second-order observation, i.e., an observation of the first-order observation of spatial semantics, a critical geopolitics that integrates systems theoretical insights would then operate as a separate system outside the system it observes. By conceptualising space as semantics within operationally closed systems, this approach then ties every form of space to a very restricted set of communicative contexts.

CONCLUSION

Critical geopolitics can take the credit of providing a crucial stimulus to the development of a post-positivist political geography in Germany. Especially on the empirical side, it has opened up a whole new perspective of looking at the imbrication of space, power and politics at various scale levels. Underpinning much of the German conceptual engagement with critical geopolitics is a call for research that reflects more explicitly on its theoretical foundations. The dissatisfaction with the conceptual constitution of critical geopolitics has spawned inquiry into theoretical avenues to address what is perceived as conceptual lacunae of critical geopolitics. Although some of this work has consciously shed the label of critical geopolitics, it nevertheless remains highly indebted to the core ideas of critical geopolitics.

While some elements of the critique levelled at critical geopolitics in the German context have been voiced in cognate form in Anglo-American geography, others are unique to the theoretical trajectory of German human geography and German social sciences at large. This distinctive academic embeddedness offers the chance of a conceptual reflection on the foundations of critical geopolitics from without. A critical geopolitics which is more aligned with poststructuralist and postcolonialist principles should make explicit that the negotiation of geopolitical representations must always and inevitably be incomplete and imperfect. As such, critical geopolitics becomes the basis for sensitising us for the contingency and arbitrariness of geopolitical representations and consciously acknowledges that it must occupy a position from which to render this sensitisation. A systems theoretical approach, on the other hand, alerts us to pay greater attention to the function of spatial semantics instead of concentrating on their contents.

Despite the endorsement of a renewed discussion of the conceptual assumptions, when talking about the possible avenues of the future development of critical geopolitics, we need to firmly focus on keeping critical geopolitical research relevant and attuned to the shifting vicissitudes of society. Considering what has been said before, perhaps the greatest challenge for critical geopolitics now is forging a convincing and durable link between theory and practice: a link which permits the engaging analysis of the nexus between society, space and power – the trademark of its sweeping success for the past 20 years – but which at the same time commits to a more rigorous theorising and reflection of the conceptual foundations underlying this analysis. Some of the different shapes such a link can assume are currently being explored in empirical projects in Germany and in the future will hopefully yield pertinent results to advance the project of critical geopolitics in some of the directions sketched in this article. But although the concrete shape of this link is flexible, its functioning will be crucial for the further evolution and disciplinary progress of critical geopolitics.

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NOTES

1. This article is an attempt to highlight in a pointed form what we perceive as central lines of the German engagement with critical geopolitics. As always, the importance of different arguments as well as the choice of nomenclature can be a matter of dispute. We acknowledge that other authors would have made different choices and we therefore do not claim to speak on behalf of German geography as a whole. We use 'German' as a linguistic rather than as a national attribute and in this article it functions as a shorthand for 'German-speaking'.

2. K. Kost, 'Geopolitik und kein Ende: Thesen zur Gegenwart der Politischen Geographie in Deutschland' [Geopolitics and No End: Hypotheses on the Present State of Political Geography in Germany], in R. Graaen and W. Tietze (eds.), *Colloquium Geographicum* (Bonn: Asgard 1997) pp. 133–152; J. Oßenbrügge, 'Die Renaissance der Politischen Geographie: Aufgaben und Probleme' [The Renaissance of Political Geography: Challenges and Problems], *HGG-Journal* 11 (1997) pp. 1–18.

3. For example in the models of H. Uhlig, 'Organisationsplan und System der Geographie' [The System and Organisational Schema of Geography], *Geoforum* 1/1 (1970) pp. 7–38 and U. Ante, *Politische Geographie* [Political Geography] (Braunschweig: Westermann 1981), *Das Geographische Seminar*.

4. Numerous authors use the German term *Geopolitik* as a synonym for a particular school of aggressive geopolitics, for example, J. O'Loughlin and H. Heske, 'From "Geopolitik" to "Géopolitique": Converting a Discipline for War to a Discipline for Peace', in N. Kliot and S. Waterman (eds.), *The Political Geography of Conflict and Peace* (London: Bellhaven 1991) pp. 37–59; H. H. Herwig, 'Geopolitik: Haushofer, Hitler and Lebensraum', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 22/2–3 (1999) pp. 218–241; for a problematisation of this use see A. Behnke, 'The Politics of Geopolitik in Post-Cold War Germany', *Geopolitics* 11/3 (2006) pp. 396–419.

5. G. Sandner and J. Oßenbrügge, 'Political Geography in Germany after World War II', in E. Ehlers (ed.), *40 Years After. German Geography: Developments, Trends and Prospects 1952–1992* (Tübingen: Institute for Scientific Cooperation 1992) pp. 251–275.

6. Indicative of this are the works of Carl Troll (in the very first issue of *Erdkunde*) and Peter Schöller: C. Troll, 'Die geographische Wissenschaft in Deutschland in den Jahren 1933–1945: Eine Kritik und Rechtfertigung' [The Science of Geography in Germany from 1933 to 1945: A Critique and Justification], *Erdkunde* 1/1 (1947) pp. 3–48; P. Schöller, 'Wege und Irrwege der Politischen Geographie und Geopolitik' [Pathways and Meanders in Political Geography and Geopolitics], *Erdkunde* 11 (1957) pp. 313–316.

7. The special issue of *Political Geography Quarterly* 1989, Volume 8, Issue 4 provides an overview of the breadth of German engagement with the legacy of German political geography. See also the monographs by Henning Heske, Mechthild Rössler and Hans-Dietrich Schultz: H. Heske, . . . *Und morgen die ganze Welt: Erdkundeunterricht im Nationalsozialismus* [. . . And Tomorrow the Whole World: Teaching Geography in the Time of National Socialism] (Gießen: Focus Verlag 1988); M. Rössler, *Wissenschaft und Lebensraum: deutsche Ostforschung im Nationalsozialismus* [Science and Lebensraum: German Ost-Science During National Socialism] (Berlin: Reimer 1990); H.-D. Schultz, *Europa als geographisches Konstrukt* [Europe as a Geographical Construction] (Jena: Friedrich-Schiller-Universität 1999), Vol. 20, Jenaer Manuskripte.

8. J. Oßenbrügge, *Politische Geographie als räumliche Konfliktforschung: Konzepte zur Analyse der politischen und sozialen Organisation des Raumes auf der Grundlage anglo-amerikanischer Forschungsansätze* [Political Geography as Spatial Conflict Research: Concepts for the Analysis of the Political and Social Organisation of Space on the basis of Anglo-American approaches] (Hamburg: Institut für Geographie 1983), Vol. 40, Hamburger Geographische Studien.

9. See, for example, the monograph by P. Reuber, *Raumbezogene politische Konflikte: geographische Konfliktforschung am Beispiel von Gemeindegebietsreformen* [Spatial Political Conflicts: Geographical Conflict Research in the Case of Communal Redistricting] (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner 1999), Vol. 131, Erdkundliches Wissen.

10. The term 'new geopolitics' is used by K.-A. Boesler, 'Neue Ansätze der Politischen Geographie und Geopolitik' [New Approaches in Political Geography and Geopolitics], *Erdkunde* 51/4 (1997) pp. 309–317, whereas 'alternative geopolitics' appears in J. Oßenbrügge, 'Kritik der Geopolitik und Alternativen' [Critique of Geopolitics and Alternatives], *Geographische Zeitschrift* 81/2 (1993) pp. 253–255. Both contributions zero in on the actor as a central analytical moment. The special issue 'The New Spatial Structures of Global Politics: Challenges for Political Geography' of *Geographische Zeitschrift* in 1993 marks the beginning of a renewed interest in geopolitics.

11. Among the first conceptual contributions were J. Lossau, 'Anders Denken. Postkolonialismus, Geopolitik und Politische Geographie' [Think Different. Postcolonialism, Geopolitics and Political Geography], *Erdkunde* 54/2 (2000) pp. 157–168, which explicitly takes up the cudgels for the political element in political geography and introduces the notion of positionality; G. Wolkersdorfer, *Politische Geographie und Geopolitik zwischen Moderne und Postmoderne* [Political Geography and Geopolitics between Modernity and Postmodernity] (Heidelberg: Geographisches Institut der Universität Heidelberg 2001), Vol. 111, *Heidelberger Geographische Arbeiten*; P. Reuber and G. Wolkersdorfer (eds.), *Politische Geographie: handlungsorientierte Ansätze und Critical Geopolitics* [Political Geography: Action Theory and Critical Geopolitics] (Heidelberg: Geographisches Institut Heidelberg 2001), Vol. 112, *Heidelberger Geographische Arbeiten*; and the review by P. Reuber, 'Postmodern and Action-Based Approaches in Political Geography: Anglo-American Concepts and Recent Fields of Research', *Geographische Zeitschrift* 88/1 (2000) pp. 36–52.

12. Lossau, 'Anders Denken' (note 11); J. Lossau, *Die Politik der Verortung: Eine Postkoloniale Reise zu einer Anderen Geographie der Welt* [The Politics of Verortung: A Postcolonial Journey to a Different Geography of the World] (Bielefeld: Transcript 2002).

13. M. Redepenning, 'Territorien und Politik: Anmerkungen zu den Friedensplänen für Bosnien-Herzegowina zwischen 1993 und 1995' [Territories and Politics: Remarks on the Plans for Peace in Bosnia-Herzegowina between 1993 and 1995], in P. Reuber and G. Wolkersdorfer (eds.), *Politische Geographie: Handlungsorientierte Ansätze und Critical Geopolitics* [Political Geography: Action Theory and Critical Geopolitics] (Heidelberg: Geographisches Institut der Universität Heidelberg 2001) pp. 187–198.

14. Respectively, P. Reuber and G. Wolkersdorfer, 'The Transformation of Europe and the German Contribution: Critical Geopolitics and Geopolitical Representations', *Geopolitics* 7/3 (2002) pp. 39–60 and P. Reuber, M. Schott, and G. Wolkersdorfer, 'Geopolitische Grenzen und Leitbilder Europas aus der EU-Erweiterungsperspektive: Das Beispiel Tschechien' [Geopolitical Borders and Visions for Europe from the Perspective of EU Enlargement: The Case of the Czech Republic], *Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen* 148/3 (2004) pp. 68–75.

15. *Geographische Rundschau* 54/7–8 (2002): J. Lossau, 'Das Mittelmeer: Ein Konstrukt zwischen Ferienziel und Krisenregion' [The Mediterranean Sea: A Construct between Holiday Destination and Crisis Region], pp. 30–32; M. Redepenning, 'Was und Wie ist der Balkan? Entstehung und Persistenz von Raumbildern' [What and How Is the Balkans? Construction and Persistence of Spatial Images], pp. 10–15; P. Reuber, 'Die Politische Geographie nach dem Ende des Kalten Krieges. Neue Ansätze und aktuelle Forschungsfelder' [Political Geography after the End of the Cold War. New Approaches and Research Areas], pp. 4–9; P. Reuber and G. Wolkersdorfer, 'Clash of Civilizations aus Sicht der Kritischen Geopolitik' [The "Clash of Civilizations" From the Perspective of Critical Geopolitics], pp. 24–28.

16. G. Wolkersdorfer, 'Karl Haushofer and Geopolitics: The History of a German Mythos', *Geopolitics* 4/3 (1999) pp. 145–160; G. Wolkersdorfer, 'Politische Geographie und Geopolitik: Zwei Seiten derselben Medaille?', in P. Reuber and G. Wolkersdorfer (eds.), *Politische Geographie: Handlungsorientierte Ansätze und Critical Geopolitics* (Heidelberg: Geographisches Institut der Universität Heidelberg 2001) pp. 33–56.

17. The action-oriented approach in German geography was pioneered by Benno Werlen, e.g., in *Gesellschaft, Handlung und Raum: Grundlagen handlungstheoretischer Sozialgeographie* [Society, Action and Space: Fundamentals of an Action-Oriented Social Geography] (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner 1988), Vol. 89, Erdkundliches Wissen; *Sozialgeographie alltäglicher Regionalisierungen: zur Ontologie von Gesellschaft und Raum* [Social Geography of Everyday Regionalisations: On the Ontology of Society and Space] (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner 1995), Vol. 116, Erdkundliches Wissen; *Sozialgeographie alltäglicher Regionalisierungen: Globalisierung, Region und Regionalisierung* [Social Geography of Everyday

Regionalisations: Globalisation, Region and Regionalisation] (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner 1997), Vol. 119, Erdkundliches Wissen.

18. For concise formulations of this critique cf. Reuber 'Approaches in Political Geography' (note 11); P. Reuber and G. Wolkersdorfer, 'Geopolitische Leitbilder und die Neuordnung der globalen Machtverhältnisse' [Geopolitical Representations and the Global Re-Arrangement of Power Relationships], in H. Gebhardt, P. Reuber and G. Wolkersdorfer (eds.), *Kulturgeographie* (Heidelberg: Spektrum Akademischer Verlag 2003) pp. 47–65.

19. See in particular M. Redepenning, *Wozu Raum? Systemtheorie, Critical Geopolitics und raumbegleitende Semantiken* [Why Space? Systems Theory, Critical Geopolitics and Spatial Semantics] (Leipzig: Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde 2006) and Lossau, 'Politik der Verortung' (note 12).

20. C. Browning and P. Joenniemi, 'Contending Discourses of Marginality: The Case of Kaliningrad', *Geopolitics* 9/3 (2004) pp. 699–730, in particular p. 708.

21. G. M. Hollander, 'Securing Sugar: National Security Discourse and the Establishment of Florida's Sugar-Producing Region', *Economic Geography* 81/4 (2005) pp. 339–358, in particular p. 339.

22. J. Ackleson, 'Constructing Security on the US-Mexico Border', *Political Geography* 24/2 (2005) pp. 165–184, in particular pp. 166, 168.

23. E.g., K. J. Dodds and J. D. Sidaway, 'Locating Critical Geopolitics', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 12/5 (1994) pp. 515–524; G. Ó Tuathail, 'The Bush Administration and the "End of the Cold War": A Critical Geopolitics of US Foreign Policy in 1989', *Geoforum* 23/4 (1992) pp. 437–452 or, more recently, G. Ó Tuathail, 'Geopolitical Discourses: Paddy Ashdown and the Tenth Anniversary of the Dayton Peace Accords', *Geopolitics* 11 (2006) pp. 141–158.

24. Redepenning, *Wozu Raum?* (note 19) p. 95.

25. Confer *ibid.* for an excellent exposition of this theme.

26. See, for example, the summary of critical geopolitics on p. 564 in N. Megoran, 'God on Our Side? The Church of England and the Geopolitics of Mourning 9/11', *Geopolitics* 11/2 (2006) pp. 561–579.

27. On the interrelationship between deconstruction and reconstruction see M. Albert, 'On Boundaries, Territory and Postmodernity: An International Relations Perspective', *Geopolitics* 3/1 (1999) pp. 52–68.

28. With 'obfuscation' (*Dämpfung*) Redepenning refers to the 'soft' and imprecise use of concepts and terms in critical geopolitics which have been imported from various epistemological approaches.

29. Redepenning, *Wozu Raum?* (note 19) p. 139.

30. P. Reuber and G. Wolkersdorfer, 'Raum und Macht: Geopolitik des 21. Jahrhunderts' [Space and Power: Geopolitics of the 21st Century], in H. Gebhardt, R. Glaser, U. Radtke, and P. Reuber (eds.), *Geographie: Physische Geographie und Humangeographie* (Munich: Elsevier 2007) pp. 895–903; see Albert (note 27) on the potential usefulness of poststructuralist thought for the study of territoriality and boundaries.

31. Cf. G. Ó Tuathail, '(Dis)Placing Geopolitics: Writing on the Maps of Global Politics', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 12/5 (1994) pp. 525–546; G. Ó Tuathail and J. Agnew, 'Geopolitics and Discourse: Practical Geopolitical Reasoning in American Foreign Policy', *Political Geography* 11/2 (1992) pp. 190–204.

32. The quote is taken from page 368 of a critique of Ó Tuathail's book *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1996) in N. Smith, 'Is Critical Geopolitics Possible? Foucault, Class and the Vision Thing', *Political Geography* 19/3 (2000) pp. 365–371.

33. M. Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (London: Tavistock 1973).

34. M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books 1973) p. 5.

35. See M. Müller, 'Reconsidering the Concept of Discourse in Critical Geopolitics: Towards Discourse as Language and Practice', *Political Geography* 27/3 (2008) pp. 322–338 for a critique and attempt at reconceptualisation of the discourse concept in critical geopolitics.

36. See A. Mattissek and P. Reuber, 'Die Diskursanalyse in der Geographie: Ansätze und Potentiale' [Discourse Analysis in Geography: Approaches and Potential], *Geographische Zeitschrift* 92/4 (2004) pp. 227–242 for a more detailed exposition of discourse analytic methodologies and the position of critical geopolitics.

37. M. Pêcheux, *Analyse Automatique Du Discours* [Automatic Discourse Analysis] (Paris: Dunod 1969); see also T. Hak and N. Helsloot (eds.), *Michel Pêcheux: Automatic Discourse Analysis* (Amsterdam: Rodopi 1995) and M. Montgomery and S. Allan, 'Ideology, Discourse, and Cultural Studies: The Contribution of Michel Pêcheux', *Canadian Journal of Communication* 17/2, available at www.cjc-online.ca, accessed 15 May 2007.

38. Results of the project in question have been published in P. Reuber, A. Strüver, and G. Wolkersdorfer, 'Geopolitische Diskurse in den Printmedien nach dem 11. September und während des Afghanistan-Krieges' [Geopolitical Discourses in the Print Media after September 11 and During the War in Afghanistan], in M. Schultze, J. Meyer, B. Krause, and D. Fricke (eds.), *Diskurse der Gewalt - Gewalt der Diskurse* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang 2005) pp. 195–209.

39. See especially the project on the discursive constitution of Francophonia: G. Glasze, 'The Discursive Constitution of a World-Spanning Region and the Role of Empty Signifiers: The Case of Francophonia', *Geopolitics* 12/4 (2007) pp. 656–679; G. Glasze, 'Vorschläge zur Operationalisierung der Diskurstheorie von Laclau und Mouffe in einer Triangulation von Lexikometrischen und Interpretativen Methoden [Proposals for the Operationalisation of the Discourse Theory of Laclau and Mouffe Using a Triangulation of Lexicometrical and Interpretative Methods]', *FQS - Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung* 8/2 (2007), available at www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/239, accessed 21 June 2008.

40. Curiously enough, a debate devoted to Ó Tuathail's monograph (note 32) revolved around similar issues at about the same time that they were picked up by German political geography. See *Political Geography* 2000, Volume 19, Issue 3, pp. 345–396.

41. Lossau, 'Anders Denken' (note 11) p. 160; for the structuralist character of a postcolonial geopolitics see Mattissek and Reuber, 'Diskursanalyse in der Geographie' (note 36) p. 236.

42. See Lossau, 'Anders Denken' (note 11); Lossau, 'Politik der Verortung' (note 12); J. Lossau, 'Anders Denken in der Politischen Geographie: Der Ansatz der Critical Geopolitics' [Thinking Differently in Political Geography: The Approach of Critical Geopolitics], in P. Reuber and G. Wolkersdorfer (eds.), *Politische Geographie: Handlungsorientierte Ansätze und Critical Geopolitics* [Political Geography: Action Theory and Critical Geopolitics] (Heidelberg: Geographisches Institut der Universität Heidelberg 2001) pp. 57–75; J. Lossau, 'Politische Geographie und Geopolitik: Bemerkungen zu einem (un-)bestimmbaren Verhältnis' [Political Geography and Geopolitics: Remarks on an (In-)Definable Relationship], *Erdkunde* 56/1 (2002) pp. 73–81 for explicit contributions to a postcolonial geopolitics and M. Müller, 'Lost in Translation: Development Politics in between the Spaces of "the Cultural"', *Geographische Zeitschrift* 93/2 (2005) pp. 121–133 for a similar stance.

43. This passage draws in large measure on Redepenning, *Wozu Raum?* (note 19).

44. J. Miggelbrink and M. Redepenning, 'Narrating Crises and Uncertainty, or, Placing Germany: Reflections on Theoretical Implications of the Standort Deutschland Debate', *Geopolitics* 9/3 (2004) pp. 564–587, p. 568.

45. Redepenning, *Wozu Raum?* (note 19) p. 140.