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# From a *critique* to self-evolving (inter)discipline: Critical geopolitics vs. popular geopolitics

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**Abstract:** The paper shows the development of critical geopolitics from its conceptualisation by O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge at the end of the last century up to its critics and development of phenomena that influenced the self-evolution of discipline. The first goal of this research is the analysis of the main thesis from the above-mentioned authors in order to test them on contemporary examples. The second goal is consisted of the contemporary phenomena analysis, from the media critique to a wider societal critique, as well as their influence on the self-evolution of the discipline, especially in the area of popular geopolitics. This review streams towards the state of the art analysis, defining and positioning this (inter)discipline in frames of old/new geopolitics, international relations, and human geography. The main thesis is that contemporary phenomena (as a cause) narrowed down the focus of research areas in some scientific fields, while in others it made unavoidable to skip interdisciplinary perspective both in theoretical as well as in methodological sense. The critics of classical geopolitics developed three directions for research: as a part of critical geopolitics as self-contained discipline and numerous subdisciplines or even disciplines (e.g., popular geopolitics); as critiques of newly developed neoclassical theories and schools in international relations; and as interdisciplinary attempts that highlights research on contemporary phenomena and criticise all so far developed methods and tools as non-adequate for research in such a complex world of the present challenges.

**Key words:** critical geopolitics, popular geopolitics, Gearoid O Tuathail, Simon Dalby, Paul Routledge.

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Geopolitics has come a long way since 1899, the time Rudolf Kjellén, a Swedish political scientist, coined the term. Today, the science is far from looking for *Lebensraum*, and much closer to interrogating how space is being perceived, moreover, “how and why we have come to think of the world (or parts of it) in a certain way”.<sup>2</sup> Discursiveness of geopolitics and geopolitical thought is the main postulate in critical geopolitics in the legacy of O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge and their *Geopolitical Reader* from 1998.<sup>3</sup> For them, three intellectual critiques – of political realism as a backbone for geopolitics, wise man in the centre of the state actions, and power – make the construction for a *new discipline* of critical geopolitics. And indeed, it was the most successful way to bring the geopolitics back in the frames of science since the devastation after World War II.<sup>4</sup>

The turbulent contemporary world of the late 20th century brought new realities that influenced international relations, political geography, geopolitics, human geography and security studies in the most crucial way: states were not the only actors in the international arena, the territory and challenges become interconnected beyond state borders in a globalised world of information, and power was subdivided and fragmented in asymmetric manners.

As states remained the only subjects with mechanisms developed for actions in the international arena, they remained key subjects, but new ones, as well as different divisions in power politics, demanded new approaches for research in the above-mentioned disciplines. In the area of geopolitics, it changed the main core of discipline definition: neither states were sole actors acquiring for power, nor power was solely obtained in an old-fashion way with guns. And even if so, the legitimacy for violent actions is nowadays required from (global) citizens. Information and flow of information became a playground, not to say a battleground, for requiring global power and global sympathy.

Those facts led to a narrowing of research focus in some of the disciplines, on the one hand, as well as unavoidable interdisciplinary views and new perspectives in both theoretical and methodological ways, on the other. Critique of classical geopolitics resulted in researches in three directions: critical geopolitics as a new

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<sup>2</sup> Jason Dittmer and Daniel Bos, *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, and Identity*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham (MD), 2019, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Gearoid O Tuathail, Simon Dalby and Paul Routledge, *The Geopolitics Reader*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> For different attempts and new names for the return of geopolitics see more in: Marta Zorko, „Politička geografija, geopolitika i geostrategija u Političkoj misli od 1964. do 2013. godine“, *Politička misao: časopis za politologiju*, Vol. 51, No. 1, 2014, pp. 109–132.

discipline with self-evolving subdisciplines; as a critique of power relations within the existing neoclassical IR theories; and as an interdisciplinary field of science with a focus on rapidly changing phenomena and criticising all methods and tools as non-sufficient for explaining the complex contemporary world.

Several examples of self-evolving (sub)disciplines could be found in the past ten years. For instance, anti-geopolitics with its subdivisions,<sup>5</sup> geopolitics of emotions,<sup>6</sup> environmental geopolitics,<sup>7</sup> and popular geopolitics,<sup>8</sup> which will present a case study in this paper. For all of them, attempts for classification lie in in-between questions whether they a) are a subdiscipline of critical geopolitics; b) form a new discipline or c) belong to the interdisciplinary field. In this paper, popular geopolitics has been chosen as an example due to the fact that it has been the most developed part of *contemporary* geopolitics in a sense of the number of authors, case studies involved, and papers claiming its belonging to one of three categories defined. Contemporary geopolitics is used as a collective phrase here, hence the aim of this paper is to analyse relations in or in-between scientific fields involving popular geopolitics.

## The legacy of O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge

O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge introduced a new form of geopolitical thinking – critical geopolitics. Although this form of radical geopolitical thinking was already introduced in France, O Tuathail and others classified and introduced it to a wider audience. Critical geopolitics represents more than merely critical thinking about geopolitical phenomena and geopolitical legacy. Critical geopolitics is consisted of three negations/critiques and could be positioned in post-structuralism in an IR theoretical sense. Critical geopolitics has been developing as a perspective in political geography and IR since the 1980s, and it is based on “three sets of

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<sup>5</sup> Gearoid O Tuathail, Simon Dalby, Paul Routledge, *Uvod u Geopolitiku*, Politička kultura, Zagreb, 2007, pp. 257–269.

<sup>6</sup> Dominique Moisi, *The Geopolitics of Emotion: How Cultures of Fear, Humiliation, and Hope are Reshaping the World*, Doubleday (NY), 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Simon Dalby, “Environmental Geopolitics in the Twenty First Century”, *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, Vol. 39, No. 1, 2014, pp. 3–16.

<sup>8</sup> Gearoid O Tuathail, “Understanding Critical Geopolitics: Geopolitics and Risk Society”, in: Colin S. Gray and Geoffrey Sloan (eds), *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategy*, Frank Cass Publishers, London and Portland, 1999.

intellectual arguments”.<sup>9</sup> The first one tries to go beyond political realism in defining geopolitics as “a discourse”.<sup>10</sup> This first argument helped in developing a different perspective on theoretical grounds that geopolitics might be embedded in. As a counterpoint to the leaning to realism in IR, O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge offered a perspective in which worlds are being structured rather than given. Geopolitics as a discourse puts emphasis on unpacking different narratives that have been created out of the desire for power. The second argument tries to explain the cultural embodiment of geopolitics going beyond the *wise man*.<sup>11</sup> Although these authors accept that geopolitical discourses could be created in the centre(s) of state power, they arise from a set of historical narratives, myths, identity, and cultural heritage. The final argument tries to go beyond power structures that create geopolitical discourses. O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge argument that there is

(...) a paradox in classical geopolitical thinking: on one side, they create a fight for power between states, on the other hand, they have small or no influence on social structures of power within the state that create geopolitical discourses for fighting.<sup>12</sup>

The same authors through several papers tried to conceptualise critical geopolitics by dividing it into four subareas.<sup>13</sup> The first one is formal geopolitics, whose object of research lies in geopolitical thoughts and geopolitical tradition. It is oriented towards the re-conceptualisation of classical geopolitical authors and their thesis in cultural context as well as the time-space dimension. The second one is practical geopolitics and it is oriented towards the everyday practice of statecraft. The main question is how geopolitical imaginations may trigger actions in foreign policy strategies. As the third one listed, there is popular geopolitics. Popular geopolitics objectifies communication, the media and popular culture, trying to create a geographical meaning for produced geopolitical imaginations. The image of people(s) and places, as well as the image of nations, are being created and deconstructed through communication canals and popular culture products. Since this area is developing so quickly and rapidly, there is a lot of researches done from the perspective of popular geopolitics as well. This subdiscipline evolved in its own direction, and that is the reason it will be broadly

<sup>9</sup> Gearoid O Tuathail, Simon Dalby, Paul Routledge, *Uvod u Geopolitiku*, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> Especially John Agnew, Simon Dalby and Gearoid O Tuathail. See also: Gearoid O Tuathail, “Understanding Critical Geopolitics: Geopolitics and Risk Society”, op. cit., p. 111.

explained in this paper as well. The final subarea was called structural geopolitics, and it is oriented towards global processes, tendencies, and contradictions in contemporary geopolitical conditions.<sup>14</sup> As an only globally-focused subarea in its reach, it triggered the development of different perspectives and topics in research due to the fact of ongoing changes in the contemporary world, which is globally interconnected. For instance, environmental geopolitics as a subdiscipline or even a discipline of ecopolitics should be emphasised in this sense.<sup>15</sup>

### **Contemporary geopolitical phenomena in a globalised world**

Twenty years ago, in the area of geopolitical researches, a lot was being explained by the process of globalisation. Both in the form of a research question, and the same time as a research output, misleading thesis on globalisation insisted on the end of the physical World we knew and “introduced a virtual sphere of territoriality as more important one”.<sup>16</sup> Those endisms in the form of new world order realities have been discredited by globalisation critics, namely O Tuathail. His main thesis in several papers explained the theory of deterritorialisation as a re-territorialisation, as well as revealed globalisation for not being global at all.<sup>17</sup> O Tuathail claims that ongoing phenomenon is not loose in the importance of the territory in today’s world but rather the phenomenon of re-conceptualisation between territory, people and power.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, globalisation as he sees it led to severe differences and divisions worldwide and cleavages inside societies.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, globalisation is the main driver in researches placed in the area of popular geopolitics. The power that global products of popular culture may cumulate and impose plays the central role in content and discourse analysis undertaken from different scientific fields, not only in the area of popular geopolitics.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Gearoid O Tuathail, “Understanding Critical Geopolitics: Geopolitics and Risk Society”, op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>15</sup> Simon Dalby, “Environmental Geopolitics In The Twenty First Century”, op. cit., pp. 3–16.

<sup>16</sup> Marta Zorko, *Geopolitika i teritorijalnost*, Jesenski & Turk, Zagreb, 2018, p. 24.

<sup>17</sup> Gearoid O Tuathail, “Political geography III: Dealing with deterritorialization”, *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1998, pp. 81–93.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Robert A. Saunders and Vlad Strukov (eds), *Popular geopolitics: Plotting an evolving discipline*, Routledge, London and New York, 2018.

The phenomena arisen out of an unevenly globalised world in a constant change are threefold: “the interconnections of territory, the multiplication of actors, and fragmentation of power”.<sup>21</sup> The territory is interconnected mainly through information, the media, popular culture and virtual space, and therefore new tools for research in the area of geopolitics were needed. That tool emerged partly in the subdiscipline of popular geopolitics, but concrete tools were “borrowed” from the theory and methodology of the media and communication. That is the reason for claims that popular geopolitics belongs to an interdisciplinary field rather than being an isolated subdiscipline.<sup>22</sup> The multiplication of actors stands for the fact that states are not solely subjects in international relations and geopolitics. “Classical” geopolitics puts states in the centre of the discipline stressing the importance of power and forming it as a study of states in the context of the global map defined by power-relations. Nowadays, states are not the only actors that influence, may influence or are being influenced by global space phenomena. Global space is functioning on the basis of inequality, asymmetry, as well as shifts of multipolar centres of power. Therefore the power is being fragmented not only between states in bilateral or multilateral manner but in multipolar centres combined of states, supra-national entities, global cities, terrorist organisations, multinational companies, powerful individuals, celebrity leaders, etc.<sup>23</sup>

The new perspectives and realities introduce two new levels of research. Other than only state-centric and nation-state oriented subjects, phenomena and exchange in power, micro-level and macro-level perspective allows a wider and interdisciplinary approach to contemporary geopolitics. O Tuathail’s classification of critical geopolitics could also be explained through those two levels or perspectives.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge put formal, practical and popular geopolitics into a state-centric perception of the geopolitical culture of a state.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, for them, structural geopolitics is the only one left for both micro and macro-level perspective. When explaining geopolitical traditions embedded in the geopolitical culture of the state through imaginations, O Tuathail, Dalby and

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<sup>21</sup> Marta Zorko, *Geopolitika i teritorijalnost*, op. cit., pp. 25–26.

<sup>22</sup> Robert A. Saunders and Vlad Strukov, “Introduction”, in: Robert A. Saunders and Vlad Strukov (eds), *Popular geopolitics: plotting an evolving discipline*, Routledge, London and New York, 2018, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Saskia Sassen, “The Global City: Introducing the Concept”, *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. XI, No. 2, Winter/Spring 2005, pp. 27–43; Robert A. Saunders and Vlad Strukov, “Introduction”, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Gearoid O Tuathail, “Understanding Critical Geopolitics: Geopolitics and Risk Society”, op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>25</sup> Gearoid O Tuathail, Simon Dalby, Paul Routledge, *Uvod u Geopolitiku*, op. cit., p. 22.

Routledge define the products of formal, practical and popular geopolitics.<sup>26</sup> Statecraft, strategies, studies and constitutional acts are the product of formal geopolitics; statesman speeches, foreign policy decisions and actions are the product of practical geopolitics; while the representation of a country projected/imagined through the media and popular culture products are the product of popular geopolitics. With the state being the only subject of formation and the only subject being formatted in this circular process of discourse creation, the critique from scholars suggesting the global citizens concept was being expected.<sup>27</sup>

Understood narrowly, popular geopolitics is engaged in (how) a state produces discourses about other states (or Other people) and image of a state being produced by other states or globally. This global part is the most problematic one for Saunders and Strukov explaining that global culture and global citizens in the area of popular geopolitics break the bonds with a states-only approach.<sup>28</sup> They define popular geopolitics as an interdisciplinary balance between popular culture, geopolitics and international relations.<sup>29</sup> One could add different disciplines to this equation and therefore popular geopolitics deserves further elaboration in the next part of this paper.

Mentioning global space brings us back to non-state actors and levels. Micro and macro processes belonging to structural geopolitics in O Tuathail's classification have their own dynamics as well.<sup>30</sup> Defining interrelation between a state and micro or macro levels, several concepts must be further explained: global space, global challenges, the interconnection of challenges, multi-centrism, asymmetry, state role in the contemporary world, re-territorialisation, and new micro divisions. The understanding and definition of those concepts put the view on critical geopolitics into the perspective of the existing theories and may help with positioning within different fields of science. Using or "borrowing" different methodological tools does not make a discipline vague or empty. An interdisciplinary approach is common in the social sciences. Nevertheless, such global space is being connected, divided and influenced by information. The power of information and its placement becomes crucial in geopolitical visioning as well. Spivak defined geopolitics as a creation of different Worlds – *Worlding* – while trying to explain its discursiveness.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Robert A. Saunders and Vlad Strukov, "Introduction", op. cit., pp. 4–5.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Gearoid O Tuathail "Understanding Critical Geopolitics: Geopolitics and Risk Society", op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>31</sup> Spivak 1988: quoted in Gearoid O Tuathail, Simon Dalby, Paul Routledge, *Uvod u Geopolitiku*, op. cit., p. 15.

If we accept the notion from critical geopolitics that geopolitics is a discourse, then popular geopolitics becomes the most effective tool for geopolitical reasoning in the contemporary world of discourses and representations.

### **The analysis of a subdiscipline and its merits: Popular geopolitics as an interdisciplinary tool?**

In the (r)evolution of geopolitics, popular geopolitics plays a major part. In numerous attempts to put this (sub)discipline in theoretical and methodological context, three perspectives stand out. First one, in a legacy of O Tuathail, Dalby, Agnew and others, popular geopolitics is being a part of critical geopolitics, a subdiscipline dealing with discourses about states in the media and popular culture products. The key misunderstanding in this narrow perspective of popular geopolitics serves the limits of focusing on states as the main actors in the production or re-production of discourses in the media and popular culture. The further evolution of the media, communication and technology, as well as new authors engaged in this field, led to notions that popular geopolitics is ready for the definition of being a self-contained discipline.

Jason Dittmer can certainly be considered as the father of this discipline (if considered as a discipline), along with Johanna Sharp and Klaus Dodds. Dittmer asked seemingly a very simple question: “What is the relationship between popular culture and geopolitics” and maybe more importantly – “What does that relationship have to do with you and me”.<sup>32</sup> The drive to search the answers to these questions led him to write *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, and Identity* which later got its second edition. Before defining popular geopolitics as a new discipline, one must question and understand the connection geopolitics has with popular culture. If we were to oversimplify it by putting it in one word, one could say that the connection is – propaganda. It can be a song that is supposed to evoke national pride, a movie whose villain is of a certain nationality or even just a newspaper article that is telling us how bad some other government is.<sup>33</sup> But not everyone will interpret a James Bond villain with a Russian accent as an allegory that the Russian Federation is bad; or an Arab terrorist in a Hollywood film as a sign that the Middle East should be invaded. So, the question is, what does make a film or

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<sup>32</sup> Jason Dittmer and Daniel Bos, *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, and Identity*, op. cit., p. vii.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. xviii.



a song (geo)political and what gives a deeper meaning to popular culture? Usually, it is very important if the creator of a certain piece of popular culture is making it with a deeper meaning in mind. Although, sometimes what the author had in mind is not the same as what the consumer will understand or perceive. Dittmer's example for this is a song by Bruce Springsteen, *Born in the USA*. The song was meant as an anti-war protest and a protest on negative consequences in the context of Vietnam War veterans. But now, it is regarded as a song that invokes feelings of patriotism and pride for being a part of the American nation.<sup>34</sup>

There is even a Croatian version called *Rođeni u Zagrebu* that is a local patriotic song, creating an identity for people born in the capital of Croatia, Zagreb. Therefore, the same melody has (at least) three interpretations depending on the area of the consummation of product, as well as (at least) three different meanings. This example clearly shows us that a very big part of making popular culture geopolitical is done by its consumers. They are the ones who, in the end, determine if popular culture is fun or propaganda and that depends on their identities. Therefore, "whether popular culture is propaganda or just entertainment is determined not by its content but rather by the identity of the consumer".<sup>35</sup> The relationship between popular culture and geopolitics is that popular culture is used to create certain imaginations of people, events or places, and to evoke certain feelings about others or us. Popular culture reminds us of who we are or who we supposed to be.<sup>36</sup> The other question was regarding the influence that popular culture and geopolitics have on our everyday lives and us. Part of this answer can be found in the last sentence and in the fact that our identities shape our understanding and perception of popular culture that we consume. The novelty in this approach plays the importance of consumers brought down to individual persons. The key to explaining popular geopolitics as a new discipline lies in the psychosomatic effects that discourses of different places could have on individuals (who then support state actions or disobey them). In this perspective of popular geopolitics being a discipline, it is all about the critique of how individuals imagine spaces, places and people(s), and how those imaginations influence their perceptions.

If considered a new discipline, it could be summarized as "a niche within political geography wherein scholars study the everyday experience of

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<sup>34</sup> Gillian Rose in 2007 defined three places (sites) for culture to be studied at: place of production, place for the product in question, and place of consumption. Citing Rose, Dittmer gives the example of different places for Bruce Springsteen's song. For more see: Jason Dittmer, *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, and Identity*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham (MD), 2010, pp. 37–38.

<sup>35</sup> Jason Dittmer and Daniel Bos, *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, and Identity*, op. cit., p. xviii.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

geopolitics”.<sup>37</sup> In other words, “popular geopolitics refers to the everyday geopolitical discourse that citizens are immersed in every day”.<sup>38</sup> But these definitions do not paint a vivid picture of popular geopolitics, so it is perhaps better to use a quote from a book by Klaus Dodds that says:

The geopolitical power of the media, therefore, lies not only in the broadcasting itself but also the manner in which events, people, and places are “framed”. The latter is a term used in media studies to describe the way in which a story is explained to viewers or listeners.<sup>39</sup>

As one could see, the media and communication theories, as well as the media studies methodology, play a crucial part in popular geopolitics as a discipline.

Jason Dittmer, in his first edition of *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, and Identity*, mentions methods that could be used for studying popular geopolitics.<sup>40</sup> Starting from differing places (as Gillian Rose did in 2007) of production, act, and consumption, Dittmer puts similar importance on producers and their intentions as well as audience and their perception in the discourse making process. And indeed, by introducing the importance of audience a whole variety of new perspectives, from the media, sociology to psychology should be considered as well. The need for such an interdisciplinary perspective led Saunders and Strukov to position popular geopolitics as an (inter) discipline in-between popular culture, geopolitics and IR. They state that the main problem of popular geopolitics lays in the fact that popular geopolitics “simultaneously defines and produces what it studies”.<sup>41</sup> That is why three perspectives of this

(...) dualistic relationship include: (a) the use of popular culture to construct and promote a specific world view; (b) the dissolution of ‘real politics’ in favour of hyper-mediated, impression-based politics on the world stage; and (c) disciplinary approach to the study of contemporary and historical phenomena.<sup>42</sup>

At the same time, all of these approaches to popular geopolitics have been considered in works of authors claiming popular geopolitics to be an independent

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. xix.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> Klaus Dodds, *Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007, p. 149.

<sup>40</sup> Dittmer mentions archival research, composition analysis, content analysis, discourse analysis, and ethnographic methods as the most common ones, as well as interviews and the focus groups as tools for gathering the data. Jason Dittmer, *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, and Identity*, op. cit., pp. 38–42.

<sup>41</sup> Robert A. Saunders and Vlad Strukov, “Introduction”, op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

discipline as well. The puzzle continues as some authors see popular geopolitics as two sides of the same coin in these intertwined relations of disciplines and subdisciplines. For Kyle Grayson

(...) the co-constitution of popular culture and politics has thus led to the development of two related fields of inquiry: popular geopolitics in political geography and popular culture and world politics (PCWP) in international relations (IR).<sup>43</sup>

No matter being a subdiscipline of critical geopolitics (Agnew, O Tuathail, Dalby), a discipline (Dittmer, Dodds, Sharp) or an inter-discipline (Saunders, Strukov), popular geopolitics stands out with the number of published papers and undertaken researches. Themes, topics, case studies and papers show that the only possible classification for the State-of-the-Art in this area is medium. The medium through which information or discourse is being communicated set the ground rules for research methodology as well. Each medium has its own postulates of functioning, existing theories of potential influence and methodological apparatus for research. Other than labelling popular geopolitics through discourses of sub-intra-yes-no-discipline one might categorise it through medium practices and postulates.

### **A Medium as an only plausible label in popular geopolitics classification**

Dittmer and Bos say that “the focus of popular geopolitics on the media includes the news media [...] comic books, television shows, novels, movies, music, and the internet”.<sup>44</sup> We could find examples for all forms of the media mentioned here and many more that are not, for example, radio or photography. But it makes more sense if we group them in certain categories regarding their main attributes and connections. As we know, the word *geography* comes from the Greek language and can be roughly translated as *earth writing*, which has its roots in its “early definition as the science of mapping and dividing the world up into natural

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<sup>43</sup> Kyle Grayson, “Popular geopolitics and popular culture in world politics: Pasts, presents, futures”, in: Robert A. Saunders and Vlad Strukov (eds), *Popular geopolitics: plotting an evolving discipline*, Routledge, London and New York, 2018, pp. 43–62.

<sup>44</sup> Jason Dittmer and Daniel Bos, “Popular Culture, Geopolitics, and Identity”, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

regions”.<sup>45</sup> One needs to label areas, geographically or even virtually, since the early beginnings of cartography. Although the modern map is being rather complicated in acknowledging all the subjects and their interrelations, virtual sphere and interconnections, the need for visualisation and imagination of space still remains crucial for geopolitics.

Regions in a sense of popular geopolitics could be oriented towards medium through information sent, or moreover, the type of receptors needed to absorb the information. The regions for the perception of space and spatial relations are visual, audio and virtual. Bearing in mind that limits between those regions are often blurry, that visual may have audio background, as well as songs have videos, and they all came together in virtual area, each of them has its own postulates of functioning and therefore interdisciplinary methods of popular geopolitics should rely on the understanding of those postulates as well.

In defining the regions of popular geopolitics, one has to ask a key question – what does stimulate consumers? In visual popular geopolitics, the main stimulation comes from what we see. But some forms of popular culture transcend just one natural region such as films and television shows. They do not rely on the consumer only to see them but also to hear them. Nevertheless, the main stimulation from them is still visual. People can enjoy *The Godfather* even if they do not understand English and therefore do not understand that Don Vito Corleone is making them an offer they cannot refuse, but they have subtitles that will explain them that. Although a valid point can be made about the audio stimulation in films, visual stimulation is much more important.<sup>46</sup> That is why silent movies were able to thrive for such a long time.

When discussing visual popular geopolitics, there is no other form of popular culture that relies so heavily on the visual stimulation as comic books. The most important author in this field is, once again, Jason Dittmer, with his book *Captain America and the nationalist superhero*. He claims that there is a widespread belief that superheroes reflect a “uniquely American understanding of power and morality”, and therefore they have the “ability to serve as a proxy for American geopolitical identity”.<sup>47</sup> But do authors of comic books really design them having

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<sup>46</sup> Music is an integral part of every film, and as such can influence the quality and reception. But a film without any sounds is still a (silent) film, whereas music without any visual stimulation is music. That is the difference between films and music (videos), and the difference between video and audio regions of popular geopolitics.

<sup>47</sup> Jason Dittmer, *Captain America and the nationalist superhero*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2007, p. 2.

their (geo)political influence in mind? Not necessarily, but what they often do have is their set of political beliefs. They integrate those beliefs in characters and then project them, whether intentionally or not, on the consumers of comic books. For example, the author of Captain America comics, Jack “Kirby was the son of an Austrian immigrant and grew up in the Lower East Side of Manhattan in a Jewish neighbourhood” and these comics gave him an opportunity to “express his view of America from an immigrant neighbourhood in New York City”.<sup>48</sup> This shows the importance of identity in popular geopolitics, not only of the consumers, as it was already stated, but also of the author.

In visual popular geopolitics, other than comic books, one may add books and book screenings, written media, films and TV series, as well as specific genres, e.g. manga and anime. For Saunders and Strukov some examples in this area are Joanne Sharp and analysis of the *Reader's Digest* influence on the U.S. Cold war imagination; Klaus Dodds' *James Bond* films analysis; Jason Dittmer's *Captain America*; Jutta Welde's research on the television and film series *Star Trek*, Cynthia Weber's analysis of the filmic U.S. identity in war; Iver Neumann's and Daniel Nexon's *Harry Potter* analysis; Daniel Drezner's potential zombie addition to international relations theories.<sup>49</sup> One may add here Dominique Moisi's geopolitics of TV series, including famous GOT, Sean Carter and Derek McCormack's *Black Hawk Down* analysis; Saunders' Nordic noir TV drama or *Boratology*.<sup>50</sup> There have been some attempts of analysis in the area of popular geopolitics in Croatia as well. Marta Zorko and Hrvoje Mostarac defined three geopolitical discourses of Japan communicated in the world of anime.<sup>51</sup> Marin Cvitanović searched for (re)construction of Balkan identities in popular music and found four discourses: Balkan as Balkanisation, Balkan as Emotion, Differentiation in male and female Balkan and Balkan as Orient/southern from Happiness.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> Robert A. Saunders and Vlad Strukov, “Introduction”, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>50</sup> Dominique Moisi, *Geopolitika televizijskih serija*, Clio, Beograd, 2016; Sean Carter and Derek McCormack “Film, geopolitics and the affective logics of intervention”, *Political Geography*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2006, pp. 228–245; Robert A. Saunders, “What the TV series ‘The Bridge’ tells the world about Malmö”, *Sydsvenskan*, 6 December 2019; Robert A. Saunders, *The Many Faces of Sacha Baron Cohen: Politics, Parody, and the Battle over Borat*, Lexington Books, Lanham, 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Marta Zorko, Hrvoje Mostarac, „Popularna geopolitika Japana: geopolitički diskursi anime serijala”, *Medijske studije*, Vol. 5, No. 10, 2014, pp. 4–18.

<sup>52</sup> Marin Cvitanović, „(Re)konstrukcija balkanskih identiteta kroz popularnu glazbu”, *Migracije i etničke teme*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 2009, pp. 317–335.

Although Marin Cvitanović analysed song lyrics mentioning Balkans, not rhythm or chors, this case study along with Ivan Barić's analysis of Roma people in popular music in ex-Yugoslavia belongs to the area of audio popular geopolitics.<sup>53</sup> Audio popular geopolitics is defined by audio stimulation, in other words, by what we hear. Just as comic books are a clear representation of the visual region, there is one form of popular culture that fits perfectly within this one. It is, of course, music or rather, songs. One song was already mentioned in this paper – Bruce Springsteen's *Born in the USA* – as a combination of discursiveness in production and reception. Except from music discourses produced in stand-up comedy format also belong in this area.<sup>54</sup> Radio Geopolitics is not a new concept as well. Alasdair Pinkerton and Klaus Dodds analysed the importance of radio and radio communication in everyday practice and diplomacy.<sup>55</sup>

Virtual popular geopolitics is oriented mainly towards the Internet content and is developing rapidly. There are some crucial postulates and terms that define research from this perspective and are closely connected to different definitions and meanings of terms: fragmentation and multiplication of discourses; fake news, selective aspects of reality, virtual reality, augmented reality, and mobile augmented reality.

Video games are a rapidly growing industry that influences young people and their perception of the world. Salter argues that video games change the reality in a sense of involvement in war developing strategic thinking, or even send subliminal political messages in this virtual environment.<sup>56</sup> Social networks may be another example in which discourses could be produced and consumed.<sup>57</sup> Even so, a similar question remains: by whom and why? User-generated content in big data becomes more and more important each day. (Re)presentations of tourist locations, photographs on Instagram, comments on Twitter, check-ins in Facebook create imaginations about places, spaces and people and co-create geopolitical

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<sup>53</sup> Ivan Barić, *Analiza narativa i diskursa o romima u popularnoj glazbi na području bivše Jugoslavije*, University of Zagreb, Rector's Award for 2015, <https://apps.unizg.hr/rektorova-nagrada/javno/stari-radovi/preuzmi>, 12/12/2019.

<sup>54</sup> For instance: Darren Purcell, Melissa Scott Brown, Mahmut Gokmen, "Achmed: The Dead Terrorist And Humor in Popular Geopolitics", *GeoJournal*, No. 75, 2010, pp. 373–385.

<sup>55</sup> Alasdair Pinkerton and Klaus Dodds, "Radio geopolitics: Broadcasting, listening and the struggle for acoustic spaces", *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2009, pp. 10–27.

<sup>56</sup> Mark B. Salter "The Geographical Imaginations of Video Games: Diplomacy, Civilization, America's Army and Grand Theft Auto IV", *Geopolitics*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2011, pp. 359–388.

<sup>57</sup> Robert A. Saunders, *Ethnopolitics in Cyberspace: The Internet, Minority Nationalism, and the Web of Identity*, Lexington Books, Lanham, 2011.

imaginations and discourses of the contemporary world. Is a place being perceived as a safe, is a tourist location being appealing, is a comment changing one's mind, or why all beaches have the same colour of sand and nuance of the sea? – these are the questions one must ask oneself and will provide a basis for future research in this area.

## Discussion and conclusion(s)

Critical geopolitics is scholarship emerged at the end of the last century oriented towards moving beyond the three common mistakes of classical geopolitics. In doing so, it has distanced itself from *Geopolitik* of imperial times as well as from the realism in international relations as the only recognised perspective of World power-relations and state actions. Both dissociations made a clear-cut from violent ideologies of the 20th century but as well as with its scientific (or not so scientific) origins. While bringing geopolitics back on scientific track, critical geopolitics left its positioning undefined: was it an old discipline abolished from all wrongdoings of imperial and ideological geopolitics through critique; or a new one acknowledging changes in the world and anticipating new power relations in global space?

There is a lot of evidence for both statements, as well as parallel co-existence of old postulates in new geopolitical order. The main critics of critical geopolitics bring back the issues of the interrelation of classical geopolitics and critical geopolitics, where the critique undermines the main backbone of geopolitics as a whole by not recognizing it. Phil Kelly compared the classical and critical approach, suggesting that “both versions, although different in most respects, are equally legitimate for study and perhaps may be brought closer together, at least in ways that may complement each other”.<sup>58</sup> And indeed, in an unevenly globalised world, there is still a place for classical geopolitical thinking, as well as the need for critical geopolitical conceptualising. The same author defines co-existence in a way that “the classical version deserves consideration as a contribution to international relations theory and to foreign policy-making”.<sup>59</sup> At the same time, “the critical approach provides a needed and necessary critique of the classical, exposing its weaknesses and suggesting an emancipatory alternative”.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Phil Kelly, “A Critique of Critical Geopolitics”, *Geopolitics*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2006, p. 24.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

Terrence Haverluk and others argue that “critical geopolitics unnecessarily limits the wider application of geopolitics because it is: 1) anti-geopolitics; 2) anti-cartographic; and 3) anti-environmental”.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, in their analysis they argue, “all three ‘beyonds’ are no longer dominant discourses in geopolitics, having died mostly a natural death”.<sup>62</sup> The natural death of *beyond realism* they see in the fact that “assumptions and conclusions of realism have been widely challenged since the end of the Cold War”; of *beyond wise man* in the fact of having female leaders around the world; and natural death of *beyond the power* in the fact that “most contemporary writing on geopolitics acknowledges the structure of power within states as a potential constraint on power capabilities and geostrategy”.<sup>63</sup> But, geopolitics being resonated as a discourse originated from critical geopolitics. No matter of *beyond* not being any longer dominant discourse(s), discursiveness in geopolitics and geopolitical thought is still present. That creates another set of problems for critics of critical geopolitics. The post-structuralism in international relations paved the way for alternative understandings of the creation of perceptions and imaginations. Poststructuralists

(...) always call into question how certain accepted ‘facts’ and ‘beliefs’ actually work to reinforce the dominance and power of particular actors within international relations. Post-structuralism doubts the possibility of attaining universal laws or truths as there is no world that exists independently of our own interpretations.<sup>64</sup>

This poses a major issue in front of critical geopolitics since individual and partial interpretations are legit in its merits but may limit the totality in world view, especially one of the global world. Haverluk and others remind us that despite of (...) the penchant for critical theorists (is) to remind us of the ‘social construction of geopolitical theories’ does not obviate the fact that many of these theories, past and present, explain only a partial slice of reality.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Terrence W. Haverluk, Kevin M. Beauchemin & Brandon A. Mueller “The Three Critical Flaws of Critical Geopolitics: Towards a Neo-Classical Geopolitics”, *Geopolitics*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2014, p. 19.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20 (f. 2).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Aishling Mc Morrow, “Introducing Poststructuralism in International Relations Theory”, in: Stephen McGlinchey, Rosie Walters and Christian Scheinpflug (eds), *International Relations Theory*, E-International Relations Publishing, 2018, <https://www.e-ir.info/publication/international-relations-theory/>, 12/12/2019.

<sup>65</sup> Terrence W. Haverluk, Kevin M. Beauchemin & Brandon A. Mueller, “The Three Critical Flaws of Critical Geopolitics: Towards a Neo-Classical Geopolitics”, *op. cit.*, p. 20 (f. 2).



Rather than the global world, critical geopolitics is a tool in explaining and criticising the global world due to the difference of the phenomena in question.

New realities in power flow shifted the question of balance in power from where to whom. This reality changes the realm of geopolitics towards new potential aspects of resistance. Existing of the different subaltern

(...) imaginaries that offer creative alternatives to the dominant (critical) geopolitical scripts. The concept of subaltern makes direct reference to postcolonial notions of power relations, suggesting a position that is not completely other, resistant or alternative to dominant geopolitics, but an ambiguous position of marginality.<sup>66</sup>

For now, these bottom-up power shifts and influences are reserved for people who have been marginalised by dominant geopolitics. The practices, whether strategies of survival or getting on with everyday life in Palestine, newspaper publication in Tanzania, or practices of peace-building in the Philippines or Colombia, are all ways of reworking dominant geopolitics not simply through the critique, but through offering up lived alternatives.<sup>67</sup> As Joanna Sharp noticed (as well as O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge by defining Anti-geopolitics), the term subaltern geopolitics is twofold:

(...) it looks past the binary vision of geopolitical reasoning and much critical engagement with it, and also seeks to go beyond the endlessly critical nature of critical geopolitics, to offer alternative ways of imagining and doing geopolitics.<sup>68</sup>

Inspired by postcolonial stress, feminist thought and dissident actions as well as anti-geopolitical interventions to common power-knowledge debate, form new directions of development in geopolitics. Moreover, with the development of the media, especially social media, user-generated content turned the perspective of power in the creation of spaces from exclusively top-down to cumulatively bottom-up imaginations. Unknown users are able to create content, define worlds and share their imaginations.

Besides the debate of interrelations of classical and critical geopolitics, the authors involved in the field of critical geopolitics mainly disagree regarding its position in the scientific frameworks. The main question is whether parts of critical geopolitics (especially popular geopolitics) are new disciplines, critique to neo-classic international relations perspectives or an interdisciplinary view to similar issues of

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<sup>66</sup> Joanna Sharp "Subaltern geopolitics: Introduction", *Geoforum*, Vol. 42, No. 3, 2011, pp. 271–273.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

the global world addressed from different perspectives in (social) sciences. In this paper, it is shown that there are arguments and authors to support all three above-mentioned notions. However, the real question is not positioning the discipline itself but keeping up with everyday development of a medium through which the information, discourses, and imaginations are being communicated. The struggle in positioning and classification unnecessarily limits this self-evolving (inter)discipline by putting labels and, once again, being geopolitical in a discursive way.

Visualising geopolitics through contemporary phenomena and their relations is not an easy task anymore. Kaplan tried to define new cartography as holograms of mobile power and chaos.<sup>69</sup> The Grand Chessboard as Zbigniew Brzezinski called the world has been changed.<sup>70</sup> Simon Dalby argues that not only the rules have changed, but the playground as well. Geopolitics is “no longer just about playing the great game of state rivalry; it is also now literally about remaking the playing field”.<sup>71</sup> Bearing in mind that Dalby refers to the new geological age of Anthropocene and geopolitics evolving into ecopolitics as new realities, in sports jargon one could conclude that due to the climate-related facts the great game will no longer be soccer but handball: with the smaller ballpark, new rules and without grass.

Nevertheless, it is not that simple either. Due to the ongoing debate between classical and critical geopolitics, unevenly developed and globalised co-existing world(s) of different challenges and concerns, the great game is nowadays more similar to three-dimensional Star Trek Chess Sets. With fixed and movable board levels in different sizes; different, confusing and disputable sets of rules and multiple players, popularised through popular culture products, adding new imaginations and meanings (e.g., The Big Bang Theory Series), this game only begins to sum up the reality of the current geopolitical game and approximate the difficulties in categorising it as a discipline in classical scientific frames.

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**Marta ZORKO, Dario SRŠEN**

### **OD KRITIKE DO SAMOEVOLUIRAJUĆE (INTER)DISCIPLINE: KRITIČKA GEOPOLITIKA PROTIV POPULARNE GEOPOLITIKE**

**Apstrakt:** Rad prikazuje razvoj kritičke geopolitike, od kako su je koncipirali O Tjetaj (O Tuathail), Dalbi (Dalby) i Rutlidž (Routlegde) krajem prošlog veka, pa sve do njihovih kritika i pojave fenomena koji su uticali na samorazvoj discipline kao takve. Prvi cilj je analiza glavnih teza pomenutih autora i prevođenje istih na savremene primere današnjice u svrhu testiranja postavljenih teza. Drugi cilj je prikaz savremenih fenomena koji utiču na razvoj discipline u različitim smerovima, od kritike medija, do kritike društva, s posebnim naglaskom na popularnu geopolitiku. Radi se o preglednom radu koji teži analizi stanja discipline, definisanju i pozicioniranju u okviru nove/stare geopolitike, međunarodnih odnosa i humane geografije. Središnja je teza kako su savremeni fenomeni (kao uzrok) suzili fokus izučavanja unutar nekih grana nauke, dok su u drugim uveli danas nezaobilaznu interdisciplinarnost pogleda i nove pristupe izučavanju i u teorijskom i u metodološkom smislu. Kritika klasične geopolitike rezultirala je razvojem triju pravaca izučavanja u ovom smislu: u okviru kritičke geopolitike kao zasebne discipline, s čitavim spektrom poddisciplina ili čak samostalnih disciplina poput popularne geopolitike; u okvirima kritika novo razvijenih neo-klasičnih teorija/škola međunarodnih odnosa; i u okvirima interdisciplinarnih pokušaja koji u fokus istraživanja stavljaju savremene fenomene, kritizirajući tako sve do sad razvijene metode i alate kao nedostatne za objašnjavanje kompleksnog sveta današnjice.

**Ključne reči:** kritička geopolitika, popularna geopolitika, Džeraoid O Tjetaj, Sajmon Dalbi, Pol Rutlidž.