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Geopolitics at 25: an editorial journey through the journal's history

John Agnew, Simon Dalby, Colin Flint, Virginie Mamadouh, David Newman, and Richard Schofield

ABSTRACT¹

Geopolitics is 25 years old. In this Forum former editors reflect on the journey the journal has taken in those 25 years and the wider discipline (or disciplines) in which the journal sits. Alongside a recounting of how the journal came into existence and its name change to just 'Geopolitics', the editors reflect on the resurgence and increasingly interdisciplinary nature of geopolitics as a field of study which the journal played a role in and all meticulously chronicled in its pages (or bytes); the meanings and importance of the "geo" in *geopolitics*; the dynamics and politics of international publishing, the academic publishing industry, metrics, citation and the move online; as well as the continued Anglophone nature of political geography within a supposedly internationalising academy. This is coupled with suggestions for future avenues of research, including a plea to consider physical geography more concretely.

Geopolitics and Boundaries

Richard Schofield (1996-1999)

Department of Geography, King's College London

The story effectively began with a chance conversation sometime during early 1995 between Frank Cass and George Joffe about their shared enthusiasm for classic mid-nineteenth century lithographs of Middle Eastern landscapes, principally the creations of Scottish painter David Roberts. The former was, of course, our original publisher and the latter my colleague at the School of Oriental and African Studies Geopolitics (and International Boundaries) Research Centre (GRC), which had been set up within its Department of Geography. Frank got onto talking about how he'd suggested making a Mediterranean handbook edited by Richard Gillespie into a *Mediterranean Politics* journal and George suggested he might also consider starting a *Journal of North African Studies*

while he was at it, consolidating a number of smaller, sporadic publications that were already out there. George would add that the active conference and seminar programme of SOAS's GRC was also potentially generating plenty of good copy on complex contemporary regional geopolitics and territorial questions.² So, a *Geopolitics and International Boundaries* journal was mooted. A quarter of a century later, all three of these titles are celebrating their twenty-fifth anniversaries with Frank Cass having long since sold them on to Taylor and Francis but both his and George's role were utterly crucial in getting things off the ground.

As for our original title, I really wasn't sure about it. As editor, I wanted to provide a loose ragbag as a carrier for material from a whole variety of disciplines that would address the complex manifestation of disputes surrounding territory, with its edges, at various scales and levels of (mainly regional) application. I remember suggesting, obviously unavailingly, a preference for 'Territory and Sovereignty' as a journal title but we ended up sticking with that working title of *Geopolitics and International Boundaries*.

But, in terms of defining approaches, things really were up for grabs as we passed into the mid-1990s. World Systems Theory was demonstrably struggling to cope with the force, variety and salience of regional dynamics in a post-Cold War context where different things were happening at different speeds in different parts of the world (Corbridge and Agnew, 1995). Power was increasingly being recognised as a key theme in political geography (including its treatment of territorial themes) but authors were sometimes struggling in framing suitable approaches and in developing their theoretical underpinnings (see Slowe, 1990).

With a preference for nuanced regional treatments instilled at SOAS (where I was an undergraduate and returned to lecture), I was ultimately less bothered as editor about cultivating geopolitical approach than exploring the complex array of factors that shaped (often differing) territorial dynamics for given areas of the world – historically as well as contemporaneously. There was a somewhat amorphous and largely unstated missive here to make better sense of the range of territorial issues that were making media headlines (and not just Western ones) in various regions of the post-Cold War world. Territorial

dynamics thus involved consideration of not just the emergence of new state territories and identities within their new borderlands but how regional change was affecting the status of long-established boundary, territorial and resource disputes. There were top-down and ground-up experiences that needed fuller representation and I considered as editor that a deliberately loose, multidisciplinary ragbag was likely to be the most effective carrier for all this. At the same time, we needed to be guided by consideration of what might be the 'geo' in all of this – something that has surely been a priority for all succeeding editors. Two and a half decades on, the question of how geography and geographers might better do territorial and disputes remains a live issue, at least as far as I'm concerned³.

As to that 'and international boundaries' suffix of our original title. It was an understandable focus moving into the early 1990s, in as much as new international boundaries had appeared on land with the end of the Cold War and offshore resource development depended on the settlement of inter-state maritime limits. In more specific connection with the latter, both Keith McLachlan at SOAS and Gerald Blake at Durham – each very much associated with the regional Middle East geography school established back in the 1950s by Bill Fisher at Durham – had assisted as academic geographers with the legal process of boundary dispute resolution – for instance, in Libya's 1980s maritime boundary cases at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) with Tunisia and Libya.

Gerald would go on to found the International Boundaries Research Unit (IBRU) at Durham in 1989 and Keith the GRC at SOAS in 1990. As someone who was involved with the institution of both⁴, I would have to admit that there was initially a bit of creative tension between Keith and Gerald, though – from the start – each had different aims and ambitions. Gerald wanted to cover international boundary questions, particularly definitional issues of alignment and status, with a detailed precision that had largely eluded past geographical treatments and which would bear scrutiny and attract support from the international law community. IBRU sought from the start to assist with the peaceful management of international boundary disputes, particularly in developing world contexts with their focused series of workshops - something that continues today with Martin Pratt's tireless, continuing input. IBRU put on excellent international conferences every two years for the best part of a decade, always helped by the reality that keeping people together in Durham

for a few days was always much easier than trying to do the same in London, when speakers generally just turn up for the session they're involved in. They also ran a genuinely useful publishing programme in-house with their *Boundary Bulletin*, *Maritime Briefing* and *Territorial Briefing* titles deserving of better marketing and distribution.

The GRC that Keith started at SOAS in 1990 (with the strong encouragement of senior management who thought it might prove a cash cow) proved less-long-lasting but convened some timely conferences and workshops on territorial themes along regional lines in the half-decade of its existence. It reflected Keith's view – largely shared by George and I - that isolated analysis of territorial questions outside their full and usually complex context was ultimately pointless and, as a committed regional geographer, he obviously saw this being provided in regional terms. I often think back and wonder whether an approach that married Gerald's precision and concision with Keith's commitment to uncovering complexity might have been realised. As commented earlier, the GRC departed with a decent publishing record of its own and a legacy in the shape of a masters programme that survives to constitute KCL Geography's largest today (MA in Geopolitics, Territory and Security) - also, at least in its origins, our *Geopolitics* journal.

IBRU's explicit focus on the management of international boundaries and the GRC's on their regional context and dynamics would I suppose make them, and many others emanating from that vintage, subject to being classified as doing boundary rather than border studies here⁵. As someone who puts on the (somewhat pompously-entitled) *London International Boundary Conference* today⁶, I know I still probably am. In any event, *Geopolitics and International Boundaries* got launched later than planned (actually in 1997 as I recall, whatever date appeared on its cover) with its distinctive two-tone pink and maroon cover and an advisory board that reflected its origins, as well as the editor's immersion – if you like - in 'boundary' studies. Many of our better early papers ended up being written-up versions of those delivered to GRC workshops and conferences and, for a while, this proved a fruitful source for the sort of content I wanted the journal to be distinguished by – but it was obviously no long-term model for a new international journal. I also hoped we might ideally respond more quickly in covering emerging regional geopolitical questions than, for instance, *Political Geography*. Utterly respected though that carrier was, it was not known –

as undergraduate students would always point out – for covering the here and now. So, we would only partially achieve that topical ragbag referred to earlier under my tenure but I could still count as highlights a number of papers that still hold up well today. Four that stick in the mind as illustrating the richness and variety we were hankering after were authored respectively by geographer and Arabian expert, John Wilkinson (1996); the late, much-missed international lawyer, Kaiyan Kaikobad (1996) — who for a time ran a Masters programme in International Boundaries with Gerald at Durham — my old buddy and lifetime border-nut, Carl Grundy-Warr (1997) (once of IBRU himself) and, lastly; my successor as editor, political geographer David Newman (1997).

David, who – like George - also enjoyed a personal relationship with Frank Cass, would soon come on board to join me as co-editor before taking over the reins for his own, defining stint as editor of *Geopolitics*. My chance to launch the journal came after I'd made a minor name for myself in charting the evolution of Iraq's boundaries at the head of the Persian Gulf (and other Arabian ones) from primary sources in the early 1990s – at a time when the world wanted to hear about them (Schofield, 1993). Yet, while I was lucky to be in the right place to become editor, it really wasn't the right time for me to do so⁷. Unsurprisingly, we would experience the usual challenges for any new publication beyond its first few issues in attracting enough quality submissions to fill further ones going forward - something we would address partially (and long beyond my editorial stint) by commissioning special issues, starting with a rather good one on landlocked states⁸. I probably needed to better articulate what the journal was trying to attract in terms of submissions – here all the advantages of its loose founding basis would come a little unstuck since it wasn't clear to potential contributors what we were after.

Looking back, I didn't move quickly enough to develop an effective editorial team, as I'm sure my in-house editor at Frank Cass at the time, Anthony Green would attest - I was in clear need of some assistance. That would arrive in the dynamic form of David, who I knew well as a fellow former student of both Gerald and Keith and a keen supporter of IBRU's activities (as well, of course, as Tottenham Hotspur FC!). As David's own research moved from empirically-based study of Israel's political geography to more of a concentration on global territorial process (and what was or was not happening to boundaries/borders), he

suggested we drop the ‘and international boundaries’ suffix and more confidently set our stall on doing geopolitics. It proved to be a great decision, as the journal managed to capture early ventures into critical geopolitics and was there in place a bit later on as an obvious carrier for attempts to articulate a nascent critical border studies. Still, there was the odd lament for the passing of my loose old ragbag, including from original advisory board member Alasdair Drysdale, who was kind enough to rate our earliest incarnation as ‘genuinely useful’.

Straddling the Disciplinary Boundaries: Reflections on Fourteen years as the Editor of Geopolitics

David Newman (1998-2014)

Department of Politics and Government, Ben-Gurion University

The fourteen years during which I served as editor of the journal (with a series of co-editors, Richard Schofield, John Agnew and Simon Dalby respectively) was a period in which the label “geopolitics” underwent a process of re-legitimation, experiencing a significant growth in scholarly research, amongst established scholars along with an increase in the number of young scholars undertaking Ph.D and post-doctoral within a discipline which had been shunned for the previous four decades. The establishment of a journal with Geopolitics in its name was itself an indication that the past associations with the Geopolitik of the Third Reich, was beginning to free itself, although as my editorial experience, especially in the early years, continued to throw up a reticence amongst some to use this particular academic label as an outlet for their research.

Dropping the Bad Boy Image of Geopolitics

As Richard Schofield has mentioned, the founder editors of the journal appended “international boundaries” to the term “geopolitics” as a means of making it more acceptable, if only to soften the impact of Geopolitics making a comeback from the

academic mortuary. One of my first decisions as editor was to remove the “international boundaries” from the journal title, and was surprised by many of the reactions which indicated to what extent the bad boy labeling of geopolitics because of its association with the German school of Haushofer during the period of the Third Reich, remained a powerful factor. Not a few scholars wrote to me that this change was inappropriate – not least because of my position as an Israeli academic, and one who should be “more sensitive” to the association of the term with the World War II period – although it was precisely that status which enabled me to undertake the name change without being accused of political preferences.

Not only did the development of the journal during this period reflect a renewed interest in geopolitics and its sub-categories, but it also heralded a period in which a re-assessment of the Geopolitical “bad boys, not least Ratzel and Mackinder, whose works had, for almost forty years, been seen as providing the ideological justification for Haushofer’s German Geopolitik. Haushofers applied and expansionist form of Geopolitik, attaining a formal status in most German universities had drawn strongly on ideas from both of these scholars, Ratzel’s dynamics of State expansion and contraction along with Mackinder’s geostrategical ideas of the world island in the heartland of central-Eastern Europe, and the three, as a group, were not studied or discussed during the four decades of academic blackballing. The renaissance of Geopolitics, through a recourse to other aspects (such as critical geopolitics, the borderless world discourse etc;) also gave rise to an in-depth analysis of the sum total of both Ratzel’s and Mackinder’s writings, stretching well beyond the specific ideas which had been “borrowed” by Haushofer in the development of his own ideas which suited the lebensraum policies of the Third Reich in the 1930’s and 1940’s. Ratzel in particular had been a graphomaniac in a period long before the advent of a cut and paste wordprocessor era, and his important book, *Politische Geografie*, in which he expounded his ideas on the State as an organism and elaborated his seven laws of State expansion and contraction (clearly drawing on Darwin’s ideas, just a few years previously, about the survival of the strongest and the most powerful) , were but a small part of his overall contribution to the world of geography at the time.

Thanks to the contributions of Mark Bassin, many of these ideas underwent a reassessment in a sub section that the journal entitled Geopolitical Traditions and Thinkers, while the 1997 Political geography conference held in the appropriate location of Trieste to mark 100 years since the publication of Ratzel's Politische Geografie has, to this day, mischievously been known as the "Rehabilitating Ratzel" conference, to which the largest number of political geographers (or those openly professing to work in this area) had congregated. I was personally privileged some years later, on a visit to the University of Leipzig, to visit the archives of the Leibniz Institut (IfL) which holds most of the original handwritten manuscripts of Ratzel (including that of Politische Geografie) and which had been kept under lock and key and inaccessible during the Communist period.

Traditional and Critical Geopolitics

The partial readmission of Geopolitics to the family of "legitimate" disciplines by the academic gatekeepers of the 1980s and 1990s had also been due to the new labels which were attached to Geopolitical sub disciplines (such as the study of borders, political landscape change) as the term became more acceptable to geographers as an alternative to that of Political geography, along with alternative ways of analysing geopolitical topics, not least the birth of critical geopolitics, which occupied a central place within the discipline during the 1990s and into the millennium. A value loaded distinction was made between the bad old "traditional Geopolitics" with that of the emerging and more acceptable discourse of "critical Geopolitics", spearheaded by Gerard Toal and Simon Dalby. The use of the term "critical" in the social sciences has a distinct socio-political affiliation and it is clear that by appending the term "critical" to geopolitics, this would, by definition, be vastly different from the old and traditional Geopolitics. Critical geopolitics was a discursive analysis of foreign policy makers and practitioners, critical in the sense that their policies were mostly seen as constituting the bad interests of the West (albeit by no means exclusively so). This too was subject, for a number of years, to a section in the journal in which Toal interviewed and contextualized past practitioners and senior governmental and foreign policy personalities, retrospectively examining the global impact of their policies within a wider discussion of global political change in the post WWII era.

The International Boundaries title, which had been dropped, remained but one sub-area of interest, albeit a major one, along with other topics (the important focus on environmental geopolitics, the impact of global migration) which reflected the inter-disciplinary interest in the coming together of the spatial-territorial with that of the political, and the parallel growth of both Geopolitics, and Political Geography Quarterly (which had been founded at the beginning of the 1980s and was the first indication of a reborn and legitimate interest in Political Geography topics) topics. The common theme for both was the bringing together of spatial and political processes and the way in which each impacted on the other as part of an ongoing and dynamic process of change. This was increasingly understood to be a two way effect, as contrasted with much traditional geographic discourse in which the territory (the spatial dimension) was normally understood to be no more than the physical outcome, the creation of a political landscape, of the political process. As Geopolitics and Political geography have undergone their mutual renaissance during the past 30-40 years, territory is increasingly understood to be part of the dynamics through which political change can take place, with physical change on the ground (political landscape) impacting upon the political process in an ongoing feedback effect. This without the perceived dangers of an “applied geopolitics” returning to haunt the world, even in the relative instability the world is experiencing at present.

Geopolitics means different things to different people. During my period as editor I was inundated with long essays which were little more than foreign policy analyses of contemporary events, the sort of essay one would expect to read in a magazine, but 2-3 times as long. These reviews were invariably returned to their authors with suggestions that the writers place their obvious detailed knowledge of specific regional and global events, more often flash points and shatterbelts (to give credit to Saul Cohen for the endurance of the term he created in the political geography of the 1950s – one of the few scholars to engage with such topics at that time) within a context of geopolitical ideas and theories. The attempt to contextualize largely fell on deaf ears. The journalistic nature of things “geopolitic” is clearly evident from any simple google search engine. The term is applied to a great deal of global political change, although it often remains unclear as to where the “geo” enters what is otherwise a contemporary analysis of political dynamics, especially in areas of conflict. Yet the term “geopolitics” attracted readers and writers from beyond the discipline

(see below) more than the term Political Geography amongst a non-academic audience. Notwithstanding it is important to note that Political geography has, on a number of occasions, been ranked as the most read “non-Political Science” journal (whatever that means) by Political Scientists.

Inter-Disciplinarity – Crossing the Geo-Politics Boundary

It was always important to me to draw on as wide an inter-disciplinary audience of writers and readers and, as a matter of principle, the journal was increasingly opened up and publicized to scholars from Political Science, IR and other related disciplines. This, despite the fact that the majority of the editorial board, and the editors themselves, are from a geographical background. There were always some who insisted that this remain a “geographical” journal to which Political Scientists and International relations scholars would contribute, while others (including this writer) argued that we should endeavor to transform Geopolitics into a shared academic space which did not belong on either side of the boundary, but within a transition or frontier zone which straddled the artificial scientific constructs on both sides. The artificiality of these compartmentalized disciplines was evident when the journal publishes decided to include the journal in its Political Science categories, rather than in Geography, potentially giving it wider exposure, especially through mailing lists and at publishers’ booths at international conferences, but ironically providing it with less exposure within what many continue to see as its core discipline – that of Human Geography. The editorial board meetings continue to take place at the annual meeting of the Association of Geographers conference, to which the largest number of editorial board members attend at any given point in the calendar, and the issue of scientific affiliation and “belonging” remains an ongoing, as yet unresolved, debate, even point of contention.

As part of a review process which required a minimum of three reviews, I endeavoured to ensure that at least one review of any paper was always from the “other” discipline. This often resulted in a situation where the third reviewer would suggest literature which had not been cited by the author(s) and it was surprising the extent to which the majority of authors, remained focused on the relevant scholarly literature from within their own scientific discipline, reflecting the strength and relative lack of porosity of the borders

separating the different scientific categories. I was made even more aware of this dilemma during a six year period as Dean of a joint faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, where any attempts to promote inter-disciplinarity in research and teaching was always met by approval in open debates, but always fell back in promotion and tenure committees where, invariably, there would be someone who would question the precise academic affiliations of the candidate – either he/she was too focused on a narrow discipline and a single journal for their scholarly output, or they were too broadly dispersed over a wide range of disciplines and sub-disciplines. As a metaphor to the study of borders itself, a sub topic which remained one of the main areas of manuscript submission during a period in which the study of borders underwent a major global renaissance (and remains so until today), Geopolitics remained at best, a frontier discipline straddling the border between the two, and at worst a geographic discipline to which the occasional political science / IR scholar would contribute or a reference would be cited.

Geopolitics became transformed into a journal in which practitioners of the social sciences met each other in a common publishing and discursive space, but did not necessarily engage with each other's literature. This can be partly explained by the way in which academic disciplines continue fight for their own self perpetuation in a world of powerful scientific social gatekeeping, much of which focuses on the world of rankings, citation indices and promotion, and this has proved challenging as a new generation of scholars, for whom the concept of inter disciplinarity is much more than just an acceptable slogan or mantra, have undertaken exciting new research projects.

It contributed a great deal to my own thinking about the nature of borders and the extent to which they create artificial compartments, but once created (whether they are physically visible or not) become sacrosanct and difficult to remove – certainly in the perceptions of the beholder.

Geographers reading this will be more than aware that in the contested space of academia recognition, there is a tendency for practitioners of those disciplines which are perceived as being on the periphery to seek to gain legitimacy amongst practitioners of those disciplines which are perceived to occupy a core position. This is often reflected in the extent to which

scholars read and cite scholarly material from disciplines to which they are not formally or institutionally affiliated. It is more common for geographers to submit papers which draw on, and engage, political science and/or IR literature than the reverse is true. This is ironic in the sense that geographers have a far more sophisticated understanding of the changing notions of space and landscape (as too multi layered concepts of core-periphery) than is evident in much of the Political Science literature. The latter continues to relegate space or (the preferred term) territory to an empirical construct which can be measured, quantified, applied to models of forecasting, as contrasted with a conceptual and theoretical debate about the way in which landscape and territory are constructed, perceived and exploited amongst geographers engaged with a critical understanding of landscape and place. This is probably true of much human geography of the past three decades, where geographers understanding of space as a dynamic construct cannot be understood without recourse to the political, cultural, economic or sociological, as contrasted with a political science understanding of space as being no more than the physical construct which is a fixed outcome of the other sociological and political processes. This too was reflected in many of the submissions to the journal which were received during my period as editor, while attempts to cajole writers to engage with the literature of the “other” in revised submissions, was more difficult to achieve amongst those who perceived themselves to be part of the “core” discipline, to which the geo dimensions was no more than an addendum.

From a Western to a Global Geopolitics

The journal attempted to engage with the geopolitical discourses of scholars beyond the traditional confines of the Anglo-Western world. Africa, Asian, Latin American and Russian scholars were all actively cajoled into submitting their work on the different geopolitical discourses and traditions – both conceptual (in terms of the way territory, borders, and political landscapes were understood) and empirical in terms of the geopolitical changes which had been experienced in these non-Western spaces. Leading geopolitical scholars, such as Sanjay Chatuverdi from India and Vladimir Kolossov from Russia became members of the editorial board, although this had limited impact. Much remains today for the geopolitical traditions of these regions to receive adequate coverage. In one case, a series French language papers from Hérodote were translated for a special issue, but this was an

exception rather than the rule. – and as much due to financial constraints as the success in attracting young scholars from these regions to submit their research.

We do not know nearly enough about the geopolitical, culture based, territorial traditions of many non-Western societies. All too easily we regurgitate the mantra that many of these regions, subject to European colonialism and imperialism, were subject to a process of territorial fixation along the lines of the European State, with superimposed and clearly demarcated boundaries. In most cases the outcome of this enforced imposition of European territorial models clashed with local notions of territorial behavior, many of which had been culturally specific and which had lasted for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. But to this day we have, as a community of geopolitical scholars, failed to fully engage with or understand what the alternative territorial models of behavior were or how territorial regimes in these regions operated, and how they fed into (or derived from) political process and governance. This remains a challenge, even more so as in the post 9/11 world we are subject to a re-imposition of borders, walls and territorial fixation, imposed (according to the accepted narrative) of ensuring “homeland security” in an era of renewed global instability.

Concluding Comment

It was a privilege that a significant part of my academic career was spent editing *Geopolitics*, enabling me to engage with a renaissance discipline, one which had roots back to the late nineteenth century, was blackballed by the social gatekeepers and managers of the global academic community in the immediate post WWII era (when most social science disciplines were experiencing growth rather than decline) and which has undergone a renewal, as evidenced in the number of publishing outlets, conferences and workshops and, most importantly, the number of young PhD and postdoctoral scholars working on topics of “geopolitical” significance. The journal remains an important conduit of this renaissance, in which many of the topics identified in my comments remain to be strengthened.

The Geopolitics of *Geopolitics*

John Agnew (1999-2008)

Department of Geography, UCLA

The journal came into existence at a time when many of the old longstanding geopolitical “verities” associated with the Cold War were in question. The Iron Curtain was raised, borders were back in dispute, ethnic separatism was rife, and globalization was on the march. Indeed, a case could be made that the word “geopolitics,” even if Nixon and Kissinger had brought it back to half-life in the 1970s, had only lost its largely negative aura once the world was widely seen to be back in flux. This time around, of course, the word had a more capacious meaning than it had previously. Even if older schemas based on elemental oppositions such as land and sea and the relative disposition of the continents were revived in some quarters, there was also a sense that the old concept needed revisiting and redefining not least to reintroduce some human agency into its deployment. So, this is also the time of the birth of a “critical geopolitics” focused on geopolitics as a set of discursive framings of world politics and of a geopolitical economy that refused to see world politics as simply the outcome of states or other polities banging up against one another but as involving a range of economic and political actors such as banks, businesses, and international organizations as well as states and their geographical assumptions and operations.

Geopolitics was founded in this context. Without the “new world” in the making I doubt there could have been a journal that would have been founded or have taken off so fast. The name *Geopolitics* itself took on a whole new meaning. There is clearly much to be said about the role of the founding editors and publishers in seeing the trend of the time and responding to it. I was not privy to any of that. Richard and David have much to offer in that regard. I would just like to comment on a number of features of the journal that reflect how it first developed in the early 2000s and that I believe it still reflects.

First off, I think that between the late 1990s and the present the journal has committed itself to a heterodox definition of “geopolitics.” There is little or no sense of a single theoretical framing or methodological orthodoxy that would guide the editorial decisions. I do not recall there being any conscious decision to operate in this way. But I think that this was very much its editorial *modus operandi* from the time I was involved in it down to today. It has been open as much to neoclassical as to critical geopolitics, for example. I think that perhaps having as co-editors from 1999-2008 two people who shared certain sensibilities (above all about English football, if for different teams) but who otherwise represented different strands of thinking about geopolitics was important in producing the relative openness. Second, it was never primarily a disciplinary journal, even if professional geographers dominated many of the early issues. From the outset, the editorial board, for example, contained political theorists and a few unorthodox scholars of international relations. It has maintained this quality. For me, at least, this is to be celebrated as an intellectual openness from which we have all learned. Third, the journal has tracked the changing character of global geopolitics over the course of the past twenty-five years. The subject matter of the articles shows the dynamic nature of the world to which the word “geopolitics” is applied. I think it matters that the journal has not been just a repository of reviews of past geopolitical thought or the recapitulation of the approaches of the Great Men whose every thought we should still hang on however irrelevant to contemporary concerns. The journal has been oriented to what Machiavelli called “current reality” in regard of shifting historical-geographical realities. Gramsci was later to borrow this phrase to emphasize how much theoretical explication is useless if it is based in past not current practices and actions.

The world of the 2020s looks likely to be even more “dynamic” than the era in which *Geopolitics* was founded. All sorts of prophetic statements about the world we will see in the aftermath of the Great Pandemic of 2020 will stand in need of our critical attention: from predictions of the demise of the “nation-state,” the collapse of the US-based international order (and the international organizations like the WTO and WHO that underpin it) to Russia and China as the big “losers” in global reputation, and the disintegration of the global supply-chains that have been central to recent economic

globalization. The journal will not soon run out of appropriate subject matter. What is important to me is that it continues to reflect the geopolitical realities that brought it to life in the first place. In learning from Machiavelli, we should be ever attentive to the fact, and the word geopolitics is our prime example, that “the social energy of political configurations always spills out of the neat constructs in which it’s meant to stay put” (Boucheron, 2018: 7).

“Geopolitics: Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose”

Simon Dalby (Co-editor 2009-2014)

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The political and economic world has changed dramatically since the journal was first published in the mid 1990s. So too has the intellectual scene, in geography and across the social sciences and humanities. More specifically within the discipline political geography has become established as one of the thriving foci which attracts attention from a broad array of non-geographers. The journal has it seems, been a key vehicle for extending the discussion across disciplinary divides, and for maintaining the importance of studying geographical formulations in the structuring of power. This was its ambition in the early stages, and Richard Schofield, John Agnew and David Newman clearly succeeded.

The journal’s heterodox approach to its theme has served it, and its now extensive collection of contributors, well over the last few decades. While the diversity of intellectual perspectives has grown, as scholars in both geography and cognate fields grapple with innovations in social and political theory and new analytical methods, the central themes of space, power, conflict, borders and identity persist as matters in need of critical analysis. Globalization was all the rage in the late 1990s--both as a process to be advocated, or in the eyes of its numerous left-wing critics, as a political danger to many things, not least traditional notions of sovereign nation states. In contrast now as the journal reaches its 25th year of publication, exclusionist tropes of ethno-nationalism are in circulation in politics in many places, galvanizing authoritarian and sometimes expressly fascist movements.

Space and power are being reconfigured by technological innovation and fractious politicians as well as media, that, for unexplained reasons, are still widely called “social”. The themes of geopolitics persist in these endless reinterpretations. That they do demands our attention to novel developments, but also to continued careful rethinking of the traditions that these reinterpretations invoke, if frequently without much intellectual reflection on their genealogies. Brexiteers want to take back control, and do so in a remarkably simplistic articulation of a supposed prior condition of geographical autonomy lost in the process of Europeanization. Donald Trump thinks walls are efficacious at least as political slogans. But security in these forms for some comes at the price of very much enhanced insecurity for many others.

Territoriality is thus a remarkably persistent political strategy and one marked by the presence of boundaries of various sorts, and state borders most obviously. In its early incarnation as a Frank Cass journal the title of the publication was *Geopolitics and International Borders*. The international borders part of the title disappeared quite quickly. This suggested to me, at least, at the time that it was a redundancy. The title *Geopolitics* simply implied the importance of state borders. But in reflecting on the academic contribution of the journal subsequently, it is interesting to note that, as of early 2020, most of the papers listed on the journal website, as “most cited”, include the word “border” in their titles. None of those listed as the “most read” have it in theirs!

While one presumably shouldn’t make too much of the strange artifacts of journal metrics they do suggest something in terms of how themes in the journal are taken up as part of the ongoing scholarly enterprise represented in its pages. (When I was an editor I too had to contend with a steady stream of journalistic submissions focusing on either regional conflicts or efforts at foreign policy commentary that didn’t engage the scholarly discussions of geopolitics.) Editors are always tempted to insist on contributions to the journal citing other pieces in the journal because it boosts citation index scores. While editing papers I did try to resist that temptation, but also tried to ensure that papers spoke to each other and added cumulatively to the scholarly discourse in our pages.

That said, in my time as an editor the one thing I was never able to get a satisfactory answer to from Claire Cusack, the ever helpful publisher's representative from Taylor and Francis, (and she really was very helpful: thank you Claire, once again, for your role in the success of the journal in those years!) concerned how exactly the publisher measured the journal's performance. Clearly article downloads mattered more than anything else, and as they steadily increased in number each year, we were repeatedly assured that we were in good shape! But how and why simply wasn't clear. Nor was it clear how this fitted with the larger marketing of scholarly knowledge in the publishing world.

What was clear was that article downloads too are a matter of geopolitics. A huge spike in article downloads towards the end of one year happened because Iranian scholars and librarians were downloading papers in very large numbers. Faced with the then imminent application of financial sanctions on the Iranian regime, they had realized that shortly thereafter online journal access would be unavailable in the country because electronic subscriptions could not be paid due to how the sanctions were administered technically. International borders matter too in terms of journal sales and access by institutions and scholars to particular forms of knowledge, a corollary point to the continuing difficulties that Anglosphere journals have in incorporating voices in other languages and from the Global South.

Whatever the finer points of download statistics submissions to the journal continue to increase, and as of 2020, adding a fifth issue to each volume has become necessary. This is a clear indication of success as a growing research community finds this journal an outlet for scholarly work and does so even though other journals with broadly similar mandates have appeared in recent years.

It also seems to be the case that the breadth of topics encompassed by geopolitics is expanding simultaneously. The first issue of volume 25 is on subterranean geopolitics, exploring new territory as it were, in the increasingly important realms of materialist geopolitics. While one special issue isn't a trend, elsewhere the discussions of climate change, biodiversity loss and the numerous governance efforts to grapple with these and

related earth system issues, raise numerous questions about how the future of the “geo” is being shaped, by whom and whose interests.

This is about the core concerns of our discipline and about quite literally what “world” is being made, and how this increasingly artificial biosphere that nearly eight billion of us inhabit, will be divided and ruled. How the technosphere is shaped will matter in terms of global ecology, but also in terms of which parts of the global economy generate the technologies of the future, and whether these are ones that facilitate a sustainable future for most of us. Geopolitics is now very much about these matters of global production systems and the potential conflicts that may yet arise if the, as yet, grossly inadequate mechanisms of global governance fail to chart a course through increasingly severe disruptions to the earth system.

Here the increasing focus on China in the pages of the journal is important, not least because how successful the shift toward making an ecological civilization there in the near future is, will partly shape the global mix of energy technologies. If China’s current dominance in solar and wind energy systems persists, its continued “rise” may well be in part as a result of just this industry. Tesla’s recent move into the Chinese vehicle market might end up being significant too in accelerating the shift to a post-carbon fueled economy. How far global concerns will shape China’s domestic energy politics in a world where threats of trade wars and other forms of conflict are sadly persistent, is another key geopolitical consideration in need of much more analysis.

The promises of a borderless world and modernity as the answer to whatever question one wished to raise in the 1990s haven’t been realized. The “global” war on terror, the rise of China, massive inequalities within and between polities, the fears in Washington about many things, and the accelerating crises of biodiversity loss, habitat destruction and climate disruptions offer a daunting agenda for geopolitics scholars in coming years. At least they do if we are to offer useful insights that lead away from the dangerous rivalries that haunt the geopolitics of the past. What comes after the so-called liberal world order, and who shapes it? Can the world polity demilitarize and decarbonize simultaneously?

All of this is about the traditional task of geography in studying the earth as humanity's home. Now it is also very much about the possibilities of reimagining that home as a crowded place where politicians have to work out how to make peaceful and sustainable policies, rather than reverting to tactics of division and rivalry in attempts to dominate and divide a very rapidly changing world. The latter strategy suggests grave peril for all the world's peoples.

These are the big difficult questions for the current generation of geopolitics scholars. Fortunately, here, we now have an established scholarly journal in very good shape to publish their findings!

Reflections and suggestions of a recent editor

Colin Flint (Co-editor 2014-2019)

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I served as co-editor, with Dr. Virginie Mamadouh, of *Geopolitics* from the last few months of 2014 to December 2019. One reason I accepted the position was that I had recently moved to a political science department and I had a strong desire to remain firmly situated within political geography. The experience was made possible and, largely, enjoyable because of the successful partnership with Dr. Mamadouh. We had shared values and visions, and different strengths and weaknesses in the way we approached management of papers. I believe that was a good combination, and I thank Dr. Mamadouh for helping me think through my role as an editor, and in guiding the trajectory of the journal. I also thank all the colleagues who gave their time to review papers. Our tenure was marked by a large increase in submissions and a rise in the impact factor score. Such gains led to certain headaches; especially how to manage increased submissions as it became harder to find colleagues willing to review papers. The circumstances required Dr. Mamadouh and I to enact a large number of "desk rejects" – rejections of papers we made jointly without sending the paper to reviewers. The basis of the decision was often around the degree of the "geo" in geopolitics, which I will now go on to discuss.

Geopolitics is an eclectic journal, and has increasingly become an outlet for all forms of political geography with an international dimension. This is a positive state of affairs, illustrates and drives the success of the journal, and will, I'm sure, be encouraged by the current and future editorial teams. However, being eclectic is not without its problems, especially when the word geopolitics means different things to different people. Dr. Mamadouh and I decided that one of our tasks as editors was to ensure that submitted papers needed a clear and academic understanding of the "geo" in geopolitics. Our intention, and I hope our practice, was to be accommodating to many different definitions of, and frameworks to investigate, the "geo" in geopolitics. However, we were quite stringent in demanding that papers contained some discussion of geography that, very broadly, reflected the paradigm that politics and geography are mutually and socially constructed.

The approach while I was co-editor was to ensure that the journal's role was to further academic inquiry that investigated the entwined social constructions of spatialities and international politics (both broadly defined). However, the journal was open to papers investigating many forms of such spatialities and, most importantly, the theoretical frameworks adopted to do so. My tenure as co-editor did provoke consideration of the dearth of inquiry into the role of one form of "geo" – the geophysical, or the constraints and opportunities physical geography creates as a barrier or conduit to global connections. Recent investigations on the geopolitics of verticality, volume, and the subterranean, have moved in this direction. But the new directions are a theoretical distance from a rather basic understanding that "geography matters" – as eluded to in Cohen's (2003, 11) emphasis upon "geographical factors underlying international relations." I do not have the space to further discuss what the geophysical could be in contemporary geopolitical inquiry. Instead, for this essay I would like to point out the lack of concentration in academic inquiry on the role of physical geography in geopolitics is related to our lack of relevancy in the policy community. The absence of discussion of physical geography, or seeing it as an ephemeral or contingent construct, is baffling to policymakers involved in security issues. Academics who study geopolitics have a choice: Adopt social theories that marginalize physical geography or focus on its contingencies and thereby make us irrelevant to policymakers, or revert to more traditional (though non-deterministic) views of physical geography that

engage the issues policymakers are facing. Here, I merely point out what I see, dichotomously for sake of provoking an argument, as the choice: greater participation in academic conversations with decreased relevancy, or deciding now is the time to tackle geographically deterministic skeletons in the cupboard and re-writing physical geography into geopolitics to enable policymakers in a time of heightened international tensions. Editorship of a sub-disciplinary journal provides a vantage point to consider some issues facing political geography. Of course, such views are selective and far from exhaustive. To conclude this essay, I briefly introduce three issues that would, I believe, benefit from wider discussion by political geographers. First, is the issue of the dominance of articles written by scholars from Britain, Europe, and the United States. This issue is hardly new (Keighren, 2020). I am sure that every editorial team and board of all major journals wrestle with this problem, and have a sincere desire to expand the sources of accepted articles from underrepresented regions in the country. Yet years of such lament should be enough to tell us that whatever efforts have been made have been inadequate to address the structural constraints that result in the promotion of voices from the wealthiest and most powerful regions and the relative silencing of scholars from, largely, the global South. A more conscious effort is needed. Some possibilities include special issues co-edited by scholars from different regions of the world. Another approach could be for journals to provide a “clearing house” service in which scholars from disparate regions announce ongoing paper projects that would benefit from collaboration. I leave the particular form of creativity to current and future editors, but something needs to be done other than annual lament at editorial board meetings.

The second issue is the decreasing breadth of methodologies adopted by political geographers. We often complain that related disciplines, especially political science, do not cite geographers and adopt their ideas and approaches. There are multiple reasons for this, as O’Loughlin (2000) has outlined. But one issue is the discrepancy in the attitude towards research design and methodology between political science and political geography. Political scientists increasingly emphasize the “science” of their studies, and the publication process involves rigorous evaluation of case selection logics, the methodologies adopted, and the confidence in the inferences that may be made from a piece of research. In contrast, it is very common for papers to be published in *Geopolitics* without any elucidation

of research design. There is also no equivalent evaluation of the data used in *Geopolitics* articles compared to the norms of political science where all data that is used in an article must be made available to the research community, and many journals require precise independent replication of results prior to publication. The argument can be made that political geographers tend to publish research based on qualitative analysis, that does not lend itself to making data public (Institutional Review Board considerations may prohibit this), and that conclusions stem from the author's interpretation rather than precise statistical methods. There is truth to these arguments, but they can also obscure a different attitude to research and methodology between political geography and political science that creates difficulties in creating inter-disciplinary conversation.

There is also a dichotomy between the strong emphasis in political science upon quantitative methodology and the emphasis upon qualitative analysis in political geography. As editor, I hoped for and encouraged papers using quantitative methodologies; but, if I recall correctly, just one such paper was submitted and published during my tenure. *Geopolitics* should try to be a broader church in terms of methodology. This is easier said than done, as journals largely respond to sub-disciplinary trends rather than set agendas. However, perhaps some themed issues that either promote quantitative analysis, or address a particular issue through a collection of papers adopting both quantitative and qualitative methods, would send a message that the journal is home to a greater variety of methodologies than are currently included. Increasing such diversity would be good to diversify the type of papers published; it may also help with developing a dialog with political science.

The third issue I would like to raise, very briefly, is the reality that the global climate change crisis will lead to increasing pressure to question the morality of academic conferences requiring long-distance travel. And yet, conversation, debate, dialog, and the exchange of ideas are all vital to academic progress. Journals must play a role in enabling such collaborative conversations by hosting webinars and other forms of virtual conferencing. Again, I have the luxury of raising the issue and letting others come up with solutions! In sum, the trajectories of *Geopolitics* and geopolitics remain entwined, challenging, and relevant. Keep up the good work.

Geopolitics of a thriving international journal: From the perspective of the editor as a midwife

Virginie Mamadouh (Co-editor 2014-2019)

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Geopolitics turned 25 years old and is by all standards a thriving international journal. I am most grateful for the invitation of Polly Pallister-Wilkins and the new team of editors to comment on the past, present and future of the journal for the occasion. *Geopolitics* is thriving by all metrics: submissions, published articles, downloads and citations (the proxy metric for readers) but also reviewers and editorial team. Such a success is the outcome of collective work, and editors are just one link in a very long chain, from authors to production.

Originally, I thought it would be a good opportunity for an analysis of the “reclamation of geopolitics” (Flint & Mamadouh 2015) in the pages of the journal, by completing a review of the geopolitics of themes, approaches and authorship in *Geopolitics* I had envisioned when starting as an editor in 2014. While the geopolitical has regained its appeal, it remains a highly contested notion, both inside and outside academia. Thanks to the archival work of Mandy Hoggard, who was then embarking on a long journey as our faithfully appreciated editorial assistant, I had an overview of volume 3 thru 19 but had failed to find the time to finish the article. Updating her careful inventory (470 articles and 11,000 pages) with the details of the last six years (another 200 articles and 5,000 pages) was a daunting task. Moreover, this was something anyone interested in the evolution of the contested notion of geopolitics could do, and still can do, as it was about published material. I therefore decided to seize the occasion to reflect on the painstaking work behind the editing of a thriving journal in light of a further internationalization and digitalization of academic publishing.⁹

Digitalization

In those 25 years academic publishing changed so dramatically that it is hardly possible to compare journals in the mid-1990s and now. The move online has dramatically changed the dynamic of journal publishing. And this is more recent than we remembered. I looked it up and was surprised to read that Taylor and Francis journals are delivered online since... 2011. Not even ten years ago. According to the information about date of online publication on the website of the journal, *Geopolitics* volume 10 (1) was in 2006 the first issue available online on publication, while earlier issues were put online afterwards, some articles in 9(4) even as late as 2012.

Digitalization has greatly eased access, at least for those getting through the paywall. For others probably too. Authors have circulated pdf to a wider network than they did when receiving a set of offprints. While solidarity between academics also works and those of us in institutions with good access to academic journals sometimes download a much-needed article for someone in a much less fortunate position, much more quickly than they were Xeroxing an article and putting it in the mail (yes, young reader, we actually did that in the era of printed journals). And the publishers benefit from this, since it contributes to higher circulation and high citation indexes.

Of the most dramatic effects of the online move of academic publishing is the disappearance of the journal as a community. To my knowledge a hard copy *Geopolitics* is still sent to editorial board members. I thank Taylor & Francis for this and I hope they will keep this old-fashioned habit for much longer. I am on the editorial board of journals that I only see online. I get an announcement of the table of contents when a new issue is published (and probably only because I registered to that service at the publisher's website) but I never get as engaged as with a paper journal. You don't get to browse through an online issue, the way you do through a hard copy, when you get a glimpse of each and every paper, get intrigued by a figure or a table or by a reference. Even worse the hard copy on your desk and your bookshelf is always an opportunity to mention the journal to colleagues or to students¹⁰ and to promote the journal.

The effect is of course even more notable for authors, reviewers and readers. Authors don't get a hard copy of the issue featuring their article. Only older academics sometimes ask about it. Most authors could not care less and would not know what to do with it, in their nomadic lives. The pdf is sufficient. Readers find articles through search engines, either on the website of the journal or the publisher, in key databases such as WorldCat, JSTOR, Scopus and Web of Science or university repositories, in commercial networking sites for academics such as Research Gate and Academia.edu, and of course thanks to the unavoidable Google Scholar. Articles are individualized items and their fate is hardly linked to the established readership of the journal. This is true even if they are part of special issues. Links to other articles are limited to "People also read" recommendations on the publisher's site (of course limited to its own journals, but not to that specific journal) and via references and citations. Tweets or blogs of acquainted authors.

Observing new generations of (PhD) students I see that they just have no sense of a journal as a community of readers and that it makes no sense to them to follow a journal and to check what appears in a new issue, just to know what is happening. This is aggravated by the multiplication of journals and the exponential growth of online first publications. The new issue is evidently not synonymous of the latest news anymore. Potential authors also keep their distance and do not show any sense of attachment to the journal in which they publish. Some never have time when they are asked to act as a reviewer (or even worse are too obviously busy getting rid of a potential competitor). Most follow elaborate publication strategies in which they are encouraged to publish in different top journals, as a demonstration of the breadth and the relevance of their scholarship.

This digitalization has diminished the sense of community traditionally associated with an academic journal. It also changed the role of editors, who are less than before a gatekeeper for a journal, because the journal is no bounded space, but possibly for a 'system' of academic publishing that is more and more a business model and less and less an academic community. And that model is a globalized academic marketplace (see Paasi 2005, 2015). Publishing in an English language international journal like *Geopolitics* is a necessity for academics in most academic institutions in the world (Canagarajah 2002, Lillis & Curry 2010, Curry & Lillis 2017). The problematic effects of this internationalization of academia and the

role of English have been discussed extensively in the field of (human) geography, asking again and again whether the so-called international academic journals are so international (Minca 2000, Gutiérrez & López-Nieva, 2001, Garcia-Ramon 2003, 2006, Aalbers 2004, Kitchin 2005, Aalbers & Rossi 2006, 2007, Desbiens & Rubbick 2006, Hioussay-Holzschuch & Milhaud 2013, Bajerski 2017, Imhof & Müller 2020 to name only a few contributions).

Internationalization

Geopolitics was founded in 1996 by Richard Schofield in the United Kingdom as *Geopolitics and International Boundaries* and got its shortened title two years later. Its successive editors were British (or Irish) but based in the USA (3x), Canada, and Israel, while I was based in the Netherlands. In editorial years the division was more balanced: 5 years the editor was affiliated to a British university, 17 for those based in American ones, 6 for the editor based in Canada, against 17 years for Israel, and 6 for the Netherlands. Nevertheless, I have been the only one not a native speaker of English. Maybe not the most obvious feature setting me aside from my fellow editors over the years, but the one I would like to discuss in light of the internationalization of academic publishing and the role of international journals like *Geopolitics* as - recommended and/or desirable - outlets for geographers outside the Anglophone world.

My struggle with English is a bit different from that of non-native speakers studying, living and working in Anglophone countries, since I never choose English, and I never functioned in an English language social context. Meanwhile keeping on publishing in other languages stands in the way of a more pervasive English acculturation and the taming of the English language and I see myself as writing from outside the Anglosphere. I don't want to suggest that it is necessary to be sensitive to the difficulties of non-Anglo academics struggling with English to publish in *Geopolitics* but it helps. Far be it from me the idea to suggest that Anglophones are all oblivious to these issues (many of them are not monolingual of course) and I would like to stress that many Anglophone colleagues are highly sensitive to the difficulties of foreign speakers, and that some are great communicators to foreign audiences because they take this into account in their slower and clearer diction and their straightforward vocabulary choices, and some are generous advisors to foreign writers. By contrast foreign speakers of English can occasionally turn out to be the bluntest and crudest

reviewers when it comes to bringing to the fore that the English syntax of an author is deficient.

In discussion about the hegemony of Anglo-American geographers in international geography the composition of the editorial team and editorial board is often seen as an indicator of genuine internationalization (for a recent example Imhof & Müller 2020). The presence of academics affiliated to non-Anglo universities is a signal that such authorship is welcome. Possibly editors and reviewers are expected to have more empathy to the struggle of authors from other academic contexts and more affinity with their perspective and more expertise on their terrains. I would not be able to draw definite conclusions whether it does work like that, but I would like to offer a few comments on those quandaries from the perspective of an editor.

But let me first clarify that I do not see the editor as a gatekeeper mainly patrolling the borders of a discipline or socializing authors into a specific field (see O’Loughlin 2018 as a gatekeeper editor despairing of some bad and ugly trends in the field of political geography in the 35 years he was editor of *Political Geography*). Neither do I see the editor as a gatekeeper disciplining the aspiring authors into the Anglophone publishing culture. While I understand that many authors (especially those facing rejection) see it this way, I want to propose a more adequate metaphor.

In my view the editor is more a midwife helping the authors to get their paper out there. And if you find it a disturbing metaphor, you can maybe follow Sparks’ alternative to the gatekeeper metaphor in the field of English education, when she suggests to see the editor as a facilitator and to consider the submission and publishing process as a negotiation (Sparks 2007). As a midwife the editor has a key role to play looking for a compromise between the original message and some engagement with the “international” standard of academic publishing.¹¹ It is a tough process though and there are a few discouraging stumbling blocks.

The first is the engagement with the “international” literature which turns out to be mostly Anglophone - even when the topic is a review of research in another language community,

some introduction to make explicit why it matters and what it contributes to the Anglophone readership is necessary. A typical objection would run like: why do I need to discuss a bunch of often cited Anglophone authors that did not inspire me, when I want to build on the conceptual richness of the work of a Claude Raffestin, a Milton Santos or a Bertha Becker? (Well yes, but you want to convince them that these authors have great things to say...).

The second difficulty is what makes a paper a valuable contribution to the field.

Anglophone geography is notoriously biased toward theoretical novelty: (the performance of) conceptual innovation is a must. In geography in other places and contexts, and in International Relations Studies, the other big reservoir of papers for the journal, empirical novelty is the main justification for publication: a new empirical case, in a new location, in a new place, or new sources are the main reason to pay attention to a study. Many reviewers however expect however some conceptual innovation and are generally lukewarm about empirical contributions that do not gesture appropriately towards the promise of a conceptual contribution. This is even more the case when the empirical details abound and entail places and actors less familiar. The paradox is that if you write about the borderscapes of Tijuana and San Diego, you might expect the readership to have some background knowledge about the US-Mexico border, but if you write about Xishuangbanna and Luang Prabang or about Goma and Gisenyi you need a lot of words to set the stage for your case study.... With some benevolent guidance the contribution to conceptual discussions can often be made explicit. But the cultural gap remains wide and many academics across the world are moved by empirical puzzles – rather than theoretical ones, by new observations rather than by theoretical over-sophistication. And they might not want to bridge the gap.

An additional mismatch is specific to *Geopolitics* as some potential authors submit policy briefs or journalist accounts of events they see as geopolitical whatever that means (sometimes no more than power politics, a perspective that re-emerged in the mid-2010s after the Russian annexation of Crimea and China's Belt and Road Initiative) without any analytical engagement with geographical aspects of politics (territory, borders, scales,

networks, places....). These are desk rejects as the journal does not aim at advising diplomats, state persons and other (geo-)political decision makers.

The third difficulty is even more arduous to tackle. The craft of academic writing is culturally bounded: how you write, how you build an argument, how you use references, etc. none of these is universal. Bluntly speaking some (academic) cultures request climbing on the shoulders of others (or in less flattering terms: hiding behind a wall of references) while others value above all the staging of an original argument (or concealing sources of inspiration). And then comes the English language itself, and its many varieties. It is a meagre consolation to the foreign writers of English that native speakers of certain varieties of English are also struggling to get their prose accepted. As a foreign language editor, I feel very challenged. I am of poor help to deal with the subtleties and the quirks of the language, as I have no authoritative appreciation of English syntax, and lack the emotional intelligence to assess the text. As long as (I think) I understand what the sentence means, it works for me. Utterances that are oddities to me might be the most nuanced, creative and literary British sentences; creative neologisms that I find imaginative and accurate might be complete oddities in the eyes of native speakers (but then again are they the owners of English as the international academic language? See Mamadouh 2018).

How this unfolds backstage is more important than many native speakers realize, and not only for the authors. The most exhausting is that the struggle with the English language never ends. Writing a review, writing a review of reviews to justify a decision, suggesting improvements are particularly tricky exercises in a foreign language. No doubt I spend much more time on this than any native speaker: not only to come up with suggestions but also to shape the message in a polite and constructive way but foremost to put this in a grammatically acceptable way. The fear of making spelling errors and grammatical mistakes remain more paralyzing than any writer's block or lack of inspiration. How embarrassing can it be to convene a critical assessment of someone's academic writing and overlook typos, misuse a phrase or get a conjugation wrong in your own letter? Trust this self-conscious editor, it is really awkward! And no matter how often you read and re-read yourself, mistakes keep popping up when you re-read the letter a few stages later in the procedure. In an attempt to turn that handicap into an asset I have tried to make visible the multilingual background of much of the academic work published in the journal. As an editor I felt I was

not proactive, trying to influence the directions in which peers would develop geopolitical inquiries, but mostly reactive, dealing with manuscripts and special issues proposals peers would be willing to send us – so much for those who have high expectations of the power allegedly held by editors to shape the research agenda of their journal. One of the few things I tried to do was not to push for a specific interpretation of geopolitics or a specific way of doing geopolitics, but rather to make the international character of *Geopolitics* visible. This boils down to the little things. Sometimes battles that were probably not that well-chosen but illustrative of the pervasiveness of Anglophone hegemony and uniformity.

One of those lost battles was my struggle to get the spelling of proper names right – at least for authors (I quickly abandoned the idea of correcting names that became known in English in a time where typographers or computers could not deal with letters inexistent in English – think of Lech Wałęsa). My stubbornness brought about quite a lot of mail exchanges with guest editors and production to get it right in the table of contents or in cross-referencing in special issues. Sometimes only to discover afterwards that in the correction of the proofs of their own article, the authors had, chosen to get rid of accents, umlauts, cedillas, tildes, Polish ł, Turkish ı (i with no dot) and other diacritic signs, to make their name easier to spell and memorize for a non-German/ French/ Spanish/Portuguese/Polish or Turkish readership. Even more complicated are issues about the spelling of particles (capital or not? and when?) and alphabetical ranking (by the particle or by the name proper?), especially since it differs between language (or even by country if you think of diverging conventions for Dutch names in Belgium and the Netherlands). The most confusion I managed to create was around Spanish and Portuguese double names in a themed section, as I thought it was inappropriate that people would drop part of their name just out of fear that an Anglophone readership would select the wrong half of their name when shortening it (and here too, it does not help that Spanish and Portuguese conventions are contradictory). Think also of the order of names for Chinese, Japanese or Hungarian names (customarily putting family names first). The authors fears are not trivial: it is eventually about not being recognized and about not being cited properly. In this context ORCID (probably primarily designed to distinguish between series of authors named Jones or Williams or Smith) is a true advancement for those whose names are not always listed or spelled the same way.

Another battle I lost when trying to make the multilingual embedding of the research published in *Geopolitics* more visible was about transcription. Especially for Cyrillic. For Chinese references, authors were more inclined to take advantage of new opportunities of technological progress, and sources in other alphabets are unfortunately very few. While transcription is redundant now that it is technically very easy to incorporate terms and references in other scripts in a text in English, the few authors I tried to convince were categorically against using Cyrillic. They claimed it was customary to use transcription in Slavic Studies and it would upset or at least confuse their readership. I could not understand why. Someone able to read Russian would surely be pleased to read the original term, and someone unable to read Russian was not really helped by a Russian transcription. For Chinese, things are a bit different because there are people understanding and speaking Chinese but not reading ideograms well (including a large proportion of the Chinese population, but presumably no readers of *Geopolitics* among them) and pinyin could be useful (and pinyin has indeed not been designed to serve foreigners in the first place).

Another wish was to include quotes in the original language and discuss more explicitly translation issues, not as a weakness, but as an additional layer (see for elaborated discussions in geography Müller 2007, Germes & Hussein 2016 and Hancock 2016,¹² Fregonese 2017) but authors generally do not include original quotes in languages other than French or German, and if they do, reviewers find them redundant and distracting, and if they don't, editors and text editors at production find them tricky because guaranteeing correct spelling can be an insurmountable challenge. Looking more systematically for more reviewers outside the Anglophone sphere is also a way of dealing with this, but it has some limitations. There is a real danger of depending on a few people, creating (not so anonymous) border guards that regulate the access of authors from specific languages or areas to the journal. Moreover, it is uneasy to rely excessively on non-native speakers of English because you know you are asking them more than from Anglophone reviewers (as explained above, writing a review is more demanding in a foreign language and they would need to copy-edit quotes and references on top of it).

Last but not least referencing to sources in other languages than English has sometimes been seen by reviewers as redundant "because the readership has not access to these

sources". I have encouraged authors to keep them as often as it was relevant, and even to add more of them when it would help readers to navigate these literatures. The argument against non-English sources is disturbing on many accounts: first, because it assumes the readership of the journal is monolingual (which is highly unlikely); second, and this is way more serious, because it contributes to the devaluation of sources in other languages than English. Even for translation of English language work, referencing to the translation is relevant, providing the translation is marked as such, so that other readers can recognize the original work. Again, nobody minds when references to Foucault or Lefebvre refers to English editions of their work without acknowledgement of the original or even the original year of publication (sometimes giving way to some surprising readings of their work, decontextualized from the French society of the 1960s and 1970s in which they were originally written). Again, using translated references would make visible the circulation of academic ideas and the important work of translators (and publishers) in these flows, including the work of many translating geographers.

These details certainly do not change the central position of English in international academic exchanges but make the international context of specific contribution more visible. This is only a symbolic and very small step towards questioning the 'neutral' position of English and promoting meaningful mediation between linguistic academic communities. While the internationalisation of the editorial board is mostly a declaration of intent (editorial board members are only marginally involved in the day to day management of a journal, they might attract and encourage a more diverse authorship), the enlarged editorial team that now takes care of the journal can embody more diversity than two editors possibly could. Therefore, I trust the team to be well-equipped to foster *Geopolitics* as an ever more international academic journal.

¹ Abstract written by Polly Pallister-Wilkins, Forum and Reviews Editor

² A SOAS/GRC Geopolitics book series had already been launched with Roger Jones and Nick Essen's newly-launched UCL Press by this stage with 5 titles arising from these activities by 1995: *Territorial Foundations of the Gulf States; The Boundaries of Modern Iran; The Horn of Africa; The Changing Shape of the Balkans and Transcaucasian Boundaries*.

³ A dozen years on from the journal's launch, Gerard Toal would try to bring his well-rehearsed critical geopolitical approach to a regional territorial dispute. The results made for fascinating reading and made me think back and reflect upon my hopes for what the *Geopolitics and International Boundaries* journal might aspire to. For the article came across as a nuanced, sophisticated and comprehensive regional geopolitical analysis – an advance on previous regional political geography approaches but keeping in spirit with the best that the tradition had to offer. See: O'Tuathail, G (Toal, Gerard) (2008). 'Russia's Kosovo: A Critical Geopolitics of the August 2008 War over South Ossetia', *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 49(6): 670-705.

⁴ IBRU's foundation was provided for by a grant from the specialised archival publisher, Archive Editions, who had published Schofield and Blake's sprawling *Arabian Boundaries* anthology (all 30 volumes of it!) a year earlier: Richard Schofield and Gerald Blake (Ed.s) (1988). *Arabian Boundaries: Primary Documents, 1853-1960*. Archive Editions: Farnham Common. My first academic post at SOAS was as a part-time Research Fellow, organising the GRC's conference and seminar programmes.

⁵ Certainly, in a *Geopolitics* article of 2005, Henk van Houtum saw such a split with each community attending its own conferences and publishing in its own spaces: Van Houtum, Henk (2005). 'The geopolitics of borders and boundaries', *Geopolitics*, 10(4): 672-679 – but, to a degree, the binary he characterised was tongue in cheek.

⁶ Jointly with public international lawyer, Robert Volterra (www.londoninternationalboundaryconference.com)

⁷ My first wife, Patricia Toye – a Canadian historian of the Middle East and North Africa, had died suddenly during October 1994.

⁸ Special issue on 'Land-locked states of Africa and Asia', *Geopolitics and International Boundaries*, (2) 1. Frank Cass also published this collection as a book.

⁹ Academic publishing is amidst another revolution that I have no room to comment on – the move towards open access publishing and the diminishing role of commercial publishers. So far it generates quite some extra inequalities in access and circulation but that promise opportunities to issues of translation (see the discussion below, and more specifically ACME in note 3).

¹⁰ In the pre-COVID-19 world it was, and hopefully in the post-COVID-19 world it will be.

¹¹ The acknowledgement of the role of reviewers and the editors in that process do not necessarily reflect the intensity of the process.

¹² Both part of a Themed Section For A Critical Practice of Translation in Geography, *ACME* 15(1) 2016 <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/issue/view/97>

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