

Towards a New Concept of Constructivist Geopolitics

Bridging Classical and Critical Geopolitics

Rebin Fard

'In Space We Read Time'!

This essay deals with the question to what extent perspectives of classical and critical geopolitical thought are suitable for analysing geopolitical structures of world politics. The following article discusses the potential that opens up a constructivist perspective for the conceptualisation of space and spatiality in geopolitics. This article is about links between geopolitics and international relations for a theoretical rebuilding of geopolitics. It focuses on the constructivist geopolitics and thus questions of power, space, politics and new political spaces; however, not only in a global and national context but also on a local and regional scale. According to the basic premises of constructivist geopolitics, geopolitical constructions and conceptions of space can be asserted as subjective and objective categories. From this perspective, it also shows that the geopolitical world order can be understood not only objectively but also subjectively in reciprocal interaction. These discussions are seen as an interrelated contribution to combine two different paradigms and to promote the synergy of scientific expertise to understand world politics and for the management of temporary global problems. Constructivist geopolitics attempts to conceptually rethink classical geopolitics and critical

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geopolitics together in a new way to enrich the subject of geopolitics as a possible approach.

Keywords: constructivism, constructivist geopolitics, classical geopolitics, critical geopolitics

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One of the well-accepted narratives of our time claims that world politics is in the midst of a transformative change. With the end of the East-West Conflict and the years after the end of the bipolar world order, the unanswered question remains how new spatial structures of international relations and world politics have developed. From this perspective, a series of new geopolitical narratives, namely clash of civilisation, geo-economy and new bloc formation, claim to offer plausible discursive framings for changing global constellations of power.² Today's global politics go far beyond a simple model of the power-based interaction of sovereign states in an anarchic international system.³ At the global level, nothing illustrates this better than the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenge that climate change presents — especially the impact of fossil fuel emissions on an increasingly crowded planet. In this respect, the world faces two types of geopolitical impasse. One is the poor state capacity and the other is the poor market capacity.⁴ But the rising of this new world order is not yet completed, it is structurally between the Westphalian state system and postmodern statehood; historically between the certainties of a particular bipolar world order and the uncertainties of a world without a world order, and geographically between the end of the static 'ensemble world' and the emerging of the dynamic 'integrated world society'.⁵ Therefore, in order to recognise the structures of the emerging world order, the question is often asked how new geographical structures of international relations and world politics in the 21st century have developed, especially regarding its geographical perspective – Eurocentrism or Sinocentrism –, its shape – multilateral or asymmetrical multipolarity –, its tendency – universal interculturality or multicultural coexistence –, and its norms and values – competitive or cooperative multipolarity. But where this rising world order leads world politics in the 21st century remains controversial and constitutes the relevant reference point of the debates within political science, international relations, and geopolitics.⁶ This article seeks to make a further contribution to this debate from the point of view of a multi-theoretical approach in the context of constructive geopolitics.

In the tradition of geopolitical thought, space has always been seen as a relevant entity. Thus, the importance of geographical space for politics and its interrelations has always been the subject of political reflection.⁷ Political geographers such as Alfred Thayer Mahan (1897),⁸ Halford J. Mackinder⁹(1904), Karl Haushofer (1937)¹⁰ and Nicholas J. Spykman (1942)¹¹ have asked questions about typography, climate and others factors, in which they explicitly or implicitly speculated about the way strategy might influence the geography of world affairs..¹² Accordingly, it is less about the influence of the climate on the political constitution of political communities, but about how the global power structure can be shaped and changed for their benefit. Geopolitics unfolded at a time when the term ‘World’ was experiencing a boom.¹³ Thus, geopolitical thinking orientated itself on the global power structure. The heightened significance of the world as the basis of political thought and action had already been demonstrated by the fact that the world was perceived as fully developed.¹⁴ World politics and its order appear to have a clear and objective framework from which guidelines for political action can be derived.¹⁵ It is therefore about how the political reality of the world order is perceived and structured on the one hand, and on the other side how it flows into thought and action on the other. The spatial conceptions diverge depending on the perception of the spatial conditions. In this way, a different assessment of the world order, allowing for different interpretations, depends on the perspective of those who make the assessment.¹⁶ Thus, the world order can either be competitively interpreted or valued as a cooperative central policy option. In this sense, the new diversity of spatial images and spatial discourses have a high degree of dynamics.¹⁷ From a discourse-theoretical perspective among the competing conceptions of space, some conceptions become dominant and shape political interactions. The question of which spatial concept is used to analyse the geopolitical world order always reflects the hegemonic power relations in a specific histological, disciplinary and linguistic context.¹⁸

Since the beginning of scientific geography, space has been thought of as a given wholeness at the centre of its scientific discussion. This understanding of space was aimed at the identification and description of political and social processes and structures according to the laws and the givenness of an objective space.¹⁹ In doing so, classical determinists studied the influence of the natural and objective space as determinant factors on the behaviour of political actors. Spatial rela-

tions are subject to a direct influence on politics, in which a biological comprehension of space revealed itself.²⁰

From this one can distinguish a possibilistic point of view, which does not consider space as objectively given spatial structure. In contrast to the deterministic view, it considers space as a variable and subjective factor which can influence political reality.²¹ It emphasises that man is part of nature, but he can dominate nature through his wisdom, skill and technology. At the end of the 1960s, geographers criticised the objective given spatial patterns for explaining political and social processes and the spatial-scientific thinking in causal laws of space.²² In contrast to this objectivist understanding of space, some geographers focus on how spaces are produced and reproduced in everyday life and communication.²³ They assume that the construction of spaces is shaped by social practices and structures. At the same time, spaces are constructed as expressions and consequences of social practices and structures.

The connection between spatiality and social realities is radicalised in discourse-oriented approaches insofar as they assume that social structures or actors are never established, but always find themselves in a situation of conflict and fragility. Spaces cannot simply be an expression of a fixed and static social structure. But the production of spaces is always a constitutive element of the permanent (re-)production of the social processes.²⁴ With this critique of stable social power structures and the conception of autonomous actors, the negotiation processes for particular interpretive ways and identities as well as conflicts resulting from them are in the focus of the analysis²⁵.

Space, territory and borders have always been prominent and determining factors in the planning of the military and politics. The geography with its natural space factors is often considered objective in the tradition of the realistic school of international relations from which normative compulsions are driven to act, which are circumscribed using the terms geopolitics and geostrategy. With the end of the East-West Conflict, the years after the end of the bipolar world order and the elimination of political boundaries also meant the creation of intellectual freedom which developed a critical relationship to the traditional conception of geopolitics.²⁶ Political Geography always sets itself as a more theoretical understanding through which is no longer accepted the traditional positivist-scientist view of geopolitics and geostrategy. So the processes get social space construction in the fo-

cus of interest, but the critical approaches do not become a substitute for classical geopolitical thinking.²⁷ Traditional thinking of geopolitics continues to coexist alongside emerging modern approaches.

Up to this time, as a legacy of classical geopolitics, the creation of difference through territorial metaphors has remained an essential part of many more recent approaches.²⁸ Geopolitical thinking is essentially interested in structuring space by drawing boundaries. In short, geopolitics is a form of spatial inclusion and exclusion. Geopolitics can be described as thinking in terms of spaces of power, zones of influence and areas of power.²⁹ Critical approaches, therefore, deal very centrally with which boundaries are drawn, where this happens, how divisions are legitimised and naturalised and which mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion are discussed. Since its inception, critical geopolitics has used other theories and approaches both methodically and theoretically. Integrations of other approaches may therefore have to be done carefully and taking into account the respective specificity. What can be methodologically and theoretically helpful in a discipline may be inspiring for critical geopolitics, but a congruent transfer raises problems. However, the focus is not only on the methodological and theoretical applicability but also on the fact that a comprehensive approach is excluded from the outset. Although this view leads to a large number of criticisms as a result - above all the accusation of arbitrariness - it also opens up the chance of alternative approaches and the option of dealing not only with unorthodox topics, apart from traditional approaches and regardless of possible sensitivities, but also to integrate methods and theoretical structures.

Mono-paradigm and monodisciplinary methods for the analysis of world politics and for the design and vision of world politics are limited and need to be re-discussed and redesigned. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to provide a new approach in the context of critical geopolitics to examine the geopolitics of world politics. After the introductory first part, the second part deals with the theoretical principles of the investigation. First, the most important theories of geopolitics are explained, and the development of geopolitical thinking is elaborated in order to specify these constants and to be able to establish a connection to constructivist geopolitics. After considering these debates and theories of geopolitical science, this new geopolitical approach will be further developed. The two approaches contain elements that are cited in order, by combining them, to develop the argument for geopolitical

thinking from the perspective of a constructivist approach and to understand world politics. From the perspective of a constructivist-geopolitical analysis approach, this study is based on three constants: firstly on the global geopolitical structure on which a state orients itself and on which its structure of interests depends, secondly on the domestic structure of a state, in which not only spatially relevant criteria but also its structure of values form a basis for policy decision-making processes, and thirdly on the spatial actions of states when pursuing their interests and goals in the international system. In order to specify these constants and to be able to establish a connection to constructivist geopolitics, this new geopolitical approach will be further developed after considering debates and theories of geopolitical science. With their help, a new geopolitical concept is systematically derived. Afterward, a convergence between classical and critical geopolitics is worked out for a new structural approach to geopolitics.

Against this background, this article presents first the most important theories of geopolitics and the development of geopolitical thinking are elaborated in order to specify their constants and to establish a connection to constructivist geopolitics. The constructivist geopolitics is developed in this study on the one hand based on constructivism theory by Alexander Wendt, and on the other hand, focuses on the reconciliation of classical and critical geopolitics. Afterward, the question of how geopolitical thinking developed in the post-bipolar world order is discussed. Based on this basic understanding, a look at geopolitical thinking and the current debates of geopolitics after the end of the East-West conflict, namely geo-economy, geo-culture, regionalism and the spatial turn, will be thrown out. Subsequently, a rapprochement between classical and critical geopolitics will be elaborated on this new constructivist approach to geopolitics. After considering these debates and theories of geopolitics, this new constructivist geopolitics will be further systematically derived.

Geopolitical thinking in the post-bipolar world order

Concerning globalisation and developments in world politics, geopolitical thinking has experienced a new change of perspective. Globalisation and the resulting consequences influence international politics³⁰ and lead the world of states to ever greater cooperation and internal solidarity. Accelerated global change through economic globalisation requires a new paradigm.³¹ As a result of globalisation, representatives

of a geopolitical paradigm shift argue that geopolitics should be replaced by geo-economics and geo-culture.³² Accordingly, they point out that world politics has entered the era of the geo-economy.³³ Economy and culture are the new driving forces for the spatial analysis of world politics. From this perspective, the primacy of the economy is emphasised. Besides, world politics is no longer geopolitically and politically characterised but is identified by an enormous dynamic economisation.³⁴ Based on the view that the geo-economy necessarily calls for international cooperation through cross-border capital markets and international peaceful trade,³⁵ representatives of the geo-economy and geo-culture point out that world politics has left behind the era of geopolitics and the resulting territorial and ideological conflicts, which involved power and influence politics as well as territorial conquest. Rather, geopolitics seems to be replaced by the geo-economy.³⁶ In geo-economics, world politics is shaped by economic cooperation and the logic of competition. Although advocates of the geo-economy note that the intergovernmental rivalries and the associated politico-military power politics as well as the threats of the 20th century - especially those of the Cold War - have been replaced by the geo-economy. However, some critics emphasise that geopolitics and political power conflicts are not replaced by the geo-economy but have shifted to economic and financial conflicts.³⁷ In this sense, they contradict the thesis of the geo-economy as an alternative paradigm to geopolitics.

Another perspective that provides the basis for a new orientation in geopolitics and that unfolds as a crucial space-related factor after the end of the East-West conflict is geo-culture. Geo-culture was developed based on Hegel's philosophy of history by Francis Fukuyama (1989)³⁸ in a paper entitled 'The End of History?' Fukuyama formulates his thesis on the East-West conflict and considered it as the last struggle between two antagonistic ideologies. He argued that after the end of the East-West conflict, liberalism prevailed in the form of democracy and a market economy as a final model of world order. In this sense, Fukuyama proclaimed the victory of the culture of liberal democracy. In this context, he emphasises that liberal democracy is the only Geo-cultural and democratic model that, compared to other political systems, can make a universal claim to satisfy human needs within society, to give social recognition and to safeguard human freedom. With this, Fukuyama says that the end of geopolitics and the resulting rivalries and conflicts have come.³⁹

Against the thesis of Fukuyama Samuel Huntington (1993)⁴⁰ positioned in his contribution ‘The Clash of Civilizations?’ based on the view that world politics of the 21st century will no longer be marked by political, ideological or economic conflicts, but by conflicts between different cultural groups. In contrast to Fukuyama, he argues with the basic thesis that conflicts between different cultural areas - especially those of the western culture with the Chinese and Japanese as well as the Islamic cultural space - will determine the new world order. Accordingly, in his book entitled ‘The Clash of Civilizations’, he noted that world politics had become uni-multipolar and multicultural after the end of the East-West conflict. From this perspective, political-economic ideologies no longer determine world politics, but they are constituted by cultural spaces. Against this background, he contradicts the thesis of the victory of liberal-democratic philosophy and its universal validity and advocates that the West in the new world order cultural values of other actors must be considered to avoid potentially global conflicts. Unlike Fukuyama, Huntington argues that the dominance of Western civilisation is not based on its superiority in terms of universal ideas and values, as this superiority has been established not through the recognition of Western culture but organised violence. From this perspective, the future world order is determined by different cultures.⁴¹

Despite the innovative efforts of the theoretical approaches of geo-economics and geo-culture, which attempted to thematise world political contexts in terms of economy and culture according to the premises of a bipolar world order, their theoretical and methodological approach has been criticised because their treatment of geopolitical reality appears to be reductionist and unsatisfactory. The critics of the geo-economic and geo-cultural models assume that the end of geopolitics has not come⁴² and that the approaches presented are unable to replace the significance of geopolitics as an approach to analysing world politics.⁴³ In this sense, they emphasise that international geopolitics will continue to be determined by the political power struggle over the spaces.⁴⁴ Also, geopolitics is an action-guiding discipline that deals with power-political, economic and cultural factors to grasp the global political reality. Although the growing importance of economic and cultural factors in the age of globalisation is being pointed out for the analysis of world politics, geopolitics has not lost its significance and influence,⁴⁵ but its claim of scientific theory has even been rediscovered in terms of power policy aspects for the analysis of foreign trade

and world politics. Although culture and economics play crucial roles in international politics as spatial factors, geopolitics deals with these aspects even more comprehensively and, as a discipline with both its comprehensive perspective and its holistic approach, considers culture and economics alongside political power factors on scientific-theoretical and methodological analysis.

Spatial turn and paradigm shift of geopolitics

In recent decades, geopolitics has been marginalised and space has been displaced into oblivion.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the importance of geopolitics and the resulting concepts - such as space, identity and object - was hidden in scientific discussions. In recent years, the social and cultural sciences have experienced a 'Spatial Turn'. In this context, we discuss geopolitics and the 'Return of Space'.⁴⁷ In this sense, space, identity and culture concerning the concept of the Spatial Turn are placed at the centre of political and geopolitical considerations.⁴⁸ In this sense, the action-initiating character of geopolitics for the analysis of political reality should be emphasised not only in international relations but also in foreign policy.⁴⁹ Although geopolitics was taboo after the Second World War because of its impact on Nazi politics, its theoretical and methodological foundations were questioned and marginalised about space,⁵⁰ but geopolitics experienced a renaissance at the end of the East-West conflict and its action-initiating character became the focus of politics for spatial analysis of political reality.⁵¹ Thus advocates argue for geopolitics as a design-oriented and action-guiding discipline that deals with space, politics and power.⁵² Geopolitics captures spatial relationships and addresses the political reality in the context of politics and geography. Here, in respect of the Spatial Turn, it is argued that space and its significance are indispensable for the object of analysis of politics or foreign policy.⁵³

In the field of tension between hegemonic struggles and equilibrium politics, world politics is divided between different powers and spheres of influence between the major powers. From the point of view of Lacoste (1994),⁵⁴ geopolitics is a socio-historical discourse. In other words, it is 'a Mode of Representation of the World'. He assumed that we live in a time when the Marxist approach to the many conflicts in the world could no longer claim and provide a sufficient explanation for the conflict. According to the basic premise of his teaching in geopolitics:

'Geopolitics considers power rivalries to the extent that they are territorial, which is very often the case since the control (or possession) of the territory is a means the people and resources that are here to exercise power or influence. This not only refers to intergovernmental rivalries, which can revolve around spaces and very significant dimensions but also competitions between other forms of political forces, which may involve territories of relatively small dimensions'.⁵⁵

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Lacoste emphasises in his theorem that the geopolitical conflicts at all levels arise from historical developments and their socio-cultural backgrounds are to be addressed. Finally, from his point of view, geopolitics refers to the power rivalries for spaces, for the control of people and resources and the political problems in its geopolitical basis, not only on a global level but that it should also be perceived and analysed at a local level. In his view, it is taken into account that power factor and power politics continue to play a crucial role in geopolitics in current international relations.

Similarly, he argues that, after the end of the East-West conflict, global politics was determined by the geopolitical tensions between hegemony and power balance, which proved to be the basic pattern of current geopolitics.⁵⁶ Current international geopolitics results from both political rivalries and regional economic power competitions where regional coalitions and the integration of nation-states play a significant role together.⁵⁷ This geopolitical regionalism enhances the political and economic competitiveness of nation-states within a geographical region. Besides, regions' space for manoeuvres is guaranteed by the regional power and their increasing competition between them leads both to the regional balance of power and regional hegemony.⁵⁸ In a sense of power politics, the new basic structure of world politics arises from rivalries of the major powers through alliances, counter-alliances or regional power-building and counter-power formation between central actors in a political power and economic competition. National states are intensifying their influence policies in the form of regional structures to ensure their competitiveness in international relations.⁵⁹ By turning to regionalism, which primarily refers to the interaction between political power and the geographical environment, it is possible to look at the relationship of political actors in the international system, which is shaped by foreign policymakers in different

regions. In this sense, current geopolitics deals with power-political rivalries and competitions. It is about differentiated spheres of influence of both global and regional dimensions. In this context, geopolitics and its spatial analysis are hegemony, power balance and counter-power formation.

Constructivist approach of thinking in geopolitics

Constructivism is referred to as a meta-theory and an alternative explanatory perspective that has developed in the ontological examination of neorealism.⁶⁰ The constructivists assume that the 'Social Reality' does not open up to us directly, but is constituted by the shared ideas (social) about the world. Constructivism transfers the object of investigation from the epistemological level – as knowledge is constituted – to the ontological level – as the world is constituted. From a constructivist point of view, 'Social Reality' is the subjective ideas that are constituted by the interaction processes.⁶¹ The ontological objects are the focus of constructivism. Alexander Wendt is the most prominent reference theorist who has built up the basic premises of constructivism in international relations. Wendt focuses his theory on two basic assumptions: Anarchy is a socially constituted reality and not an exogenous given reality.⁶² The change of the international system can be explained by the change of identities and interests. Although Wendt (1994) developed his theory with the critique of neorealism, he adopts several neorealist basic assumptions.⁶³ In his main work 'Social Theory of International Politics', Wendt accepts the form of anarchy as constituted reality, which is embodied through the interaction processes of its content and structure. In this sense, Wendt says that international politics is anarchic and that states have offensive capabilities. Anarchy is what the states make of it. Where constructivists think it is so made of social relationships.⁶⁴

Constructivism starts from a fundamental ontological assumption that the social structure for the construction of social reality is at the centre of the investigation. Wendt points out that this social structure can only be perceived through the idealistic and material dimensions. This social structure is implemented through the actions of the actors and embedded in an interaction process and produced and reproduced over time. The ideal dimension of the social structure deals with the constitution of the identities and interests of the actors so that they are in a cooperative-reciprocal relationship with other actors. Based

on the structuring theory of Giddens, Wendt (1995) considered the basic premise of the 'Agency-Structure Problem' at the centre of his theory.⁶⁵ He argues that states are the key players in the international system. Still, the role of local-global actors such as institutions, NGOs and social movements should be taken into account. Therefore, Wendt argues that states, on the one hand, and the construction of world politics, on the other hand, have no fixed structural identities and interests. At the same time, the identity and interests of the states are taken from their interactions and actions. Wendt (1999) illustrates how the structures in international relations are constituted by social constructions. Wendt emphasises that the structures and the actors constitute each other.⁶⁶ The actors are influenced by the structures, and at the same time, the structures are changed by the interaction processes between the actors.⁶⁷ The central question of constructivism was how the change in international relations can be explained. For the answer to this question, Wendt referred to the various factors that depend on the structural change in international politics. Wendt expressed that the structural change in international politics is produced, reproduced and transformed by interactions between states. At the heart of constructivism are the changes in the structure of international politics and the changes in the interaction processes between states. Furthermore, constructivism represents an alternative explanatory approach for the description of states. Constructivism focuses on the 'Social Reality' of world politics, drawing on the categories of conflict, competition and the cooperation of political actors. Finally, the main question is the constructivist theory of how and under what conditions states constitute their actions and interaction processes in the international system and how they change.⁶⁸

The preoccupation with the social construction of space locates the present statements almost inevitably in the broader catchment area of geopolitics and international relations. Space-related constructivist research questions and their methodological approaches can be found in political geography as well as in political science since the late 1980s. At the centre of research interest of critical geopolitics stands geopolitical discourses and models as targeted to expose geopolitical constructions.⁶⁹ By revealing the role of language, one can not only be more transparent about its role in the social construction of space but at the same time make society sensitive to the working of language as the basis of all perception, evaluation and experience.⁷⁰

By referring to discursively mediated spatial representations and interpretations, the critical geopolitics approach is of particular interest for constructivist issues. In contrast to the traditional thinking of geopolitics and space-deterministic approaches, geopolitics is understood by critical geopolitics as a social phenomenon; the geopolitical discourse, represented by the actors of international politics.⁷¹ This means that geopolitics is losing its status as a prophet of almost natural truth. Conversely, it is understood as a discursive practice of international politics.⁷² Geographical knowledge is discursively produced and constitutes and legitimises spatial orders. The study of geopolitics in discursive terms, therefore, is the study of the socio-cultural resources and rules by which geographies of international politics get written.⁷³ Something can only arise and be perceived as existing if it is delimited from something else and constructed as existing at all. Boundaries are the basis of the structure of the social and natural environment.⁷⁴ Against this background, differentiation and normalisation between the 'own' and the 'other' is a crucial moment in geopolitical practice. The aim of critical geopolitics is not only to deal critically with classical geopolitics but also, and above all, thinking in dichotomies, binary demarcations and differences must be countered with (self)critical thinking that recognises the heterogeneity, diversity and the complexity of the 'other'.⁷⁵ The central question of critical geopolitics is accordingly how geopolitical worldviews are linguistically constructed in the discourse of the actors, how new political spaces are designed in the form of geographical regionalisation and delimitations and how these discursive concepts then develop their dynamics in the political arena. Critical geopolitics shows how political actors promote their territorial-political interests with the means of geopolitical argumentation, with a geographical context and separation rhetoric to ensure its supposed coherence and correctness. Geopolitical constructions including their cartographic representations are not perceived as objective entities, but rather as subjectively constructed for political purposes. In the sense of a constructivist ontology, deconstructivist approaches do not understand Political Geography and especially geopolitics as an objective description of the world, but rather assume that certain concepts of order and power relations are (re-)produced with geographical descriptions.⁷⁶ Inevitably, the critical geopolitics research approach thus thematises the relationship between geography, politics and power. Methodically, critical geopolitics is based on Foucault's archaeology

and genealogy as well as on interpretative text-analytical methods of literature and linguistics. Discourse analysis is used to formulate research questions, the deconstructivist geopolitical discourses. As can be seen from the brief sketch of post-structuralist geography, such research programs are compatible, in fact only possible if the assumptions of constructivism are supported.⁷⁷ Similar research questions, such as in critical geopolitics, are also investigated and justify recourse to social constructivist premises. From the previous explanations of the underlying theoretical understanding, it becomes apparent that constructivist approaches necessarily aim at texts, symbols, linguistic utterances and representations, and the mediation and representation of the events, therefore, move ahead of the events themselves.⁷⁸ Which narrative ultimately prevails, also because of the means used, is a question of connectivity, which ultimately enables assertiveness. With the discursive context of reality, it becomes clear that objective realities are only valid with reservations. Because the mediation and representation of whatever kind of space and categorisation are based on narratives, a multitude of narratives result from the discursive contextuality.⁷⁹ Which narrative version prevails after all is closely related to the question of power. However, this power is not tied to individual actors but rather is located in the discourse itself. Discourses allow certain representations and language acts and prevent others. A complete break out of discursive contexts is not possible, but individual statements can gradually change the discourse. It is essential, however, that actors cannot make the decision for or against a speech act in the discourse based on a generally valid and thus objective reality, but only in the context of discursive contexts and interpretations. Moreover, actors do not influence how the speech acts performed are received in the discourse.

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Critique of the postmodern constructivist understanding of critical geopolitics

The approach of critical geopolitics is not free from antinomies, discrepancies and inconsistencies. The problems range from fundamental, ontological objections to specific aspects of methodological implementation in empirical research. The subjective approach of critical geopolitics, due to the underlying postmodern ontology, does not want to claim absolute truth. The resulting potentially infinite possibilities of interpreting texts give the reader a wealth of options and

ideas but make it difficult to get an overview of problem areas and areas of knowledge. At long last, the only thing left to the reader is the certainty of reading just one more 'story'.⁸⁰ For a postmodern political science or geography, there remains the danger of sinking into insignificance due to obscurity and uselessness. The criticism of the reduction of multiplicity and the exclusion of the different⁸¹ also gives cause for complaint. The reduction should certainly not be accepted without reflection, but without a reduction in complexity, many aspects are hardly understandable, especially from the sometimes difficult to understand international relations.⁸²

A lack of alternatives, which can hardly be developed from internal logic, weakens the approach, at least for practical interest. Into the bargain, critical geopolitics is not concerned with factual criticism in such a deconstruction. Their goal is not the supposedly better reformulation of such a concept.⁸³ But still vibrating in the deconstruction, geopolitical models always include an implicit criticism that suggests an 'other' and has possibly found a better answer. An image of supposed objectivity emerges, especially through the reflexive use and recognition of one's subjective position. This positioning creates the impression of a superordinate meta-level with a prevalent perspective, which leads to a seemingly superior point of view.⁸⁴ Despite all the criticism of the discourses and the disclosure of hidden backgrounds and strategies, the approach remains just another discourse. A radical breakaway from given structures must remain an illusion. But the multitude of competing points of view also lead to criticism. To understand subjective spatial concepts and conflict views in the interplay of subjective interests and socio-political structures,⁸⁵ one would have to gain an insight into the thinking of the actors. This is not only denied to outsiders, but also the agent himself in the case of unconscious actions. Another point of criticism that critical geopolitics is often accused of is its focus on elites. The work of statesmen, politicians or influential personalities would be the focus.⁸⁶ However, with the expansion of the work in the area of critical geopolitics, this point of view can no longer be maintained without further ado. The origins of the critical geopolitics program, which undoubtedly mainly relate to the deconstruction of rulership structures, have now diversified.⁸⁷ The critical geopolitics approach is criticised for its too strong focus on taking nation-states as the primary level of analysis without adequately addressing it.

Besides, critical geopolitics understands itself as a representative of postmodern or poststructuralist approaches that explicitly avoid, basically even doubt the existence of, wanting to make normative statements. But that does not rule out an emancipated critical attitude towards everyday political business. In the public discussion, which demands that science provide statements that guide action, this attitude is met with criticism. On top of that, the approach does not have a clearly defined theoretical concept, which through the reference to postmodern or poststructuralist meta-references, must be denied anyway. The increasing number of publications on Critical Geopolitics and its theoretical background suggests that the debate will continue to expand in the future. What all geopolitical approaches have in common is their dealing with space. However, the underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions differ significantly. While the classic understanding of geopolitics does not question the content of space as such, but only questions its relationship to politics, alternative approaches understand geopolitics and space as negotiable. As the above has shown, critical geopolitics is not one deterministic spatial science in the traditional sense. Rather, strategic political content hidden by discourse analysis should be shown to make the background to action more transparent. Here, the classic thinking in binary categories as opposed to an approach that does not negate the respective specific differences, but accepted them. Nonetheless, it is explicitly aware that the deconstruction is merely a different, further reconstruction that only contributes to an emancipated self-understanding, but cannot deliver an objective result.

The rapprochement between classical and critical geopolitics

Every scientific discipline has some basic concepts that help us to gain our knowledge of an object that underlies all objects of this science as a node. Science investigates the world on account of such concepts and perspectives. Geopolitics, like other disciplines of social science, knows these basic concepts and has occasionally tried to explain the specific events due to their view in international geopolitics.⁸⁸ Geopolitics has been outlawed since 1945 and neglected by the disciplines of international relations, political science and political geography.⁸⁹ Political scientists understand the term geopolitics as an analysis of political-economic phenomena,⁹⁰ which focuses on geographical causal factors and focuses on violent power politics and military-geostrategic interests.⁹¹

Concerning tectonic shifts in geopolitical structures of world politics and the consequent conflict-laden events following the East-West conflict, it is not only the end of geopolitical thinking that has come in geostrategic categories, but also the end of history.⁹² Against this background, the geopolitical conflicts on international politics are not completed, and political science and international relations can no longer claim or find any meaningful solutions.⁹³ At this time, it seems that the geopolitical approach as an alternative should be able to grasp the new world order, explain increasingly globalised world politics and address change processes of new geopolitical spatial structures when it comes to geopolitical conflicts in the global to theoretically get a grip on the scale because of its complexity and intertwining by the international relations and political science. Accordingly, political conflicts are rarely explained successfully on a disciplinary basis. Accordingly, an increasing dialogue between international relations and geopolitics is indispensable.

In this context, classical and critical geopolitics is at the centre of the discussion. Classical geopolitics is based on objective political reality and existing power structures and, on a theoretical level, complements the consideration of geographical factors and circumstances to explain the evolution and action of states in formulating their foreign policy.⁹⁴ In the face of this, classical geopolitics sought recurring geographic patterns in world politics. In this way, the contrast between land and sea crystallised and the question of which of these two spaces was more appropriate opened up the opportunity for global power projection. Global power and dominance would therefore depend on whether a country was positioned as a naval or a land power. Thus, the global rivalry between the land and sea powers forms a basic pattern of geopolitical thinking. To summarise, in classical geopolitics, thinking in global power structure occupies a crucial position whereby the domination of either the land or the sea is seen as a prerequisite for the exercise of global power. In doing so, it works in a reductionist, simplifying way, suppressing, simplifying and thus creating controllable geopolitical abstracts.⁹⁵

In a postmodernist way, critical geopolitics criticises the scientific-theoretical currents of classical geopolitics and questions their basic statements, which from a positivist point of view are indispensable for science. In this way, the main theorists of

critical geopolitics advocate a new kind of Enlightenment that links itself to a new understanding of science through the deconstruction of established science. Critical geopolitics turns the traditional understanding of geopolitics upside down. It assumes that the reality of world politics can no longer be explained from a naturalistic, objective given space and that space is by no means an objectively predetermined quantity for humans, in which the political space of the world of defined reality is unfolded⁹⁶ They postulate that space is constituted in a discursive practice through both human actions and the emancipatory potential of communication. In this sense, they reject the naturalistic concept of space and the resulting processes of objectifying cognition.⁹⁷

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In contrast to classical geopolitics, critical geopolitics is based on the idea that objective reality does not exist outside and independently of human consciousness.⁹⁸ Instead, critical geopolitics looks at reality from the subjective point of view of the viewer. From this perspective, the reality consists of plurality and diversity, which are constituted in different cultural, social and political spaces in manifold constructions and forms of organisation.⁹⁹ This starts from the view that space is constituted from a constructivist point of view as a social-cultural and political construction through linguistic mediation in specific discourses.¹⁰⁰ According to Foucault's philosophy, critical geopolitics tends to define geopolitics as a discursive process from a constructivist point of view, in that geopolitical world views and spatial constructions are not constituted by space, but instead as the result of a discursive practice unfolded through both linguistic mediation and socio-cultural and political actions of space, power and knowledge.¹⁰¹ Although critical geopolitics distinguishes itself from classical approaches to geopolitics and, according to its understanding of science, excludes space and its unfolding as an objective predetermined category in political reality.¹⁰²

Since this approach avoids all scientific knowledge of the political reality in the sense of a deconstructivist analysis, its position, and the resulting theoretical and methodological basis, remains controversial.¹⁰³ Furthermore, the basic premises of critical geopolitics, which involve the discovery of territorial power discourses and power relations are considered contradictory in neighbouring sciences. Geopolitics has dealt with the analysis of spatial power relations from the outset

about its theoretical starting point, while critical geopolitics questions the ontological premises of classical geopolitics and is characterised by a postmodern discourse.¹⁰⁴

However, classical and critical geopolitics are different in most respects. On the one hand, the classical approach takes on a decisive position with spatial thinking in global spaces of power and thus deserves attention as a contribution to international relations and foreign policy.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, the critical viewpoint criticises the classical approach. According to the classical approach, the geographical position of a country affects its foreign policy. Classical geopolitics refers to its ontology and epistemology to a modernist aspect.¹⁰⁶ In contrast, critical geopolitics is based on a postmodern view.¹⁰⁷ The modernist ontological perspective of classical geopolitics regards spatial reality as an objective reality in the exterior that differs from the observer. In contrast, critical geopolitics is based on a subjective spatial-political reality.¹⁰⁸ From this context, however, it also follows that the political reality for description and analysis requires a theoretical perspective which allows for a greater technical ability and plausibility of the scientific-theoretical and fundamental maxims of geopolitics in international relations and foreign policy.¹⁰⁹ The question, therefore, arises as to what extent the perspectives of classical or critical geopolitics are suitable for describing world geopolitical structures and analysing the geography of world politics, and what the indications are for a new geopolitical approach. That is why a constructivist geopolitics theme is discussed here, and thus the questions of power, space and politics in the international system of states are conceived. For these purposes, both approaches are considered as a possible step to increase the technical ability of the basic science-theoretical knowledge of geopolitics. In this sense, political reality emerges from a combination of objective and subjective dimensions. Therefore, both approaches can complement each other in their theoretical and methodological foundations.

Towards a new concept of constructivist geopolitics

As early as the 1970s, some philosophers tried to emancipate science from normatively binding methods of scientific thinking. Their philosophical approach should free people from the tyranny of philosophical obscurants and abstract concepts such as truth, reality or objectivity. They emphasised that these abstractions can only be logically and comprehensibly derived if their contingency is integrated into the

original premises.¹¹⁰ True insights are thus degraded to a contextual decision that is always possible differently. The contingency of truths can be transferred to other levels of social action. Therefore, space as an absolutist category seems incompatible with postmodern theoretical approaches.

From this perspective, space, as an unchangeable leading category, must be critically questioned and rather presented as a socio-historical phenomenon. Boundaries that are taken for granted and other apparent facts are problematised. Postmodern approaches claim to deconstruct concepts and try to reflect on the contexts of power through discourse analysis to gain a new perspective on international politics. In doing so, not only are the drawing of boundaries, theoretical or ontological basic assumptions of other orientations or disciplines critically questioned, but one's hypotheses and embedding of power is also critically and reflexively accompanied.¹¹¹ This multidimensionality and openness can also be found in the analytical understanding of postmodern approaches. Such an understanding of postmodernism by John Gerard Ruggie and Alexander Wendt is represented¹¹² and after which there is ultimately a describable reality. Denying more radical views although not the existence of a reality per se, they do not regard its comprehensibility as immediately given, but only through the detour of language. Reality is always discursive reality. The real space in the world is the consciousness of the actors. All knowledge is therefore always relative, shaped by inevitable historicity, contextuality and contingency. While positivist approaches start from the possibility of objective knowledge that reveals seemingly irrefutable truths, the change to constructivist approaches brings about a change of perspective in the sciences.¹¹³ The construction and use of knowledge, of apparent, or at least temporary truth, move to the centre of scientific investigation. This makes these approaches interesting for the analysis of spatial order patterns. Geopolitics in particular is branded by the ideologically motivated use of objective facts, also apart from various ontological basic assumptions. On the other hand, post-positivist approaches are more radical in their assumptions and take neither ideas nor interests as given a priori. Because if there can be no objective knowledge, then this knowledge, which cannot be objective either, inevitably leads to aporia. Avoiding this infinite circularity and avoiding the need for an imperative subjunctive can only be successful if the constructivism debate does not focus on the concept of reality, but rather focuses on

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the knowledge, the perception of reality by the subject, the discursive production as well as the relationship between the subject of knowledge and the object of knowledge. Almost inevitable for a postmodern understanding of constructivism¹¹⁴ is the preoccupation with language as a central element in assigning meaning to social constructions.¹¹⁵ Ideal factors that are at the centre of a constructivist ontology are linguistic constructions, which explains the frequent recourse of constructivist approaches to discourse-analytical procedures.¹¹⁶ Linguistic statements are part of discourses and the analysis of linguistic representations therefore often refers to the level of discourse. Since discourses themselves only appear as producers of linguistic utterances, the post-positivist variant of constructivism can also be understood as constructivism focusing on language or as discursive constructivism. Language is not tied back to reality as such; rather, it is about discourses that appear as producers of this reality.¹¹⁷ This also means that language or the discourse with all the internal logic and mechanisms is the prison that determines the ultimate analysis. However, this also raises the question of which version of reality is understood as a linguistic-social construct that ultimately prevails and how this happens.

Basic ontological premises

In the geopolitical context, the global reference level is of crucial importance. The world thus turns out to be a primary geopolitical framework for action and orientation. Geopolitics helps us to understand global politics on a global level.¹¹⁸ Geography as a science that deals with the investigation of the interrelation of social and political relations and space is at the centre of its research subject on the three levels of human, space and interaction. Thus, geography is the material-ecological and social structures in which the identity of the actor is constituted. In geography, interaction couples space and man into a composite entity, because without these interactions effects no spatial forms and constructions are designed. The people, their space, and the interaction between them are situated in a certain place, which through the personalisation of the interaction causes the peculiarity of the space so that the constituted social identity in one space is different from another space. The population is assigned to states and these states identify themselves with a territory in which the views and beliefs of their population are determined.¹¹⁹ In other words, one belongs to a territorially determined community in which to live and

experience special but shared visions of meaning from a place in the world and the global system. This spatial identification of a community that belongs to a particular territory that is linked to a particular culture can be understood as origin and identity. People are socialised in different territorial sections, how they live, how they understand the information they receive and how they communicate through geographically specific institutions. With the turn to space and currently, the identity of a country is shaped. Rather, the identity of a country is shaped in its unique space, interpreted in its time by dominant and ruling institutions.¹²⁰

However, the new emerging transnational actors relativise the thesis of the meaning of territorial states or nation-states. Rather, in the process of globalisation and networking, nation-states are being sealed off across their borders.¹²¹ On the other hand, the objection is raised that states are in any case dependent on their external framework conditions and that the sovereignty of nation-states is not replaced in the process of globalisation, but that only the borders of nation-states have been exceeded. In this line, political-economic and social interactions have been located only in a transnational space.¹²² Starting from the view that space could also be understood as a container in which state and society act.¹²³ States have not been abolished by the process of interdependence and transnationality, but have been placed next to the space of nation-states in another space of transnationality.¹²⁴ Against this background, the territorial states and their political spaces and the spatial images and spatial concepts resulting from them as the object of political science as well as geopolitics are still in the centre. Moreover, when spatial thinking is taken into account, there are also transnational spaces in addition to nation-state spaces.¹²⁵

Space and dealing with it should, therefore, be regarded as a resource of political thought. Insofar as space is of interest as a component of geopolitical or political thinking, it is not about the space itself, but about how it is perceived on a conceptual level and included in the thinking. In this respect, space forms the categorical frame of reference to which scientific thinking and action have an explanatory-theoretical function. Space is thus seen as a factor determining policy. Here it is possible to distinguish between the possibilistic and the geo-deterministic approach. However, this can be differentiating forms, as far as once a geopolitical determinism is represented, which points to classical geopolitics. Classical determinists studied the influence of the

natural and objective space as determinant factors on the behaviour of political actors. Spatial relations are subject to a direct influence on politics, in which a biological comprehension of space revealed itself. From this one can distinguish a possibilistic point of view, which does not consider space as an objectively given spatial structure but considers it as a variable factor that can influence political reality. It emphasises that man is part of nature, but he can dominate nature through his wisdom, skill and technology. In the possibilistic school, the effects of social law, rather than natural law, on human habits play an important role.¹²⁶ With his dependence on nature, man becomes less and he remains aware that nature limits his possibilities. From the possibilistic point of view, the politics of a state can be arranged according to geographical categories. From the point of view of constructivist geopolitics, different conceptions of space and spatiality in Political Geography can be interpreted. The spatial conceptions diverge depending on the perception of spatial relations. In this way, a different subjective perception of the objective space takes place. In this sense, spatial images reveal a high degree of dynamic in the production of spaces, which is a constant constitutive element of the permanent production and reconstruction of the social. However, this is not only dependent on subjective considerations, but also the objective-material spatial structure.

The identity construction of each state is constituted in its geographical space. Into the bargain, the states are geospatial coverage of their national geography on the international stage. Space represents a social-cultural difference that shows us how one particular group identity is constituted in comparison to another group identity, and how different geographical landscapes reflect different identities. Space represents the extensive interaction contexts that provide the background for the constitution of different identities. Accordingly, the politico-spatial actors pursue the appropriate interests that correspond to their identity construction and result from their geographical space. It should be noted that the different political actions based on different cultural geographies are a series of actions that are taken by political actors in pursuit of their interests concerning the geopolitical space for power. States form their spatial identity with other states with three levels of scale at local, regional and global levels. How a country orients itself to the world¹²⁷ is its spatial identity or geopolitical mental maps. In this sense, geopolitical visions form a basis for the

understanding of world politics. They point to the geopolitical situation of a state in which its political space and the resulting structure of interests are recognisable. Based on these geopolitical maxims, a state orients its actions in its spatial relationship structures. This spatial identity presents the geopolitical actions not only of a state but also the actions of its population.

From this perspective, the constructivist geopolitics in this essay is an explanatory approach to the action of states in the context of space and power on a global scale in international politics. From this theory-oriented perspective, not only the idealistic material structures but also the spatial structure of states on the national-international level is examined. I assume that political reality has not only the social but also the spatial dimension. Rather, the identity and political action of states are primarily constituted in space and then constituted in social interaction processes. Each state is a spatial construction with different-specific characteristics compared to other states.

Turning to the constructivist geopolitics, geopolitical thinking can be shown on the one hand with 'spatiality', namely the influence of space on politics, and on the other hand in terms of 'temporality', including historical developments in spatial policy action and thought systematically reflects it. It becomes clear that the constructivist geopolitics and the investigation of the influence of space-relevant categories in a temporal framework are concerned with the geopolitical structures and the spatial actions of the political actors. Against this background, I assume two premises: First, the spatial factors or the geographic criteria as a basic pattern, and second the historical developments or experiences as temporal basic patterns have a decisive effect on shaping the geopolitical perspective of a state, and geopolitical world structure. Constructivist geopolitics is based on the structural view of the analysis of international politics. The inevitable structure of international politics has been generated by the interaction of actors, and the actors' actions are embedded in this structure and restricted. Constructivist geopolitics emphasises that anarchy derives from the distribution of power on the one hand and the condition of the individual dominant, shared ideas on the other hand. The political reality is characterised by the world order in which the political actor behaves, power-political competition and the distribution of power. The geopolitical world order and the resulting power competition have an important significance for the development of the foreign policy of

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a state and are regarded as a fundamental framework for the action of foreign policy actors in their spatial relationship structures. In contrast to the classical and critical geopolitical approach, which considers political reality or spatial-political processes either as objective spatial structures or as the result of subjective social structures, they are not a fixed concept and are changed by political actors. I put forward the thesis: Although the global political reality is usually shaped by certain political actors and changeable, they do not change so fast and have a relatively constant character. Regarding the geopolitical world order, I assume that the change in the spatial realities of world politics is occurring gradually and within the constraints of a long historical period called the geopolitical world order.

From this point of view, it is taken into account that power factor and power politics continue to play crucial roles in geopolitics in current international relations. Similarly, Werner Link argues that, after the end of the East-West conflict, world politics was determined by the geopolitical tensions between hegemony and power balance, which proved to be the basic pattern of contemporary geopolitics.¹²⁸ International current geopolitics results from power politics, countervailing power and power-economic competitions at the regional level, in which regional coalitions and the integration of nation-states play a significant role¹²⁹. It should be pointed out that the states are regarded as the main actors in international politics and that their foreign policy activities are embedded in the national-international levels. This means that the state, as a political actor, once constituted, on a national scale, its identity and interest structure and then in the pursuit of its objectives on an international scale. The structure of international politics is repeatedly produced and changed by the actions of states. From a theoretical perspective, both the idealistic foundations of political action and the material-spatial conditions can be considered to explain the construction of reality in geopolitical analysis and Political Geography.

Epistemological-methodological basics

Constructivist geopolitics assumes that our perceptions and insights about the world are constructed. Moreover, this world outside of our perceptions is constituted in a spatial dimension. From this perspective, the geopolitical world is, on one hand, opened up by the nature of a social-political construction - such as language, symbols and shared

ideas - and, on the other hand, the epistemology of constructivist geopolitics is concerned with how this social-political construction is constituted in a spatial construction. In other words, the constructivist view in geopolitics in knowledge production is how states act in international geopolitics through both experience and observation based on the scientific explanatory model of a causal of intersubjective shared ideas, which are based on the reconstruction of geopolitical reality from the discursive-historical processes in a constitutive understanding perspective. Constructivist geopolitics are the two explanatory and understanding perspectives for the analysis of the world geopolitical structure and the foreign policy action of the states in an epistemological viewpoint and focus on the geopolitical actions of political actors on the international scale, which as reality constructions of individual preferences, social rules and spatial relations are derived and constituted. From what has been said, a methodological spectrum of positivist-constructivist methods are to be undertaken. At the same time, the object of investigation and the question of geopolitics should be geared to a combination of quantitative-qualitative approaches, thereby establishing the specific research results and establishing validity about geopolitics.

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Conclusion

In summary, one of the most important characteristics of theory formation in Geopolitics is its close interaction with the neighbouring discipline of international relations, which, in line with its concepts and perspectives, can be brought about again in Geopolitics. It should be noted, although the two disciplines examine the same object of knowledge, international relations is challenged by geopolitics because of its space oblivion 'Raumvergessenheit'. It was shown how the action of states on spatial constructions in geopolitical models has been constituted. It, therefore, presents a possibility that overcomes the problematic separation between geopolitics and international relations through constructivist geopolitics. The Constructivist geopolitics in political geography is characterised by the fact that it focuses on the role and meaning and production of spaces for the production of political realities. Constructivist geopolitics thus makes an important contribution to the interdisciplinary debate between political geography and international relations. In this article, I have taken a position midway between rationalistic-classical geopolitics and post-modern

approaches - critical geopolitics from the perspective of constructivist geopolitics to combine the positivistic and poststructuralist approaches in Political Geography and to bridge these two perspectives with a scientific theory to build. I developed this perspective based on a systematic structure and tried to explain world politics from the structure of the international system as the basis for the actions of political actors. The world politics and the actions of political actors can be understood not only in the context of the objective but also on the basis of the subjective space.



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