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TOWARDS A CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICAL GEOPOLITICS - INSPIRATIONS FROM THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL OF CRITICAL THEORY

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This paper seeks to enrich the scholarly potential and further develop the societal role of critical geopolitical scholarship. In particular, we elaborate on some of the challenges of what we call a 'constructive critical geopolitics'. This is done through a selective inquiry into some of the key insights of the first generation of Frankfurt School critical theory, in particular as regards its reflections on political action and public engagement. We argue that incorporating some of the central tenets of critical theory into critical geopolitics has important implications for the sub-discipline – theoretically, empirically and as regards its applied/constructive role in society. Our argument seeks to contribute to the inclusion of constructive critical geopolitical analysis alongside the focus on thorough deconstruction of hegemonic knowledge productions, power relations and systems of exclusion. More concretely, drawing on critical theory as well as on geographic feminist and peace research, we call for more explicit normative positioning in critical geopolitical scholarship and suggest that we embrace the complexity of the geopolitical phenomena we study and, in so doing, to consider both their progressive and regressive aspects. We use our interest in processes of European (dis)integration, and the Brexit vote in particular, to highlight the need to further develop such multiperspectival analysis on highly complex and multifaceted geopolitical processes, such as European (dis)integration.

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Introduction

The relationship between critical geopolitics and political engagement has been subject to much debate, reflecting the problematic relation between geography as discipline and geographic knowledge production with politics and the projection of state power, including war, fascism, imperialism and colonialism (McConnell et al., 2014; Dodds et al., 2013a; Hyndman, 2010; Mamadouh, 2005; Dodds, 2001; Lacoste, 1976). The emergence of critical geopolitics in the late 1980s was motivated largely by the denunciation of such entanglements. Indeed, critical geopolitics has made significant contributions to understanding the discursive construction and processes of the knowledge generation of "geopolitics". However, its impact beyond academia has been much more limited. Almost two decades ago Jennifer Hyndman observed how

> [c]ritical geopolitics decentres the nation-state and exposes the investments that our dominant geopolitical narratives embody, but it does not put Humpty Dumpty back together again, so to speak. Nor does it question why Humpty is always falling off the wall. We are left with well-interrogated but tacitly masculinist categories, and no clear way forward in practice. (Hyndman, 2001: 213)

Scholars of feminist and critical geopolitics as well as of geographical peace research (Dowler and Sharp, 2001; McConnell et al., 2014; Hyndman, 2001; 2010; Megoran, 2011; Murphy, 2013; Ó Tuathail, 2017) have subsequently illustrated that a more active political and social engagement of critical geopolitical scholarship is not necessarily at odds with the deconstructive foundation on which the school of thought is built. We take this work as an inspiration for the argument advanced in our paper. In order to broaden the theoretical base as well as the scholarly

and societal relevance of critical geopolitics, we provide a reading of the first generation of the Frankfurt School of critical theory. Even though this link between critical theory and critical geopolitics is not new, it remains underexplored.

The early debates around the emergence of critical geopolitics sought to distance political geography from political action and from the role of positivist "policy advisory". Through its intellectual origin in the deconstruction of the 'tradition of geopolitical thought' (Ó Tuathail, 1994: 313) critical geopolitics strongly rejected previous forms of geopolitics and the idea of 'geography as an aid to statecraft', as Teggart (1919) famously proclaimed in his appreciation of Mackinder's (1919) *Democratic Ideals and Reality*. Gearóid Ó Tuathail's response to a paper published by Herman van der Wusten and John O'Loughlin (1986) in *The Professional Geographer* illustrates this deconstructive orientation succinctly. Rejecting van der Wusten and O'Loughlin's 'instrumentalist problem-solving model of science', Ó Tuathail (1987: 196) argues against an empiricist political geography, suggesting instead that the discipline needs 'critical theory to empower its analyses [and] distance it from hegemonic discourses on international politics'. In light of the absence of such critical theory, Ó Tuathail continues, geography '*remains* an aid to the practice of statecraft' (ibid: 197, emphasis added).

While deconstruction and distancing from state power have since become central to critical geopolitics, other connections with critical theory have been much less explored. We are particularly interested here in aspects of the Frankfurt School around Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno that address the role of critical theory in political action and public engagement. The claim to actively contribute to societal change has always been important to critical theory – in particular after Adorno and Horkheimer returned from the American exile to Frankfurt and "never again Auschwitz" became their key motivation.

For critical geopolitics, this is much less so. The 'impulse to purification' (Ó Tuathail, 2013: xx) from prior notions of geopolitics with the deconstruction of hegemonic knowledge production and of power (in a broad sense) remains a central aspect. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the contribution of critical geopolitics within academia seems more significant than its impact on the formation of geopolitical imaginaries and related practices (Moisio, 2015: 230). Over the past three decades, scholars of critical geopolitics have been more willing to deconstruct geopolitical representations and processes than to imagine and propose alternative strategies. As a result, the maturing of critical geopolitics within academic geography has not been coupled with an active involvement in policy processes. Similar observations for the discipline of geography more generally have resulted in insightful calls by geographers for more public engagement (Mitchell, 2008; Murphy, 2006; Ward, 2006; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2005). For instance, in his call for a 'public geographies project', Murphy (2013: 132) urges geographers to engage more strongly with the 'broadscale regional questions' (ibid) that 'so profoundly influence public understandings and actions' (ibid: 143).

For critical geopolitics in particular, feminist influences have been instrumental in stimulating researchers 'to be constructive and to take a different kind of responsibility' (Massey, 2008: 145). Feminist criticism of critical geopolitics' distanced neutrality has immensely enriched the school of thought towards more concrete engagement with alternative geopolitical power relations (Dowler and Sharp, 2001) and critical geopolitical peace researchers have embraced a normative positioning around non-violence (McConnell et al., 2014). More recently, the "big issues" of our time have clearly become the focus of critical geopolitical writing – both in academic and more popular outlets, such as blogs, comments, newspaper articles or as policy advisors (see, for instance, Ó Tuathail, 2017; Mattissek and Reuber, 2016; Dalby, 2015; 2013).

So, while critical geopolitics has shed its initial exclusive focus on deconstruction (Ó Tuathail, 2015), constructive formulations of policy alternatives or suggestions by critical geopoliticians still remain rare. And, what is more, the relationship between critical geopolitics, critical theory and left scholarship more broadly also remains vague.

With this paper we hope to make a modest contribution towards clarifying some of this vagueness. Our argument will proceed as follows. We begin by briefly sketching out some of the basic elements of the critical theory á la Frankfurt School, in particular as regards its take on political and societal engagement and what implications such reasoning has for thinking about critical geopolitics. In the following section, we discuss these implications in greater detail as regards the theoretical, empirical and political inspirations that critical theory might bring to critical geopolitical scholarship. In so doing, we address critical geopolitics' relation to normativity and values, the influence of feminist and peace scholarship, the complexity of progressive and regressive geopolitical phenomena, as well as the uneasy relation between critical scholarship and political engagement. We argue for the explicit inclusion of normativity into critical geopolitical scholarship; scholarship that seeks to overcome systems of exclusion, but also does so by subscribing to normative positions and political values. Our argument is illustrated through references to critical geopolitical scholarship on European integration and the Brexit and seeks to stimulate further engagement with the question of critical social sciences' wider role beyond academia.

The Frankfurt School Critical Theory and Critical Geopolitics

The intellectual tasks and theoretical foundations of critical geopolitics are historically contingent. The early critical geopolitics took its intellectual inspiration from the French social

philosophy of Foucault in particular, and focused on deconstruction as well as discourse analysis. Contextually, the gradually vanishing Cold War geopolitical order – and the persistent geopolitical divides between different forms of "us" and "them" or friends and foes (Dalby, 1990; for a critique, see Ó Tuathail, 1996: 182) – provided a major stimulus for the emergence of the sub-field as a study of the ways in which politics is geographically specified in and through geopolitical discourses, narratives, scripts etc. Bordering practices that separate friends and enemies, together with the related politics of writing the spaces of global politics (Ó Tuathail, 1996) more generally, remain significant research foci in critical geopolitics in the present geopolitical context. Similarly, in terms of method, the continuing relevance of the analysis of geopolitical discourses or more specific speech-acts and related intersubjective meaning-making – together with the more recent emphasis on affects, assemblages, post-human geographies, practices, ethnographies and the like – continues to provide a useful toolkit and a broader methodological-conceptual contact surface with the various strands of critical theory.

As testimony to the abovementioned intellectual expansion, critical geopolitics has evolved substantially over the past three decades, attracting contributions from a wide range of (political) geographers and scholars from cognate disciplines. Amongst many other publications, a comprehensive volume on the state of the sub-discipline, to which the original author as well as many others have contributed, illustrates how critical geopolitical writings have been modified and diversified over the past three decades (Dodds et al., 2013a). Suggested from the beginning as a 'heterology in the house of geography' (Ó Tuathail, 1994: 313), today heterogeneity remains 'central to its vibrancy' (Dodds et al., 2013b: 10), despite occasional laments about the lack of conceptual clarity (Müller and Reuber, 2008). This heterogeneity has frequently been discussed at conferences (see Power and Campbell, 2010) as well as in written

overviews of the subdiscipline such as Kuus (2010), Jones and Sage (2010), Dodds et al. (2013a), and Moisio (2015).

The contemporary geopolitical context is characterized by a complex entanglement of militarism, neoliberal austerity politics, malign nationalism, potentially militarist and violent populism, and uneven geographical development. Promoting peace; tackling uneven geographical development, its related socio-spatial inequalities and the related rise of populism; and enhancing socio-spatial justice are not only interesting research topics for critical geopolitics. These pressing political developments, which touch upon the ways in which 'territories of wealth, power and belonging' (Moisio, 2018a) are constantly constructed and re-worked, force a scholar of critical geopolitics to elaborate the theory/praxis nexus of critical geopolitics itself. This dimension grows even more important given the obvious lack of discussion on the political role and purpose of critical geopolitics, a purpose which – if understood from the perspective of critical theory – reaches beyond the mere analysis and deconstruction of hegemonic discourses and practices.

One way to analyse this theory/practice nexus is to look at some of the basic tenets of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. At the risk of oversimplification, this theory is premised on combining practical as well as normative reasoning, and on understanding knowledge and understanding (rationality) themselves as forms of political practice. The first generation proponents, from Horkheimer and Adorno to Marcuse (Demirović, 2016; Adorno, 1971; 1971 [1966]; 1966; Horkheimer and Marcuse, 1937; Horkheimer, 1937), highlighted the importance of not only explaining and understanding the existing societal reality, but also providing norms and values on the basis of which social criticism towards the existing societal problems arises. The goal, in short, was first to specify the practical societal goals that a given "society" works

towards. Second, the aim was to change the societal reality in and through scholarly work (Horkheimer, 2002 [1968]; Adorno, 1971). In other words, and apart from its enormously useful theorizing of such issues as ideology, rationality and false consciousness, critical theory highlights the unity of theoretical work and political praxis. In the postscript to his famous *Traditional and Critical Theory,* Horkheimer (with Herbert Marcuse) emphasizes that critical theory 'never aims simply at an increase of knowledge as such. Its goal is man's [sic][1] emancipation from slavery' (Horkheimer, 2002 [1968]: 246)[2]. The focus of critical theory, therefore, is not theorizing for its own sake, its key objects are 'men [sic] as producers of their own historical way of life in its totality' (Horkheimer, 2002 [1968]: 244).

Critical theory is fundamentally concerned with human beings [*Menschen*] and their possibilities for fulfilment or, rather, self-fulfilment and asks the question of why *Menschen* are prevented from such fulfilment or, in the words of our translation, why they are prevented from emancipation from enslaving conditions. The term *Menschen* has a broad meaning here, ranging from individuals and the human body as the smallest scale of political space and geographic inquiry to families, communities, societies, etc. Critical theory, then, is an 'essential element in the historical effort to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers of men [sic]' (Horkheimer, 2002: 246) and works through 'identifying *and overcoming* all the circumstances that limit human freedom' (Bohman, 2015: emphasis added), that is the systems of exclusion that prevent *Menschen* from achieving their fulfilment.

[1] In the original German version, Horkheimer uses the gender-neutral term *Menschen* – human beings.
[2] The official translation cited here, however, is somewhat inaccurate. In the original German version Horkheimer and Marcuse (1937: 626) write that critical theory aims at 'the emancipation of human beings from *enslaving conditions*' (author translation, emphasis added): ‚[Kritische Theorie zielt] auf die Emanzipation des Menschen aus versklavenden Verhältnissen [ab]'.

Horkheimer formulated *Traditional and Critical Theory* during his American exile in the mid-1930s. At that time, the claim to totality, to complete socio-economic transformation, a transcending of the capitalist system, was a key aspect in the writings of Horkheimer, Adorno and their colleagues. Traditional theory, so their argument, is statically embedded in society and thus incapable of critically questioning its very foundations – the foundations that critical theory seeks to overcome: 'The abolition of social relationships which presently hinder development is in fact the next historical goal' (Horkheimer, 2002 [1968]: 248). World War Two and the Holocaust changed their claim to totality. Instead of complete socio-economic transformation, the prime objective became the prevention of another Auschwitz and fascism more generally. For Adorno, European fascism was not only a failure of society, but also a failure of theory (Adorno, 1966). This does not imply, however, that the basic tenets of critical theory were wrong. In a review on Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* fifty years after its initial publication, Alex Demirović (2016: 459) asks:

> What if the efforts to change the world failed, but one is not discouraged, does not want to give up and continues to be convinced that the objectives are right? Does this not also apply to theory? Do we then not have to ask questions about "interpretation", about theory, about the subjects of theory, about a renewal of theory and the intellectuals? [authors' translation]

Theory has to learn from failure and, instead of abandoning the theory of emancipation, it should be renewed and given new impulses (Demirović, 2016: 460). Horkheimer's and Adorno's return to Germany and the re-opening of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* in Frankfurt after World War Two can be seen as two such new impulses – as can their efforts to instill critical thinking much more generally into higher education.

In 1951, Horkheimer became the president of the University of Frankfurt, aiming to transform the hierarchical and class-based German university system to a more democratic university with a critical pedagogic system of education. Both Horkheimer and Adorno became public figures and forethinkers on education and didactics. Between 1959 and his death in 1969, Adorno was a regular on German public radio. What had been implicit in their writings since their American exile was explicitly expressed by Adorno during one of these radio conversations in 1966: 'The premier demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again. Its priority before any other requirement is such that I believe I need not and should not justify it. I cannot understand why it has been given so little concern until now' (Adorno, 1971 [1966]: 88).

By way of summarizing the key tenets of critical theory as a form of political standing, two issues are worth mentioning. First, one set of the targets of critical theory is the seemingly neutral scientific theories which support the existing order and its regressive/oppressive aspects. The key question is not whether empirical evidence supports a particular theory; the key is rather to understand the ways in which particular theories produce "worlds" and their regressive/oppressive features. The critical theory á la Frankfurt School thus considers "science" as one of the key productive powers of humankind and presents critique on the existing theories from an ethical standpoint (Horkheimer, 2002 [1968]). Second, critical theory rejected the notion of objectivity in knowledge, and understands knowledge as necessarily historically and materially bound and thus contingent.

Critical theory therefore asks how particular scientific theories of "normal science" promote certain values and structures, as well as preventing the emergence of alternative societal conditions. Examining how progressive and liberating tendencies in society are "chained" by

regressive and oppressive societal tendencies and their related theoretical knowledge is thus a central component of critical theory. In short, it considers knowledge as something "functional" to ideology critique and social emancipation rather than a passive reflection of objective reality; knowledge becomes social action in itself. Critical theory hence highlights the nature of scholarly work across its whole spectrum, not as a technical exercise to discuss empirically verified "theories" but rather as a contested site for bridging research, education and value-laden theories – which inescapably disclose normative aspects – in order to enhance human emancipation through consciousness and self-reflection.

Identifying and Overcoming Systems of Exclusion in Critical Geopolitics

Critical geopolitics is socially less engaged than the clearly formulated, tangible objectives of the Frankfurt School. Through its deconstructive impulse, it has arguably identified and criticized systems of (spatial) exclusion and the related practices, power relations and underpinning geographical knowledges. Yet, when it comes to overcoming such systems of exclusion, the subdiscipline has done much less – or, rather, has not expressed serious interest.

The geopolitical present provides critical geopolitics with a number of relevant research topics: the constant re-bordering of states, the rise of revanchist nationalism across different geographical contexts, the constantly evolving relationship between territorial states and transnational urbanism, and increasingly visible xenophobia which is on the rise across Europe and the United States, to mention but a few topics. While critical geopoliticians can put together thought experiments on alternative geopolitical worlds related to these themes, or some others, these alternative geopolitical visions need to be communicated to different kinds of audiences. This, in turn, would require some form of political engagement within and beyond the

academia, a role which is otherwise eagerly taken up by all sorts of think tanks, journalists and policy/business pundits. What we seek to emphasize here is McConnell's et al. (2014) addition of a *constructive* impetus to critical geopolitics' deconstructive orientation. It is the ambition to 'create' rather than just 'dissipate' (Megoran, 2011: 188). This involves 'sticking out our necks and making judgments' (Olson and Sayer, 2009: 187) through offering concrete political standpoints and tangible commitments, such as the Frankfurt School's. Such critical geopolitics aims to facilitate the production of new forms of consciousness and new conceptions of the world that may prompt novel forms of geopolitical experimentation, alternative spatial practices of governing, and oppositional political mobilization (see Brenner, 2017).

Calls for a more public role for geography and geographers are not new, yet they are generally voiced by geographers themselves (Mitchell, 2008; Murphy, 2006; O'Loughlin, 2018; Ward, 2006; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2005), not by others calling for geographers. In his most recent book, Gerard Toal re-emphasizes how 'scholarship is inevitably enmeshed in the complexities of the world we live within, and cannot sit on the sidelines' (Ó Tuathail, 2017: 15). Indeed, critical geopoliticians are increasingly attempting to reach beyond the narrow confines of academic scholarship by engaging with more concrete political and social challenges or popular phenomena, such as climate change and the anthropocene (Dalby, 2015; Johnson et al., 2014), grand narratives and "public geographies" (Murphy, 2013), sports and mega-events (Müller, 2017; Koch, 2017), Brexit and Trump (Ingram, 2017; Bachmann and Sidaway, 2016), etc. As part of this ambition to move beyond "the sidelines", a few means are available to overcome the real but permeable borders between universities, the public and wider non-academic circles. Firstly, "activist research" is often mentioned as a bridge between the academic knowledge production and political action "on the ground" (Schipper, 2017; Oldfield et al., 2004). Secondly, one may argue that scholars of critical geopolitics should more effectively popularize

their activities through different kinds of media (Ingram, 2017). Finally, critical theory in the meaning of the Frankfurt School highlights the pedagogical aspect of the political and the role of critical pedagogy as a notable political resource in particular. Adorno and the critical theorists of the Frankfurt school built those bridges – within their work in academia and, even more importantly, also beyond. The experience of Nazi Germany was a decisive turn in their intellectual trajectory towards identifying the importance of such bridging in its contribution towards overcoming systems of exclusion. Most critical geopolitical scholarship places much less emphasis on such bridging.

Three Ways to Enrich Critical Geopolitics through the Frankfurt School

Taking inspiration from feminist critical geopolitics, geographic peace research and the Frankfurt School offers implications that can help us enrich both the conceptual and empirical basis of critical geopolitical scholarship and its societal relevance. We discuss such enrichment under three broad themes: the relation with normativity and values; the complexity of progressive and regressive geopolitical phenomena; and the uneasy relation between critical scholarship and political engagement. We will discuss these themes using the example of European integration and Brexit, as well as by reflecting on the ongoing processes of spatial justice more generally.

Critical Geopolitics' Complex Relation with Normativity and Values

While critical geopolitics shares critical theory's interest in systems of exclusion, power relations, oppression, etc., it remains focused on the deconstruction of such "negative"

processes. Critical theory, on the other hand, through its key objective to prevent another Auschwitz, transforms the rejection and investigation of such "negative" processes into an interest in countering them with more "positive" notions such as inclusion, social justice, peace, multiculturalism, democratic control, etc. Critical theory thus commits to normative values – a commitment that remains difficult for critical geopolitics and critical geography more generally. Hyndman (2010: 247) asks if critical geopolitics 'adopt[s] explicitly normative positions to remain critical and politically relevant to the violence of war? Or are its followers more likely to rekindle efforts to destabilize dominant modes of producing geopolitical knowledge and unravel the policies and popular cultures that propagate conflict?' Arguing that both are possible, she observes how critical geopolitics continues to wrestle 'with the conundrum of not wanting to resuscitate a liberal humanism and with it fixed notions of "justice", but also wanting to make political commitments in specific struggles' (ibid).

Such questions are still pertinent and the reluctance to adopt value-laden positions largely remains. In a related debate on normativity in radical geography, Olson and Sayer (2009: 188) observe how 'under the influence of elements of post-structuralism, it has become common to attempt to suspend judgement or valuation'. They reject the claim that normativity is always 'subjective, ethnocentric, essentialist and implicitly authoritarian' (ibid: 180) and instead call for 'embracing the normative'. Hyndman's argument above, that both are possible and that it should not be a question of either/or, offers a commendable way forward, yet also raises the question of theoretical incompatibility between the 'purely poststructuralist project of deconstructing the texts of elite political actors and popular players' and 'political positions that oppose violence' (Hyndman, 2010: 247). Hyndman offers a way to bridge this divide through feminist approaches that are 'more reconstructive in their geographical imaginations' and thus serve as starting points for 'alternative epistemologies, more embodied subjectivities and a post-

foundational ethic of geopolitical encounter'. She explains how, in this context, post-foundational 'means simply that the normative content of an encounter is not pre-given; such an ethic eschews the essentialism (not to mention ethnocentrism and exclusion) of a single geopolitical narrative' (ibid: 249). The 'humanist commitment to prefigured subjects and normative positions' can thus be avoided 'by using the human body's vulnerability to violence as a basis to materialize a nonfoundational ethic of encounter that engages "the political"' (ibid: 254).

Through its focus on 'embodied subjectivities', feminist geopolitics lays out a path for critical geopolitics that is more concerned with the normative and the political and thus moves beyond mere disembodied critique or objective theory. Feminist geopolitics has long been positioned as being 'not just about critiquing hegemony, but also about pointing to, and […] *creating*, alternatives' (Koopman, 2011: 277, emphasis in original; see also Dowler and Sharp, 2001). This should apply also to critical geopolitics. Clearly, its anti-authoritarian character and the identification and critique of systems of exclusion remain essential, yet this does not necessarily demand a limitation of our work to distanced deconstructions. In fact, constructive political and social scholarship necessitates the prior deconstruction of hegemonic discourses, geopolitical imaginations and systems of exclusion, as Ingram and Dodds (2009: 3, emphasis added) argue with respect to the war on terror: 'geographical imaginations are essential to any critique of the war on terror and emerging landscapes of security, *and to the construction of alternatives*'.

The problem in critical geopolitical scholarship is not the lack of normative positions (see Megoran, 2008), but that we tend not to subscribe to the implicit normativity that guides our theoretical arguments (Olson and Sayer, 2009). Olson and Sayer (2009: 182) argue that, out of fear of being exposed to critique by others for normative judgment, 'most of critical social

science, including radical geography, tends to avoid such arguments'. Their call for normative positioning has most prominently been taken up by human geographers advocating commitment to non-violence and peace research as well as with calls for critical geopolitical engagement with the processes and practices of peaceful resolution of (potential) conflicts (Megoran, 2011; McConnell et al., 2014; Williams and McConnell, 2011).

Hyndman's (2010: 254) suggestion to use the 'human body's vulnerability to violence' as the basis for political engagement of feminist, critical and peace researcher offers a conceptual opening for more direct, normative and constructive positioning in critical geopolitics. We take these arguments as a starting point for the inclusion of critical theory's ambition to *overcome* systems of exclusion into broader critical geopolitical scholarship. Feminist geography, peace research and critical theory share a commitment to normative judgment and researchers' active positioning in favour of certain agents and processes. Such constructive positioning is still too often missing in critical geopolitics. Clearly our judgements and opinions remain subjective, yet the complete suspension of judgment by scholars of critical geopolitics is a poor alternative to subjective opinions. Especially when national-revanchist and populist political movements are on the rise in many (European) countries, the silence of critical scholars on (geo)political issues, for fear of becoming an 'aid to the practice of statecraft' (Ó Tuathail, 1987: 197), stands in contrast to possible contributions to overcoming systems of exclusion and towards '"human emancipation" in circumstances of domination and oppression' (Bohman, 2015: referring to Horkheimer).

Finally, we propose that critical geopolitics, inspired by critical theory, should also investigate certain structural elements. These elements, we believe, have an impact on the ways in which people perceive, experience and live through social and spatial inequalities, and how they act

upon such perceptions and experiences. This brings us to uneven geographical development and the multiple ways in which such development translates into political action in different geographical contexts. One of the key observations of critical geography has been, as Neil Smith (2005: 895) has argued, that 'socially divided societies reproduce their forms of social differentiation in geographical space and, by corollary, that hierarchically produced geographies reaffirm and reproduce social differences'. The critical geopolitics we have in mind should investigate persistent socio-spatial hierarchies vis-à-vis broader geopolitical developments such as the rise of revanchist nationalism.

We regard the fight against geopolitical populism in particular as an important intellectual task for critical geopolitics (Lizotte, 2019; Reuber and Bürk, 2017). The many forms of increasingly visible populism are associated with a rise in malign nationalism, which, in turn, is premised on highly exclusionary, violent and even militarist forms of geopolitical imagination. But the rise of malign nationalism and populism are clearly related to the melting down of the at least seemingly stable Fordist-Keynesian political geographical state formations, and to the associated rise of transnational global capitalism (Moisio and Kangas, 2016). In other words, welfarist state processes have gradually been replaced by new spatial processes of urbanization that produce increasingly visible spatial injustices (Amin, 2002; Harvey, 2001; Moisio, 2018b; Smith, 1984). Interestingly, contemporary global capitalism produces new hinterlands and margins, and result in the 'revenge of places that do not matter' (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). The interconnection of transnational geopolitical processes of capitalism and forms of political populism, national revanchism, and militarism is a topic that merits more critical geopolitical investigation and commentary.

The Complexity of Progressive and Regressive Geopolitical Phenomena

The geopolitical phenomena we study are not generally homogenous and coherent; often they are multifaceted and complex – including regressive and oppressive as well as progressive and liberating elements. Critical theory's duality of identifying *and* overcoming systems of exclusion offers an approach that is more suitable for accounting for such complexity than critical geopolitics' focus on identifying and deconstructing systems of exclusion. This entails the need to move beyond exclusive judgment on an actor/phenomenon/process in its entirety and to consider its complexity and heterogeneity, from multiple perspectives of the same actor/phenomenon/process. In our own work, this complexity has challenged us, as European citizens and researchers alike, as regards our critical geopolitical engagement with the EU as an actor and with European integration as a geopolitical process. It is, therefore, in this context – and considering Brexit especially as a decisive disruption of this process – that we argue for such a consideration of complexity and heterogeneity, focusing on two particular systems of exclusion: nationalism and inequality. Both have long been researched as part of critical geopolitical, or more generally geographical, scholarship. As laid out above, twentieth-century geopolitics' aid to nationalist statecraft has been a key factor in the emergence of critical geopolitics in the first place. The resistance against inequality has long been a key concern not only of critical geography but of critical social science more generally (Smith, 1984).

Our own normative positioning towards the EU is thereby ambivalent. On the one hand, the EU has long been an effective means, perhaps not for completely overcoming, but at least for providing an alternative to nationalism and *Realpolitik*, namely a "state" building project that is inherently heterogeneous and cooperative, often described in terms such as civilian or normative power (Manners, 2010; Bachmann and Sidaway, 2009). We regard this role as a

collaborative peace project as a progressive and normatively desirable side of the EU as geopolitical process – a role often accredited to the EU when seen from the outside (Bachmann and Müller, 2015; Holland and Chaban, 2014; Lucarelli and Fioramonti, 2010). On the other hand, we are much more critical of the EU's performance when it comes to overcoming spatial inequality. While it was a decisive factor in decreasing inequality between Eastern and Western Europe in the accession process, the Union's neoliberal pushes have resulted in a spatially marginalizing race for competitiveness. Moreover, the politics of austerity has produced increased inequalities within EU countries and between the North and the South of Europe (Ballas et al., 2017). In the Brexit vote, such growing inequalities played a crucial role in the leave campaign also because British politicians successfully managed to project *their* neoliberal policies – and the increasing inequality and divisions in British society produced thereby – onto the EU (Hennig and Dorling, 2016; Bachmann and Sidaway, 2016).

Critical geopolitical scholarship on the EU tends to leave out this complexity of the EU as actor/phenomenon/process and the heterogeneous effects of its policies. It focuses on the regressive and oppressive effects of the (EU's) neoliberal pushes and exclusionary practices. It thereby takes a more critical/deconstructive and less constructive view of the entirety of the integration process. Critical geopolitical scholarship is largely concerned with deconstructing power hierarchies and identifying systems of exclusion with rising inequalities imbued with European integration (see Bialasiewicz, 2011). At the same time, it often neglects the progressive and liberating effects of the integration process, for instance the anchoring of multilateralism and supranationalism in European polities or towards overcoming malign nationalism as a key system of exclusion. Against this imbalance, we suggest that critical geopolitics should offer a multidimensional analysis of European integration. In so doing, it would examine the relationship between austerity politics, right wing populism, the politics of

competitiveness and the constant bordering of the EU vis-à-vis the geopolitical subtext/pretext of European integration as a peace process, and a process that seeks to enhance spatial justice across Europe.

We regard the abovementioned imbalance as problematic and suggest taking inspiration from critical theory to engage not only with the regressive/oppressive effects of the European integration process, but also with the progressive/liberating ones. Our motivation for doing so stems not least from a panel discussion on the EU's global role in which we both participated during the 2008 RGS/IBG conference in London. All the panellists (including ourselves) critically laid out aspects of the projection of EU power – mostly through the lens of the EU's role in promoting neoliberal globalization. After the panellists' statements, Nick Megoran, who was part of the audience, asked 'Why are you all Eurosceptics?'. The question took the panellists as a surprise given that we all considered ourselves very fundamentally pro-European integration.

Our support for the EU's role in overcoming nationalism was implicit, but it remained unarticulated and unstudied. The arguments laid out at the panel exclusively highlighted rising spatial inequalities, neoliberal ways of governing and the fostering of inter-spatial competition in Europe, as well as the systems of exclusion that have come along with the integration process. Clearly, our criticism was of a very different nature than that which the EU currently faces from right-wing populist movements across the continent, such as UKIP, the French *Rassemblement National*, the German *Alternative für Deutschland*, and alike. Yet both the populist right and the critical academic left share the silence about progressive/liberating aspects of the integration process and the EU's substantial role in producing a political-economic system based on cooperation rather than violent confrontation and, most importantly, in delivering 70 years of

peace in Western Europe. This reminds us of the need to be able to critically excavate some of the recent neoliberal tendencies to produce the EU as a supranational and neoliberal "competitiveness machine" vis-à-vis European integration as a peace process. In short, treating the European Union as a complex geopolitical process, a site within which competing political forces constantly seek to define the meaning of integration, opens up possibilities for a politically-engaged critical geopolitical investigation of the EU, and for the production of the geopolitical theorizing of Europe – accounting for the complexity of regressive/oppressive as well as of progressive/liberating effects of EU policies in different contexts.

The Uneasy Relation between Critical Scholarship and Political Engagement

In an insightful attempt to reconcile participatory research approaches with poststructural perspectives, Mike Kesby (2007) lays out how the power relations implicit in participatory research, often the focus of poststructural critique, can also exercise an empowering function and thus facilitate 'reflection and social transformation' (ibid: 2814). Power, so the argument goes, can empower marginalised populations. Thus participation can serve 'as a means to outflank more oppressive and less self-reflexive forms of power: giving the poststructural critique of participation a practical political edge' (ibid: 2820).

We are similarly cautious about the power imbued in the production of geopolitical knowledge and the articulation of geopolitical positions, yet we want to offer here the notion of a more constructive critical geopolitics, naturally inspired by its inherent poststructural critique, in order 'to outflank more oppressive and less self-reflexive forms of power' (Kesby, 2007), such as nationalism. The more constructive critical geopolitics we suggest builds on and fully utilizes critical geopolitics' deconstructive and anti-authoritarian analytical power, while at the same

time calling on critical geopolitical scholars to 'stick out their necks and make judgement' (Olson and Sayer, 2009). The reluctance of critical academics to do so by adopting normative standpoints and constructive, rather than exclusively deconstructive, positions and studying progressive/liberating geopolitical phenomena has helped sideline the work of critical scholars in political and social practice. Scholars of critical geopolitics working on the EU (including ourselves) have for too long focused exclusively on identifying aspects of the "EU empire", the systems of exclusion and inequalities that have come along with the creation of the polity of the EU (Bachmann, 2016a; 2016b; 2013a; 2011; Moisio and Luukkonen, 2018; Luukkonen and Moisio, 2016; Moisio et al., 2013; Moisio, 2011). We have neglected to study how European integration has contributed towards overcoming nationalism and war over large parts of the continent. We criticize, and rightly so, growing inequalities and the EU's neoliberal pushes, but do not conduct research on how particular political-economic developments contribute to European integration as a peace process or a solidarity process. It is partly for this reason that concrete suggestions for improvement are as rare as intellectual support for the EU as peace process (Bachmann, 2013b).

A reflexive geopolitical critique requires a systematic examination of the changing historical conditions of possibility for a critical geopolitical orientation towards more active engagement (Brenner, 2017). This would entail normative positioning around 'some conception of the human good or flourishing' (Olson and Sayer, 2009: 181) that we should stop shying away from for fear of essentialism or authoritarianism. It is precisely because of the inextricable involvement of knowledge production with the practice of statecraft that the refusal to develop arguments in support of 'some conception' of "good" (ibid) opens the door for nationalism, xenophobia and all kinds of forms of essentialism, authoritarianism and systems of exclusion – as can well be observed in the rise of the right across Europe (see also McConnell et al., 2017).

To be clear, this does not entail a withdrawal from criticism. The EU and the Eurozone certainly offers a large enough target for criticism for its increasingly neoliberal orientation and for prioritizing economic elites over social concerns – irrespective of the much debated "European social model". One of the key successes for the "Leave" campaigners in the Brexit referendum may have been to project this elitism onto Brussels rather than London (Bachmann and Sidaway, 2016). In an insightful compilation of short essays on Brexit in the *London Review of Books,* Streeck lays out:

> The decomposition of the modern state has reached a new stage, in the very country where the modern state was invented. It was the UK under Thatcher that blocked the development of the EU into a supranational welfare state on the postwar British model associated with Keynes, Beveridge and T.H. Marshall. Since then the neoliberal revolution, led by the US and the UK, has forever closed this window. Instead of protecting Europeans from the maelstrom of the world market, the EU has turned into a powerful engine of liberalisation in the service of a deep economistic restructuring of social life. Under the aegis of the EU, the UK has reverted to being two nations, a nation of winners using the globalised world as their extended playing field, and a nation of losers driven from their commons by another firestorm of primitive accumulation. Seeking refuge in democratic protection, popular rule, local autonomy, collective goods and egalitarian traditions, the losers under neoliberal internationalism, unexpectedly returning to political participation, place their hopes on their nation-state. But the existing architecture of statehood is no longer designed to accommodate them, certainly not in the land of Thatcher, Blair and Cameron. (Streeck in Runciman et al., 2016)

From a politically left viewpoint, many aspects of the EU's system(s) of political-economic organisation require change. Our concern is with the role that critical academics play (or do not play) in those contexts and as regards the future of Europe's integration project. Our criticism of the flaws of this project, of its increasingly neoliberalizing policies, of the external projection of its power, of the production of systems of exclusion, is important and has to remain a key part of critical geopolitical research. Yet, our refraining from doing so constructively, from studying the EU as a non-nationalistic peace project and other progressive/liberating dimensions of the integration process, certainly does not help to counter xenophobic arguments from the nationalist right.

Conclusion

> What are the critical challenges facing the European Union (EU) today? How might growing inequalities in China affect that country's economic and political future? What are the principal sources of instability in contemporary Southwest Asia and North Africa? Will the United States continue to be the dominant global power in the 21st century? (Murphy, 2013: 131)

Alec Murphy illustrates the need for geographers to engage with the "big" questions of our time, with topics of wider political and public interest. To us, personally as well as in terms of our research interests, the future of European (dis)integration is such a "big" question. We take Murphy's call, as well as previous feminist, normative and peace orientations, as inspiration for our ambition to enrich critical geopolitical scholarship through a re-reading of the Frankfurt

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School at a critical political conjuncture in Europe and beyond. With the British decision to leave the European Union and the election of Donald Trump as US president, two of the world's leading liberal democracies followed highly worrisome nationalist and populist tendencies in key votes in 2016. Critical geopolitical commentaries have identified the exclusionary geographical imaginaries of both (see, for instance, Ingram, 2017; Bachmann and Sidaway, 2016), yet have done little to contribute to different outcomes *before* the votes were held. In a call for a critical political geography and for positive accounts of peace, Bregazzi and Jackson (2018: 85) argue, critical geopolitics exposes damaging ideas by 'identifying the ways in which geographical imaginaries exclude the "other" and justify use of violence'. Referring to Sharp (2011a) they add 'to this the need to recognize and foster enabling ideas' and lay out how the 'renaturalization of ideology is not a replacement for deconstruction or discourse analysis, but instead demonstrates how critique is only one part of the political undertaking if we want to try and reduce harmful ideas and promote enabling ideas' (Bregazzi and Jackson, 2018: 85-86).

Examples of critical academics' promotion of such enabling ideas include, for instance, Schipper's (2017) suggestions for countering tightening housing markets, Sharp's (2013; 2011b) call for the inclusion of "subaltern" systems of knowledge production, Müller's (2017) work on the planning and impacts of mega-events, calls to develop more inclusive spatial and social systems of knowledge-intensive forms of capitalism (Moisio, 2018a), diverse demands for peace geographies (McConnell et al., 2014; Sheppard, 2013; Megoran, 2013) and embodied critique (Hyndman, 2010). Whether we should refer to this work as applied is up to debate (Massey, 2008), but the ambition of these (and other) authors underlines the richness and compatibility of critical and engaging scholarship. It is in this light that we call, both empirically and theoretically, for a more constructive critical geopolitics. Such a more constructive reading of critical geopolitics takes seriously critical theory's duality of identifying *and* overcoming

systems of inclusion, such as malign nationalism and spatial inequality and injustice. It opens the door for normative positioning in critical geopolitics and for adding a constructive component to the critical deconstruction and discourse analysis of unequal power relations, systems of exclusion and hegemonic knowledge productions.

After three decades of deconstructing, critical geopolitics has matured to a level that will allow it to move beyond identifying and criticizing systems of exclusion towards normative positioning not only *against* such systems but also *for* means to overcome them. It is precisely because of its established strength in excavating and deconstructing hegemonic narratives that critical geopolitics has the analytical and explanatory potential to be applied to the *construction* of possible geopolitical visions. Through its emphasis on accounting for historical, geopolitical and local sensitivities in different time-spaces, critical geopolitics is particularly well suited as an approach for constructive geopolitical visionizing that is sensitive to unequal power relations and the pitfalls of earlier/other 'subjective, ethnocentric, essentialist and implicitly authoritarian' (Olson and Sayer, 2009: 180) geopolitical accounts.

By following the more general conceptualization of critique by Brenner (2017), such critical geopolitical scholarship is intended not only to serve deconstructive purposes (see also Murphy, 2013; Mitchell, 2008). It should also offer some sort of intellectual and normative orientation to those social forces struggling to realize some of the alternative "geopolitical worlds" that the normalizing hegemonic discourses systematically both hide and possibly stigmatize. In so doing, we suggest that critical geopolitics take conceptual inspiration from critical theory not only to be part of a critical social science endeavour that *identifies* systems of exclusion, but that also contributes towards *overcoming* them with the goal to 'create a world which satisfies the needs and powers of men [sic]' (Horkheimer, 2002 [1968]: 246). Such a deeper political

engagement may offer a sustained basis for a constructive form of geopolitics which seeks to provide alternative geographical knowledge for policy practices. Rather than understanding participation in the policy process as an inappropriate dimension of critical geopolitical scholarship (see also Peck, 1999), we thus call for a "double maturing" of critical geopolitics that involves both its theoretical rigour and its role in policy-making. Irrespective of the recent neoliberalization of universities, the academy is still one of the few spaces where oppositional ideas can be developed and debated relatively free from countervailing influences (Castree, 2000: 2091-2092).

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