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Geopolitical images and security: a conceptual relation.

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Abstract. Geography is a distinctively visual discipline where the I/eye plays a fundamentally active role in the shaping of the world around us. Geopolitical studies under the banner of 'Critical Geopolitics' have advanced in an agenda that foregrounds the shortcomings of a *geopolitical tradition* that had revolved around an understanding of geography as the science of representation of the world 'out there'. The challenge of that exteriority via the unveiling of power relations behind geographical knowledge resulted in the reorientation of part of the discipline towards the critical examination of discourses, representations, images, etc., where the geopolitical imagination of Sates stands out as a powerful manifestation thereof. This paper is set out to explore the nature of geopolitical images, conceptualized as a function of the interplay between geographic knowledge, security concerns and identity formations.

Key words. Critical geopolitics, discourse, geopolitical images, security, conceptual relation.

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1. Introduction

A substantial body of research and many leading figures in the social sciences (Todorov, Agnew, Ó Tuathail, Spivak, Campbell, Said, etc) have in recent decades along with their intellectual efforts –ascribed to diverse niches of knowledge– contributed to the critical endeavour of challenging political geography's epistemological foundations and ontological anchoring. Broadly speaking, this has implied the revision of several premises that for long constituted the moral and scientific background of a so-called 'geographical tradition' premised on the following assumptions: (i) Geography was born as a fundamentally imperialist discipline that gained special salience in the context of the 19th century empires and has carried on this imprint at least until the end of World War II, (ii) geopolitical thinking was underpinned by the belief in white men's superiority over other races and colonized peoples, and (iii) the reliance on an approach to reality based on a 'Cartesian perspectivalism' that implied a "divide between an inner self and an outer reality, between an internal mind and an external world of objects" (Ó Tuathail, 1996a: 21-22).

Channels of communication between the realm of factuality and the intellectual trajectories of International Relations (IR) and geopolitics have been fluid, since scholarly production has logically attempted to offer valid explanations of "international affairs". Scientific innovation within those fields of inquiry is especially sensitive to stimuli from a purported outside world of events and processes, that includes wars and alliances among states, transnational terrorist organizations, ethnic conflicts, natural disasters or challenges posed by the accelerated exchange of people, commodities and capitals. While, as a response to the former, geography has needed to cope with various kinds of disorientations affecting deep-seated believes, categories of analysis and normative basis –inheritors of the project of 'modern geographical imagination'–, Ó Tuathail sees no contradiction between the latter and the irruption of a 'postmodern geopolitical condition', but rather

> the intensification of the postmodern geopolitical condition may provoke a deepening assertion of modern geopolitical imaginations and/or hybrid geopolitical imaginations that (con)fuse it with the deterritorializing tendencies associated with advanced modernity into new forms of geopolitical discourse (2000: 167).

This paper argues that geopolitical discourses are pervaded by variable but never inexistent degrees of security concerns that threaten some or all dimensions of Our identity vis-à-vis Theirs. As a consequence thereof, my contention is that geopolitical images (no matter whether they are qualified as 'modern' or 'postmodern') are a function of the mutually constitutive interplay between geographic knowledge and security and identity discourses[2]. Hence, my interest in disentangling the processes by which geography, security and identity relate to each other in the configuration of geopolitical imagination. This paper proceeds by, first, sketching out the centrality of vision and imagination in geographical discourse and practice, and the critique launched by Critical Geopolitics. Secondly, attention is paid to the intersectional/dissent/peripheral space that connects critical projects in geopolitics and IR, and to the proposal of a geosophy of international affairs that might help overcome this breach. Thirdly, I explore the outreach of security reasoning in the geo-graphing of the world. To conclude, I will offer some suggestions as to how this combined approach can help sharpen our insights into the construction of global space.

2. From Geography to Critical Geopolitics: vision and imagination.

2.1 The order of the world and the birth of a mythical discipline.

As a discipline and practice, geography is tightly tied with the act of imagining, viewing, and representing. The task of geographers is primarily bound to the ability of taking positions, deploying viewpoints and offering perspectives that have traditionally been put forward under the guise of truth, neutrality or scientificism. In that sense, geography is, among the social sciences, a fundamentally visual science, and geographic knowledge a paradigmatic instance

2 For the sake of brevity, I might, throughout this paper, use the short-terms 'geography', 'security' and 'identity'. However, my understanding of these three is informed by critical approaches to geopolitics and IR, which means that beyond objectification, 'geography', 'security' and 'identity' are discursive formations.

of 'situated knowledge'[3] –where the problematization of space that critical approaches claim for threatens to destabilize the divide line between subject and object of study. Thus, whereas traditional geographical reasoning singled out space as geography's object of study *par excellence*, radical and critical geographers have highlighted the double value of space as also the place inhabited and actualised by scholars and practitioners who incarnate specific *loci* of enunciation. In a historical juncture where attempts to master space constitute the primary dynamics of global politics (Ó Tuathail, 1996a: 2), low awareness of geography's *situatedness* raises exponentially the risk of totalitarian readings of world affairs[4]. Under that light then, viewing and imagining shall be read as the basic cognitive operations in charge of fueling geography's own mechanism of knowledge production[5], rather than neutral instruments to access reality.

The 90s witnessed the release of a substantial amount of works that today are considered a basic corpus of texts in 'critical geopolitics'. Simon Dalby was responsible for coining this subfield of study in his analysis of the representational practices laid out by the Committee on Present Danger –a US conservative foreign policy interest group– in the 70s and 80s (1988, 1990; Kuus, 2010: 685); and while

[3] Linda McDowell contends that "knowledge reflects and maintains power relations, that is partial, contextual, situated in particular times, places, and circumstances. Representations of these partial truths are produced by authors who are "raced", gendered and classed beings with a particular way of seeing the world" (2002: 282). Edward W. Said –whose production and biography seem to fit this depiction comfortably– draws on the metaphor of "traveling theory" to connote that "Theory has to be grasped in the place and time out of which it emerges" (Said in *The world, the text, and the critic*, quoted in Gregory, 1994: 9). In the same vein, Duvall & Varadarajan qualify Said's intellectual project as "a form of secularism that is not simply opposed to religious dogma but to all kinds of totalizing 'certainties' functioning as orthodoxies" (2007: 94).

[4] I am here drawing on Adib-Moghaddam's (2011) warnings vis-à-vis reductionist analyses of the relation between a so-called West and Islamic worlds: "The object of a totalitarian methodology, in short, is a decrease in complexity. It is a retractile device suggesting hermetic consolidation through reduction: the shrinkage of the self and the other into neatly defined epistemological territories. This is the ultimate mode of persuasion underlying the us-versus-them logic and it is essential to understanding the spatial compartmentalisation of the clash regime" (2011: 110).

5 Interestingly, in a valuable piece of writing (2000), Sui gathers strong arguments in favour of making geography a more aural discipline. The author rightly points at a postpositivist turn in philosphy and science –with Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Foucault, Derrida, Habermas, Rorty, and Bernstein as leading figures–, whereby the I/eye might be displaced from the centre of the discussion by the force of dialogue, discourse and conversation. If "vision has been singled out as the master sense of modernity" (Sui, 2000: 325), postmodern writers shall privilege the ear and the act of listening and dialoguing as activities with a greater potential for emancipation. As for geography, "In a very fundamental sense, geography in the late twentieth century marks the end of an illusion of the optical, ocularcentric illusion. The siren calls of postpositivist thinking has awaken us to a brave new world, which is so obviously not for arrogant gazing, but for humble listening" (Sui, 2000: 328).

Mamadouh identifies something like "an identity problem" in critical geopolitics (2009, quoted in Editorial 2010: 244), as a matter of fact, the driving force that brought together a series of scholars in their efforts to critically reexamine geography was that considerations about power, discourse and (post-) modernity needed be brought into the debates of the discipline (also Jones & Sage, 2010):

> Approaching geographical knowledge as a technology of power -both the result and a constitutive element of power relations - it pushed geography out of the illusion of political neutrality and fueled a critical examination of the discipline itself. Whereas traditional geopolitics treats geography as a nondiscursive terrain that preexists geopolitical claims, critical geopolitics approaches geographical knowledge as an essential part of the modern discourses of power (Kuus, 2010: 685).

Authors went very vocal in denouncing traditional geopolitical reasoning's dependence on the almost undisputed power of the I/eye and the ocularcentrism – furthermore, seasoned with ethnocentric hubris- deployed by scholars and practitioners. Ó Tuathail's, who penned the influential *Critical Geopolitics*, asserted that,

> The struggle over geography is also a conflict between competing images and imaginings, a contest of power and resistance that involves not only struggles to represent the materiality of physical geographic objects and boundaries but also the equally powerful and, in different manners, the equally material force of discursive borders between an idealized Self and a demonized Other, between "us" and "them"" (Ó Tuathail, 1996a: 14).

Before him, Derek Gregory had in his *Geographical Imaginations* summarized the project of a renewed critical human geography as follows: (i) a human geography ought to reject those strategies of representation that treat discourse as an unproblematic reflection of the world, (ii) reflexivity is an inescapable moment in any critical human geography, (iii) human geography is an irredeemably situated, positioned system of knowledge (1994: 75-76). Informed by this renewed spirit in human geography studies[6], John Agnew carried out the most accomplished attempt to disentangle the issue of a "modern geographical imagination" (2005) that has so crucially contributed to reinforce the mythical scaffolding of modernity

[6] Hepple is right in warning us that while disgrace fell upon geopolitics in the aftermath of the Second World War (as a consequence of the interchange between Nazism and German *Geopolitik*), "interpretation and analysis continued, but sailed under such other colours as strategic studies or even political geography" (1986: S23) until the recovery of the label 'geopolitics' in the 70s.

–"laypersons and scholars alike have uncritically accepted a series of convenient but stultifying geographical myths, based on unwarranted simplifications of global spatial patterns" (Lewis and Wigen, 1997: xiii), including continents, states, but also ideas of the West and the Rest (Hall, 1992), the East-West and North-divides, as well as the fictions of First, Second or Third Worlds (Barkawi & Laffey, 2006).

Modern geographical imagination constitutes a well ingrained power grid resulting from a series of historical developments and epistemological strategies that entailed, first, the *visualization of global space,* which could not be accomplished until the 19th century when, literally, the entire global space was opened up to human inspection –thus, rendering itself knowable and controllable to men. Following Agnew, this process started in the 16th century upon the European encounter with the Americas[7] and marked a fundamental transition from a threefold (Europe, Asia and Africa) to a fourfold (Europe, Asia, Africa *and* America) partition of the world (Lewis and Wigen, 1997: 25). The 'binary geographies' (i.e. the compartmentalisation of 'peoples, places and dramas' (Ó Tuathail, 1996; Agnew, 2005) into civilized vs. barbaric, advanced vs. backwards, Christian vs. non-Christian, etc.) that underpinned the colonial project started by the Iberians in the 16th century helped the solidification of modernity in an almost definite manner.

The *conversion of time in space*, another defining feature of modern geographical imagination, is deeply intertwined with the idea of 'a world of binary geographies', where imperial/colonial projects are vitally anchored in a taxonomy of global space in which places and peoples occupy positions of more or less importance according to a lineal conception of time[8]. To be more precise, by converting time in space, modern geographical imagination successfully managed

[7] Tzvetan Todorov's *The Conquest of America* (1987) is a referential work in that respect, as well as a well-documented and outstanding example of how projects of territorial appropriation are more "effective" when strategies of "dispossession through othering" occur (Gregory, 1994: 169). For an elaborated discussion of Todorov's study and questions of identity, see Connolly (1989), who contends that ""International Relations", as we know them, were compounded at this time out of the intertext between the Old World and the New. This is a world historical moment in the history of western intertextuality" (p. 325).

[8] Development studies hinge on this kind of reasoning in order to elaborate their agendas. See Slater (1993) for a discussion on geopolitical imaginations under the light of development theory.

to reify features of civilization/barbarism, development/underdevelopment, nurture/nature, rationality/exoticism to places (territories), rather than to peoples –thereby sealing off certain territories as secure (i.e. Europe or the West) or insecure (i.e. Africa, the Middle East, the Orient), but also awarding space the performative power to infuse people with their own qualities.

The project of modernity was not complete without the promotion of a *world of territorial states*, a process of domestication of global space consecrated by the Peace of Westphalia and fraught with "particularly bloody histories" (Dalby, 1996: 660). It constituted an attempt to suppress the physical and epistemic violence required to accomplish an 'order of closed space' only in the 19th century (Ó Tuathail, 1996a: 16), but has not ceased to encounter resistance in different parts of the world and in different historical junctures. "For Shapiro, the development of the modern state system was the beginning of the geopolitical imagination, for geopolitics is world space as organized by the state. He argues that the state system as a horizontal organization of space around the principle of state sovereignty is innately a moral geography, 'a set of silent ethical assertions that preorganize explicit ethico-political discourses' (Shapiro, 1994: 482, quoted in Dalby & Ó Tuathail, 1996: 452). All in all, modern geographical imagination was driven by the force of reducing the "extreme ontological insecurity" (Agnew, 2005: 137) stemming from the world beyond what is known and apprehensible (Agnew, 2005: 17) or, in other words, from *terrae incognitae* that awaited Europeans in rendering them *terrae cognitae* (Wright, 1947).

2.2 Geopolitical imaginations, political praxis and the question of scale.

If, as I contended previously, geography is a highly visual discipline, it is no less tied to the practice of 'real politics'. In geopolitical scholarship, the distinction between formal, practical and popular geopolitics has been set up to convey three distinct levels of discourse and practice that belong to the realm of academic reasoning, state practice (including statemen and military officers) and cultural

production, respectively (Ó Tuathail, 1996a: 60)[9]. The centrality of practice must then be understood on the basis that (i) the divide line between formal and practical geopolitics works in analytical terms rather than as a definite separation of how things "actually" happen (the origins of the discipline are telling in this regard), (ii) geopolitical images are the result of the constant transfer of knowledge between the practical and formal realm of geopolitics, and (iii) practice requires the existence of some *doer*, author, agent (individual or collective) that is endowed with the capacity to produce geopolitical knowledge. Thus, who or which scales are involved in the *geo-graphing* of the world are issues that shall be granted due attention.

All disciplines have their official founding fathers and geography in not an exception. Ratzel, Kjellen, Mackinder, Mahan, Haushofer… are names that recurrently pop up in the accounts that attempt to tell the story of political geography from scratch. Their geographic production constitutes what has coalesced around the banner of a *geopolitical tradition*. Putting them together might be a too generous generalization, as each of the authors and their productions are a response to specific historical, academic and national demands (Russia, Sweden, Great Britain, United States and Germany are their respective countries of origin), but the common geopolitical reasoning –most of the times driven by explicit imperialist hubris– that fueled their production is a major argument in favour of this grouping. Intertextuality too plays a central role in geographic knowledge production and reproduction, since geopolitical texts (all kinds of texts, for that matter) draw on past texts in order to construct their rationales and convey plausible explanations of how global space is subject to mastering. In that sense, the bound between their geopolitical projects and

[9] The focus of this paper will be placed on the first two levels, while the realm of popular geopolitics is no less important to the discussion of geopolitical images and representations. As a matter of fact, a great deal of attention has been devoted to the different mediums through which popular imagination is infused with geographical knowledge (Dittmer & Dodds, 2008; Dittmer, 2010). This includes, for instance, photography (Campbell, 2007) and journalism (Hansen, 2008, 2011). The impact of images upon world affairs has gained special salience in the post-9/11 era, when the so-called 'War on Terror' and the intimate relation between new forms of warfare and media is particularly acute (Campbell & Shapiro, 2007; Doods & Ingram, 2009)

political practice, whereby geographers granted a service to the state ('national security' in contemporary terms), is irrefutable (Cairo, 2010).

It might be almost impossible to measure the extent to which, for instance, Ratzel's idea of *Lebensraum* has informed later developments in the discipline. Or else, the width and breadth of Mackinder's famous *geographical pivot of history/heartland* model ("the most influential geopolitical model in the 20th century" Cairo, 2010: 323) in geographical reasoning and practice well beyond the second half of the twentieth century. The outreach (even 'success', according to the resonance they have attained) of models like Mackinder's, or Brzezinski's *Grand Chessboard*, or Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*, ought to be explained on the basis of the high level of apprehensibility offered by them. When Rose poses the question of "How, exactly, is Geography "Visual"?, she reckons that "The visualities deployed by the production of geographical knowledges are never neutral. They have their foci, their zooms, their highlights, their blinkers and their blindnesses" (2003: 213) and, therefore, they must forcibly engage simplicity in detriment of space complexity. In view of this, geopolitical models consist of a series of geopolitical images that, put together, attempt to offer a comprehensive picture of global space in its entirety[10]. They present an account of the distribution of power at global scale, whereby different parts of the world are granted different positions in a scale of spatial, temporal and ethical variability. The security discourses/practices that take place at state level contribute decisively to the forging of geopolitical imaginations. Geopolitical imaginations shall be defined, in a nutshell, as follows:

> The relative location of a state in the global system is a function of the position accorded to it by other states within the system, as well as the imagined preferences of its own citizens. The geopolitical imagination follows on from such notions as 'imagined communities' and 'banal nationalism' which relate to the national imaginations held by citizens of the state, at both the individual and collective level, and which reflect, in turn, the preferred geopolitical location of these groups within the global system (Newman, 1998: 4).

[10] The fact that geopolitical models are usually upheld by specific cartographic representations ('maps') only contributes to reinforce the idea that geography and geopolitics are disciplines that have traditionally taken advantage of the deep-seated visuality infusing positivist scientific knowledge.

In other words, the geopolitical imagination of a certain collectivity (a nation, a state, the Western world,…) is the projection in geographical terms of the narrative whereby Our spatial/temporal/ethical[11] position in the world differs from Theirs. My contention here is that the state –understood as a scale rather than a unitary actor, plays a fundamental role as a conveyor of such geopolitical imaginations in detriment of other geographical scales. Following Kuus, "The principal object of this scholarship [critical geopolitics] is not the state as an object but statecraft as a multitude of practices" (2010: 687). The difference between "state as an object" and "statecraft as a multitude of practices" is all the more relevant here, as well as symptomatic of the debates about the centrality of the state that have pervaded political geography and IR. Mainstream approaches in IR and geopolitics have traditionally privileged the centrality of the state as the basic unit of analysis in those fields of study. IR has definitely indulged in such statecentrism as it is evident among realist, neorealist, institutionalist and even constructivist approaches in the discipline. The taken-for-grantedness of the ontology of the state and its reified nature has only been challenged by more peripheral trends within the discipline, such as post-structuralism[12].

Vis-à-vis IR, critical approaches to geography have probably gone further in the problematization of the state as a contingent category in the social sciences. By looking at the state as a scale of analysis rather than as an objectivable reality, attempts to overcome reification might attain greater success. However, the underscoring of the state as scale does not solve the problem of where to look for the exact source of geopolitical imagination's production. My suggestion is that analyses shall pay special attention to 'intellectuals of statecraft' in the terminology used by (Agnew, 2005; Ó Tuathail, 1996) or 'in(security) professionals' as coined by the Paris School of security studies for the privileged position they occupy in the

[11] Here I am following Lene Hansen's argument about the multidimensionality involved in identity discourses where identity is, again, a product of the interplay between spatial, temporal and ethical variables that sustain an idea of 'We-ness' as opposed to 'They-ness'. (2006) I shall further elaborate on this later on this paper.

[12] In *Metaphors in International Relations Theory* (2011), Michael P. Marks convincingly argues about the metaphorical assumptions upon which the discipline of IR is built –starting off with the very idea of "anarchy" and the alleged existence of a "system" of states. Significantly, the author offers a quick perusal of the different interpretations related to the ontology of the state, as a unitary actor, a person, an individual, etc. (pp. 44-51).

administrative and political structure of the state. As stated in the C.A.S.E. Collective manifesto, "to attend to the study of securitization is to focus on the creation of networks of professionals of (in)security, the systems of meaning they generate and the productive power of their practices" (C.A.S.E. 2006: 458).

3. Intersection, Dissidence, Periphery?: The geosophy of international affairs.

The interplay between two (separate) fields of study, geopolitics and International Relations, is a concern that stands as a backdrop to the discussion that vertebrates this paper –i.e. the inquiry into geopolitical imagination as a function of geographic knowledge, security and identity discourses. "Geopolitics, International Relations and Political Geography: The Politics of Geopolitical Discourse", authored by Mamadouh & Dijkink (2006), is one of the few pieces of writing where the issue of how these three distinct but intimately related fields of study stand in relation to each other. Thus, this article explicitly states that "despite a common research object and shared epistemological and methodological problems (How to do sound discourse analysis? How to deal with silenced voices?), the exchange between these subfields is limited" (2006: 354), obviously as a result of "an academic politics of boundary-making" (2006: 349) that, to a great extent, affects the dual path of development in geopolitics and IR. Roughly speaking, my suggestion is that the distinctive feature that keeps geopolitics and IR's agendas afar is the intensity with which geopolitics addresses questions of space and power, whereas IR has placed concerns with the outside and the inside of the state (and foreign policy, for that matter) squarely at the centre of the analysis. Newman puts it in the following terms:

> It [Geopolitics] is, for some, no more than an alternative way of looking at International Relations, with a stronger emphasis on the 'geo' than is apparent in many of the traditional political and IR analyses, from which the territorial and spatial dimensions are frequently lacking. It is also of interest to specialists in international law and must, by its very definition, be of concern to national, regional and global policymakers (1998: 3).

If ‘agenda issues’ or ‘questions of approach’ are the reasons behind independent developments in critical geopolitics and IR, then the question that needs to be answered now is how these disciplines stand vis-à-vis the core fields of study from which they branch out. Mamadouh & Dijkink quote a statement made by Peter J. Taylor where he asserted that geopolitics is “the ‘periphery of a periphery’ meaning that geopolitics is the periphery of political geography which is the periphery of geography which is the periphery of social science” (2006: 352). In view of this, we could concur in that the qualifier ‘critical’ only adds a higher degree of ‘peripheral-*ness*’ to the study of geopolitics, since logically critical examinations place the mainstream of their respective disciplines as the target of their conceptual, epistemological and ontological challenges. Instead of ‘periphery’, Dalby chooses the label ‘dissidence’ to qualify the kind of discourses that challenge the dominant discourse of discipline and practice in IR,

> The term 'critical geopolitics' encompasses poststructuralist and other forms of what were once known as 'radical' approaches, not all of which accept the epistemological or political precepts of (Frankfurt style) critical theory or (neo-Marxist) critical political economy. The 'critical' in 'critical geopolitics' then usually refers to the meaning of the term that invokes problematization of the discourses of geopolitics. It does not necessarily imply the presence of a worked-out alternative political project, not necessarily the support of a particular counter-hegemonic political movement [...]. 'Dissident' scholarship in the discipline of IR most obviously refers to the poststructuralist (some prefer 'postmodern') inspired unravelings and deconstructions of the dominant disciplinary discourses (1996: 655-656).

What I mean to underscore by these considerations is the marginality that has run through what I obviously understand as a proper framework to address social and political affairs that bring the international into view –a proposal that allows the possibility for an emancipatory politics, to say the least. Academic policies that trace a line between disciplines and subdisciplines, fields of study or subfields of study, actively contribute to an endeavour that painfully marginalizes alternative ways of knowing and speaking to the backstage of science. Gregory vocally asserted that he was “more interested in the discourses of geography than in the discipline of geography” (1994: 11). I would probably specify that there is no discipline of geography beyond the discourses of geography and, that, reflecting upon the meta-discourses of geographical knowledge is a necessary requirement in critical endeavours to assess ‘reality’. As early as 1947, when radical or critical

geographies had not still been conceived, Wright pointed at the necessity to address geographical knowledge in a comprehensive critical way:

> Geosophy, to repeat, is the study of geographical knowledge from any or all points of view. To geography what historiography is to history, it deals with the nature and expression of geographical knowledge both past and present –with what beyond the core area of scientific geographical knowledge or of geographical knowledge as otherwise systematized by geographers. Taking into account the whole peripheral realm, it covers the geographical ideas, both true and false, of all manner of people –not only geographers, but farmers and fishermen, business executives and poets, novelists and painters, Bedouins and Hottentots– and for this reason it necessarily has to do in large degree with subjective conceptions. Indeed, even those parts of it that deal with scientific geography must reckon with human desires, motives, and prejudices, for unless I am mistaken, nowhere are geographers more likely to be influenced by the subjective than in their discussions of what scientific geography is and ought to be (1947: 12).

A geosophy of international affairs would then entail, yes, the raising of awareness around the *geo-* that pervades the interplay between collectivities (mostly states, but also nations, faith communities, ethnic groupings, etc.) on the global stage. As refers the present project, a geosophy of geopolitical imaginations requires the problematization of geographical knowledge, as well as the pointing out of the metageographies of identity and security discourse. All of the previous cannot be but the result of a polyphony of voices speaking from different corners of the social field and geographical scales.

4. What role for security in the *geo-graphing* of the world? The 'Us' and 'Them' of security discourses.

This paper has thus far considered geopolitics as an open process of meaning-making of the world where, in addition to geographical knowledge, security discourses underpinned by collective identity formations operate, as a result of what the contours of geopolitical imaginations can be drawn. In other words, the interplay between these three elements constitutes the raw material out of which geopolitical imaginations are woven together. The figure below represents an attempt to convey the dimensions at play in the modeling of geopolitical imaginations, where the arrows point at the mutually constitutive relationship between the elements. So far a great deal of attention has been paid to the

'geography' apex in a bid for providing the context of a transformation in the status of geographical knowledge occurred within disciplines of geography and geopolitics. Changes have also operated at the level of IR, with very specific considerations as regards the study of 'security' and 'identity'.

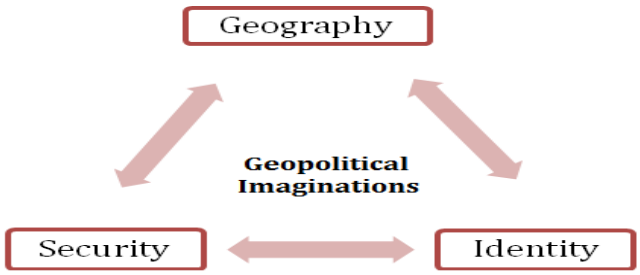

Figure 1. *Geopolitical Imaginations*. Source: Author.

In the words of Shapiro (1997), "A territorial logic of "here" and "there" and an easy ethnocentric hubris that has "us" as different and superior from "them" still enframes many contemporary Western security discourses" (quoted in Ó Tuathail, 2000: 176). The study of security in relation to the role played by culture, ideology or identity in international relations is representative of the change in trends within IR studies upon the end of the Cold War. An understanding of security as a discourse involving "a shift from an objective conception of security where threats could be assessed, to a practice through which subjects were constituted" (Buzan & Hansen, 2010: 790) and identity as relational, contingent and, therefore, subject to constant resignification (Hansen, 2006) are defining features in post-structuralist and feminist approaches to IR –and, more precisely, in the realm of security studies. The end of the Second World War already fostered a shift of focus from the study of defense and war (thus, security understood in purely military terms) to the study of security as a field encompassing non-military threats and vulnerabilities, as well. Critical security studies (CSS) with the Copenhagen, Paris and Aberystwyth Schools as representative of the vigourous debates taking place in Europe in the last decades have played a major role in the problematization of security (C.A.S.E. Collective, 2006).

I have previously drawn upon Newman to define geopolitical imagination as "The relative location of a state in the global system [that] is a function of the position accorded to it by other states within the system" (1998: 4). Crucially, the question that needs to be answered now is, how do states accord positions to other states in the system of states? My contention is that security discourses that necessarily rely on identity constructions of 'Us' and 'Them' are the driving force behind the multi-vocal processes out which the world is *geo-graphed*. This statement raises some thorny issues that CSS has put at the centre of its research agenda in recent decades. Is 'security' the primary concern of states (vis-à-vis peace, cooperation, survival…)? Is 'state' the dominant category/scale from which security discourses emanate, or else, should we look beyond and below the state? Does the Us-versus-Them logic of identity construction entail radical Otherness or is there room for degrees thereof?

Most probably, approaches that like post-structuralism have, in the words of Der Derian (1995) worked "through the concepts of classical realism –security, power, war, the state- rather than rejecting them" (Hansen, 2010: 5880) have to a greater or lesser extent addressed these questions. This includes, of course, critical geopolitics. Interestingly, Kuus contends that "Geographers were latecomers to the critical study of security, but there are now a number of specifically geographic studies on the processes of securitization. They flesh out the inherent spatiality of these processes –the ways in which practices of securitization necessarily locate security and danger" (2010: 288). The question that ensues is, what glues together security/danger/threat to specific territories? Certainly, traditionalist adherents in defense and strategic studies (the old-school 'tag' for security studies) and geopolitics would retort to material capabilities and advantages/disadvantages derived from the facts of geography (location, size, demography…), whereas critical scholars would grant identity processes formation a prominent position in the discernment of security concerns. In the following excerpt, Ó Tuathail validates the role played by 'binary geographies' (i.e. Us-and-Them logics) in security discourses and the practice of geopolitics:

> Security is overwhelmingly conceptualized in territorial terms, with friendly blocs and zones to be protected and consolidated against external threats from the unfriendly blocs and enemy

> space. The territorial extent and reach of the enemy is to be curtailed and contained. Today the security problematic faced by states is infinitely more complex, with some defense intellectuals proclaiming a "threat revolution" or "new threat paradigm" as a consequence of globalization, informationalization, and technoscientific developments (2000: 174).

In her ambitious study of security discourses in relation to the Bosnian War, Lene Hansen (2006) accomplished a successful conceptualization of identity, and what is probably even more significant given the methodological shortcomings that affect a discipline like IR, she provided a useful toolkit for the study of identity. I am particularly seduced by the threefold dimensionality she accords to identity discourses, since it reinforces my argument that, crucially, geographical assumptions pervade discourses of security. When discussing the ideological structure sustaining the project of "modern geographical imaginations" previously in this paper, the spatial, temporal and ethical dimensions of identity have been pointed at. According to Hansen, every security discourse[13] conjures up the location of a Self pitted against an Other and is, thus, bound to the production of difference[14]. Similarly, Connolly asserts that "The definition of the internal other and the external other compound one another, and both of them seep into the definition given to the other within the interior of the self" (1989: 326). Poststructuralists –and very particularly Campbell (1992)– have been criticised for putting the Self/Other relation into conflictual terms, namely, radical Otherness and, consequently, for sharing realism's assumption that states' ontology is built upon the belief that the space beyond the domestic arena is fundamentally alien and antagonistic (Hansen, 2010: 5882). The fact that Hansen and others (Neumann, 1999) allow room for degrees of Otherness or *less-than-radical* Others is probably the only guarantee that conflict can be avoided.

[13] In *Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics* (2003) Williams dwells extensively on the conceptualization of security as speech-acts that need to fulfill a series of requirements in order to enact effective securitizations. The Copenhagen School of security studies has been pioneer in the framing of security in those terms. See also Buzan, Waever & de Wilde (1997).

[14] In this same vein, in *Mapping Meaning, Denoting Difference, Imagining Identity: Dialectical Images and Postmodern Geographies* (1991) Watts discusses a so-called 'cultural politics of difference and identity' in the light of postmodern geographies, because "mapping the spectrum of cultural forms, onto spatial, class and social identities in the context of global interconnectedness might constitute an important frontier for geographic inspection" (Watts, 1991: 10).

The War on Terror –the most recent enactment of a purported conflict between the West and Islam– is the contemporary laboratory where previous considerations can be tested, since concerns with security and identity discourses have risen considerably since the most lethal attacks on American soil took place. If according to Murphy et al. (2004) "Prior to 9/11, real-world geopolitics was creating a new peace discourse", the intensification of the conflict between the West and a fundamentalist Islamic Other granted the consolidation of

> a (re)newed securitization and threat discourse. Borders have been re-established to protect us from the 'outsider', foreign immigrants who were beginning to be part of a new melting-pot culture are once again being suspected of disseminating the evil cultures of the 'other', while the 'us' and 'them' syndrome forms the foundations of what is now seen as the new foreign policy-making. States have to be defended, aliens have to be kept out, security has to be maintained -this is the geopolitical discourse of the new millennium (Murphy et al., 2004: 628).

It looks like ideas surrounding questions of civilization and barbarism –and, by analogy, spaces of security and spaces of insecurity– which were deeply woven into the politics of space pacification all along the 19th century, have never lost momentum.

5. Conclusions

(esbozadas deficientemente, se reconsiderarán de cara a la presentación).

This paper represents an attempt to explore a central category of geopolitical knowledge, i.e. geopolitical imagination, from a three-fold approach that combines geographical knowledge and security and identity discourses, since I contend that the role played by geopolitical images in the history and practice of the discipline demands a multi-dimensional approach that transcends geography. Crucially, geography has been of importance here for the centrality it has granted to viewing and imagining as the basic cognitive operations that work at the service of geographic knowledge production. This is a consideration that critical geographers/geopoliticians have located at the very origins of the discipline, but that, in fact, have not lost impetus so far. In that sense, traditional geographical knowledge has contributed to the fiction (I warned previously on the highly

mythical nature of geography) that threats and insecurity may be constrained to closed spaces from which moral spaces of civilization and rationality must be sealed off.

Critical Geopolitics, a 'convenient fiction' in the words of Ó Tuathail (1996) has worked hard in the dismissal of a geography understood as (i) a neutral science of mostly representational value, (ii) whose practitioners embody and deploy a 'gaze from nowhere'; and, therefore, underscored the highly performative outreach of geography as a discourse and practice. Geopolitical models and the geopolitical imaginations conveyed through them are good examples of the creative power of geographical knowledge, where map-making epitomizes such endeavour.

'Stasis would be death' is the often cited phrase in which David Campbell (1992) encapsulated the idea that states cannot do without practices of representation. That is to say that states (or any political unit, for that matter) are inevitably active in the building up of identities for themselves and Others –via speech acts where images of Us and Them are conjured up simultaneously. This paper has attempted to bring this widely studied argument to the liminal space where geopolitical images and discourses of security fuel each other.

The ideas laid out in this paper suggest that against realist-positivist conceptions of the state as the unquestionable beginning and end of (I)nternational (R)elations, states can be thought of as a compilation of manifold layers of meaning that are activated differently according to context and interests. From this perspective, States work thus as 'floating signifiers', i.e. a sort of empty container awaiting to be filled in by state and military officials, media outlets, scholars, artists, social activists or the general public.

I have pointed to the dislocation of the category of 'state' as the centre of all analysis carried out from the ranks of geopolitics and IR as one of the most ambitious projects in those disciplines. Ambitious because even though scholars launch vocal defenses against the contrary, the state still occupies a privileged position in debates in those fields of study. This paper is an example thereof, since I have from the outset set states' geopolitical imagination at the centre of my

research agenda. However, my understanding of the state has more to do with a *scale* than with a top-down unit of analysis and, thus, it should be taken as a multidimensional category consisting of various and indefinite levels of meaning where intellectuals of statecraft, politicians, military officials, media outlets, academics, civil society actors, etc. struggle to capitalize. This has to do with the priority position that modern geopolitical imagination grants to the global and national (stato-national) scales (Agnew, 2005: 9).

6. References

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