

Main Article—Developments in the field

Understanding Ethnogeopolitics and its Developments

Babak Rezvani

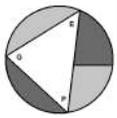
A much shorter 'teaser' version of this essay on the evolution of Ethnogeopolitics as a multi-faceted and multidisciplinary field of studies, has appeared in an earlier issue of this journal (see Rezvani 2018: 8).

Abstract

Ethnogeopolitics is a new concept, indicating an emerging multidisciplinary field of research.

Theoretical development of, and discussion about, ethnogeopolitics as an academic (sub-)discipline, are among the main scopes of Association for the Study of EthnoGeoPolitics and its

journal Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics. Ethnogeopolitics is a type of geopolitics in which in addition to traditional political, strategic and economic factors, attention is paid to cultural factors in particular. Association for the Study of EthnoGeoPolitics does not necessarily endorse the ideas of all authors who have used the term ethnogeopolitics. However, it is fair to state that regarding



the subjects of study and the levels of analysis, ethnogeopolitics is fairly close to “Subversive Geopolitics” and particularly close to the French school of “géopolitique interne et externe”. Nevertheless, a typification of ethnogeopolitics remains the subject of its further development as a (sub-)discipline.

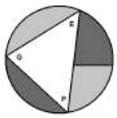
Keywords

Geopolitics, Subversive Geopolitics, *Géopolitique Interne et Externe*, Levels of Analysis, Critical Geopolitics, Ethnogeopolitics, Political Geography, Cultural Geography, International Relations

Introduction

Theoretical development of, and discussion about, Ethnogeopolitics as an academic (sub-)discipline, are among the main scopes of Association for the Study of EthnoGeoPolitics and its journal titled *Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics*. After more than seven years of producing issues of this journal, it is appropriate to reflect upon the developments of Ethnogeopolitics. The section “developments”, of which this article is the first one, serves this purpose.

We hope that we will discuss the development of Ethnogeopolitics within this section regularly, and preferably annually. This section should not necessarily be authored by our journals’ editors. In fact, we welcome contributions of scholars on the said theme, and invite everyone, from all relevant academic (sub-)disciplines, to contribute to it. As I put in the maiden Editorial of our journal, “Ethnogeopolitics, like

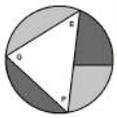


any other academic field, is dynamic and subject to change and conceptual and methodological development. A better understanding of this field can only evolve as time passes. Therefore, we encourage contributions from academics, policymakers and thinkers—in order to engender dialogue with each other and with us—which should contribute to the further development of ethnogeopolitics” (Rezvani 2013: 5).

As I put in subsequent publications, "Ethnogeopolitics is a new concept, indicating an emerging multidisciplinary field of research. Its definition and scope of study depends much on those of related (sub-)disciplines, particularly those of geopolitics” (Rezvani 2013: 4; see also Rezvani & Ilyasov 2017: 7).

The previous quote is from the first article of *Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics* published nearly seven years ago. Is it fair to state that ethnogeopolitics is now an established concept? I tend to answer this question in the affirmative. Association for the Study of EthnoGeoPolitics already exists longer than seven years and is growing. Also, public interest and contributions to our journal continue to grow.

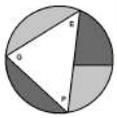
Indeed, *Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics* has started to publish also in other languages than English, such as Russian, Spanish and German, and also in Persian and possibly other languages in the near future. Especially Spanish is a useful language, as Indigenous peoples, a lot of whom are living in Latin America, constitute a main focus of Association for the Study of EthnoGeoPolitics’ studies.



Nowadays the term “Geopolitics” is being widely—and perhaps it is fair to say loosely—used in the media, perhaps as a more elegant equivalent for international relations, inter-state strategic, security and even economic relations, and foreign policy. This situation has not always been so. Particularly in Europe the term Geopolitics was cautiously avoided owing to its alleged association with German National Socialism. This current article does not intend to discuss this issue at length. However, two remarks could be made that disprove such an allegation: Geopolitics—and Political Geography in general—is an academic field and not an ideology; and it is remarkable that the German National Socialist claim that their empire will last 1000 years, contradicts the organic German classical geopolitical ideas that a state is an organism which grows but also ultimately dies.

First in 1995, as a student of international relations, I wanted to write a paper using the geopolitical approach. I was discouraged by others to do so, and I did not proceed. It was remarkable that in our intellectually excellent Dutch reading book *Wereldorde en Machtspolitiek: Visies op de Internationale Betrekkingen van Dante tot Fukuyama* (World order and Power politics: Visions on International Relations from Dante tot Fukuyama) (Van Der Pijl 1992), Geopolitics was discussed using the German term *Geopolitik*.

However, in 1998 I managed to attend an intriguing course about Geopolitics, using the book *National Identity and Geopolitical Visions: Maps of Pride and Pain* (Dijkink 1996), offered by human geographers at the University of Amsterdam, among whom the term geopolitics was regarded and used as a broad, legitimate, and neutral term.



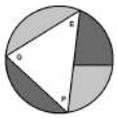
Gert-Jan Dijkink is a prominent political geographer whose work can be typified as Critical Geopolitics. I had not yet encountered the term “Ethnogeopolitics”. However, concentrating on the Caucasus, I argued that the cultural demographic policies of the Iranian Safavid Empire and the Soviet Nationalities Policy could be called ethnogeopolitics.

Nevertheless, as the term “Ethnogeopolitics” was not yet an established term, I was advised to use instead the terms ethnic geopolitics or simply political and cultural geography in my writings, which I did. However, later, despite serious objections, and wrong associations, I decided in the end to use the term after all. One reason was, exactly, that I did not want a semantically meaningful, and otherwise academically neutral, term be exclusively used and associated with a particular stream or school of thought (see below).

Situating EthnoGeoPolitics

What is Ethnogeopolitics? A definition of Ethnogeopolitics is highly dependent on a definition of Geopolitics. There are no general agreements about its definition, as different types of Geopolitics could be distinguished. Ó Tuathail (2006: 8) distinguishes three types of geopolitics: 1-Formal—i.e. of scholars’, 2-Practical—i.e. of policymakers’, and 3-popular—i.e. prevalent among public opinion.

These types of geopolitics are ideal-types and may overlap in practice; e.g. a scholar may be a member of a policymaking think-tank or a politician at the same time. Mamadouh (1998: 238-239; 2009) maintains a quadratic typology. In fact, she disregards—perhaps for



the purposes of clarity—the popular type and adds explicitly one more dimension: State-centeredness—i.e. whether the type only regards the territorial nation-state as the only geopolitical actor or recognizes more, other kinds of actors (see table 1).

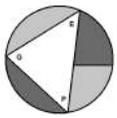
Table 1: Four geopolitical approaches (Mamadouh 1998: 239)

	<i>Policy oriented</i>	<i>Purely Academic</i>
<i>States</i>	neo-classical geopolitics, geopolitics, géostratégie, geoeconomics	non-geopolitics, political geography
<i>Other political actors</i>	subversive geopolitics, géopolitique interne et externe	post-structuralistic geopolitics, critical geopolitics

Regarding the fact that Ethnogeopolitics focuses on cultural—in addition to political, strategic and economic—factors, it could be placed in table 1's bottom row, either in the cell together with “*Géopolitique Interne et Externe*” or in the other cell together with “Critical Geopolitics”.

However, Ethnogeopolitics is not necessarily post-structuralist. In fact, Ethnogeopolitics' primary focus is the subject of study rather than its methodology. The applied methods are largely determined by the research questions. Hence, ethnogeopolitics' “place” in the table may be in either cell, depending on its policy vs. academic orientation.

In addition to the (nation-)state, a typical ethnogeopolitical analysis



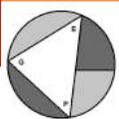
recognizes more actors that could be, and function, at the state, sub-state or supra-state level. An ethnogeopolitical study may not always be premeditated by a policy problem. However, regarding their focus and levels of analysis, ethnogeopolitical studies are often politically relevant.

It is fair to say that Ethnogeopolitics is closer to the French school of *Géopolitique Interne et Externe* of Yves Lacoste's (see e.g. Lacoste 1993; 1995) and his associates at the journal *Hérodote*, than it is to Critical Geopolitics (Mamadouh 1998: 139-141; see also Flint 2006: 3-17).¹ However, this issue remains a subject of further development of and discussion within Ethnogeopolitics as a (sub-)discipline.

Mark Bassin's 2009 paper titled "The Emergence of Ethno-Geopolitics in Post-Soviet Russia" is perhaps the first English-language paper on this topic published in an authoritative academic journal. Bassin cites a number of Soviet and Russian sources and authors, and discusses the geopolitical ideas and discourse of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy—who maintains a civilizational geopolitical approach (c.f. Huntington 1993; 1996).

According to Bassin (2009: 137-145) Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's ideas are often contradicting and he often (ab)uses ideas of Lev Gumilev. Gumilev became famous after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Arguably his ideas serve the Russian geopolitical code of Eurasianism after the collapse of the bipolar world.²

Bassin (2009: 142-143) cites Russian sources that regard the Soviet Union as an ethnosystem (*etnosistema*). It is questionable whether the

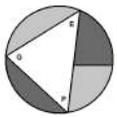


Russians were the first ones who used the term ethnogeopolitics. However, regarding the Soviet Nationalities Policy and Soviet preoccupation with ethno-national, and broadly cultural, engineering it is logical that the concept—or even the term—is used by Russians.

For sure, Association for the Study of EthnoGeoPolitics is not affiliated with, and does not endorse or represent, the ideas of Zhirinovskiy and other authors cited in Mark Bassin's 2009 paper. Perhaps it is superfluous, but interesting, to mention that ethnogeopolitics is written as ethno-geopolitics—with a hyphen—in the Russian sources mentioned by Bassin (2009), but as EthnoGeoPolitics (or simply Ethnogeopolitics) by Association for the Study of EthnoGeoPolitics.

Thus “Geopolitics can be focused on military strategy, economics and natural resources, but also on culture. The latter focus on culture is what could be called ethnogeopolitics” (Rezvani 2013: 4). Therefore,

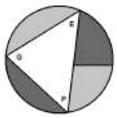
[E]thnogeopolitics in a narrow sense is an intersection of ethnicity and geopolitics; that is, when ethnicity and ethnic identity, and in general cultural attributes of peoples, matter—and affect the foreign policy and security of one or more countries. Ethnogeopolitics is thus a good tool for understanding and explaining ethnic conflict, civil war and transnational political issues... [However] in a broad sense [ethnogeopolitics]...encompasses all its sub-elements, and what each sub-element contains. It encompasses ethnogeography, ethnopolitics and geopolitics, as well as ethnic studies, geography and political science in general. All these disciplines and subdisciplines are broad, and their definitions and scopes vary in different schools and among different scholars (Rezvani 2013: 4).



In studies published until now in *Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics*, and by scholars associated with Association for the Study of EthnoGeoPolitics in other journal and (book) publications as well, special attention is paid to people living in a state or region, and their cultural attributes, such as language, religion, belief systems etc. are regarded as geopolitically relevant factors.

By 'people(s)' we do not exclusively refer to national groups; for us the term includes or can include also other types of social groups—whether natives or migrants—such as sub-national and transnational ethnic, religious, ethno-religious groups, indigenous peoples in colonized areas especially in the Oceania and the Americans, and castes in societies in which they are (still) socially relevant, like the Dalits in India (see Garimella 2014; Kumar 2015; Prasad 2015).

Internationally renowned scholars like George Bournoutian (2015), Willem Floor (2015) and Ronald Grigor Suny (2015) have contributed to our journal *Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics*. Among the conceptual developments is worth to mention Arnav Anjaria's 2017 paper titled "The Tibetan Culture Area: Contours and Civilizational Linkages", which has introduced the concept of Tibetan Culture Area, based on a diffusion of Tibetan Buddhism within civilizational geopolitics. Indeed, "Culture Area" could be a good substitute for "Civilization" (c.f. Huntington 1996) as the latter is multifaceted, includes several other diverging factors than only religion, and, hence, is more difficult to apply in geopolitical analyses. Caspar Ten Dam (e.g. Ten Dam 2015) has discussed a new Brutalization Theory which could be a useful theory in studying ethnic and religious conflicts. Bo Petersson (Petersson 2015) has explained the importance of Area Studies.



Naturally, the utility of generalist, often quantitative, studies for ethnogeopolitical studies cannot be denied. Even so, the intimate knowledge of an area or region—be it either (within) a country or of transnational nature—often offers a better understanding of the situation and the actual relations of powers in a region, a country or an area within a country.

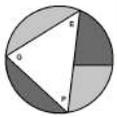
Concluding Remarks

Association for the study of EthnoGeoPolitics and its journal *Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics* intend to offer a venue for relevant research papers, analytic discussions and debate, and hence contribute to the development of Ethnogeopolitics as an academic (sub-)field.

Ethnogeopolitics is a type of Geopolitics in which in addition to traditional political, strategic and economic factors, attention is paid also—or above all—to cultural factors.

Association for the study of EthnoGeoPolitics is not affiliated with and does not necessarily endorse the ideas of certain streams of thought, such as those of Zhirinovsky and his associates. However, Russia—and the Post-Soviet Space in general—is undeniably an important area of the world where ethnogeopolitical thoughts and policies have been prevalent.

Ethnogeopolitics and ethnogeopolitical analyses are fairly close to “subversive Geopolitics” and particularly close to the French school of “*Géopolitique Interne et Externe*”. Nevertheless, a typification of Ethno-



geopolitics remains the subject of its further development as a (sub-)discipline.

As mentioned before, this new 'Development' section should not necessarily be authored by the editors of *Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics* alone. This journal welcomes contributions of scholars on this theme of discipline-development and invites everyone to contribute to it.

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Endnotes

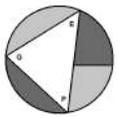
1. See also www.youtube.com/watch?v=MK6shV4M24Q&t=1172s.
2. See e.g. www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHvVhqWuykE.

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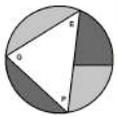
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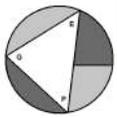
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