

PERSUASIVE AND EXHIBITIONIST CARTOGRAPHIES: MAPPING PRACTICES OF RUSSIA IN THE NEAR ABROAD

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Abstract

This thesis looks at border redrawing practices and sets out to explore the question of how cartographies reaffirm geopolitical discourses, that is how the new maps are being communicated by different actors. The matter is addressed from the critical geopolitical standpoint, understanding geography as performance rather than a constant given. Cartography is therefore being regarded as a discursive practice for inscribing territories and reinforcing its particular understanding. While addressing the research question, besides one of the possible answers being provided by the concept of “cartographic exhibitionism” – explicit depiction of a state’s visual desire concerning its territory, and being attributed to the popular geopolitical level, the thesis focuses on the concept of “persuasive cartography” which examines the quieter mapping practices for naturalizing a new self-portrait of a state through its casual taken-for-grantedness. For exploring the concepts, imperial mapping practices on the example of Russia are being analyzed through a visual discourse study. The thesis looks at the Russian cartography of redrawing borders in its Near Abroad on practical, formal and popular geopolitical levels by exploring the mapmaking of the government, statesmen, official institutions, academia, school, media, public spaces and digital mapping platforms. Persuasive cartography proves to be a useful analytical tool for describing the implicit cartographic practices on practical and formal levels, exercised through the use of academic maps, “neutral” world maps, or by shifting the focus on the Other while mapping. However, in popular geopolitics, except for the economically selective deployment of persuasive cartography by the digital mapping platforms, cartographic exhibitionism prevails.

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I dedicate this thesis to my father who hung the first map in my room, opened the door to the world of cartography and taught me how not to get lost.

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Introduction

“The main task of the critical geopolitician (crit-geo) is to challenge the arrogance of the Empire’s cartographers as well as the mapping imperatives of the social sciences that would colonize the present, reduce the other to the same, even confuse the map for the ‘real thing.’”
James Der Derian¹

We get acquainted with maps from early school days, when we are taught – that is how the world looks like. However, the *reality* we see might look different in classrooms on other geographic locations, especially if these locations are contested. Coming from Georgia, the map I have known and identified with my home-country my whole life is different from the one that people living in Abkhazia or South Ossetia have in mind. The borders that we learn to be constant, are indeed flexible from different viewpoints and even if the world already appears to be mapped out, a struggle over territory then calls for cartographic practices – in order to show what is told, in order to make the new realities natural. For the redrawn borders of the state to be internalized by its population, visual image is being communicated, which then will be reaffirming the new reality.

This circle of making new spatial realities can be looked at from the critical geopolitical lenses, which drawing from the poststructuralist roots, as opposed to the traditional geopolitics that understands geography as given, sees it performatively – as a process of „geo-graphing“.² The aspect of performativity implies agency: the *realities* are being constructed by different actors through the meaning-making practices - discourses. Though which of the discourses are to be dominant, is determined by the power of the actor. Thus, it is important to see who creates maps as a practice of making sense of the world. On a state level, in imperial times, cartography

¹ Der Derian, James. “‘All but War Is Simulation’.” Essay. In *Rethinking Geopolitics*, edited by Simon Dalby and Gearóid Ó Tuathail, 261–73. London: Routledge, 1998. 261-262.

² Tuathail, Gearóid. *Critical geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*. London: Routledge, 1996. 2.

was used by the powerful countries to inscribe the “blank” territories and broaden their self-image.³ Therefore, map is essentially geopolitical, since it describes territory in a way that it is represented in the political imagination of a state, at the same time providing vital clues to the changes of such visions.⁴ So, to (re)draw border lines on the map is not just an act, but a practice of changing (or reaffirming) the meaning of how one sees itself within those lines and how to see others beyond them. That is how the different geopolitical realities take place along the conflict lines.

In order to observe these changes, to zoom into the discursive practices and uncover power structures, cartography, the visual aspect of geo-graphing, can be examined closely. In particular to see how and who draws a map in order for it to be harmonized with the new geopolitical discourses. The focus on *who* is essential, since states are not black boxes having just one state/government logic which is being followed without questioning. Instead geopolitical reasoning is shaped by the different actors – statecraft practitioners, thinkers and general public – hence the geopolitical triade of practical, formal and popular analytical levels have been outlined by the scholars of critical geopolitics.⁵ Thus, this research seeks to look at the contested borders on the maps, where one can best appreciate the acuteness of this perpetual struggle over space in global politics⁶ and seek for answers to the question: *how do cartographic practices reaffirm new geopolitical discourses of border changes?* While focusing on the cartographic performativity and the way how new images of the state are being communicated through map-making by different actors on three different levels – practical, formal and popular.

³ Tuathail, Gearóid. *Critical geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*. London: Routledge, 1996.

⁴ Dodds, Klaus. *Geopolitics: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. 143.

⁵ Tuathail, Gearóid Ó. “Introduction: Rethinking Geopolitics Towards a Critical Geopolitics.” Essay. In *Rethinking Geopolitics*, edited by Simon Dalby and Gearóid Ó Tuathail, 1–16. London: Routledge, 1998. 4.

⁶ Tuathail, Gearóid. *Critical geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*. London: Routledge, 1996. 2.

One of the possible answers to this question are provided by Broers and Toal who on the example of mapping Nagorno Karabakh in Armenia outlined a practice of „cartographic exhibitionism“, looking at popular geopolitics and referring to „a desire within the Armenian geopolitical culture to project and display enlarged national territorial images“ and practiced through the explicit public display i.e. exhibition of maps that were focusing on showing Armenia and NK together.⁷ Despite cartographic exhibitionism being a solid answer which also explicitly conveys a message to the audience and reaffirms a particular territorial understanding, it does not cover the other, more silent corners of mapping practices. Within the scope of this thesis I argue that meaning-making regarding change of maps is sometimes exercised in a quieter fashion, what can be referred to as “persuasive cartography”, a term used in political geography and critical cartography, – by depicting the “new” image strategically but implicitly, and making it natural and taken-for-granted, especially through altering the knowledge of the self-imagination.

In order to explore the concept of persuasive cartography, I will rely on critical geopolitical approach as a theoretical starting point, consider cartography as discourse and cartographic practices as instruments of power. The quieter manner of redrawing borders would be clearly visible in the case of the imperialistically inclined states, trying to naturalize the expansionist discourses and enlarged images firstly internally, but also on the international level. Therefore, for applying persuasive cartography on empirics, I will look at Russia and its mapping practices in the Near Abroad⁸, namely in Ukraine and Georgia and how it can be described by persuasive cartography or cartographic exhibitionism in official, formal and

⁷ Broers, Laurence, and Gerard Toal. “Cartographic Exhibitionism?” *Problems of Post-Communism* 60, no. 3 (2013): 16–35. <https://doi.org/10.2753/ppc1075-8216600302>.

⁸ “Near Abroad” is a translation of the Russian term for the post-Soviet space ‘bliznee zarubejhe’, which for some conveys a message of Russian desire to have a sphere of influence, and for the others solely depicts „new arrangement of sovereignty and an old familiarity, a longstanding spatial entanglement and a range of geopolitical emotions“. Toal, Gerard. *Near abroad: Putin, the west, and the contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. 3.

popular geopolitics in Russia and how these two concepts are connected to each other. Post-Soviet space is a region with multiple territorial contestations, several frozen conflicts, de-facto states and an ongoing war which at the same time means contradictory cartographic imaginings - making the topic of border-redrawing practices as relevant as ever.

While the main emphasis is being put on cartography, it should be mentioned that in my understanding, sharing a view of David Campbell, maps as visual images are not almighty icons capable of completely reshaping imagination or fundamentally altering identities and perceptions of a particular "reality."⁹ Instead, they are discursive practices that interact with other practices to shape preferred realities.

The paper will take the following course on the structural map: at first the theoretical approach of critical geopolitics will be mapped out, especially concerning its visual and cartographic research agenda and discussing the literature around cartographic practices; Then the concepts of persuasive cartography and cartographic exhibitionism will be explored; Afterwards the research design of the paper will be outlined, which mainly stands on the method of visual discourse analysis. Next the paper will embark on a visual research quest to the study of the empirics on different geopolitical levels. In the concluding discussion similarities and differences of the cartographic practices in shaping the realities for different socio-spatial understandings will be addressed.

⁹ Campbell, David. 2007. "Geopolitics and Visuality: Sighting the Darfur Conflict." *Political Geography* 26 (4): 357–82. doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2006.11.005.

Chapter 1. Critical Geopolitics

“Geopolitics” is one of the omnipresent words and its meaning is often taken for granted. Nowadays the term is present in a wide range of social circles starting from political elites, researchers, and media to everyday conversations. Especially during the tensions or heated conflicts the term becomes even more active and gets deployed as a trump-card-explanation. For instance, Google searches for the term “geopolitical” which covers all the continents, and most of the countries (especially all “Western” ones) is represented with a graph that hit its highest point during February-March 2022 - the starting phase of the Ukraine war.¹⁰ Considering such trends it may indeed be “smart to be geopolitical”.¹¹ However, while historically the concept of “Geopolitics” had its ups and downs it became more prominent in modern academia with the rise of classical and critical geopolitics.

1.1. Tracing back: Traditional Geopolitics

The meaning of “geopolitics” cannot be regarded as a constant, since it has been reshaped throughout different historical contexts.¹² The word coined by a Swedish jurist Rudolph Kjellen at the turn of the 20th century started off as a strand of western political geography focusing on social Darwinist thought regarding the survival of the states and especially - empires.¹³ Traditional geopolitics offered a general understanding of world politics

¹⁰ *Google Trends*. Google, n.d. Accessed May 2, 2023. <https://trends.google.com/home>.

¹¹ Tuathail, Gearóid O. “It’s Smart to Be Geopolitical’ Narrating German Geopolitics in U.S. Political Discourse, 1939–1943.” Essay. In *Critical Geopolitics*, 111–141. London: Routledge, 1996.

¹² Tuathail, Gearóid Ó, Simon Dalby, and Paul Routledge. “Thinking Critically about Geopolitics.” Essay. In *The Geopolitics Reader*, 1–12. London: Routledge, 1998.

¹³ Dodds, Klaus, Merje Kuus, and Joanne P. Sharp. “Introduction: Geopolitics and Its Critics.” Essay. In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*, 1–18. London: Routledge, 2016.

determined by geographic location of a state, but also grand strategies of how the states could navigate their way through the static geographies to acquire more political power. A promoter of the British empirical path, Halford Mackinder, built his Pivot world strategy for domination on a geopolitical division of the world and outlining the most important part - heartland,¹⁴ the imperialist spirit of which is best understood by a well-known phrase: "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island commands the world".¹⁵ Nicholas Spykman built his Rimland theory upon Mackinder's world vision and as a strategist for US foreign policy put more emphasis on Eurasian domination.¹⁶ One of the most controversial uses of the geopolitical lenses was made available by Karl Haushofer, who in the West became known as the "mastermind" behind Nazi ideology. Haushofer, who was building upon Friedrich Ratzel's theory of a state as a living organism, was suggesting that in order to survive and thrive Germany needed to expand its "Lebensraum"¹⁷ but also combining his geopolitical theory with Mackinderian grand strategy of Eurasian domination.¹⁸ After WWII, the expansionist social darwinist understanding of geopolitics and the concept of geopolitics itself was tabooed as its meaning was intertwined with Nazi politics. However, during the cold war, geopolitics once again resurfaced in the light of the division of space between the US and the Soviet spheres of influence. This revival happened in three streams. Firstly, "Geopolitics", which appeared to have been reshaped from the social darwinist understanding into a "simple" explanation of events and great-power struggles through political-geographical linkage, slowly made its way into the realist IR vocabulary. Taking a realist backbone, understanding space as a given, and being rebranded

¹⁴ Mostly the space which was governed by the Russian Empire and then by the Soviet Union

¹⁵ Mackinder in Dodds, Klaus, Merje Kuus, and Joanne P. Sharp. "Introduction: Geopolitics and Its Critics." Essay. In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*, 1–18. London: Routledge, 2016. 2.

¹⁶ Tuathail, Gearóid. *Critical geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*. London: Routledge, 1996. 39.

¹⁷ Translation from German: "Living space"

¹⁸ Dodds, Klaus, Merje Kuus, and Joanne P. Sharp. "Introduction: Geopolitics and Its Critics." Essay. In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*, 1–14. London: Routledge, 2016. 3.

into (neo)classical geopolitics the approach still holds a significantly important place in academia and especially in international policy-advising¹⁹ and by its critics is not as much different from the traditional geopolitics since it also shares some aspects of environmental determinism.²⁰ Secondly, early critical voices towards “Geopolitics” started to appear as well, however, the critique was mostly concerned with either fully denouncing the scientific value of “Geopolitics”, e.g., labeling it as “pseudoscience” or superficially criticizing it from a Marxist perspective.²¹ The ontology of the traditional and classical geopolitics would be challenged from the viewpoint of a new critical geopolitical approach.

1.2. Critical Geopolitics - “The genie is out of the bottle”

The origin of the term “critical geopolitics” relates to Gerard Toal,²² whose book “Critical Geopolitics” is also referred to as a manifesto for the field.²³ As opposed to what the term suggests, its framework isn’t rooted in the critical theory of Frankfurt School but rather in dissident/postmodern/poststructural scholarship:²⁴ Critical Geopolitics rejects the geographical determinism of traditional geopolitics, which is being seen as “grand theorizing that provides blueprints and policy advice to foreign policy specialists and strategic thinkers”.²⁵ In contrast

¹⁹ Notable are the works of Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Thomas Barnett, Phil Kelly.

²⁰ Guzzini, Stefano. “Which Puzzle? An Expected Return of Geopolitical Thought in Europe?” Essay. In *The Return of Geopolitics in Europe?: Social Mechanisms and Foreign Policy Identity Crises*, edited by Stefano Guzzini, 9–17. S.l.: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

²¹ Tuathail, Gearóid. *Critical geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*. London: Routledge, 1996.

²² The term itself was coined by the political geographer Peter Taylor who recommended the use of the concept to Toal in his dissertation (Dodds, Klaus, Merje Kuus, and Joanne P. Sharp. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*. London: Routledge, 2016. xx.)

²³ Koopman, Sara, Simon Dalby, Nick Megoran, Jo Sharp, Gerry Kearns, Rachael Squire, Alex Jeffrey, Vicki Squire, and Gerard Toal. “Critical Geopolitics/Critical Geopolitics 25 Years On.” *Political Geography* 90 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102421>.

²⁴ However, upon evolving, apart from poststructural thought, critical geopolitics draws on different theoretical perspectives like feminism and critical theory as well

²⁵ Dalby, Simon. *Creating the Second Cold War: The discourse of politics*. London: Pinter, 1990. 180.

to traditional, or its revived form of (neo)classical geopolitics, that studies spatial impacts upon policy which is how ideological, cultural, economic, or military power is affected by geographic placement of countries,²⁶ critical geopolitics flips and deconstructs both *geography* and *power*. It stands on the ontological assumption of geopolitical practices operating through discourses that come from political power. For critical geopoliticians geography is not a neutral constant but an ever-changing process, thus rather than a naturally given, it is a process of “geo-graphing” (“earth-writing”) through space and time. Since geography is understood performatively, emphasis is put on the problem of agency, namely “geo-graphing” being undertaken by those in power.²⁷ Critical geopolitics takes the Foucauldian power/knowledge nexus as a starting point and uses deconstruction as an analytical tool, problematizing the Western point of view in classical geopolitics. Critical geopolitics, while breaking out from the state-centric understandings, gives voice to the marginalized and leaves space for social resistance. Other aspects of the placement of critical geopolitics are disciplinary and functional. Even though many authors place critical geopolitics in the discipline of geography, other scholars regard it rather as an IR approach because of its international character of inquiry. However, critical geopolitics, as will be mentioned below, offers broad enough perspectives and methodological approaches to be considered a truly interdisciplinary field. Regarding the functional role of critical geopolitics in the scholarship, authors agree for it to be referred to as an approach rather than a theory, since critical geopolitics itself does not have one form - “it is not an “is” but, in the manner of deconstruction [of traditional political assumptions], it *takes place*”.²⁸

As for the matters of agency, critical geopolitics contradicts the state-centric approach of traditional geopolitics through the three-fold typology of geopolitical reasoning: practical

²⁶ Kelly, Philip. *Classical geopolitics: A new analytical model*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016.

²⁷ Tuathail, Gearóid. *Critical geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*. London: Routledge, 1996.

²⁸ Ibid. 68.

geopolitics, where state leaders, political bureaucracy, and institutions represent main actors; formal geopolitics - academia, strategic institutes, think tanks; and popular geopolitics - looking at media, cinema, art, thus giving the agency of participating in the geopolitical practices of reshaping space to the people.²⁹ Dodds et al. outline this approach as matters of spatiality and subjectivity - “if the state is no longer the principal site and agent of geopolitics, then statesmen (and they are mostly men in conventional accounts) are no longer the principal practitioners of geopolitics.”³⁰ However, even though critical geopolitics diversified the agency, some feminist scholars rightly argue that the early stages of critical geopolitical scholarship did not pay enough attention to everyday discursive practices - the important role of the ones outside of the formal sphere to reproduce “the international”.³¹

Other general criticisms towards the field question the legitimacy of critical geopolitics and the theoretical-methodological direction of the approach. Some defenders of classical geopolitics from the realist camp question the credibility of critical geopolitics without much focus on geography.³² For a similar reason Haverluk et al. are overall unhappy with the domination of dissident scholarship in geopolitical works and claim that critical geopolitics is “anti-geopolitical” and “anti-cartographic”.³³ They call for acknowledging that “geography matters” and a shift towards a neo-classical geopolitics, which would put more emphasis on (especially environmental) geography in social contexts. However, labeling critical geopolitics

²⁹ Tuathail, Gearóid Ó. “Introduction: Rethinking Geopolitics Towards a Critical Geopolitics.” Essay. In *Rethinking Geopolitics*, edited by Simon Dalby and Gearóid Ó Tuathail, 1–16. London: Routledge, 1998.

³⁰ Dodds, Klaus, Merje Kuus, and Joanne P. Sharp. “Introduction: Geopolitics and Its Critics.” Essay. In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*, 1–18. London: Routledge, 2016. 7.

³¹ Koopman, Sara, Simon Dalby, Nick Megoran, Jo Sharp, Gerry Kearns, Rachael Squire, Alex Jeffrey, Vicki Squire, and Gerard Toal. “Critical Geopolitics/Critical Geopolitics 25 Years On.” *Political Geography* 90 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102421>.

³² Kelly, Phil. “A Critique of Critical Geopolitics.” *Geopolitics* 11, no. 1 (2006): 24–53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040500524053>.

³³ Haverluk, Terrence W., Kevin M. Beauchemin, and Brandon A. Mueller. “The Three Critical Flaws of Critical Geopolitics: Towards a Neo-Classical Geopolitics.” *Geopolitics* 19, no. 1 (2014): 19–39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2013.803192>.

as “anti-geopolitical” is a superficial or even a displaced reading of critical geopolitical works. Critical geopolitics does not nullify the geopolitical framework, rather it tries to deconstruct and contradict the taken-for-granted realist assumptions about geography and emphasize the role of power in shaping the geopolitical discourse. From the critical side, it is suggested to enrich critical geopolitics with the addition of the obvious - the critical theory - and along with deconstruction starting with the construction of alternative spaces.³⁴ Despite the right suggestion of a more active role of critical geopolitics in offering alternative solutions, the works of some critical geopolitical scholars claim to already have emancipatory value by recognizing the role of geopolitical discourse, leaving space for alternative security formulations for a more peaceful resolution or identification of a political course for complex intrastate struggles through deconstruction.³⁵

One characteristic of critical geopolitics is that it lacks a “core” - whereas some authors wished for a more focused research agenda in the field³⁶ others criticized the ones who used a single approach in their reasoning. Toal opted for a more complex approach, taking into account power, politics, geography, militarism, etc. He criticized other authors, such as Dalby and Campbell for reducing the field to a narrower explanatory value of identity politics.³⁷ In this scientific debate Dalby, who is regarded as a co-founder of critical geopolitical approach along

³⁴ Bachmann, Veit, and Sami Moisió. “Towards a Constructive Critical Geopolitics – Inspirations from the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory.” *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 38, no. 2 (2019): 251–68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654419869016>.

³⁵ E.g. clearing space for alternative understandings of security rather than a dichotomous nexus of the threat of Other (Dalby, Simon. *Creating the Second Cold War: The discourse of politics*. London: Pinter, 1990.), furthermore by deconstructing identities, seeing a space for multiethnic coexistence beyond conflict and antagonism by negotiating these antagonistic interdependencies (Campbell, David. *National deconstruction: Violence, identity, and Justice in Bosnia*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis Press, 1998. 242)

³⁶ e.g. Dalby suggesting to focus more on using critical geopolitical approach for discussing security and warfare (Dalby, Simon. “Recontextualising Violence, Power and Nature: The next Twenty Years of Critical Geopolitics?” *Political Geography* 29, no. 5 (2010): 280–88. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2010.01.004>)

³⁷ Tuathail, Gearóid Ó. “The Patterned Mess of History and the Writing of Critical Geopolitics: A Reply to Dalby.” *Political Geography* 15, no. 6–7 (1996): 661–65. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0962-6298\(96\)00034-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/0962-6298(96)00034-0).

Tuathail, Gearóid Ó. “The Critical Reading/Writing of Geopolitics: Re-Reading/Writing Wittfogel, Bowman and Lacoste.” *Progress in Human Geography* 18, no. 3 (1994): 313–32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030913259401800303>.

with Toal, answered that focusing on security and militarization is crucial in rendering global power politics visible.³⁸ It is indeed a legitimate question to ask, to what point can the research field of critical geopolitics be stretched: If it becomes too broad, should it at all be regarded as one approach? Yet, critical geopolitics is a theoretical approach - and approaching different topics such as space and power politics, territorialization, identity-creation through bordering practices, security issues, environmental politics, popular geopolitical practices, cartographic practices, feminist geopolitical inquiries, linking geopolitics with biopolitics, etc.³⁹ as it was done in the first 30 years of the scholarly engagement, will only enrich the perspectives, and frankly the tendency of an ever-broadening field cannot be stopped at this point. As John Agnew effectively noted: “The genie is out of the bottle”.⁴⁰ Thus, instead of taking shape, critical geopolitics has become an open-ended cloud of thought of making sense of geography-politics-interface. Notably, there is a vast body of critical geopolitical literature about textual-discursive or ideational analysis of space, such as Dalby’s research on discursive practices of creating Self-Other distinctions in US identity towards the Soviet Union,⁴¹ or for instance, Toal’s placing Bosnia inside or outside of the US geopolitical imagination.⁴² As Toal persuasively suggests coming from Cartesian perspectivalism, critical geopolitics should problematize the relationship between “sight, sites, and cites” - visual and textual, between subject, object and text. However, due to the scope of this paper, I will be focusing on the “sight” and “site” elements by looking at the visual body of critical geopolitical literature.

³⁸ Dalby, Simon. “Writing Critical Geopolitics: Campbell, Ó Tuathail, Reynolds and Dissident Skepticism.” *Political Geography* 15, no. 6–7 (1996): 655–60. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0962-6298\(96\)00035-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0962-6298(96)00035-2).

³⁹ Koopman, Sara, Simon Dalby, Nick Megoran, Jo Sharp, Gerry Kearns, Rachael Squire, Alex Jeffrey, Vicki Squire, and Gerard Toal. “Critical Geopolitics/Critical Geopolitics 25 Years On.” *Political Geography* 90 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102421>.

⁴⁰ Agnew, John. “The Origins of Critical Geopolitics.” Essay. In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*, edited by Klaus Dodds, Merje Kuus, and Joanne P. Sharp, 19–32. London: Routledge, 2016. 27.

⁴¹ Dalby, Simon. *Creating the Second Cold War: The discourse of politics*. London: Pinter, 1990.

⁴² Tuathail, Gearóid. “Between a Holocaust and a Quagmire: ‘Bosnia’ in the U.S. Geo-Political Imagination, 1991–1994.” Essay. In *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*, 111–40. London: Routledge, 1996.

1.3. Critical Geopolitics - but make it visual

Geo-politics, which is for its very etymology concerned about *geography* and space, is visual,⁴³ at least at first glance. Therefore, it is obvious, critical geopolitics looks at different visual representations, such as maps, photos, art (caricature), cartoons, movies, etc. for seeking a better understanding of space/power relations.⁴⁴ The visualist strand of critical geopolitics mostly concerns the popular geopolitics aspect from the three-fold typology of geopolitical reasoning.⁴⁵ Especially now, with the omnipresence of social media, visuals are everywhere, as global political visual economy has enabled geopolitics the “shift from the social construction of the visual field to the visual performance of the social field”.⁴⁶

The authors discussing visual critical geopolitics observe diverse cases. Dodds by looking at the cartoons about Bosnian crisis suggests that geopolitical iconography is more than representational practices of images that enframe geopolitical understandings.⁴⁷ Campbell, on the other hand, effectively argues, by looking at the visual media coverage of Darfur conflict, that he wants to avoid reductive iconoclasm, that is a tendency to reduce visual images as the almighty sources of explanation.⁴⁸ Campbell’s argument should by no means be understood as reducing the importance of the images in Critical Geopolitics but rather as an endeavor to open up space for more complex explanatory connections.

⁴³ Rose in Campbell, David. 2007. “Geopolitics and Visuality: Sighting the Darfur Conflict.” *Political Geography* 26 (4): 357–82. doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2006.11.005.

⁴⁴ Hughes, Rachel. “Geopolitics and Visual Culture.” Essay. In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*, edited by Klaus Dodds, Merje Kuus, and Joanne P. Sharp, 69–88. London: Routledge, 2016. 75.

⁴⁵ Tuathail, Gearóid Ó. “Introduction: Rethinking Geopolitics Towards a Critical Geopolitics.” Essay. In *Rethinking Geopolitics*, edited by Simon Dalby and Gearóid Ó Tuathail, 1–16. London: Routledge, 1998. 4.

⁴⁶ Campbell, David. “Geopolitics and Visuality: Sighting the Darfur Conflict.” *Political Geography* 26, no. 4 (2007): 357–82. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2006.11.005>.

⁴⁷ Dodds, Klaus. “Enframing Bosnia: The Geopolitical Iconography of Steve Bell.” Essay. In *Rethinking Geopolitics*, edited by Simon Dalby and Gearóid Ó Tuathail, 170–98. London: Routledge, 1998. 194.

⁴⁸ Campbell, David. “Geopolitics and Visuality: Sighting the Darfur Conflict.” *Political Geography* 26, no. 4 (2007): 357–82. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2006.11.005>. 359.

Some authors working with visuals in the field of Critical Geopolitics hint at the attention that one particular type of visuals get: maps are the more frequent sites of visual analysis.⁴⁹ But this should not come as a surprise considering the historical connection of maps to geography and to traditional geopolitics and a simple fact that maps are the visual depictions of geographical “realities”.

1.3.1 Critical Geopoliticians mapping the map

In conventional literature, maps were regarded as documents of reality that accurately depicted the world as it is.⁵⁰ However, just as geography is not a static concept in critical geopolitics, a map as its visual representation also shares a changing nature that instead of depicting one universal “reality” acts as a medium of different entities to construct a favorable one. Maps for traditional geopolitics have been crucial tools for the global visualization from the viewpoint of the imperial states.⁵¹ So, they were spaces with empty parts that needed to be re-drawn and claimed.

The authors of the field understand maps as three-dimensional “geo-graphs”⁵² - through the nexus of power, operating knowledge and change. The map is therefore seen as a flexible “graph” which plays a role in “geo-graphing, an open-ended inscribing, delimiting, and

⁴⁹ Hughes, Rachel. “Geopolitics and Visual Culture.” Essay. In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*, edited by Klaus Dodds, Merje Kuus, and Joanne P. Sharp, 69–88. London: Routledge, 2016.

⁵⁰ Dodge, Martin, Rob Kitchin, and C. R. Perkins. *Rethinking maps: New frontiers in cartographic theory*. London: Routledge, 2011.

⁵¹ Agnew, John. “The Origins of Critical Geopolitics.” Essay. In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*, edited by Klaus Dodds, Merje Kuus, and Joanne P. Sharp, 19–32. London: Routledge, 2016. 21.

⁵² Through Derridian deconstruction and hyphenation Toal tries to literally open up the concept and show, that it does not have a closure and cannot be regarded as an objective truth. Tuathail, Gearóid Ó. “(Dis)Placing Geopolitics: Writing on the Maps of Global Politics.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 12, no. 5 (1994): 525–46. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d120525>. 539.

engraving of the earth/globe/world.”⁵³ Therefore, the interest in the field has shifted from map as an object, to map as a practice.⁵⁴

Critical geopolitical scholarship focusing on borders, maps and cartography operates within a broad thematic and empirical scope where maps are viewed not as neutral and objective but as constructed by socio-political contexts. Despite the claim of critical geopolitics to incorporate actors beyond the state level, early works in the field were mostly concerned with the maps from “above”. In his critical geopolitics Toal sees maps as practice of geo-power - “the functioning of geographical knowledge not as an innocent body of knowledge and learning but as an ensemble of technologies of power concerned with the governmental production and management of territorial space.”⁵⁵ He especially emphasizes maps as an imperial instrument of power which he showcases on the example of England drawing the map of Ireland. Utilizing feminist lenses Toal describes the mapping process of Ireland as “cultivation of virgin territory in need of husbandry”.⁵⁶ However, cartography can not only be used as a tool of legitimization of power but also as a resistance or challenge to the existing power structures.

While sharing the Foucauldian understanding of geo-power and governmentalized use of maps, cartography has been discussed within the strand of scholarship focusing more on the politics of othering. Shapiro, as one of the pioneers connecting the concepts of cartography and constructing of Self/Other distinctions, understands maps as crystallization of boundaries by the states while denying the alternative social realities within the state.⁵⁷ Campbell also looks at the case of mapping Bosnia and the erasing of the multicultural aspect by different ethnicities

⁵³ Tuathail, Gearóid Ó. “(Dis)Placing Geopolitics: Writing on the Maps of Global Politics.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 12, no. 5 (1994): 525–46. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d120525>. 530.

⁵⁴ Crampton, Jeremy W. “Cartography: Performative, Participatory, Political.” *Progress in Human Geography* 33, no. 6 (2009): 840–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132508105000>.

⁵⁵ Tuathail, Gearóid. *Critical geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*. London: Routledge, 1996. 3–10.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 5.

⁵⁷ For instance, indigenous realities in the US. Shapiro, Michael J. *Violent cartographies mapping cultures of war*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

in their own cartographic practices.⁵⁸ Building on Shapiro's understanding of maps and spatialization, Campbell and Dalby look more outwards - at the foreign policy - in constructing the self-identity of states. Campbell understands international politics not as a relation of the atomic states with their own pre-existing identities but as a boundary-producing practice through the moral spaces of self/other, (such as through the dangers to security from "geographies of evil") that at the same time produces and reproduces identity in whose name it operates.⁵⁹ Campbell for instance discusses the representation of external threats by Kennan's map of "Communist Contagion", where some states were shown as "infected", whereas the United States was constructed as a "doctor" for the threat of the communist disease.⁶⁰ Similarly to Shapiro, Dalby sees cartography as representational practice inscribing territories by the powerful, that is at the same time acting within the geopolitical discourse which constructs the world through Self/Other division.⁶¹ Dalby also pays attention to the agency of cartography and who exactly imposes dominant meanings on space through cartography as for him the very essence of the development of the critical geopolitical theory is "the investigation of how a particular set of practices comes to be dominant and excludes other sets of practices".⁶² Dalby criticizes the realist classical geopolitical "objective" depiction of the world, such as Barnett's new map of Pentagon which provides a grand strategy for the US to militarily address the issues of the "gap" states that can produce terrorist threat, and close the "gap". He problematizes this type of "cartography of danger" arguing that it works as an abstraction of imperialist

⁵⁸ Campbell, David. *National deconstruction: Violence, identity, and Justice in Bosnia*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis Press, 1998.

⁵⁹ Campbell, David. *Writing security: United States Foreign Policy and the politics of identity*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 176.

⁶¹ Dalby, Simon. *Creating the Second Cold War: The discourse of politics*. London: Pinter, 1990. 28-29.

⁶² Ibid. 28.

geopolitical discourse and by removing a humane aspect from strategic state maps, use of war is being easily constructed as a just means of peace.⁶³

Even though the works of critical geopolitics have been considered “anti-map” by some,⁶⁴ the field has been engaging with cartography and territorial practices since the very beginning. However, the early critical geopolitical scholarship falls short of accomplishing “show not to tell” task, since despite putting emphasis on maps and the discourses they operate as/within, they are almost fully absent from the pages of the works.

Whereas some authors discuss mapping practices of governmental and non-governmental actors (on practical and formal geopolitical levels),⁶⁵ others look at the practices of popular geopolitics, e.g. representation of maps in media or public spaces.⁶⁶

However, there is a caveat while looking at the critical works discussing maps - much of it falls under the umbrella of critical cartography, which next to the analytical engagement with the maps (in most cases) also suggests an alternative cartographic representation. Critical cartographers, much like critical geopoliticians, see a map as a culturally specific artifact, however, the former focus more on the process of map-making while acknowledging “performative power of maps”.⁶⁷ Furthermore, critical cartography also looks at the GIS practices and mapping on all societal levels, especially nowadays, when mapping practices can take place from anyone’s computer. Critical cartography, similar to critical geopolitics, draws

⁶³ Dalby, Simon. “Imperialism, Domination, Culture: The Continued Relevance of Critical Geopolitics.” *Geopolitics* 13, no. 3 (2008): 413–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040802203679>.

⁶⁴ Haverluk, Terrence W., Kevin M. Beauchemin, and Brandon A. Mueller. “The Three Critical Flaws of Critical Geopolitics: Towards a Neo-Classical Geopolitics.” *Geopolitics* 19, no. 1 (2014): 19–39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2013.803192>.

⁶⁵ See e.g. Schnell, Izhak, and Christine Leuenberger. “Mapping Genres and Geopolitics: The Case of Israel.” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 39, no. 4 (2014): 518–31. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12052>; Broers, Laurence, and Gerard Toal. “Cartographic Exhibitionism?” *Problems of Post-Communism* 60, no. 3 (2013): 16–35. <https://doi.org/10.2753/ppc1075-8216600302>.

⁶⁶ See e.g. Boria, Edoardo. “A Matter of Ethics and Cartography. The Map of the Ambassador and the Map of the Journalist.” *Journal of Research and Didactics in Geography (J-READING)* 1, no. 5 (June 2016): 97–102. <https://doi.org/10.4458/6964-09>.

⁶⁷ Strandsbjerg, Jeppe. *Territory, globalization and international relations: The cartographic reality of space*. 1st ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 70.

from the poststructural roots and Foucauldian understandings of power/knowledge structure. Maps are being understood as active documents inscribing power, supporting dominant discourses that have to be analyzed in a historical context while cartography is seen as ideological, and cartographer as a responsible agent for the effects of the maps.⁶⁸

One related criticism towards critical geopolitics is the lack of creation of maps or providing alternative cartographic models by the scholars, that is by offering emancipatory solutions e.g. to the power political, or imperial images,⁶⁹ however, that very “task” is taken on by critical cartographers.⁷⁰ And while there is a suggestion to use both approaches simultaneously, since both of them operate with the same ontological assumptions,⁷¹ that would make the thin borders between them even more untraceable. In this thesis, while discussing the persuasive and exhibitionist cartographic practices of Russia in the Near Abroad I will rely on the cartographic strand within the critical geopolitical approach that engages with cartographic practices in an analytical and not in a practical way.

1.4. Exploring the concept of Persuasive Cartography

While discussing maps in critical scholarship, besides the explanation of what they do – how they act as discourses or how they can reinforce identity, the authors differentiate the types of cartographic condition or practices. These analytical concepts focus either on the shape of the map or on their type. Regarding the former, there is a significant body of literature dealing

⁶⁸ Crampton, Jeremy W., and J Kryger. “An Introduction to Critical Cartography.” *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 4, no. 1 (2015): 11–33.

⁶⁹ Moore, Anna W., and Nicholas A. Perdue. “Imagining a Critical Geopolitical Cartography.” *Geography Compass* 8, no. 12 (2014): 892–901. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12187>.

⁷⁰ Even though Crampton and Kryger outline two strands of critical cartography, namely analytical and practical, for differentiating critical cartography from critical geopolitics I am considering the mainly practical understanding of the former by other authors

⁷¹ Moore, Anna W., and Nicholas A. Perdue. 2014. “Imagining a Critical Geopolitical Cartography.” *Geography Compass* 8 (12): 892–901. doi:10.1111/gec3.12187.

with cartographic images of the territory and their influence on different levels of analysis, like “cartographic anxieties” or “phantom pains” while viewing the changed visual representation of one's identity and the stress felt through changing the shape of the map – a geo-body. Even though like in some of the traditional geopolitical works the spatiality is understood in anthropomorphic representations, in this case the representation is not geographically determinist but a contextual one – constructed by social perception of space. Geo-body is an image intertwined with the very understanding of self.⁷² If a term like “cartographic anxiety” focuses on the post factum state of map and its social effects, “cartographic exhibitionism”, concept coined by Broers and Toal, is concentrated on the performativity and communication of specific kinds of maps. Cartographic exhibitionism is understood as a desire of geopolitical culture (spatial identities of states as territorial and power structures and understandings of their position and mission in the world⁷³) “to project and display enlarged national territorial images”.⁷⁴ They discuss the concept on the example of Armenia and its mapping practices towards Nagorno Karabakh: while Armenian official cartography was complying to the “international transcript” leaving the representation of NKR ambiguous, in the popular geopolitics, on the other hand, the maps of NKR enjoyed a purposeful and explicit public display, i.e. were being exhibited. Exhibitionist maps are the most expressive forms of discursive transformation and they are in close relation to counter-mapping practices.⁷⁵

However, while considering the explicit exhibitionist maps, where the main emphasis is on the zoomed-in image of Armenia and NKR, and their representation, less attention is being paid to the “non-flashy” maps or maps as icons. Moreover, the exhibition of maps from former

⁷² Billé, Franck. “Introduction to ‘Cartographic Anxieties.’” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 6, no. 1 (2017): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ach.2017.0000>.

⁷³ Toal, Gerard. *Near abroad: Putin, the west, and the contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. 10.

⁷⁴ Broers, Laurence, and Gerard Toal. “Cartographic Exhibitionism?” *Problems of Post-Communism* 60, no. 3 (2013): 16–35. <https://doi.org/10.2753/ppc1075-8216600302>. 17.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 28.

de facto NKR and Armenia “proper” are mixed and discussed in a similar light. Furthermore, there is little to no discussion of the maps as icons that play a significant role in the popular cartographic practices. All maps as visuals are geopolitical practices contributing to the creation of the view about the self and about the other. However, during the contested territories, and especially when a great power is involved, redrawing a map takes a more active role in creation and reinforcement of the self-image. In this sense, Broers and Toal put right emphasis on the attention-drawing, exhibitionist maps trying to alter/confirm the imagined borders of the state, and in many cases and different levels, such practices do take place in times of territorial contestation, however what they do not consider are the quieter ways, in which the alteration of the image may take place.⁷⁶ In some cases the map-altering cartographic practices, despite taking place publicly (e.g. being published on official social media channels), might not explicitly exhibit their own understanding of their territory, but to show them in a more natural way by not leaving a suspicion that what one sees is not a reality. Therefore, while discussing the visual representation of contested territories, the concept of cartographic exhibitionism, while proving to create a framework for discussing significant part of cartographic practices, does not cover the more taken-for-granted practices. In order to shed light on the quieter corners of the map of contestation I will borrow a concept of “persuasive cartography” from political geography and critical cartography. Persuasive cartography refers to the endeavors to change opinions about particular spatial imaginings. The concept has been deployed *inter alia* for discussing the propagandistic map-making practices in Nazi Germany for constructing the visuals for Germany’s geopolitical plans,⁷⁷ or in a more benign way in Eastern Europe by

⁷⁶ Even though Boers and Toal, while looking at official maps of Armenia, argue that despite the specific coloring of Armenia and NK distinct from Azerbaijan, the internationally accepted borders are still in place. They term this as a “politically correct cartographic compliance” to the internationally accepted norms, however, do not go into the depth, how this kind of silent signs communicate the message about the territoriality of the country. Broers, Laurence, and Gerard Toal. “Cartographic Exhibitionism?” *Problems of Post-Communism* 60, no. 3 (2013): 16–35. <https://doi.org/10.2753/ppc1075-8216600302>. 26.

⁷⁷ Herb, G.Henrik. “Persuasive Cartography in Geopolitik and National Socialism.” *Political Geography Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (1989): 289–303. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0260-9827\(89\)90043-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0260-9827(89)90043-8); Herb, Guntram Henrik. *Under the map of Germany: Nationalism and propaganda 1918-1945*. London: Routledge, 1997.

showing themselves on the European map after the dissolution of the Soviet Union – to change opinions internationally and domestically about their belongingness to Europe.⁷⁸ However, Persuasive maps are not conceptualized and operationalized clearly in the political geography/critical cartography scholarship – while in the early works there was a confusion between persuasive cartography and propaganda maps, where the two concepts have been deployed interchangeably,⁷⁹ other times, propaganda maps were regarded as the worst case of persuasive cartography.⁸⁰ Some authors make a clearer distinction between these two terms and note that persuasive cartography operates in a more silent manner: “While propaganda maps communicate in shouts, persuasive maps communicate in whispers.”⁸¹ Moreover, in the early scholarship the persuasive nature of maps was perceived to be deceiving and unrealistic at its core – manipulated and false, in need to be acknowledged as such⁸² - based on the assumption of traditional geography of the static nature of reality. In the further discussion of the concept in the scope of this thesis, persuasive cartography will be understood in the broader ontological worldview of critical geopolitics – geographic “reality” and their visual representations being a part of the geopolitical imagining of the state, and redrawing a map - however unspectacularly - as a discursive practice of power.

Regarding the visibility of persuasive maps, it was most likely associated with a distortive cartographic image, putting emphasis on different visual aspects, using concrete techniques (varying in size, form, use of icons, etc.). I will argue that even though persuasive maps in many cases do look more explicit, they can also be implicit in a way when they look

⁷⁸ Zeigler, D.J. “Post-Communist Eastern Europe and the Cartography of Independence.” *Political Geography* 21, no. 5 (2002): 671–86. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0962-6298\(02\)00012-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0962-6298(02)00012-4).

⁷⁹ See Herb cited above

⁸⁰ Hall in Zeigler, D.J. “Post-Communist Eastern Europe and the Cartography of Independence.” *Political Geography* 21, no. 5 (2002): 671–86. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0962-6298\(02\)00012-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0962-6298(02)00012-4). 672.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Tyner, Judith A. “Persuasive Cartography.” *Journal of Geography* 81, no. 4 (1982): 140–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221348208980868>.

like “traditional” academic maps or unspectacular images, not particularly hinting or communicating a particular message.⁸³ In this case, the effect of these two types of persuasive cartographic practices can be different, as the explicit ones can directly be connected with affectiveness – with the emotions of the receiver, offering an instant reassurance of national identities; Whereas the implicit persuasiveness through the “realistic” or “normal” maps works more silently – it depicts the “natural way of order” and shapes reality in a long term for its own society. This quiet way of meaning-making is re-creating knowledge is also a depiction of power behind the performative nature of cartography. Therefore, while “cartographic exhibitionism” is a viable tool for discussing the contested territories, it is also important to consider the quieter discursive practices through the analytical lenses of “persuasive cartography” to focus on the power behind the mapping practices. Persuasive cartography can offer a valuable insight in exploring cartography in critical geopolitics, while considering the more naturalizing cartographic practices, it will uncover the power structures within it, and “leave power nowhere to hide”.⁸⁴

While discussing persuasive cartography I do not intend to disapprove the analytical value of cartographic exhibitionism, on the contrary – I would like to explore the relation of these two concepts and to look, which one of them is more relevant to which geopolitical levels of analysis. In order to present the analytical value of persuasive maps I will look at the empirical example of Russia and its mapping practices in the Near Abroad. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia has been seen as a revisionist power, trying to redraw the borders in its sphere of influence. The active mapping practices in the region will provide a solid ground

⁸³ Muelhanhaus who in his content analysis created typologies of more than 200 maps, has also outlined “academic cartographic” maps as an example of persuasive cartography. Muehlenhaus, Ian. 2011. “Genealogy That Counts: Using Content Analysis to Explore the Evolution of Persuasive Cartography.” *Cartographica: The International Journal for Geographic Information and Geovisualization* 46 (1): 28–40. doi:10.3138/carto.46.1.28. P.32

⁸⁴ Dalby in Tuathail, Gearóid. *Critical geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*. London: Routledge, 1996. 145.

for exploring a concept of persuasive cartography and how it presents itself in relation to cartographic exhibitionism by looking at interchangeable character of the ways of displaying maps on different geopolitical levels, their discursive role in identity re-creation and their performative power. Thus, laying out the concept of persuasive cartography will be an addition to the critical geopolitical scholarship shedding light on the taken-for-granted ways of displaying maps and uncovering the persuasive nature behind them. Furthermore, exploring the practices of implicit mapping by persuasive cartography and the explicit ones by cartographic exhibitionism under the same contextual frame, would enrich the critical geopolitical scholarship and provide a useful analytical tool for discussing the ways in which the construction of new ontological realities is sought.

1.5. Research design and limitations

Scholars of critical geopolitics, sharing mainly the post-structuralist ontologies, use interpretivist methods in their research. Even though social and anthropological methods, such as ethnography have also become present in the field, most of the times they refer to discourse analysis (looking at “cites” - textual, rhetorical practices, e.g. in creating identity binaries), but also to feminist tools of analysis⁸⁵, audio-visual methods⁸⁶, historiographic analysis⁸⁷. Discourse analysis, which does not have one concrete way of approaching, is one of the central methodological approaches in poststructuralist scholarship. Building on Foucault’s definition, discourse is a meaning-making production that fixes meaning and structure, how a thing is

⁸⁵ See Sharp in Koopman, Sara, Simon Dalby, Nick Megoran, Jo Sharp, Gerry Kearns, Rachael Squire, Alex Jeffrey, Vicki Squire, and Gerard Toal. “Critical Geopolitics/Critical Geopolitics 25 Years On.” *Political Geography* 90 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102421>.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 2.

⁸⁷ E.g. Toal puts emphasis on historical con-textuality and providing historical backgrounds in his research. See Tuathail, Gearóid. *Critical geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*. London: Routledge, 1996.

thought and how one acts due to this way of thinking.⁸⁸ For the authors themselves geopolitics is understood not as a form of geography or IR but as practice and as discourse.⁸⁹

Discourse, being an important aspect in critical geopolitics, is understood differently by different authors. Agnew and Corbridge describe discourses as “how the geography of the international political economy had been “written and read” in the practices of foreign and economic policies during the different periods of geopolitical order” - which is criticized for being “equivalent to a theory of how the world works”.⁹⁰ In his understanding of geopolitics as culture Toal outlines different conceptual bricks in critical geopolitical research: modern geopolitical imagination of the state on macro level, which influences the geopolitical culture on meso level, which through geopolitical visions sets concrete geopolitical practices - discourses - that create geopolitical measures.⁹¹ Dalby comprehends the concept of discourses in Shapiro's framework: discourses through deploying identities for actors, are not simply linguistic expressions but power related resources - a practice of spatial exclusion of otherness.⁹² However fuzzy and unsystematic,⁹³ mostly discourses overall and in particular in critical geopolitical works are studied while focusing on text/speech. Nevertheless, in Rose's point of view (also shared by some authors of critical geopolitics focusing on visual objects⁹⁴) visibility is a sort of discourse as well, since “a specific visibility will make certain things visible in particular ways, and other things unseeable, [...] and subjects will be produced and act within

⁸⁸ Rose, Gillian. *Visual methodologies*. London: Sage Publications, 2001.

⁸⁹ Dalby, Simon. *Creating the Second Cold War: The discourse of politics*. London: Pinter, 1990. 39.

⁹⁰ Toal, Gerard. “Geopolitical Structures and Cultures: Towards Conceptual Clarity in the Critical Study of Geopolitics.” Essay. In *Geopolitics: Global Problems and Regional Concerns*, edited by Lasha Tchantouridzé, 75–102. Winnipeg: Centre for Defence and Security Studies, University of Manitoba, 2004.

⁹¹ Toal, Gerard. “Geopolitical Structures and Cultures: Towards Conceptual Clarity in the Critical Study of Geopolitics.” Essay. In *Geopolitics: Global Problems and Regional Concerns*, edited by Lasha Tchantouridzé, 75–102. Winnipeg: Centre for Defence and Security Studies, University of Manitoba, 2004.

⁹² Dalby, Simon. *Creating the Second Cold War: The discourse of politics*. London: Pinter, 1990.

⁹³ Müller, Martin. “Doing Discourse Analysis in Critical Geopolitics.” *L'Espace Politique*, no. 12 (2011). <https://doi.org/10.4000/espacepolitique.1743>. 3.

⁹⁴ See Campbell, David. “Geopolitics and Visibility: Sighting the Darfur Conflict.” *Political Geography* 26, no. 4 (2007): 357–82. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2006.11.005>.

that field of vision”.⁹⁵ Rose proposes two concrete methods of doing visual discourse analysis, first focusing more on the visuals themselves and the notion of discourse articulated by them. The second method pays rather more attention to the institutions producing the visuals and is concerned with the issues of power and regimes of truth.⁹⁶

I will navigate on the surfaces and in the depth of maps using the visual discourse analysis focusing on both aspects of *what* and *who*: on the type of maps – such as persuasive or exhibitionist and the actors and institutions participating in cartographic practices but also engaging with the maps as visuals.

As for analytical subjectivity, interpretivists see the reality not as a given but as a fluid, constantly reshapeable by the social practices. There cannot be an objective truth, since the point of views and beliefs are different and the author cannot be neutral. I acknowledge my role as a person from Georgia writing about Russia redrawing its Near Abroad from my subjective point of view, but also looking at the cartographic practices in socio-historical contextuality.

In order to discuss the application of persuasive and exhibitionist cartographies I chose to focus on Russia, since Russia has been an active “revisionist” power since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and due to its territorial claims or contested territories on its border, it has been reshaping its vision of the self and the neighborhood. This practice is also visible visually in its cartographic practices. The choice of focusing on Ukraine and Georgia was the following: on one hand, to see how Russia treats visually its “new” territories and on the other hand, how it visualizes its supported “new” de-facto states along the border.

For the temporal frame I will refer to the time between 2008 up until now. This choice is due to the changes of historical contexts that happened between this timeframe, such as the Russia-Georgia war and the occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Annexation of Crimea,

⁹⁵ Rose, Gillian. *Visual methodologies*. London: Sage Publications, 2001. 137.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 139-140.

Russia-Ukraine war and Annexation of eastern Ukraine. These nodal points should show the changes or similarities in the cartographic practices.

As for analyzing the artifacts, I will refer to the primary sources - maps represented on three different levels of analysis of geopolitical reasoning: maps deployed by the Russian official level - from the state websites and social media channels; As for the formal – academic and teaching spheres atlases of MGIMO - Russia's one of the most prominent universities – and Russian Geography school textbooks/atlas of 10th and 11th grades starting from the 2009 until 2017 will be considered. As for the popular geopolitics, I will be looking at the media coverage of maps, intersection of arts and cartography - street art and the spaces of resistance, and the digital cartographic economy – online mapping platforms, especially Russian company Yandex, and its reshaping mapping practices over the given period of time.

While focusing on mapping practices through the lenses of critical geopolitics and exploring analytical concepts of persuasive and exhibitionist cartography the scope of the thesis is limited to exploring Russia's cartographic activity as an imperialist power and almost no references are made to the cartographies and counter-mapping practices from the side of Ukraine and Georgia. Moreover, the voices from the contested territories are not being considered, thus, for example, the complexities of de-facto state, parent-state, patron-state triad in terms of cartography will not be uncovered. Furthermore, the public opinion about the mapping practices is missing, which would show what exactly persuasive maps do in comparison to the exhibitionist ones through consideration of their feelings upon seeing the redrawn maps in different settings. However, exploring exact affectiveness⁹⁷ and effectiveness

⁹⁷ "Affective geopolitics" is based on emotion of being outraged "the study of powerful forces of emotion, the experience of being outraged, the desire to condemn, to abhor the behaviour of another state". Lee, Alexander. "The Affective Geopolitics of the New Cold War." Global Governance Institute, May 15, 2018. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/global-governance/news/2018/may/affective-geopolitics-new-cold-war>.

of the maps - e.g. exactly to what extent are persuasive maps persuasive - is not the intention of this thesis.

Moreover, this thesis does not focus on the most obvious type of maps - the war maps, which are the most active and change rapidly. It would be an insightful endeavor to look at the comparative visualization of war between Russia and Ukraine, however, due to its broad scope, this is a topic of its own and could be a subject for further research.

Chapter 2. Untangling Cartography in Russia

Since the critical geopolitical scholarship evolved at the end of the cold war, during the dissolution of the Soviet Union, drastic changes were occurring on the map and Russia has inherited the academic interest towards the USSR. Some authors researched historical contexts of mapping Europe's borderlands by imperial Russia⁹⁸ whereas others looked at the Russian displays of power in so called Near Abroad and creating imaginaries within geopolitical culture in the postcolonial field.⁹⁹ Others, while referring to Russia's neighborhood strategies, use biopolitical lenses and look at its practices of controlling, disciplining, protecting, managing and supervising and how it distinguishes Russia from the West.¹⁰⁰

As for the visual geopolitics, symbolic understandings of the images (caricatures, memes) and creation of identity through them in Russia and Ukraine are being discussed by Suslov.¹⁰¹ Paasi discussed the social symbolism of the Russian-Finnish border at the times of deterritorialization during globalization.¹⁰² In contrast to the globalizationist viewpoints, Berg regarded the border between Estonia and Russia as a strong discourse constituting the politics of othering through Us-Them distinction also taken into account Russian minorities in Estonia.¹⁰³ Moreover, some authors put emphasis on the agency question and how the conflict

⁹⁸ Postnikov, Alexey V. "Mapping Europe's Borderlands: Russian Cartography in the Age of Empire." *The AAG Review of Books* 2, no. 4 (2014): 154–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2325548x.2014.954208>.

⁹⁹ Toal, Gerard. *Near abroad: Putin, the west, and the contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

¹⁰⁰ Makarychev, Andrey. "Beyond Geopolitics: Russian Soft Power, Conservatism, and Biopolitics." *Russian Politics* 3, no. 1 (2018): 135–50. <https://doi.org/10.1163/2451-8921-00301007>.

¹⁰¹ 1) Suslov, Mikhail D. "'Crimea Is Ours!': Russian Popular Geopolitics in the New Media Age." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 55, no. 6 (2014): 588–609. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2015.1038574>.

2) Suslov, Mikhail. "The Production of 'Novorossiia': A Territorial Brand in Public Debates." *Europe-Asia Studies* 69, no. 2 (2017): 202–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2017.1285009>.

¹⁰² Paasi, Anssi. "Boundaries as Social Practice and Discourse: The Finnish-Russian Border." *Regional Studies* 33, no. 7 (1999): 669–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343409950078701>.

¹⁰³ Berg, Eiki. "Deconstructing Border Practices in the Estonian-Russian Borderland." *Geopolitics* 5, no. 3 (2000): 78–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040008407692>.

areas, e.g., Crimea's belongingness, are being mapped by outside actors, such as diplomats and journalists from abroad. Cartographic practices of these actors appear to differ in terms of ethical understanding by depicting the irreconcilable narratives, but both can promote acceptance of the new depictions.¹⁰⁴ However, the discussion rarely engages with simultaneous cartographic performances on practical, formal, and popular geopolitical levels which will be considered in this chapter.

Cartography and its practical applications of Russia and its Near Abroad cannot be discussed without considering the social and historical context, since images that are being brought to life by mapping are connected with the mental maps of how the territory is, or wants to be seen in the state geopolitical culture. Geopolitical cultures are understood as a synthesis of distinct spatial identities and the understanding of state's position and mission in the world.¹⁰⁵ So, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, referred to as the biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century by Putin, Russian self-image has experienced the complete change of visibility, and the territorial loss, along with the thematic understanding of it, became cartographic anxiety, which altogether was causing the call for redefining Russian identity. In contrast to the classical geopolitical literature, which claims to find reasoning behind Russia's behavior in its geographic location, such as looking for the warm seas,¹⁰⁶ critical geopolitics focuses on the mythos surrounding the territory. Therefore, during the identity rupture in the 90ies, several geopolitical cultures became prominent. Multiple of these claiming the return of the state to the condition it had been in before within the territories of its former space of influence, or Near Abroad. However, another set of contradictions was caused by the rise of

¹⁰⁴ Boria, Edoardo. 2016. "A Matter of Ethics and Cartography. The Map of the Ambassador and the Map of the Journalist." *Journal of Research and Didactics in Geography (J-READING)* 1 (5): 97–102. doi:10.4458/6964-09.

¹⁰⁵ Toal, Gerard. *Near abroad: Putin, the west, and the contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. 10.

¹⁰⁶ Marshall, Tim. *Prisoners of geography: Ten maps that explain everything about the world*. New York: Scribner Book Company, 2016.

some post-Soviet countries towards the West - trying to escape the former geopolitical realities through the integration with the West, namely EU and NATO. While Baltic states were already out of reach due to having joined the Western organizations, states like Ukraine and Georgia were still on their way of crossing the Western border. The war in Georgia in 2008 with resulting of emergence of the two de-facto states – Abkhazia and South Ossetia being recognized by Russia, reoccurring border redrawing practices with Georgia, annexation of Crimea in 2014, as well as the currently ongoing war and the annexation of Eastern Ukraine are the political practices in accordance with the dominant discourses about the understanding of the region. Nevertheless, while there are many strategies coming from Russia to reverse this regional flow and bring its surroundings in line with its understanding of the Self, cartography has been one of the most prominent ones.

2.1. Russian governmental cartography – a “natural” way of order

Even though critical geopolitics contradicts the statist blackboxing approach of classical geopolitics and gives agency to different actors within three geopolitical practices – practical, formal and popular – the importance of cartographic practices of a state, that is of official governing actors, are crucial to look at. According to the understanding of post-structuralist authors, mapping serves the interest of the state machine¹⁰⁷ and the very roots of critical geopolitics started discussing discursive geopolitical practices of inscribing space by imperialist states.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, in starting off with examining the cartographic practices of Russia, first its official, governmental level will be discussed.

¹⁰⁷ Lacoste in Dodds, Klaus. *Geopolitics: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. 120.

¹⁰⁸ Tuathail, Gearóid. *Critical geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*. London: Routledge, 1996.

First layer relates to the visualization of the narrative by the governmental institutions. In the digital age the representation of the governmental bodies and the officials take place i.a. on their own websites where a particular story is communicated. It is worth noting, that the map of Russia is not too present on the governmental webpages and the main visual focus is on icons (herald, flag), however, on some of them, such as the Kremlin website or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the maps are still shown. In this particular case, the map is functional, displaying the international visits of president Putin, however it also conveys a silent change of the cartographic “reality” as seen from the Russian perspective: the map of the world shows the new territorial self portrait of Russia depicted with Crimea and Eastern Ukraine as its territories (image 2). Furthermore, on the Southern border the de-facto states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are shown. The Kremlin map looks neutral – every country is depicted in the same color, the focus is not on one particular region but on the whole world. It looks like a “normal” taken-for-granted map where the changes occurred silently and “naturally”.



Image 1: Functional map for displaying events and trips of the Russian President as it was in 2015¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ “Events and Trips on the Map.” President of Russia. Accessed May 25, 2023. <http://en.kremlin.ru/>. The map from 2015 was restored through the internet archive tool.



Image 2: Functional map for displaying events and trips of the Russian President in 2023

Second layer relates to the maps directly communicated through the official government social media channels. Even though in the early critical geopolitical scholarship media was broadly understood and being discussed as a part of the popular geopolitical understanding – now the government officials use them as direct ways for channeling the particular stories they intend to tell. During the war when military maps are usually prominent, the Russian government tries to depict maps “naturally”, since the Russian official storyline of redrawing a map is directed towards making this practice seem as silent and at the same time as natural as possible. While discussing border changes, the official discourse reciprocates the focus on other territorial changes around it to make its own map-reinscribing overshadowed. This is a part of the discursive practice in Russian official geopolitical culture – where Russia puts the main emphasis to the territorial changes around it, e.g. the enlargement of NATO to its borders is shown as the ontological threat to Russia. Putin also touched upon the crystallization of geography in his speech after starting the war in Ukraine – underlining the ever-changing nature of technological development but the constant of the geographical threat¹¹⁰ – sharing borders

¹¹⁰ “Address by the President of the Russian Federation.” President of Russia, February 24, 2022. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

with NATO renders Russia essentially insecure. However, through the lenses of critical geopolitics this classical geopolitical setting is a discourse itself in order to make imperialistic practices neutral. Just like the quiet mapping of Russia in light of NATO enlargement, published by the official twitter page of the Russian Ministry of Foreign affairs in Spanish (image 3). In the following visual of the historical development of the changing borders by NATO the current Russian enlargement is also shown, however, only in the shadow of the former in comparison to which, Russian map-redrawing becomes just a natural, taken-for-granted reality. This depiction is a good representation of persuasive cartography where in contrast to putting its own map under the spotlight, the preferred map is communicated without explicitly outlining the changes on the map.

However, not only quieter persuasive maps can be seen on the social media channels of the government officials. Some stakeholders also depict the flashy exhibitionist maps focusing on the depiction of the greater Russia, like a Telegram post of the ex-president Medvedev, where he showed off a flashy map conveying his visions for more territorial gains from Ukraine by ascribing this opinion to the Western analytics.¹¹¹ His depiction can be placed under the Russian expansionist geopolitical culture of imagining Russia's enlargement towards the West.

¹¹¹ MapAddict. "Ex President of Russia Posted This Map of Ukraine in His Telegram Channel | Source: <https://t.co/Qs24izqa8k> #maps #geography Pic.Twitter.Com/Lygm60xw7r." Twitter, April 28, 2023. https://twitter.com/AddictMap/status/1651776410917142529?t=BRg2RU6UpE6s2hrzEkFp7g&utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=tweet

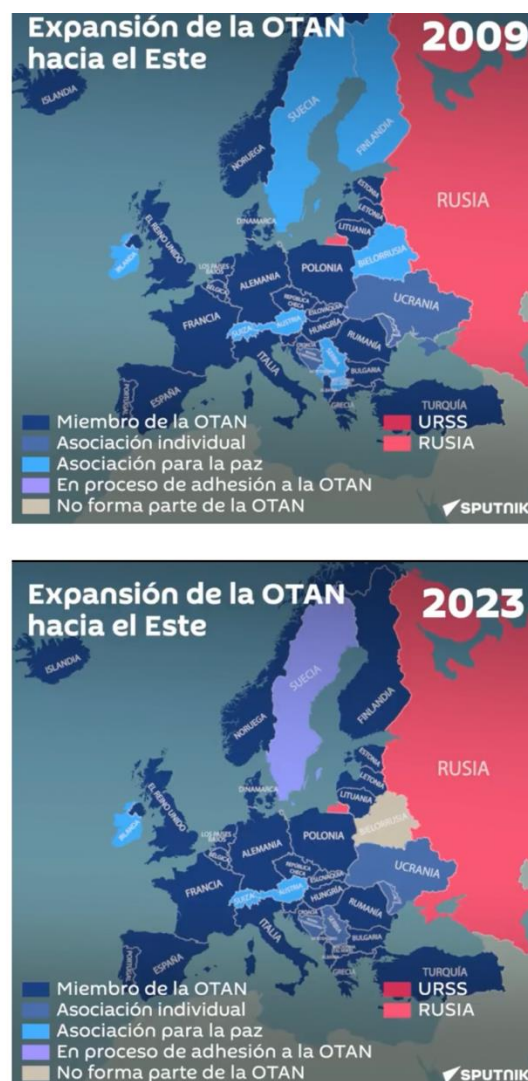


Image 3: NATO expansion video on the official Twitter account of the Russian MFA (in Spanish)¹¹²

Third layer concerns the institutionalized map-making itself, namely the Federal Agency for Geodesy and Cartography (Roscartography) which is under a direct subordination of the Russian government.¹¹³ Roscartography lays out cartographic standards and supervises cartographic practices of private map publishers in the country. To further regulate the mapmaking and alternative depictions of Russia after the annexation of Eastern Ukraine in September, the State Duma adopted the law “countering extremist activity” at the end of 2022

¹¹² Cancillería de Rusia. Twitter, April 27, 2023. https://twitter.com/mae_rusia/status/1651715347165204480?t=n36IJ4MxZ4j3bEaXLIYLLA&s=08.

¹¹³ “Subsidiaries.” Roscartography. Accessed May 26, 2023. <https://roscartography.ru/about/subsidiaries/>.

in first reading, which also implies classification of maps that go against the “territorial integrity” of Russia, as extremist materials.¹¹⁴ Since then the shops stopped ordering maps from the publishers and continued doing so after the “updated” maps began to appear.¹¹⁵ The new academic looking maps started on their journey of cartographic persuasion by institutionalizing new images of Russia. Therefore, the Russian government tried to silence the old maps in order to give way to the new depictions of “reality”. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Roscartography, which also acts as a store for selling various types of maps, these “new” maps are not added yet. However, along with the “old” ones where Russia is still depicted with Crimea only there are relatively newer maps showing Donetsk and Lugansk as independent states, which have been recognized so by Russia in February 2022 until their annexation.¹¹⁶ This fact underscores that redrawing academic looking maps is a slower discursive act, however, more silent changes sometimes need more time to take root and looking closer at state-sanctioned maps is important, since they “can provide vital clues to a country’s changing geopolitical imagination”.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Gotev, Georgi. 2023. “Russia Makes Punishable Maps in Breach of ‘New Territorial Realities.’” *Www.Euractiv.Com*. January 9. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/russia-makes-punishable-maps-in-breach-of-new-territorial-realities/>.

¹¹⁵ “Книжные Сети Начали Продавать Карты России с Новыми Регионами [Book Chains Started Selling Maps of Russia with New Regions].” *Malls.Ru*, February 8, 2023. <https://www.malls.ru/rus/news/knizhnye-seti-nachali-prodavati-karty-rossii-s-novymi-regionami.shtml>.

¹¹⁶ <https://shop.ros-cartography.ru/catalog/item/196> ; <https://shop.ros-cartography.ru/catalog/karty-mira>

¹¹⁷ Dodds, Klaus. *Geopolitics: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. 143.

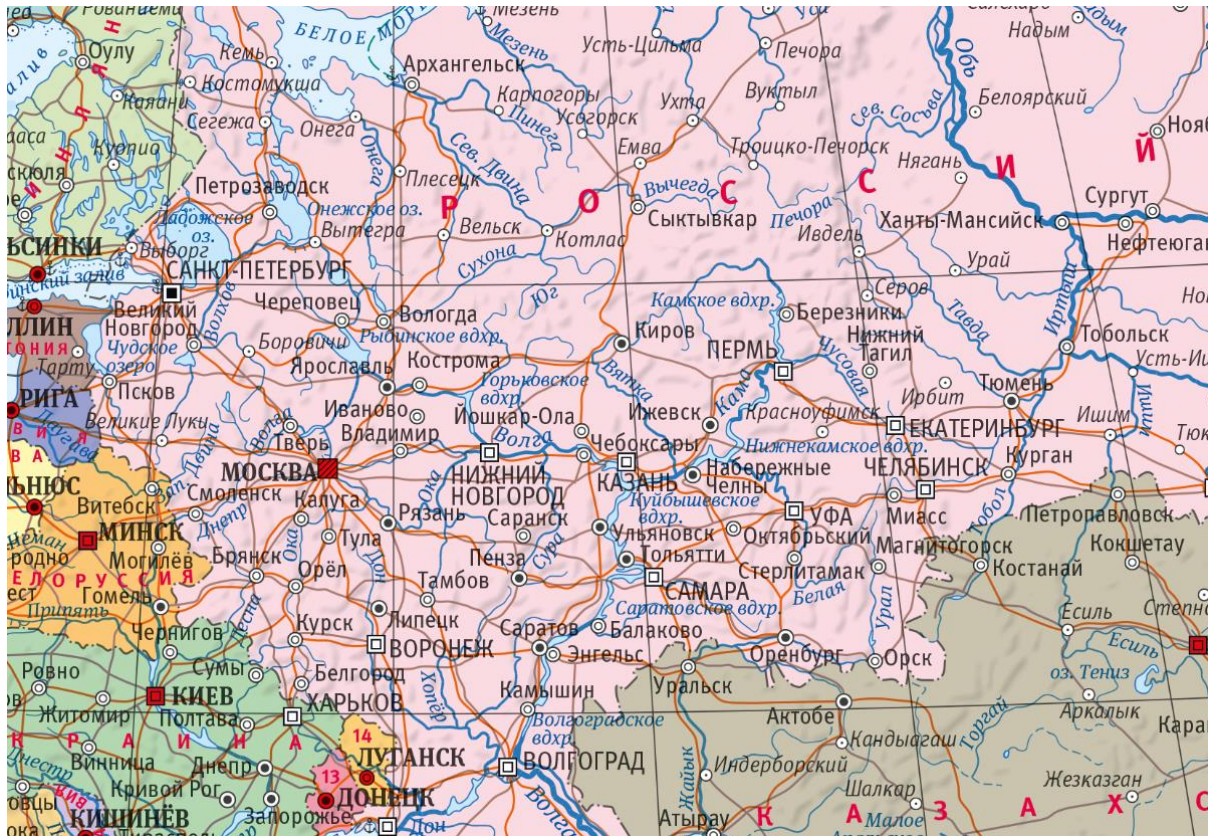


Image 4: A world map in the online shop of Roscartography depicting Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states¹¹⁸

2.2. Map as naturalizing knowledge

Teaching a particular story about the state is a powerful way of naturalizing knowledge and reinforcing the understanding of one's identity and how to see others. Thus, through geography teaching images and spatial understandings are being crystallized in the consciousness and therefore become "real". Geography teaching has been made into a strategy of the powerful states during colonial times in order to flare the imperial strivings. Mackinder conceptualized visualization as the essence of geographical power and through founding the faculty of geography he strived to educate the "imperial people" from early years.¹¹⁹ In Russia's

¹¹⁸ "Политическая Карта Мира [Political Map of the World]." Roscartography. Accessed May 25, 2023. <https://shop.roscartography.ru/catalog/item/125>.

¹¹⁹ Tuathail, Gearoid O. "Imperial Incitement: Halford Mackinder, the British Empire, and the Writing of Geophocal Sight." Essay. In *Critical Geopolitics*, 75–110. London: Routledge, 1996. 83.

geography teaching practices at school, the enlargement and the changing map is not explicitly underlined cartographically. Rather, political changes make the visual discourses follow them creepingly in order to create new knowledge about the image of the state which afterwards becomes a part of this very discourse further reinforcing and naturalizing new visions.

Considering the school geography textbooks and atlases, which are recommended by the Russian Ministry of Education and Science, also make changes relatively slowly. For instance, in the 2009 edition of the atlas for 10-11 grades, even though Russia had already recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008, they were not shown on the map.¹²⁰ Moreover, in several editions of the same atlas throughout 15 years, Georgia (and the whole South Caucasasia) were depicted as parts of Asia, which can be seen as a counter logic to its Western aspirations of joining EU and NATO. With regards to Crimea, it was shown as a part of Russia after revisioning it in two years. The overall emphasis is put on the realistic representation of space and creating new images for the future generations to grow up, since atlases through pedagogic performativity contribute greatly to the re-negotiation of the state and the national identity.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Е.М Domogatskii, N.I Alexevskii, География. Экономическая и социальная география мира. Учебник для 10-11 кл. [Geography. Economic and social geography of the world. Textbook for 10-11 grades.](Moscow: Русское слово [Russkoye Slovo], 2009)

¹²¹ Sparke, Matthew. 1998. "A Map That Roared and an Original Atlas: Canada, Cartography, and the Narration of Nation." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88 (3): 481–514. doi:10.4324/9781315246512-24. P. 480

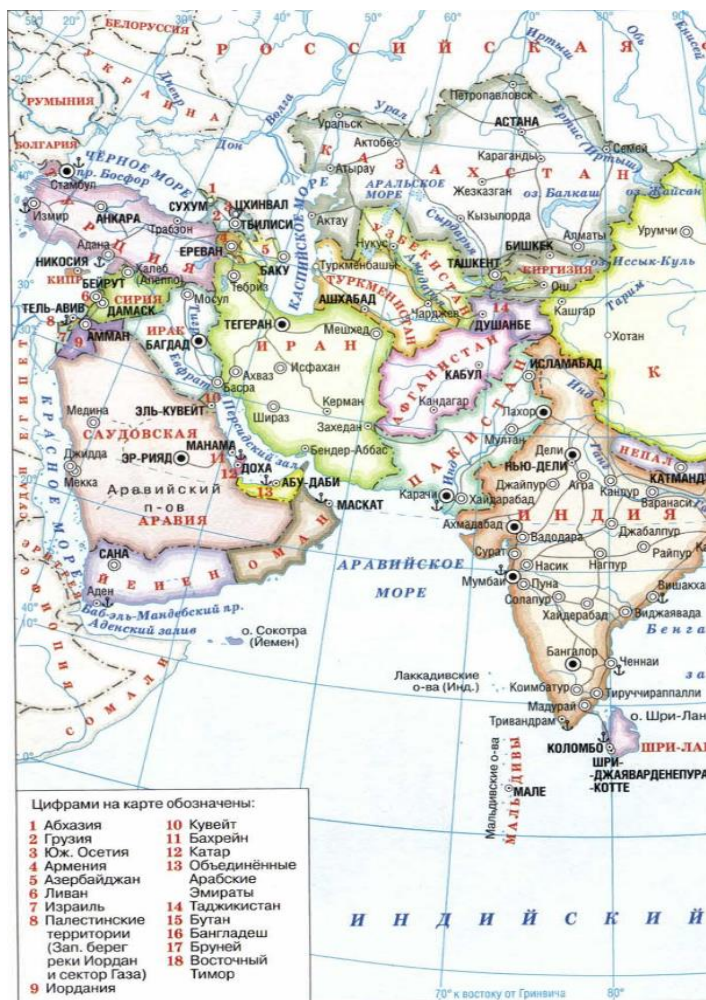


Image 5: 11th grade atlas from 2017 depicting Georgia as a part of Asia without Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The atlas was created according to the Federal State Educational Standards¹²²

On the level of higher education, MGIMO university, one of the main players of the academic elite in studying international relations and engaging with world politics in Russia, has also produced political atlases, most notable from which are 2012 “Political Systems of Modern States” created within the project of Political Atlas of Modernity and “Atlas of International Relations”

from 2020.¹²³ These books show some interesting points: The book of 2012 discusses every European state separately and while showing Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which were recognized by Russia in 2008, as independent states on a map, it does not include them in the list of the independent states and does not discuss them separately – only within the framework of the Georgian chapter. Whereas textually the book shifts towards a more neutral position while not fully acknowledging the independence of these entities, cartographically it still quietly reaffirms the state discourse and makes it visually tangible. With regards to the second MGIMO source of 2020, a deviance from the state territorial discourse can be observed: while

¹²² O.V Krylova, Атлас. Экономическая и социальная география мира. 10-11 классы. + контурные карты и сборник задач. [Atlas. Economic and social geography of the world. 10-11 grades.] (Moscow: OOO Izdatelstvo ACT [Izdatelstvo ACT], 2017)

¹²³ МГИМО (MGIMO), MFA of Russia University, Institute International relations. Атлас международных отношений: Пространственный анализ индикаторов мирового развития [Atlas of International Relations: Spatial Analysis of World Development Indicators] (Moscow: Аспект Пресс [Aspect press], 2020)

the atlas discusses various global topics in the fields of politics, demography, global trends, etc. and showing only the same world map (with different emphasis and legend) on every page – this world map contradicts the world-view the Russian official discourse tries to establish: e.g. Crimean peninsula belongs to Ukraine and the map shows Georgia in its internationally recognized borders.¹²⁴ While the cartographic deviations from the official narratives is interesting to explore it is beyond the scope of this work. However, this deviation is most likely being revised, since MGIMO is working on a new global atlas that should cover the “new developments” in the world, where most likely Russia’s new self-portrait will be shown. Meanwhile MGIMO has already shown a sneak-peek into the new touristic atlas of the Russian Federation, where during the presentation a new map was being displayed (image 6). While school geography textbooks and university atlases through their taken-for-granted depictions can be regarded as an example of persuasive cartography, the demonstration of the touristic map was more of an exercise of cartographic exhibitionism, which will afterwards overflow into the “neutral” academic image in a book that will more quietly and persuasively alter general knowledge about the national geography.

Image 6: New tourist map being presented with different regions of Russia (including newly annexed territories of Eastern Ukraine)¹²⁵



¹²⁴ МГИМО (MGIMO), MFA of Russia University, Institute for Public Design. ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ СИСТЕМЫ СОВРЕМЕННЫХ ГОСУДАРСТВ: Европа [Political Systems of Modern States: Europe] (Moscow: Аспект Пресс [Aspect press], 2012)

¹²⁵ Источник: Южный федеральный университет [Source: Southern Federal University]. “На Конференции По Международному Туризму Обсудили Работу Над Проектом ‘Туристский Атлас РФ’ [Work on the Project ‘Tourist Atlas of the Russian Federation’ Was Discussed at the Conference on International Tourism].” Seldon.News, December 7, 2022. <https://news.myseldon.com/ru/news/index/275887871>.

2.3. Mapping by the Public – persuading with or without exhibition

One of the goals of the Critical Geopolitics is to open the black box of the state and look into the different actors participating in the creation of geopolitical discourses. Therefore, it is interesting how different actors practice cartography. I argue that since actors on the public level do not have institutionalized power for silent naturalization of knowledge, here most of the time persuasive cartography is replaced by the exhibitionist.

While making an atlas or creating academic maps for the textbooks is a relatively lengthy process, cartographic practices on the public geopolitical level, on the other hand, are faster - often even instant as the answer to the geopolitical events. The strength of media and its success in meaning-making practices is discussed by many critical geopolitical authors, who outline media's role as a direct line to people's emotions¹²⁶ and its power to challenge even the meanings of "war" and "peace".¹²⁷ With regards to Russian media, in particular Russian TV, since the start of the war in Ukraine in 2022 the show of maps has been intensified through the display of war maps. However, even if war maps and strategic maps are out of the scope for this thesis, one TV-show - "Great Game" - from the Russian public broadcaster would be notable for its visual exercise.¹²⁸ "Great Game" invites experts to discuss political events, i.e. the current Russo-Ukrainian war. These discussions often include maps and depictions of Russian territorial claims – to convey a compelling visual story. The change of the map happened "punctually" in the show in accordance with the official action (images 7 and 8). The

¹²⁶ E.g. Toal and his concept of affective geopolitics.

¹²⁷ McDonald, Fraser, Rachel Hughes, and Klaus Dodds. 2010. *Observant States Geopolitics and Visual Culture*. London: I.B. Tauris.

¹²⁸ "ТВ-Шоу 'Большая Игра' 2023: Актеры, Время Выхода и Описание На Первом Канале [TV Show 'Great Game' 2023: Actors, Release Time and Description on Channel One Russia] ." Первый Канал Всемирная Сеть Зарубежное Вещание [Channel One World Wide Web Foreign Broadcasting]. Accessed May 25, 2023. <https://www.1tv.com/announce/15975/video?page=19>.

focus on the map is from the bird's eye view – “sighting” the new territories, like Mackinder's idea of going above the map and creating imperialist gaze from the top - making them vivid and then into a re-inscribed site within the new Russian borders. While there are some similarities in the map discussed above, shared by the Russian MFA where the territorial changes were visible, the map on the public broadcaster is an explicit focus on the Russian territory and bordering developments, whereas the former one, puts more emphasis on the enlargement of NATO and in the light of it naturalizes its own enlargement. Shows like “Big Game” exhibit the preferred images explicitly and directly communicate them to the audience, thus practicing cartographic exhibitionism.

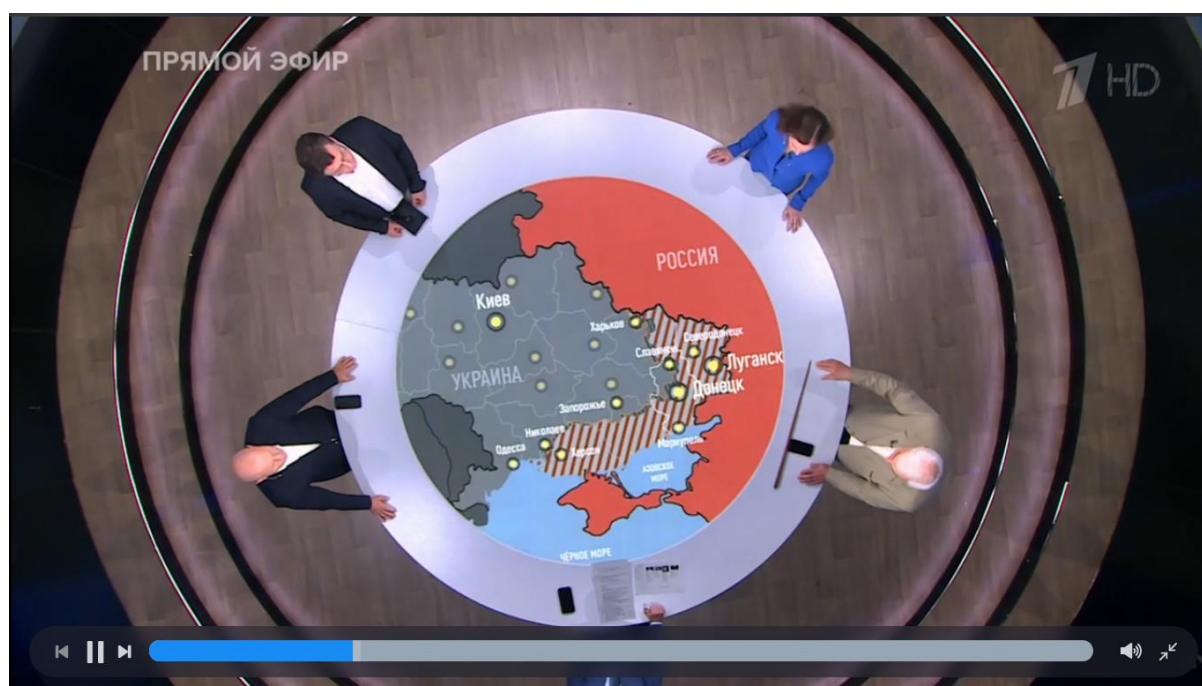


Image 7: “Great Game” TV show on 01.09.2022, before Russia announced the annexation of Ukrainian regions shows guests of the show looking at the map of the conflict

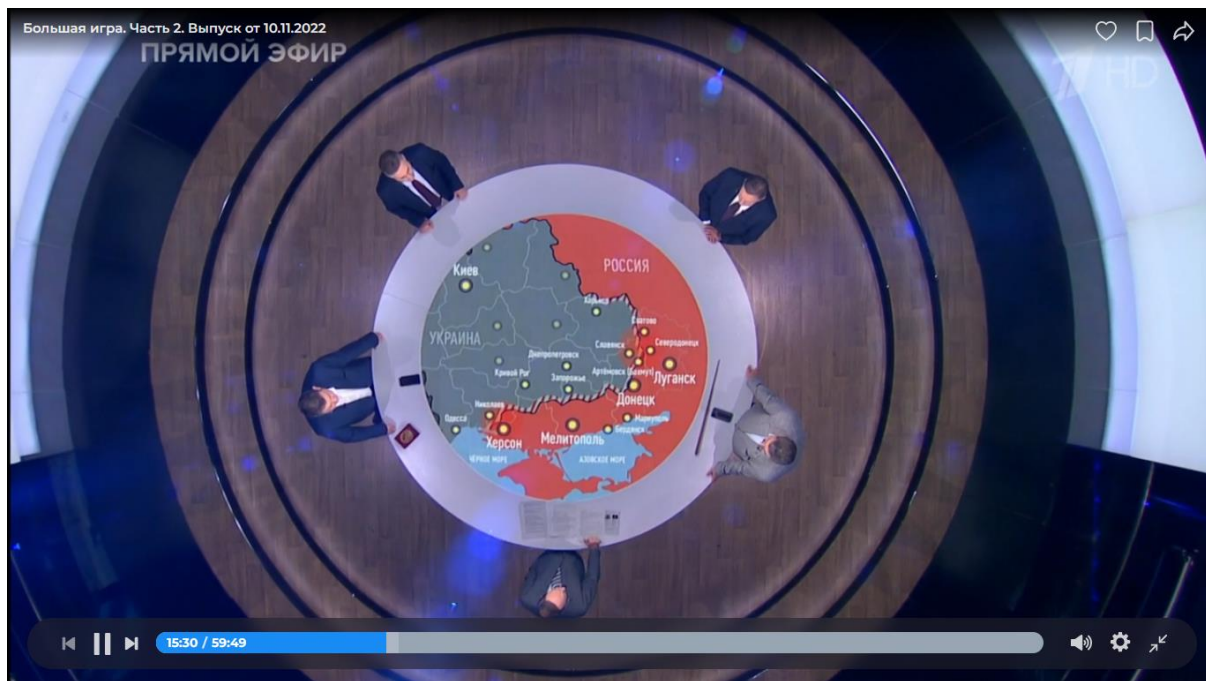


Image 8: “Great Game” TV show on 10.11.2022, Panel of experts can be seen discussing the war in Ukraine around a table depicting a “new” map of Russia

While examining public mapping, one needs to consider street art and graffiti. Shortly after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, a celebratory graffiti – geo-body of Crimea painted in Russian national colors - appeared in the streets of Moscow.¹²⁹ Graffiti are a tool for the people to express their opinion as loudly as it is possible in visual terms, and as for graffiti cartography – it most likely displays a map as a logo. Since maps can also be viewed as images, which engrain the shape of the country in our heads causing affiliation with the form, they “form an image of the state with which the inhabitants can identify”¹³⁰ – geo-bodies are their simplified, aesthetic depictions. In this case the Russian celebratory discourse of “returning Crimea to its original place” was visualized. Geo-bodies represent naturalized territorial outline, or shape of a state, which becomes easily recognizable and conflated with the national group.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Bond, Theresa. “Life and Loss in Crimea.” *Foreign Affairs*, January 17, 2023. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-10-11/life-and-loss-crimea>.

¹³⁰ Kabachnik, Peter. 2012. “Shaping Abkhazia: Cartographic Anxieties and the Making and Remaking of the Abkhazian Geobody.” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 14 (4): 397–415. doi:10.1080/19448953.2012.736219. p.402

¹³¹ Ibid. p.46

Thus seeing geo-bodies in public spaces is essentially exhibitionist – making the direct emotional connection with the viewer – whether it may be a positive (reinforcing the feeling of national identity and belongingness through visualization) or a negative one (while seeing the known and internalized geo-body ripped apart – experiencing what is termed as “cartographic anxiety”). Murals can therefore become cartographic battlegrounds, where counter-mapping practices intend to challenge the imperialist mapping through exhibiting the state self-portrait and not letting the other “reality” take over theirs (see image 9).



Image 9: Graffiti on Taganskaya square in Moscow with Crimea painted in Russian national colors, reading: “Crimea and Russia together forever”¹³²

¹³² Zhitenyev, Artem. “Patriotic Graffiti in Moscow Related to Crimea’s Reuniting with Russia.” Photograph. Sputnik Mediabank, January 16, 2017. https://sputnikmediabank.com/media/2403962.html?context=list&list_sid=list_381003.



Image 10: Patriotic graffiti in Kiev, reading: “This is our country” ¹³³

2.3.1. Escaping persuasive cartography for digital mapping platforms or the case of missing borders

In public geopolitical discourses of the 21st century, digital mapping platforms play a significant role. Through satellite view they can offer the most realistic picture of the world. Nevertheless, the realities these maps depict cannot be considered absolute truth, since e.g. state borders can not be seen from space as they are a social product, fragile and changeable. The drawing of borders is also a social practice (while now it has shifted towards a cyborg one, human subjectivity still prevails) and in this practice the agency is traceable. Thus, digital mapping platforms through their nature of being “as real as possible” are perfect candidates to function as persuasive maps – while depicting the world “as it is” and geo-graphing the

¹³³ Gusev, Oleksandr. Patriotic graffiti about Ukraine (Kiev). Photograph. Shuliavka bridge in Kiev, September 13, 2014. <https://500px.com/photo/83172045/patriotic-graffiti-about-ukraine-kiev-by-oleksandr-gusev>.

preferred “reality” quietly. Therefore, digital maps are different from the above-mentioned exhibitionist practices in public geopolitics.

However, there is an important aspect to digital map platforms – they are, more than any other type of map, a part of the global economic system. Shapeshifting in a commercialized world while trying to accommodate the (identity) needs of consumers including regarding the contested territories. Apple maps, for example, was selectively showing different borders in different countries, e.g. after the annexation of Crimea, Russian map in Russia was depicted with the redrawn borders, whereas in other places this change did not occur.¹³⁴ Even though the map was modified after the outcry of Ukrainians and the intentional society, it was mostly the consumers, who made the map maker reevaluate the choices and change back the map in Russia. Similar episode occurred in Georgia, however, on the contrary to the previous case – Yandex, Russian search engine and navigational company, referred to as “Russia’s Google”, also providing the largest mapping platform in Russia, was showing Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. Upon Yandex Taxi company entering Georgia, the people were refusing to use it because of the company map undermining their territorial integrity.¹³⁵ Yandex then accommodated the cartographic needs of their Georgian consumers and changed the map. However, Yandex maps were still reaffirming the Russian national discourse regarding their Southern border, namely depicting the three neighbors instead of one.¹³⁶ Despite the consumer-targeted shapeshifting of Yandex, the channels of the cartographic practices of Russian

¹³⁴ “Apple Changes Crimea Map to Meet Russian Demands.” BBC News, November 27, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-50573069>.

¹³⁵ “Yandex Taxi-ის რუკის მიხედვით, აფხაზეთი და სამხრ. ოსეთი დამოუკიდებელი ქვეყნებია [According to Yandex Maps Abkhazia and South Ossetia Are Independent States].” *Tabula*, August 26, 2016. <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/589088-yandex-taxi-rukis-mikhedvit-apkhazeti-samkhr>.

¹³⁶ Kakhishvili, Nino. “Yandex-მა საქართველოს რუკა მხოლოდ საქართველოს ინტერნეტმომხმარებლისთვის შეცვალა [Yandex Changed the Map for the Georgian Consumers Only].” *NETGAZETI*.ge, August 26, 2016. <https://netgazeti.ge/news/137269/>.

geopolitical culture could still be traced. Yandex map, used for navigation on a daily basis in Russia, was quietly strengthening, naturalizing and internalizing the images of new cartographic realities of Russia while at the same time navigating through the demands of the global visual economy.¹³⁷

But the story of Yandex does not end here: even though the mapping platform was aiding Russian geopolitical imagining through its cartographic practices by showing the de-facto states recognized by Russia as independent or by incorporating Crimea into the borders of Russian Federation soon after the annexation in 2014,¹³⁸ it drew a line in 2022 upon the pressure of the Russian officials from one side and the Western sanctions, on another, and actually removed the lines – Yandex became a borderless world map. The Yandex’ official statement was shifting the focus towards local navigation, with the goal to “display the world around us. So, the map will show mountains, rivers, and other data usually found on such maps”.¹³⁹ Therefore, Yandex escaped the borders of persuasive cartography by fully removing the borders. However, it is not a case of globalizationist deterritorialization of space since it just removed the façade of compliance to the demands of their international customers. It would be interesting to question whether the power would also disappear from the map, or as James Der Derian would ask: “if the map does become truly, hyper-really global, without the edge beyond which lies the unmappable, where will the monsters go?”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Although the Crimean peninsula was shown as a part of Russia also in other parts of the world by Yandex. РИА Новости. “Яндекс Обозначил Крым Как Часть России На Международных Картах [Yandex Marked Crimea as Part of Russia on International Maps].” РИА Новости [RIA News], March 1, 2020. <https://ria.ru/20140403/1002396909.html>.

¹³⁸ Blua, Antoine. “Mapmakers of the World Not United on Crimea.” RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, March 20, 2014. <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-crimea-mapmakers/25303701.html>.

¹³⁹ The Moscow Times. “Russia’s Yandex Maps to Stop Displaying National Borders .” The Moscow Times, May 26, 2023. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/06/09/russias-yandex-maps-to-stop-displaying-national-borders-a77956>.

¹⁴⁰ Der Derian, James. “‘All but War Is Simulation’.” Essay. In *Rethinking Geopolitics*, edited by Simon Dalby and Gearóid Ó Tuathail, 261–73. London: Routledge, 1998. 273.

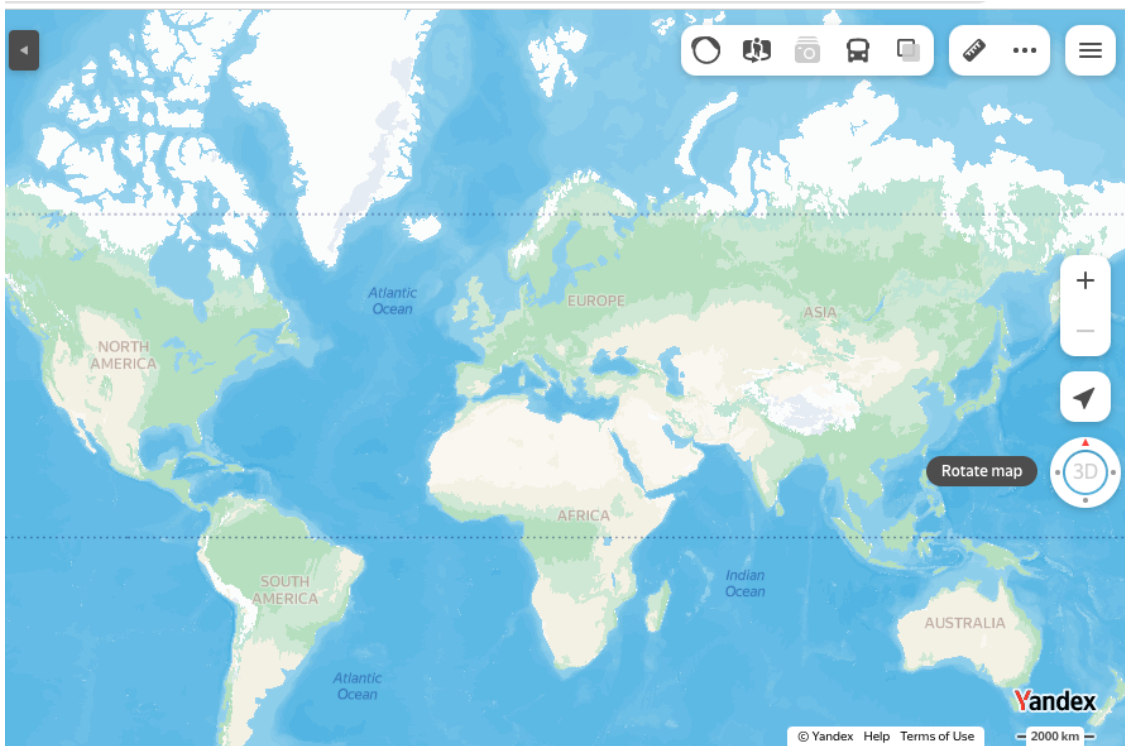


Image
11:

Yandex has removed all national borders. <https://yandex.com/maps>

Conclusion

In contrast to the assumption of geography being a science that shows us the world as it is, the realities in different social contexts might look very different. Therefore, maps as visual representations of a state self-portrait, rather than being static images of reality, are changeable as well. The map becomes an image of how one should see the Self and the Other, and thus - a discourse in itself, actively shaping geo-political realities. Therefore, cartography is a discursive practice of making a particular understanding of geographic space and political place of the state. This is an interpretation of critical geopolitical lenses which this thesis looked through for seeing the peculiarities of cartographic practices. As opposed to traditional and then (neo)classical geopolitics, which regard geography as given and study how political power is affected by the geographic placement of the countries, critical geopolitics, which stands on the poststructuralist ground, deconstructs the concepts of geography and power: geography is being understood as performatively building on the power of agency. Critical geopolitics research agenda, among other things, focuses on the imperialistic states and their inscription of space through power and how mapping practices are deployed to enlarge and reaffirm the self-image, and to shape preferable realities.

The thesis set out to zoom into the border redrawing practices which not only depict the struggle over the territory but struggle over the overlapping irreconcilable realities and asked a question of *how cartographic practices reaffirm new geopolitical discourses of border changes?* While the concept of “cartographic exhibitionism”, coined by Broers and Toal, provides an answer to this question, by outlining that through explicit exhibition of maps the desire of enlarged borders are being represented, it solely focuses on popular geopolitics and at the same time does not cover the role of implicit, quieter forms of cartography, that communicate a particular imagining through underlining its taken-for-grantedness. Like Broers and Toal, in discussing the matter from the critical geopolitical standpoint, which seeks to break

out from the blackboxing understanding of the state, I looked at the cartographic practices, regarding them as discourses, on three different geopolitical levels – practical (government and official institutions), formal (academia and teaching), and popular (public, media, business). In order to shed light on the quieter and more implicit mapping I worked with the concept of “persuasive cartography”, which looks at the visual practice of persuasion of the audience in a more silent manner than for example propaganda maps. Despite the different understanding of the concept in the political geography and critical cartography scholarship where persuasive cartography is described as anything from “false images” coming from the understanding of a constant of geography, to more natural benign endeavors of depicting a particular place of a state in the world. I understand persuasive cartography, building on Zeigler, not as much as based on deception but as a discursive practice communicating a revisionist story about the state in order to persuade the onlookers of its naturalness through implicit depiction of taken-for-grantedness of a particular image of new borders for it to be internalized and reaffirm the geopolitical culture of the state. The persuasive maps can look “academic”, monotonous - with just borders depiction, or colored – but it should do one thing – have an implicit character and the possibility to be seen as taken-for-granted. In contrast to Zeigler I looked at persuasive cartography not as a benign practice of shifting a spatial understanding of a state from one to another region, but as an imperialist practice, where the power lurks through the quiet, “natural” maps as opposed to cartographic exhibitionist maps that are flashier and more explicit about what message they want to convey.

In order to observe cartographic practices of border change and to see the differences and similarities of exhibitionist and persuasive maps the thesis set out on an empirical quest of looking at Russian geopolitics and see how it is mapping itself and its Near Abroad, namely in relation to Ukraine and Georgia. The mapping practices were regarded not in geographical deterministic way, where Russian motivations are understood as a country seeking its ways to

the Black Sea, but through a changeable geopolitical context – the border change after the dissolution of the Soviet Union which was perceived as a “geopolitical catastrophe” and a map of Russia, which “lost” many pieces it had during the Soviet Union, rendered the spatial understanding of a state cartographically insecure. By revising the discourses of what Russia is and what it wants to be, some of the geopolitical cultures encompassed keeping the region under supervision and some – included an anticipation of a greater Russia by enlargement. While Russia’s government acted upon an expansionist geopolitical culture, one of the discursive practices to reaffirm the practical choices and to create new geographic reality was cartography. While regarding the practical geopolitics of the state, three places of changing mapping practices were regarded. The Russian governmental websites were quietly adjusting the image of the state to fit it into the image of Russia with Crimea in 2014 and now Russia with the Eastern part of Ukraine. The Federal Agency for Geodesy and Cartography being under the direct subordination of Russian government and the cartographic publishers under its supervision, is slowly making progress with redrawing practices which depict new realities on academically looking maps – the most taken-for-granted kind of maps, being connected with the idea of ultimate objectivity. In Russian official social media channels, despite an example where the emphasis was put on the process of border change, this reshaping was highlighted from the perspective of the Other - the explicit message of the map was the enlargement of NATO posing a threat to Russia’s security, while enlarging borders of Russia were being neutralized by the shadow of the former and made it seem only natural. However, while these examples can be seen as persuasive cartography, some stakeholders in Russia, like Dimitri Medvedev use social media to exhibit the desire of a greater Russia by uploading flashy maps. This example highlights just how blurry the borders between official and popular geopolitics can be – since social media allows a direct interaction between the stakeholders and its audience.

On the formal level geography teaching and academia were regarded and observed the naturalization of maps through knowledge production. School atlases were also gradually adjusting to the new geopolitical realities set out on the practical level and depicting the “new” borders in Russia but also mapping the neighborhood: e.g. While Abkhazia and South Ossetia were depicted as independent states, Georgia was also displayed to be in Asia, which despite being from the soviet tradition of geographic partition of territory, also contradicts the discourse of Georgian Europeanness and its strive to the Western organizations. However, the maps of MGIMO university were showing a deviance from the general discourse, e.g. depicting a world map of Russia in 2020 without Crimea and without the neighboring de-facto states being recognized as independent. While this could be a “simple” mistake, there is already an announcement of a new MGIMO atlas which will show the “new developments” and most likely play out in taken-for-grantedness of persuasive cartography.

As for the popular geopolitics, in most cases, such as maps depicted in TV-shows or graffiti-maps in the public spaces are exhibitionist by their nature, since they explicitly communicate the desires of how the map should look like. However, while regarding the digital mapping platforms, like Yandex, which through depiction of the “true” picture of the world and through the usage of satellite views, practices persuasive cartography, their map was adjusted to the public need in different places: while swiftly making changes to its borders according to Russian official discourse, Yandex changed the map for Georgia, removing Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, while leaving them as such for other parts of the world. The escape from the “persuasiveness” might be achieved by fully deterritorializing the map by removing borders, however this is a subject of another inquiry of avoidance or resistance towards dominant geopolitical discourses.

On empirical observation this research unfolds the value of the concept of persuasive cartography in showing how the cartography as discourse can communicate. While explicit

exhibitionist mapping practices are more prominent in the popular geopolitics, it is also important to look at the quieter and taken-for-granted cartography of the practical (official) and formal levels, since they have structural power to geo-graph the preferred realities. However, this thesis is limited to one-sided understanding of persuasive cartography, since besides Russia there was almost no emphasis on counter-mapping practices against the imperialist cartographies and how they operate. Cartographic battlefields in persuasive and exhibitionist terms can be a subject for future research. Moreover, future engagements with the concept can focus on looking inside the recipients of cartographic practices, researching public opinion and observing how persuasive and exhibitionist cartographies shape the knowledge about how the world is being seen. Even though, maps are not almighty forces that are alone responsible for our understanding of space, they are visual discourses that with the other type of discursive practices can quietly make us take reality for granted.

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