

# Reading Schmitt geopolitically

## *Nomos*, territory and *Großraum*

**Stuart Elden**

With the 2003 translation of *The Nomos of the Earth*, a rather different set of Carl Schmitt's ideas became accessible to an anglophone audience. While previously his work had shaped debates on politics, the political, the friend/enemy distinction, the question of democracy and the sovereign decision, his ideas on international politics became available.<sup>1</sup> A 2004 conference session led to a symposium in the *Leiden Journal of International Law* and an edited book on his 'international political thought', in which *The Nomos of the Earth* is hailed as a 'missing classic' of International Relations.<sup>2</sup> In a 2008 book William Hooker describes Schmitt as 'one of the most profound and most prolific theorists of international order in the twentieth century', with *The Nomos of the Earth* likely to be guaranteed a place 'in the canon of essential IR reading'.<sup>3</sup> In another recent work we are told that Schmitt's work 'involves a complex theory of political territory'.<sup>4</sup> Hooker also suggests that Schmitt's 'bold vision of the importance of spatial concepts in shaping the possibility of political order' qualifies him as a geographer,<sup>5</sup> and a couple of sessions at the Association of American Geographers have led to a forthcoming edited book.<sup>6</sup> The interest in Schmitt, to an extent, parallels both the appropriations of Giorgio Agamben, whose own ideas draw greatly on Schmitt, particularly in terms of the 'space of exception', and the impact of Hardt and Negri's *Empire* on the thinking of global order. Schmitt apparently can help us understand terrorism, the 'war on terror', responses in terms of security, the post-Cold War world, the European Union and globalization.<sup>7</sup>

But if Schmitt is to be read geopolitically, then the same cautions that were made about reading him politically should be heeded. Schmitt's complicity with National Socialism should never be forgotten; nor should it be thought that this was merely opportunistic, or unconnected to his work on international politics. As Mark Neocleous put it in this journal almost fifteen years ago, Schmitt was a 'conservative revolutionary,

fascist and an *enemy* of the Left', and to turn him 'into a debating adversary... is a dangerous political manoeuvre'.<sup>8</sup> Here I want to make three moves in contesting the turn to Schmitt as a geopolitical theorist. First, I suggest that we cannot simply read *The Nomos of the Earth* alone, but must situate it both in its time and in relation to earlier parts of Schmitt's work. Second, I interrogate what Schmitt says about the concept of territory, surely one of the notions central to any adequate theory of international politics or geopolitics, and, following the first point, relate it to the notion of *Großraum*. Third, and more briefly, I look at Schmitt's understandings of global order and the shifts he saw in his own time. The argument is that Schmitt's work on territory, the world and global order is both politically compromised and intellectually limited, and that this is important in terms of his worth to IR or political geography. Yet rather than dismiss Schmitt out of hand, I want to show why the work is compromised and how it is limited.<sup>9</sup>

### ***The Nomos of the Earth:* resituating Schmitt**

Until relatively recently the two works by Schmitt that have had most impact – at least in anglophone debates – have been *Political Theology* (1922) and *The Concept of the Political* (1932).<sup>10</sup> While both pre-date his joining of the Nazi party they are works of that period in his intellectual development, deeply critical of the existing Weimar Republic. Many years later Schmitt published books that were direct reflections on these works: *Theory of the Partisan: Intermediate Commentary on the Concept of the Political* (1963) and *Political Theology II: The Myth of the Closure of any Political Theology* (1970).<sup>11</sup> While both these later works shed a great deal of light on his earlier ideas, nobody would turn to them alone for his views on political theology or the concept of the political. Yet there is a danger we do exactly that when we read *The Nomos of the Earth*.<sup>12</sup> *The Nomos of the Earth* was

published in 1950, after the war and during the period of de-Nazification. Yet this was not the first time Schmitt had written on such topics. This book, like *Theory of the Partisan* and *Political Theology II* must be read as his postwar reflections on these themes, and to an extent as exculpations. Schmitt himself liked to think that *The Nomos of the Earth* was a crucial moment and the beginning of his postwar work: Müller tells the story that Schmitt asked that a collection of his political writings begin with this book.<sup>13</sup> We should resist accepting this decision.

Although a long-term critic of the Treaty of Versailles, Schmitt turned to international issues in earnest around 1938. The year is not insignificant. It was connected both to his own position in the party, where debates on international politics were somewhat less policed, and events on the world stage.<sup>14</sup> While Hitler had broken the terms of Versailles when he marched troops into the demilitarized Rhineland in 1936, and through rearmament, 1938 was when his expansionist aspirations became most evident. March of that year saw the *Anschluss* with Austria – also forbidden under Versailles – and in September the Munich conference signed over the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia. Schmitt's key work is *Völkerrechtliche Großraumordnung mit Interventionsverbot für raumfremde Mächte: Ein Beitrag zum Reichsbegriff im Völkerrecht*, published in 1939.<sup>15</sup> This book had its beginnings in a lecture Schmitt delivered in Kiel on 1 April 1939, two weeks after the invasion of the remains of Czechoslovakia.<sup>16</sup> Translating this title into English is no easy task. *International Law of Großraum-Ordering with a Prohibition on Intervention for Extra-Regional Powers: A Contribution to the Concept of Reich in International Law* is probably as close as can be achieved, although this leaves two terms untranslated. *Reich*, empire, is well known, but in 1939 this could only have had one connotation. *Großraum* is much more of an issue. Literally it means 'great-space', but has a sense of a 'sphere' of influence, and 'geopolitical space' may be closer to the meaning. By the term Schmitt intends to grasp an area or region that goes beyond a single state (that is, a specific territory), to comprehend much larger scale spatial orderings, complexes or arrangements (VG 11–12).<sup>17</sup> As Ulmen notes, the term emerged in economic thought first, to comprehend how the provision of key utilities such as gas and electricity could be integrated and provided as part of a *Großraumwirtschaft*, a large-scale spatial economy, rather than a *Kleinraum*, a small-space or small-scale organization.<sup>18</sup> Before further discussion of *Großraum*, however, it is worth noting one other word in the title:

*raumfremde*. A word combining the German words for 'space' and 'stranger' sounds rather sinister, but it really just means external or extra-regional. Schmitt's particular focus is on countries outside the specific sphere of influence, the *Großraum*. These should have no right of intervention within it.

Schmitt's classic example of a *Großraum* in the wider international political-economic sense is the Monroe doctrine, where the United States declared that the whole of the Americas was off-limits to European powers, in terms of both colonization and influence. Something similar happened in Eastern Europe after the end of the Second World War. This was not universalism, but competing spheres: what would be called a multipolar rather than unified or unipolar world.<sup>19</sup> In the 1930s, though, his analysis of space and spatial politics was not simply for analytical reasons; but their legal context as part of his service of the regime.<sup>20</sup> At this time, Schmitt did not simply analyse the existence of these regions, but actively campaigned for one. This was for a kind of German-dominated *Mitteleuropa* (VG 12).<sup>21</sup> *Mitteleuropa* meant 'middle' or 'central' Europe; an extent of the continent exceeding Germany's own boundaries where they would hold strategic domination. While this would, in practice, include German-speaking peoples, and was therefore tied to the presence of a *Volk*, it was not explicitly dependent on the *Blut und Boden* elements of racialist discourse. Rather, the basis for the argument was a legalistic account of land law, partly derived from John Locke's argument about cultivation: adding value to the land gave a right of propriety ownership. As such, it came close to arguments made about 'land without people', which should be filled with people without – or without sufficient – land.<sup>22</sup> While Schmitt only occasionally uses the vocabulary of *Lebensraum*, his ideas at this time were hardly critical of, and sometimes explicitly endorsed, National Socialism's expansionist politics into the East (VG 23, 42–8).

The line drawn through Poland by the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact was one such division into regions (VG 47); the key point being that central and eastern Europe was Germany's sphere of influence, and that other world powers should not be involved in the region. Schmitt later declares that this world war is a *Raumordnungskrieg*, a war for spatial ordering.<sup>23</sup> In Schmitt's analysis, the *Großraum* cannot be reduced to the *Reich*, but it is the *Reich* that will dominate it (VG 49, 67). If this means his position has some distance from a policy of explicit annexation, this is little comfort. While some parts of the lands seized by Hitler were annexed to a greater *Reich*, and some were

occupied, other countries were simply subjugated while retaining nominal independence. The establishment of the *Reichskommissariat* Ukraine and Ostland was part of a multifaceted policy of occupation. Similarly, for Schmitt, a *Reich* was more than a mere state, territorially confined, but exercised authority beyond any nominal boundaries.<sup>24</sup> As Bendersky notes, press coverage of the time indicates that Schmitt was seen, at least by his enemies, as articulating the claims of the National Socialist movement.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, later in April 1939 Hitler began to articulate ideas of a German-dominated Monroe doctrine for Europe, as a response to President Roosevelt's demands on him to cease his territorial ambitions. Hitler declared that this was a European matter, off-limits for America. Schmitt was apparently warned from trying to assert his own prior articulation of such claims.<sup>26</sup> Schmitt complied and clearly followed the tide of opinion in his attitude to Nazi foreign policy: he says some of his most explicitly supportive comments in 1941 in a piece added to the last edition of *Völkerrechtliche Großraumordnung* (VG 64–73).

It has been suggested that Schmitt began *The Nomos of the Earth* between 1942 and 1945.<sup>27</sup> This was after Operation Barbarossa, which Schmitt considered a disaster;<sup>28</sup> and the entry of the Americans into the war. These events meant that it was increasingly clear that the tide had turned and that the German loss of the war only a matter of time. Although in 1942 Schmitt claimed that the entry of the USA into the war was not decisive, he acknowledged its seemingly unstoppable power in 1943.<sup>29</sup> That in 1942 and after Schmitt was able to take positions that do not openly seem National Socialist tells us little. Indeed, there is an effective denial of the context of the writing and publication of *The Nomos of the Earth* since, as Zarmanian notes, 'there is no mention of the Nazi occupation of much of Europe, let alone the horrors of the Holocaust, in the entire book'.<sup>30</sup> The key point to be stressed is that what Schmitt writes about international politics in the postwar book bears the boot-print of what he said about such issues in the context of National Socialist Germany.

Indeed, *The Nomos of the Earth* makes a number of similar moves to *Völkerrechtliche Großraumordnung* in analytic terms, though apparently shorn of their political resonances. Schmitt suggests that for Locke, 'the essence of political power, first and foremost, is jurisdiction over the land.' He reinforces this by quoting Locke to the effect that 'government has a direct jurisdiction only over the land' (NE 18/47).<sup>31</sup> His other key source is Immanuel Kant's argument about the distinction between *Obereigentum* and *Landes-*

*herrschaft*, supreme proprietorship and land-rulership, which Kant links to the Latin terms *dominium* and *imperium*. The first set of terms invoke private property; the second public property (NE 17/46).<sup>32</sup> Individuals can own land; states control territory. Schmitt reminds us that the Greek word *nemein*, from which *nomos* is derived, means both 'to divide' and 'to pasture' (NE 40/70). Hannah Arendt has similarly noted the relation between 'law and hedge in the word *nomos*', stressing the relation between law and boundary line or zone, and pointing out that 'the Greek word for law, *nomos*, derives from *nemein*, which means to distribute, to possess (what has been distributed) and to dwell'.<sup>33</sup> The legal is thus tied directly to the land. As Schmitt continues: '*Nomos* is the *measure* by which the ground and soil of the earth [*Grund und Boden der Erde*] in a particular order is divided and situated; it is also the form of political, social, and religious order determined by this process. Here, measure, order, and form constitute a spatially concrete unity' (NE 40/70).

## Territory

In his pre-1938 writings, Schmitt says relatively little about territory. He seemingly saw the relation of territory to the state to be essential, but equally unproblematic. As he says in *The Concept of the Political*:

The concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political. According to modern linguistic usage, the state is the political status of an organised people in an enclosed territorial area [*territorialer Geschlossenheit*]. This is nothing more than a general description [*Umschreibung*], not a conceptual determination [*Begriffsbestimmung*] of the state.<sup>34</sup>

While often reduced to simply the first line, this is an important formulation of which two things need to be underscored. First, that the territorial determination is inherent to Schmitt's understanding of the state. But, second, that this is insufficient. It is merely a paraphrase or circumlocution, an analytic judgement, an explication of terms, rather than the synthetic work that goes beyond this and that Schmitt believes is necessary. In *Political Theology* he makes another oft-quoted claim, but one which is similarly frequently reduced to a single sentence:

All central concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts. This is not only because of their historical development – in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver – but also because of their systematic structure, the



recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of those concepts.<sup>35</sup>

There are two aspects to the claim being made here. While the first part – ‘not only’ – is certainly important and worthy of investigation, the second part – ‘but also’ – is much more challenging. Political theory puts the sovereign in a privileged position, just as theology did God: that much is straightforward. But what is it about the systematic structure of state-theoretical concepts that owes a debt to theology, even if this is masked through a process of secularization? The point is not to wish to restore the theological, but rather to note what has been transformed in the process of secularization. To what extent is this the case with the notion of territory?

Schmitt’s analysis in *The Nomos of the Earth* covers a long historical period. His suggestion is that modern territorial politics emerges, in part, as a consequence of the conquest of the new world and the different sense of the world this gave. Before this time, there were empires (*Reiche*) that could be understood as *Großräume*, but they lacked any kind of order, because the idea of the earth of a whole, of a common space (*gemeinsamen Räume*), and its overall spatial order was lacking (*NE* 25/55). As he says in the opening lines of part II:

No sooner had the form [*Gestalt*] of the earth emerged as a real *globe* [*Globus*] – not just sensed as myth, but apprehensible as fact and measurable as space – than there arose a wholly new and

hitherto unimaginable problem: the spatial ordering of the entire earth [*Erdenballes*] in terms of international law. The new global image [*globale Raumbild*] required a new global spatial order. This was the situation resulting from the circumnavigation of the earth and the great discoveries of the 15th and 16th centuries. (*NE* 54/86)

There are a number of issues at stake here. Schmitt is suggesting that it was only with the explorations of the late fifteenth century that the earth as a globe actually became tangible. Of course, even the Ancient Greeks knew the earth was a sphere, but it was not demonstrably shown through circumnavigation until Magellan’s voyage of the early sixteenth century. At the same time, a number of scientific techniques were developed to map and survey the lands and seas encountered. This is the basis for the notion of measurability Schmitt suggests here. These had been anticipated by decisions such as the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, which had proposed a line being drawn from pole to pole through the Atlantic to divide Portuguese and Spanish claims to the new world (*NE* 56–7/88–9). The ‘global image’ he talks of is, literally, a ‘global space-picture’; and one of the words he uses for ‘earth’ is the ‘earth-as-ball’. Throughout *The Nomos of the Earth*, Schmitt outlines the ways in which political theory and nascent international law provided a basis for such an understanding to arise.

Schmitt sees a primitive relation between *Ortung* and *Ordnung*, placing and ordering (see *VG* 81). Thus political order is always a *geopolitical* order. This appears to be valuable to IR, whose neglect of the

spatial aspects of its questions is well known, but is superficial at best. Schmitt tends to work as if all ages have operated with a sense of territory and spatial ordering, just in different ways, rather than tracing the emergence of the categories themselves. Schmitt, as with most accounts, sees the conquest of the new world and the religious wars in Europe following the Reformation as the basis for the emergence of a distinctively modern political-legal understanding of the relation between space and politics. But there is a frustrating lack of detail and textual specificity to his arguments. Indeed, given his suggestion of the secularization of the theological, it is striking how little attention he pays to the theological arguments about the division between secular and temporal power, and how theorists of temporal power began to articulate the spatially limited and circumscribed extent of political rule as opposed to universalist aspirations. This spatial extent became both the object and the possibility of what was later understood as the idea of sovereignty. Nor, surprisingly for a legal theorist, does Schmitt pay attention to the impact of the rediscovery and reinterpretation of Roman law on political theory, especially for the relation between territory and jurisdiction, in the fourteenth century. He takes up the story with the more familiar sixteenth- and seventeenth-century figures of de Vitoria, Grotius and Pufendorf, rather than returning to Bartolus and Baldus.<sup>36</sup> While understandable in terms of his focus on *international* law, and the relation between the two spatial orders of firm land and free sea, this obscures the emergence of the modern relation between a state and its territory. Schmitt contends that if the focus is

isolated, sovereign, territorial states [*souveränen Flächenstaates*], then the facts of the matter are clear: the territory of the state [*Staatsgebiet*] is the theatre of rule [*Schauplatz des Imperiums*]; with a territorial change [*Gebietswechsel*], the agent of rule relinquishes the theatre and another sovereign agent appears on the stage. (NE 166/194)

For Schmitt, the complexities are in the international dimensions. The simplicity of his formulation obscures a lot; the English translation even more. His understanding of territory is far too static, and seemingly ahistorical. Territory, for Schmitt, remains a bounded space under the control of a group; a quasi-Weberian definition that may provide the terms to be analysed, but is hardly a theory in itself.<sup>37</sup> From Schmitt's time or before, the work of Otto Gierke, the Carlyle brothers and even his fellow National Socialist Otto Brunner are more informative for more properly historical conceptual inquiries.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps most intriguingly, Schmitt uses a range of German words for his concept of 'territory'. He talks, for instance, of 'the new territorial order [*Flächenordnung*] of the state' (NE 96/126), one which he later glosses as 'spatially self-contained, impermeable, unburdened with the problem of estate, ecclesiastical, and creedal civil wars' (NE 99/129). *Territoriale* is usually used as an adjective; like Weber he uses the term *Gebiet*, often in the phrase *Staatsgebiet*, or state-territory; here we see the use of *Flächenordnung*; and he sometimes uses the earlier term *Landeshoheit*, which was the German translation of *jus territorialis* in the treaties of Westphalia. This shows that, for him, at least four terms have a sense close to the English 'territory'. Historically and politically much more needs to be said about these concepts and vocabulary, and how they relate to earlier terms that demarcate the relation between place and power. But Schmitt is frustratingly imprecise: reason enough to be cautious about appropriating what he does say, especially when mediated through translation. Hooker suggests that 'territory is as close as we come to a foundation in Schmitt's thought, and the idea of trying to situate real politics without it seems absurd and fanciful.'<sup>39</sup> But it is not at all clear that Schmitt means the cohesion that the collapsing of these terms in English translation implies. He makes the valid claim that 'space, soil, land, field, area, terrain, territory and district [*Raum, Boden, Land, Feld, Fläche, Gelände, Gebiet, Bezirk*]' are not simply terminological nuances and interchangeable terms (VG 76), but never spells out the differences or accounts for their conceptual histories. He also sometimes runs the different concepts together to strong rhetorical effect. At one point in 1939, for instance, he suggests that legal doctrine's idea of a *Raumtheorie* actually implied the very opposite of a

concrete representation of space and grasped land, soil, territory, state-territory [*Land, Boden, Territorium, Staatsgebiet*] indifferently as a 'space' in the sense of an empty flat area with added depth and linear borders [*einer leeren Flächen- und Tiefendimension mit Lineargrenzen*]. (VG 16)

Schmitt wants to rescue the idea of territory – and more explicitly *Großraum* – from a 'mathematically-neutral, empty concept of space' (VG 14, 75, 76, 79). Such an argument concerning space and territory has been made elsewhere. Yet while for Schmitt this is because it is neglectful of a spiritual, Völkish sense of place (VG 77), other accounts see this more powerfully as being complicit with the calculative strategies of the state and capitalism.

## A New World Order?

If the transitions Schmitt alludes to gave birth to the 'modern' spatial order, he is clear that in the twentieth century there was yet another transition. This is the key claim of *The Nomos of the Earth*, that a new spatial-political order is taking shape; and there is a need to understand it. It is here that the concepts of *Großraum* and territory are disassociated. Within a *Großraum*, Schmitt now claims, dominant powers exercise influence, but do not seek to incorporate the land as with previous colonization. The first step, Schmitt suggests, is that the dominant power is not seeking the territorial annexation (*territoriale Annexation*) of the controlled state, but rather to absorb it into its spatial sphere of influence, its *spatiale Bereich*, spatial field or area, which Schmitt calls its *Raumhoheit*, its spatial supremacy (NE 225–6/252–3).

The external, emptied space [*äußere, entleerte Raum*] of the controlled state's territorial sovereignty [*territorialen Souveränität*] remains inviolate, but the functional [*sachliche*] content of this sovereignty is changed by the guarantees of the controlling power's economic *Großraum*. This is how the modern type of intervention treaties came about. Political control and domination were based on intervention, while the territorial *status quo* remained guaranteed. The controlling state had the right to protect independence or private property, the maintenance of order and security, and the preservation of the legitimacy or legality of a government. Simultaneously, on other grounds, it was free, at its own discretion, to interfere in the affairs of the controlled state. Its right of intervention was secured by footholds, naval bases, refuelling stations, military and administrative outposts, and other forms of cooperation, both internal and external. The controlling state's right of intervention was recognized in treaties and agreements, so that, in a strictly legal sense, it was possible to claim that this was no longer intervention. (NE 225/252)

Schmitt, then, is suggesting that there is a fragmentation of how state control of space is understood. On the one hand, there is the preservation of existing territorial divisions, fixing of boundaries and the reinforcement of settlements. In 1950, with the UN Charter only five years old, this would seem to make sense. It was the culmination of previous attempts to fix boundaries in Europe, such as the Locarno treaty of twenty years before. But Schmitt is simultaneously saying that this space, while fixed in terms of its external limits, is emptied out, hollowed out. Internally, the idea that a state is sovereign within its boundaries – the late medieval notion of *Rex est imperator in regno suo*, that the king is the emperor within his own kingdom

– is dissolved. A situation that was wrestled from the Pope only with struggle both in practice and in ideas is no more. Economically, at least, sovereignty is worth little, even if it appears that the 'territorial *status quo*' is preserved. Schmitt proposes that in the early modern period the struggle was over the enactment of the principle *cuius regio, eius religio* (NE 99/128)<sup>40</sup> – to whom the region, the religion; a principle of religious freedom put forward at the 1555 Diet of Augsburg – and that the secular equivalent of this was *cuius regio, eius economica* – to whom the region, the economy. A fundamental aspect of a sovereign state is not simply to decide on 'such concepts as independence, public order, legality, and legitimacy', but also on 'its constitution of property and economy' (NE 226/252–3). Today this has been reversed to *cuius economica, eius regio* (NE 285/308), economic power gives regional control. Economic power in that fundamental sense is no longer an option for most states. Religious struggles give birth to modern politics; economics is the central decision of a political regime; now politics becomes reduced as economics is predetermined.

As Schmitt suggests:

Territorial sovereignty [*territoriale Souveränität*] was transformed into an empty space for socio-economic processes. The external territorial form [*territorial Gebietsbestand*] with its linear boundaries was guaranteed, but not the substance of territorial integrity [*territorialen Integrität*], its social and economic content. The space of economic power determined the sphere [*Bereich*] of international law. (NE 226/252)

If it is true that individuals own land but states control territory, then it is the *Reich* that will dominate the *Großraum*. In the immediate postwar period, this may make a lot of sense of the relative spheres of the USA and the USSR. Indeed, in one of the many seemingly concluding statements of the book, Schmitt mentions the London Charter of 8 August 1945 as a moment when 'East and West finally came together and agreed. Criminalization now took its course' (NE 255/280).<sup>41</sup> What was this charter and why was this date significant? The charter was that setting up the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal for war crimes; on the same day the Soviet Union declared war on Japan, invading Manchuria.

But the idea of competing *Großräumen* with their own rules and enforcements needs to be much more thoroughly interrogated if it is to help understand the post-Cold War period, where such understandings have become more truly global. As I have argued at length elsewhere, the term used in the UN Charter,

‘territorial integrity’, has much more generally been split apart: territorial preservation seen as non-negotiable; territorial sovereignty as entirely contingent.<sup>42</sup> The US-led interventions in 2001 and 2003 took the sovereignty of Iraq and Afghanistan as subject to intervention because of their failure to meet particular codes of behaviour, yet subsequently the polities themselves were to be preserved at all costs. In particular, questioning their spatial constitution was entirely off the table, even as their sovereignty remains profoundly compromised through occupation. Similar situations can be found in Kosovo and Sierra Leone with the notion of ‘humanitarian intervention’. Indeed, it was long a rhetorical trope of Tony Blair to insist on the territorial integrity of places he was about to bomb. Yet for the Schmitt of *The Nomos of the Earth* there is no clear sense of why any of this might be happening, what it produces and to what extent we should find it worthy of embrace or critique. Schmitt sees the ‘plurality of *großer Räume* or the global spatial order of a unitary dominated world [*einer einheitlich beherrschten Welt*]’ as ‘the great antithesis of world politics’, as if these were the only possibilities (NE 220/247). Schmittian accounts today founder on similar rocks. Are different spheres of US, European, Chinese and Russian *Großräumen* really to be preferred to a unipolar world?<sup>43</sup>

### Blank space: IR and geopolitics

Schmitt is more geopolitical than most International Relations theorists. He undoubtedly says more about territory – historically, conceptually and politically – than most accounts of the international order. But these are hardly major challenges. He explicitly acknowledges the influence of geographers on his work, singling out the imperialist figure of Halford Mackinder, who proposed the heartland theory of global control (NE 5/37).<sup>44</sup> His debt to Friedrich Ratzel, the writer of the 1901 essay ‘Lebensraum’, is also important.<sup>45</sup> It would be a regressive step indeed if Schmitt’s use of Mackinder or Ratzel somehow became an influence on modern political geography, or if his work proved to be the basis of the injection of a political-spatial sensibility which International Relations so sorely needs.<sup>46</sup> If such themes deserve attention, as they surely do, then a dialogue between these disciplines might be a better start. If the search is outside, then other theorists such as Lefebvre and Foucault have much more to offer. Foucault, especially in recently published lectures, offers much more by way of a historical and conceptual purchase on territory; Lefebvre enables a much more progressive understanding of the political and eco-

nomic aspects of such questions.<sup>47</sup> But the history of the concept of territory remains to be written. The one area where Schmitt’s work here may be worth a little more interrogation is his use of a broader vocabulary than simply the German *Territorium*, but the range of complicated terms including *Gebiet*, *Land* and words derived from *Fläche*.

To what extent the concept exceeds the practice is debatable. In this regard we should also remember that the notion of territory is frequently subsumed in his work into a wider *Großraum*, for which we lack a simple English equivalent. If somewhat obscured in the postwar *The Nomos of the Earth*, the lineage of this term is essential to bear in mind. Even in his later work this remains the dominant concept for world-ordering. Yet here again, the gains from Schmitt seem minimal. In fact, one of the reasons that Schmitt seems so amenable to IR is that he repeats, anticipates and lends a spurious credibility to so many of the tired clichés of that discipline, concerning, for example, the Westphalian system and the challenges to it today. Most fundamentally, it must be remembered that Schmitt is not only offering something approaching a theory of geopolitical space, but was once a passionate advocate of a German *Großraum*. As much as he tries to obscure the explicit political context in which its ideas were forged, *The Nomos of the Earth* is a deeply reactionary text. He must always be read politically, and, if he is to be appropriated for insights into international relations or political geography, *geopolitically*. This is a deliberately chosen term. Over the past couple of decades, attempts have been made to reappropriate the notion of ‘geopolitics’, with its imperial connotations, as a ‘critical geopolitics’. But just as Mackinder, Ratzel, Rudolf Kjellén, Karl Haushofer and others need careful historical, contextual and political readings in such a project, in order to recognize the limits of their work and the reactionary politics that accompanies them, so too does Schmitt. Hooker makes the point that Schmitt is often characterized as ‘an arcane and reductive Nazi who has little to offer current debates’, and that ‘the invocation of Schmitt is dangerous, seductive and destructive’. He claims that both cannot be true.<sup>48</sup> Yet it is entirely possible that they are. While his work does have little to offer, it is precisely because he appears to be useful that he is so dangerous. The seductiveness is that he seems to transcend his circumstances and political views, when remaining deeply rooted in them. The anointing of Schmitt as a geopolitical theorist with contemporary relevance is thus a serious error, intellectually and politically.

## Notes

1. The earlier literature is extensive. For samplings, see David Dyzenhaus, ed., *Law as Politics: Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 1998; and Chantal Mouffe, ed., *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, Verso, London, 1999.
2. Louiza Odysseos and Fabio Petito, 'Introduction: The International Political Thought of Carl Schmitt', in Louiza Odysseos and Fabio Petito, eds, *The International Political Thought of Carl Schmitt: Terror, Liberal War and the Crisis of Global Order*, Routledge, London, 2007, pp. 1–17, p. 2. See Louiza Odysseos and Fabio Petito, eds, 'The International Theory of Carl Schmitt', *Leiden Journal of International Law*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2006, pp. 1–103. For a critique, see David Chandler, 'The Revival of Carl Schmitt in International Relations: The Last Refuge of Critical Theorists?' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2008, pp. 27–48, and the subsequent exchange.
3. William Hooker, *Carl Schmitt's International Thought: Order and Orientation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009, p. 3.
4. Kam Shapiro, *Carl Schmitt and the Intensification of Politics*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham MD, 2008, p. 68.
5. Hooker, *Carl Schmitt's International Thought*, p. 196.
6. Stephen Legg, ed., *Geographies of the Nomos: Schmitt, Spatiality, and Sovereignty*, forthcoming.
7. As with works cited above, see William Rasch, ed., 'World Orders: Confronting Carl Schmitt's *The Nomos of the Earth*', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 104, no. 2, 2005, pp. 177–392; and Gabriella Slomp, *Carl Schmitt and the Politics of Hostility, Violence and Terror*, Palgrave, London, 2009. For a critique of the appropriation of Schmitt in security studies, see Mark Neocleous, 'The Fascist Moment: Security, Exclusion, Extermination', *Studies in Social Justice*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2009, pp. 23–37.
8. Mark Neocleous, 'Friend or Enemy? Reading Schmitt Politically', *Radical Philosophy* 79, September/October 1996, pp. 13–23, p. 21. See also the more documentary account in Jan-Werner Müller, *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Post-War European Thought*, Yale University Press, New Haven CT, 2003. To answer the obvious charge that this is a bit rich coming from someone so indebted to Heidegger, see the analysis in Stuart Elden, *Speaking against Number: Heidegger, Language and the Politics of Calculation*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2006, which tries to suggest that what insights he has can only be used having passed through detailed textual, contextual and political analysis.
9. In this regard, this article bears more comparison to the papers in 'Schmitt's Nomos of the Earth', *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2004, pp. 492–550.
10. Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen: Text von 1932 mit einem Vorwort und drei Corollarien* (1932), Duncker & Humblot, Berlin, 2002; *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996; *Politische Theologie: Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität* (1922), Duncker & Humblot, Berlin, 2009; *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1985.
11. Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie II: Die Legende von der Erledigung jeder Politischen Theologie*, Duncker & Humblot, Berlin, 1970; *Political Theology II: The Myth of the Closure of any Political Theology*, trans. Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2008; *Theorie des Partisanen: Zwischenbemerkung zum Begriff des Politischen* (1963), Duncker & Humblot, Berlin, 2006; *Theory of the Partisan: Intermediate Commentary on the Concept of the Political*, trans. Gregory L. Ulmen, Telos, New York, 2007.
12. Carl Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum* (1950), Duncker & Humblot, Berlin, 1997; *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum*, trans. G.L. Ulmen, Telos, New York, 2003 (hereafter cited in text as *NE*, with German and English pagination; I have frequently modified the translation).
13. Müller, *A Dangerous Mind*, p. 87.
14. Joseph W. Bendersky, *Carl Schmitt: Theorist for the Reich*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1983, pp. 250–51; Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy: An Intellectual Portrait of Carl Schmitt*, Verso, London, 2000, p. 226.
15. Carl Schmitt, *Völkerrechtliche Großraumordnung mit Interventionsverbot für raumfremde Mächte: Ein Beitrag zum Reichsbegriff im Völkerrecht* (1941), Duncker & Humblot, Berlin, 1991 (hereafter cited as *VG*). See also the collection *Staat, Großraum, Nomos: Arbeiten aus den Jahren 1916–1969*, ed. Günter Maschke, Duncker & Humblot, Berlin, 1995. The argument about the pairings of pre- and postwar works on related themes is made in Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward, 'Editors' Introduction', in Schmitt, *Political Theology II*, pp. 1–29, pp. 4–5.
16. Carl Schmitt, *Positionen und Begriffe im Kampf mit Weimar – Genf – Versailles, 1923–1939* (1940), Duncker & Humblot, Berlin, 1988, p. 317.
17. The literature on this in English is not extensive. See Bendersky, *Carl Schmitt*, pp. 250–62; Jean-François Kervégan, 'Carl Schmitt and "World Unity"', in Mouffe, ed., *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, pp. 54–74; Mika Luoma-Aho, 'Geopolitics and Grosspolitics: From Carl Schmitt to E.H. Carr and James Burnham', in Odysseos and Petito, eds, *The International Political Thought of Carl Schmitt*, pp. 36–55; Hooker, *Carl Schmitt's International Thought*, pp. 126–55; and – by far the best – Peter Stirk, 'Carl Schmitt's *Völkerrechtliche Grossraumordnung*', *History of Political Thought*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1999, pp. 357–74.
18. G.L. Ulmen, 'Translator's Introduction', *NE* 23. See *VG* 12, where Schmitt recognizes but rejects the relation.
19. See Schmitt, *Positionen und Begriffe*, pp. 295–302.
20. This had been the case in the 1920s in his analysis of the Rhine region. See Schmitt, *Positionen und Begriffe*, pp. 26–33, 97–108.
21. Friedrich Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, Georg Reimer, Berlin, 1915; see H.C. Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action 1815–1945*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1955, particularly pp. 194–217; Peter Stirk, ed., *Mitteleuropa: History and Prospects*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1994.
22. The classic text on this was Hans Grimm, *Volk ohne Raum*, Albert Langen, Munich, 1926.
23. Schmitt, *Staat, Großraum, Nomos*, p. 433.
24. Balakrishnan, *The Enemy*, p. 237.
25. Bendersky, *Carl Schmitt*, p. 258.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 258–9. For a detailed discussion, see Lothar Gruchmann, *Nationalsozialistische Grossraumordnung*:

- Die Konstruktion einer 'deutscher Monroe-Doctrin'*, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Stuttgart, 1962.
27. G.L. Ulmen, 'Translator's Note and Acknowledgements', *NE* 35.
  28. Balakrishnan, *The Enemy*, p. 240, suggests that this is the subtext of Schmitt, *Land und Meer: Eine weltgeschichtliche Betrachtung*, Philipp Reclam, Leipzig, 1942.
  29. Schmitt, *Staat, Großraum, Nomos*, pp. 431, 447.
  30. Thalin Zarmanian, 'Carl Schmitt and the Problem of Legal Order: From Domestic to International', *Leiden Journal of International Law*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2006, pp. 41–67, p. 55. For minor exceptions, see *NE* 214–16/242–3, 221 n1/248 n10 on Abyssinia and the Munich Agreement.
  31. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, Second Treatise, §121, p. 349.
  32. See also *NE* 171/199 where this is related to state and colonial territory. See Immanuel Kant, *The Philosophy of Law*, trans. W. Hastie, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1887, p. 182.
  33. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1958, p. 63 n62.
  34. Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, p. 20; Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 19, translation modified.
  35. Schmitt, *Politische Theologie*, p. 43; *Political Theology*, p. 36, translation modified.
  36. Baldus de Ubaldis is never mentioned; the one substantive reference to Bartolus of Sassoferrato (*NE* 33–4/64) is misleading.
  37. In *Die Diktatur von den Anfängen des modernen Souveränitätsgedankens, bis zum proletarischen Klassenkampf*, Duncker & Humblot, Munich, 1921, p. 190, Schmitt describes the 'state of emergency' in terms reminiscent of Weber, as establishing 'an unconstitutional situation for a determined territory [ein bestimmtes Gebiet]'.
  38. Otto Gierke, *Das Deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht*, 4 vols, Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, Berlin, 1868–1913; R.W. Carlyle and A.J. Carlyle, *A History of Mediaeval Political Theory in the West*, 6 vols, William Blackwell, Edinburgh, 1903–1936; Otto Brunner, *Land und Herrschaft: Grundfragen der territorialen Verfassungsgeschichte Südostdeutschlands im Mittelalter* (1939), Vienna, 1942.
  39. Hooker, *Carl Schmitt's International Thought*, p. 101.
  40. See Schmitt, *Politische Theologie II*, p. 107; *Political Theology II*, p. 114.
  41. Schmitt also blames the interwar politics of the allies at Yalta for Czechoslovakia's ending up in the 'eastern Großraum', at *NE* 221 n1/248 n10.
  42. See Stuart Elden, *Terror and Territory: The Spatial Extent of Sovereignty*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2009.
  43. See Chantal Mouffe, 'Schmitt's Vision of a Multipolar World', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 104, no. 2, 2005, pp. 245–51.
  44. For an excellent recent study, see Gerry Kearns, *Geopolitics and Empire: The Legacy of Halford Mackinder*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009.
  45. The explicit references in *NE* 56/88, 258/283 are rather muted. See, though, *VG* 76, 78.
  46. See, for example, Hooker, *Carl Schmitt's International Thought*, pp. 69–101.
  47. For discussions, see Stuart Elden, 'Governmentality, Calculation, Territory', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2007, pp. 562–80; and Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden, 'Henri Lefebvre on State, Space, Territory', *International Political Sociology*, vol. 3, no. 4, 2009, pp. 353–77.
  48. Hooker, *Carl Schmitt's International Thought*, p. 2.

# Marx & Philosophy

## REVIEW OF BOOKS

### Announcing a new online review of books covering Marxism and philosophy

- An important new resource for the left
- New reviews added regularly
- Part of the redesigned Marx & Philosophy Society web site
- Edited by Sean Sayers and members of the Society

For reviews and details of how to subscribe, visit:

**[marxandphilosophy.org.uk/reviewofbooks](http://marxandphilosophy.org.uk/reviewofbooks)**