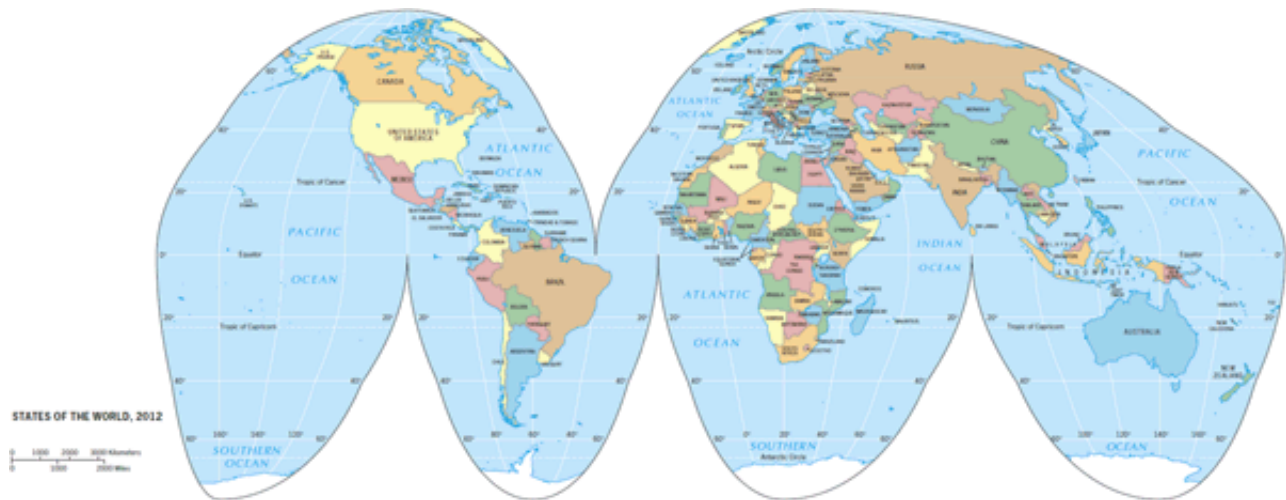


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## HOW IS SPACE POLITICALLY ORGANIZED INTO STATES AND NATIONS?

**Political geography** is the study of the political organization of the world. Political geographers study the spatial manifestations of political processes at various scales: how politically meaningful spaces came into being and how these spaces influence outcomes. At the global scale, we have a world divided into individual countries, which are commonly called states. A **state** is a politically organized territory with a permanent population, a defined territory, and a government. To be a state, an entity must be recognized as such by other states.

The present-day division of the world political map into states is a product of endless accommodations and adjustments within and between human societies. On the conventional political map, a mosaic of colors is used to represent more than 200 countries and territories, a visualization that accentuates the separation of these countries by boundaries (Fig. 8.3). The political map of the world is the world map most of us learn first. We look at it, memorize it, and name the countries and perhaps each country's capital. It hangs in the front of our classrooms, is used to organize maps in our textbooks, and becomes so natural looking to us that *we begin to think it is natural*.



**Figure 8.3 States of the World, 2011.**

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The world map of states is anything but natural. The mosaic of states on the map represents a way of politically organizing space (into states) that is less than 400 years old. Just as people create places, imparting character to space and shaping culture, people make states. States and state boundaries are made, shaped, and refined by people, their actions and their history. Even the idea of dividing the world into territorially defined states is one created and exported by people.

Central to the state are the concepts of **territory** and territoriality. As geographer Stuart Elden has pointed out, the modern concept of territory arose in early modern Europe as a system of political units came into being with fixed, distinct boundaries and at least a quasi-independent government. **Territoriality** is the process by which such units come into being. Territoriality, however, can take place at different scales. In a book published in 1986, geographer Robert Sack defined **territoriality** as “the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area.” Sack sees human territoriality as a key ingredient in the construction of social and political spaces. He calls for a better understanding of the human organization of the planet through a consideration of how and why certain territorial strategies are pursued at different times and across places.

Today, territoriality is tied to the concept of **sovereignty**. As Sack explained, territorial behavior implies an expression of control over a territory. In international law, the concept of sovereignty is territorially defined. Sovereignty means having a recognized right to control a territory both politically and militarily. The states of the world have the last say, legally, at

least, over their respective territories. When the international community recognizes an entity as a state, it also recognizes the entity as being sovereign within its borders. Under international law, states are sovereign, and they have the right to defend their **territorial integrity** against incursion from other states.

## The Modern State Idea

In the 1600s, Europeans were not the only ones who behaved territorially, organized themselves into distinct political units, or claimed sovereignty. Because territoriality manifests itself in different ways, the idea of the state appeared in a variety of forms across world regions 400 or 500 years ago. The role territory played in defining the state and the sovereign varied by region.

In North America, American Indian tribes behaved territorially but not necessarily exclusively. Plains tribes shared hunting grounds with neighboring tribes who were friendly, and they fought over hunting grounds with neighboring tribes who were unfriendly. Territorial boundaries were usually not delineated on the ground. Plains tribes also held territory communally so that individual tribal members did not “own” land. In a political sense, territoriality was most expressed by tribes within the Plains. Similarly, in Southeast Asia and in Africa, state-like political entities also existed. In all of these places, and in Europe before the mid-1600s, rulers held sway over a people, but there was no collective agreement among rulers about how territory would be organized or what rulers could do within their respective domains.

The European state idea deserves particular attention because it most influenced the development of the modern state system. We can see traces of this state idea more than two millennia ago near the southeastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, where distinct kingdoms emerged within discrete territories. Greek philosophy on governance and aspects of Ancient Greece and Rome play parts in the modern state idea. Political geographer Rhys Jones studied state formation in the United Kingdom during the European Middle Ages. He found the first states in Wales were small in size but had the attributes of the modern state. In the late Middle Ages, powerful rulers constructed more sizable states in what are now the United Kingdom, France, and Spain. We cannot trace a clear evolution in the European state idea, but we can see aspects of the modern state in many places and at many points in European history.

By the early seventeenth century, states including the Republic of Venice, Brandenburg, the Papal States of central Italy, the Kingdom of Hungary, and several minor German states created a complicated patchwork of political entities, many with poorly defined borders. The emerging political state was accompanied by **mercantilism**, which led to the accumulation of wealth through plunder, colonization, and the protection of home industries and foreign markets. Rivalry and competition intensified in Europe as well as abroad. Powerful royal families struggled for dominance in eastern and southern Europe. Instability was the rule, strife occurred frequently, and repressive governments prevailed.

The event in European history that marks the beginning of the modern state system is the **Peace of Westphalia**, negotiated in 1648 among the princes of the states making up the Holy Roman Empire, as well as a few neighboring states. The treaties that constituted this peace concluded Europe's most destructive internal struggle over religion during the Thirty Years' War. They contained new language recognizing the rights of rulers within defined, demarcated territories. The language of the treaties laid the foundations for a Europe made up of mutually recognized territorial states.

The rise of the Westphalian state system marked a fundamental change in the relationship between people and territory. In previous eras, *where* a society lived constituted its territory; in the Westphalian system it became the *territory* that defined the *society*. Territory is treated as a fixed element of political identification, and states define exclusive, nonoverlapping territories.

Even well after the Peace of Westphalia, absolutist rulers controlled most European states. During the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, the development of an increasingly wealthy middle class proved to be the undoing of absolutism in parts of western Europe. City-based merchants gained money, influence, and prestige, while the power of the nobility declined. The traditional measure of affluence—land—became less important. The merchants and businessmen demanded political recognition. In the 1780s, a series of upheavals began that changed the sociopolitical face of the continent, most notably the French Revolution of 1789. The revolution, conducted in the name of the French people, ushered in an era in which the foundations for political authority came to be seen as resting with a state's citizenry, not with a hereditary monarch.

## Nations

The popular media and press often use the words *nation*, *state*, and *country* interchangeably. Political geographers use *state* and *country* interchangeably (often preferring *state*), but the word *nation* is distinct. *State* is a legal term in international law, and the international political community has some agreement about what this term means. *Nation*, on the other hand, is a culturally defined term, and few people agree on exactly what it means. Some argue that a nation is simply the people within a state's borders; in this case, all people who live in Germany. Yet this approach gives little sense of how politically charged the concept of nation really is.

In keeping with the way the term was originally used, we define **nation** as a group of people who think of themselves as one based on a sense of shared culture and history, and who seek some degree of political-territorial autonomy. This idea encompasses different kinds of culturally defined nations. Nations variously see themselves as sharing a religion, a language, an ethnicity, or a history. How a nation is defined depends on the people who see themselves as part of the nation. One of the most widely read scholars on nationalism today, Benedict Anderson, defines the nation as an “imagined community”—it is imagined because one will never meet all of the people in the nation, and it is a community because one nonetheless sees oneself as part of that nation.

All nations are ultimately mixtures of different peoples. The French are often considered to be the classic example of a nation, but the most French-feeling person in France today is the product of a melding together of a wide variety of cultural groups over time, including Celts, Ancient Romans, Franks, Goths, and many more. If the majority of inhabitants of modern France belong to the French nation, it is because, during the formation of the French territorial state, the people came to think of themselves as French—not because the French nation existed as a primordial group that has always been distinct.

People in a nation tend to look to their past and think, “we have been through much together,” and when they look to their future they often think, “whatever happens we will go through it together.” A nation is identified by its own membership; therefore, we cannot simply define a nation as the people within a territory. Indeed, rarely does a nation's extent correspond precisely with a state's borders. Many countries have multiple nations within their borders. For example, in the country of Belgium, two nations, the Flemish and the Walloons, exist within the state borders.

## Nation-State

The European idea that the map of *states* should look like the map of *nations* became the aspiration of governing elites around the world. A **nation-state** is a politically organized area in which nation and state occupy the same space. Since few (if any) states are nation-states, the importance of the concept of the nation-state lies primarily in the idea behind it. In the effort to form nation-states, some states have chosen to privilege one ethnic group at the expense of others, and other states have outlined a common history and culture. Either way, the state works to temper identities that might challenge the state's territorial integrity.

The goal of creating nation-states dates to the French Revolution, which sought to replace control by a monarchy or colonizer with an imagined cultural-historical community of French people. The Revolution initially promoted **democracy**, the idea that the people are the ultimate sovereign—that is, the people, the *nation*, have the ultimate say over what happens within the state. Each nation, it was argued, should have its own sovereign territory, and only when that was achieved would true democracy and stability exist.

People began to see the idea of the nation-state as the ultimate form of political-territorial organization, the right expression of sovereignty, and the best route to stability. The key problem associated with the idea of the nation-state is that it assumes the presence of reasonably well-defined, stable nations living contiguously within discrete territories. Very few places in the world come close to satisfying this requirement. Nonetheless, in the Europe of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many believed the assumption could be met.

The quest to form nation-states in the Europe of the 1800s was associated with a rise in nationalism. We can view nationalism from two vantage points: that of the people and that of the state. When *people* have a strong sense of nationalism, they have a loyalty to and a belief in the nation itself. This loyalty does not necessarily coincide with the borders of the state. A *state*, in contrast, seeks to promote a sense of nationhood that coincides with its own borders. In the

name of nationalism, a state with more than one nation within its borders may attempt to build a single national identity out of the divergent people within its borders. In the name of nationalism, a state may also promote conflict with another state that it sees as threatening to its territorial integrity.

Even though the roots of nationalism lie in earlier centuries, the nineteenth century was the true age of nationalism in Europe. In some cases the pursuit of nationalist ambitions produced greater cohesion within long-established states, such as in France or Spain; in other cases nationalism became a rallying cry for bringing together people with some shared historical or cultural elements into a single state, such as in the cases of Italy or Germany. Similarly, people who saw themselves as separate nations within other states or empires launched successful separatist movements. Ireland, Norway, and Poland all serve as examples of this phenomenon.

European state leaders used the tool of nationalism to strengthen the state. The modern map of Europe is still fragmented, but much less so than in the 1600s (Fig. 8.4). In the process of creating nation-states in Europe, states absorbed smaller entities into their borders, resolved conflicts by force as well as by negotiation, and defined their borders more precisely.



**Figure 8.4 European Political Fragmentation in 1648.**

A generalized map of the fragmentation of western Europe in the 1600s. *Adapted with permission from: Geoffrey Barraclough, ed. The Times Concise Atlas of World History, 5th ed., Hammond Incorporated, 1998.*

## Guest Field Note Cluj-Napoca, Romania

To Hungarians, Transylvania is significant because it was an important part of the Hungarian Kingdom for a thousand years. Many of their great leaders were born and buried there, and many of their great churches, colleges, and architectural achievements are located there too. For example, in the city of Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár in Hungarian) is St. Michael's Cathedral, and next to it is the statue of King Matthias, one of Hungary's greatest kings. Romanians have long lived in the territory too, tracing their roots back to the Roman Empire. To Romanian nationalists, the existence of Roman ruins in Transylvania is proof of their Roman ancestry and their right to govern Transylvania because their ancestors lived in Transylvania before those of the Hungarians. When archaeologists found Roman ruins around St. Michael's Cathedral and King Matthias's statue, they immediately began excavating them, which in turn aggravated the ethnic Hungarians.

Traveling in Transylvania made me very aware of how important places are to peoples and how contested they can be.



**Figure 8.5**

*Credit: George White, South Dakota State University*

To help people within the borders relate to the dominant national ideal, states provide security, infrastructure, and goods and services for their citizens. States support education, health care, and a military to preserve the state and to create a connection between the people and the state—to build a nation-state. European states even used the colonization of Africa and Asia in the late 1800s and early 1900s as a way to promote nationalism. People could take pride in their nation's vast colonial empire. People could identify themselves with their nation, be it French, Dutch, or British, by contrasting themselves with the people in the colonies whom they defined as mystical or savage. By defining themselves in relation to an “Other,” the state and the people helped identify the supposed “traits” of their nation; in so doing, they began to build a nation-state.

## Multistate Nations, Multinational States, and Stateless Nations

People with a sense of belonging to a particular nation rarely all reside within a single state's borders. The lack of fit between nation and state therefore creates complications. Such complications might include states containing more than one nation, nations residing in more than one state, and even nations without a state at all.

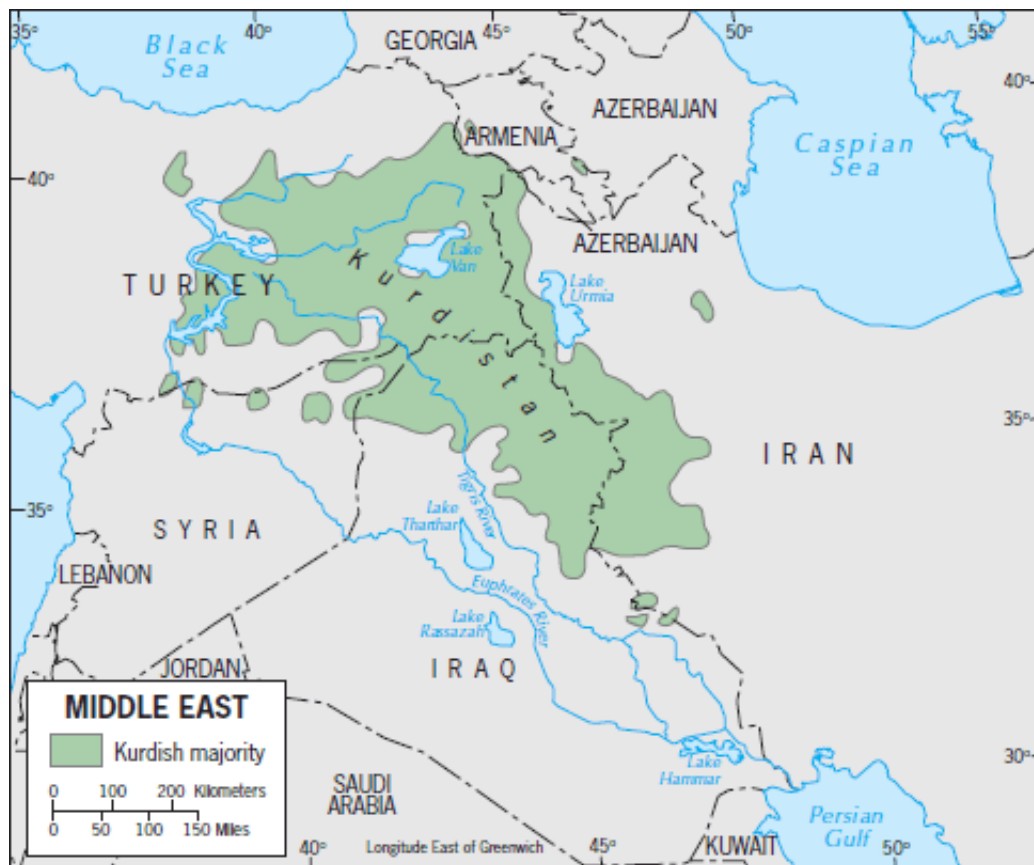
Nearly every state in the world is a **multinational state**, a state with more than one nation inside its borders. The people living in the former state of Yugoslavia never achieved a strong sense of Yugoslav nationhood. Millions of people who were citizens of Yugoslavia never had a Yugoslav nationality. They long identified themselves as Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, or members of other nations or ethnic groups. Yugoslavia was a state that was always comprised of more than one nation, and it eventually collapsed.

When a nation stretches across borders and across states, the nation is called a **multistate nation**. Political geographer George White studied the states of Romania and Hungary and their overlapping nations (Fig. 8.5). As he has noted, the territory of Transylvania is currently in the middle of the state of Romania, but it has not always been that way. For two centuries, Hungary's borders stretched far enough east to encompass Transylvania. The Transylvanian region today is populated by Romanians and by Hungarians, and places within Transylvania are seen as pivotal to the histories of both

Hungary and Romania. In keeping with the nation-state ideal, it is not surprising that both Romania and Hungary have interests in Transylvania, and some Hungarians continue to look upon the region as territory that has been illegitimately lost. White explains how important territory is to a nation: “The control and maintenance of territory is as crucial as the control and maintenance of a national language, religion, or a particular way of life. Indeed, a language, religion or way of life is difficult to maintain without control over territory.” In the case of Romania and Hungary, as in other similar situations, territory is as important as “language, religion, or way of life.” When multiple nations or states claim attachments to the same piece of territory, the potential for conflict is significant.

Another complication that arises from the lack of fit between nations and states is that some nations do not have a state; they are **stateless nations**. The Palestinians are an example of a stateless nation. The Palestinian Arabs have gained control over the Gaza Strip and fragments of the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and Golan Heights. These territories may form the foundations of a future state. The United Nations Agency for Palestinian Refugees records 4.9 million registered Palestinian refugees. Well over half of the registered Palestinian refugees continue to live in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and other Arab states. Nearly 2 million Palestinians live in the Gaza Strip and West Bank; however, the international community does not universally recognize the Palestinian lands as a state.

A much larger stateless nation is the Kurds whose population of between 25 and 30 million live in an area called Kurdistan that covers parts of six states (Fig. 8.6). In the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, the United Nations established a Kurdish Security Zone north of the 36th parallel in Iraq, and that area continues to have significant autonomy in present-day Iraq. The no-fly zone in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq has created a relatively peaceful place compared to continued violence in southern Iraq. Violent acts still mar the Kurdish north, but prosperity has also come to the region through petrodollars. An October 2008 travel article in the *New York Times* described new theme parks and gated communities that reflect the affluence in the city of Erbil, which is the Kurdish capital city in Iraq. The article also described Erbil's 6000-year-old citadel as a reminder that the city is “one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world.”



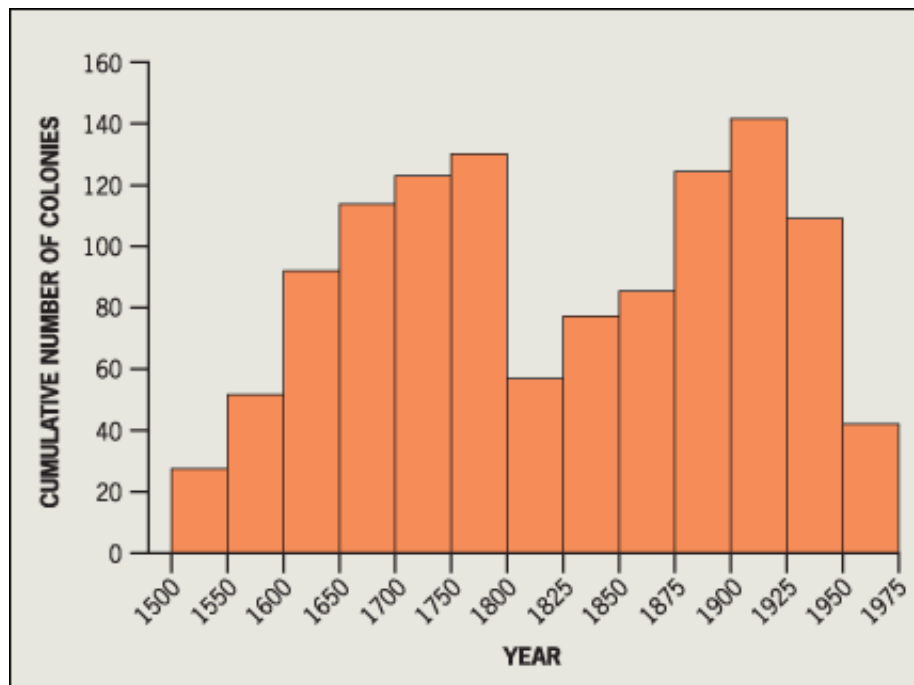
**Figure 8.6** Kurdish Region of the Middle East.

© H. J. de Blij, P. O. Muller, and John Wiley & Sons.

An independent Kurdish state seems unlikely, at least in the near future. In addition to northern Iraq, the Kurds form the largest minority in Turkey where the city of Diyarbakir is the unofficial Kurdish capital of Turkey. Relations between the 10 million Kurds in Turkey and the Turkish government in Ankara have been volatile, and Turkey regards the Kurdish region as part of the state's core territory. Without the consent of Turkey, establishing a truly independent Kurdish state will be difficult.

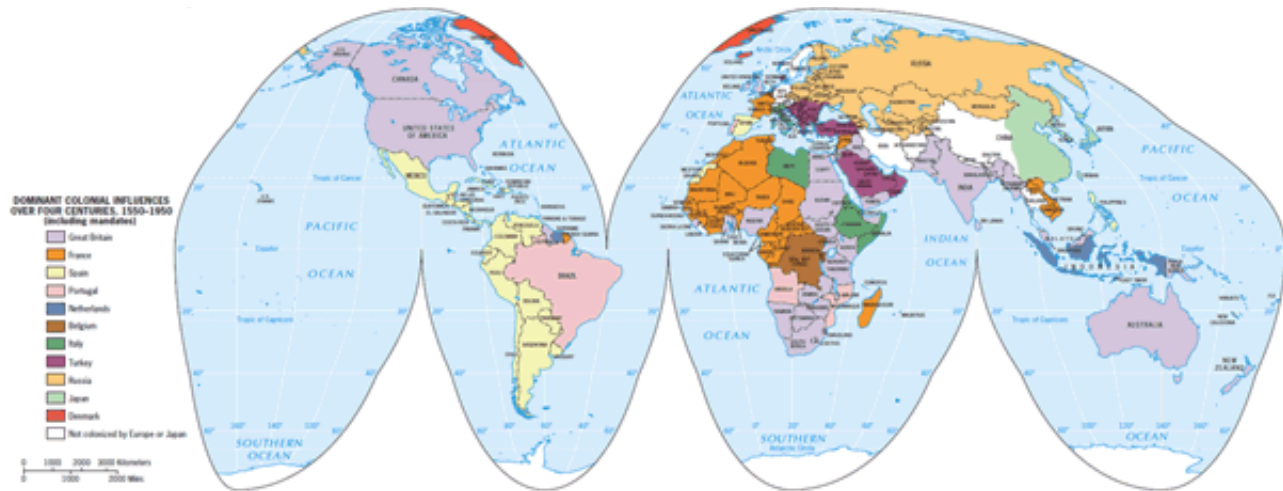
## European Colonialism and the Diffusion of the Nation-State Model

Europe exported its concepts of state, sovereignty, and the desire for nation-states to much of the rest of the world through two waves of colonialism (Fig. 8.7). In the sixteenth century, Spain and Portugal took advantage of an increasingly well-consolidated internal political order and newfound wealth to expand their influence to increasingly far-flung realms during the first wave of colonialism. Later joined by Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium, the first wave of colonialism established a far-reaching political and economic system. After independence movements in the Americas during the late 1700s and 1800s, a second wave of colonialism began in the late 1800s. The major colonizers were Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and Italy. The colonizing parties met for the Berlin Conference in 1884–1885 and arbitrarily laid out the colonial map of Africa without reference to indigenous cultural or political arrangements. Driven by motives ranging from economic profit to the desire to bring Christianity to the rest of the world, colonialism projected European power and a European approach to organizing political space into the non-European world (Fig. 8.8).



**Figure 8.7** Two Waves of Colonialism between 1500 and 1975.

Each bar shows the total number of colonies around the world. *Adapted with permission from: Peter J. Taylor and Colin Flint, Political Geography: World-Economy, Nation-State and Locality, 4th ed., New York: Prentice Hall, 2000.*



**Figure 8.8** Dominant Colonial Influences, 1550–1950.

The map shows the *dominant* European or Japanese colonial influence in each country over the four centuries. © H. J. de Blij, John Wiley & Sons.

With Europe in control of so much of the world, Europeans laid the ground rules for the emerging international state system, and the modern European concept of the nation-state became the model adopted around the world. Europe also established and defined the ground rules of the capitalist world economy, creating a system of economic interdependence that persists today.

During the heyday of **colonialism**, the imperial powers exercised ruthless control over their domains and organized them for maximum economic exploitation. The capacity to install the infrastructure necessary for such efficient profiteering is itself evidence of the power relationships involved: entire populations were regimented in the service of the colonial ruler. Colonizers organized the flows of raw materials for their own benefit, and we can still see the tangible evidence of that organization (plantations, ports, mines, and railroads) on the cultural landscape.

Despite the end of colonialism, the political organization of space and the global world economy persist. And while the former colonies are now independent states, their economies are anything but independent. In many cases raw material flows are as great as they were before the colonial era came to an end. For example, today in Gabon, Africa, the railroad goes from the interior forest, which is logged for plywood, to the major port and capital city, Libreville. The second largest city, Port Gentil, is located to the south of Libreville, but the two cities are not connected directly by road or railroad. As the crow flies, the cities are 90 miles apart, but if you drive from one to the other, the circuitous route will take you 435 miles. Both cities are export focused. Port Gentil is tied to the global oil economy, with global oil corporations responsible for building much of the city and its housing, and employing many of its people.

## Construction of the Capitalist World Economy

The long-term impacts of colonialism are many and varied. One of the most powerful impacts of colonialism was the construction of a global order characterized by great differences in economic and political power. The European colonial enterprise gave birth to a globalized economic order in which the European states and areas dominated by European migrants emerged as the major centers of economic and political activity. Through colonialism, Europeans extracted wealth from colonies and put colonized peoples in a position of subservience.

Of course, not all Europeans profited equally from colonialism. Enormous poverty persisted within the most powerful European states, and sustaining control over colonies could be costly. In the late seventeenth century, Spain had a large colonial empire, but the empire was economically draining Spain by then. Moreover, western Europeans were not the only people to profit from colonialism. During the period of European colonialism (1500–1950), Russia and the United States expanded over land instead of over seas, profiting from the taking of territory and the subjugation of indigenous peoples. Japan was a regional colonial power, controlling Korea and other parts of East and Southeast Asia as well as Pacific Islands by colonial means. But the concentration of wealth that colonialism brought to Europe, and to parts of the world dominated



by European settlers, including the United States, Canada, and Australia, is at the heart of the highly uneven global distribution of power that continues even today.

The forces of colonialism played a key role in knitting together the economies of widely separated areas, which gave birth to a global economic order called the world economy. Wealth is unevenly distributed in the world economy, as can be seen in statistics on per capita gross national income (GNI): Bangladesh's GNI is only \$1,340, whereas Norway's is \$53,690. But to truly understand why wealth is distributed unevenly, we cannot simply study each country, its resources, and its production of goods. Rather, we need to understand where countries fit in the world economy. That is, we need to see the big picture.

Think of a pointillist painting. Specifically, envision the magnificent work of nineteenth-century French painter Georges Pierre Seurat, *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (Fig. 8.9). The painting hangs in the Art Institute of Chicago. If you have the opportunity to see the painting and if you stand close enough, you will see Seurat's post-Impressionist method of painting millions of points or dots—single, tiny brush strokes, each a single color. When you step back again, you can gain a sense of how each dot fits into the picture as a whole.

<sup>1</sup> We must give credit to former student Kelsey Lynd, who came up with this metaphor for world-systems theory in a political geography class at the University of Mary Washington in 1999.

In the last few decades, social scientists have sought to understand how each dot, how each country and each locality, fit into the picture of the world as a whole. To study a single dot or even each dot one at a time, we miss the whole. Even if we study every single dot and add them together, we still miss the whole. We need to step back and see the whole, as well as the individual dots, studying how one affects the other. By now, this should sound familiar: it is one of the ways geographers think about **scale**.



**Figure 8.9** Chicago, Illinois.

Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte by Georges Pierre Seurat hangs in the Art Institute of Chicago. © Bridgeman Art Library/SUPERSTOCK.

Political geographers took note of one sociologist's theory of the world economy and added much to it. Building on the work of Immanuel Wallerstein, proponents of **world-systems theory** view the world as much more than the sum total of the world's states. Much like a pointillist painting, world-systems theorists hold that to understand any state, we must also understand its spatial and functional relationships within the world economy.

Wallerstein's publications number in the hundreds, and the political and economic geography publications tied to world-systems theory number in the thousands. To simplify the research, we can study the three basic tenets of world-systems

theory, as Wallerstein defines them:

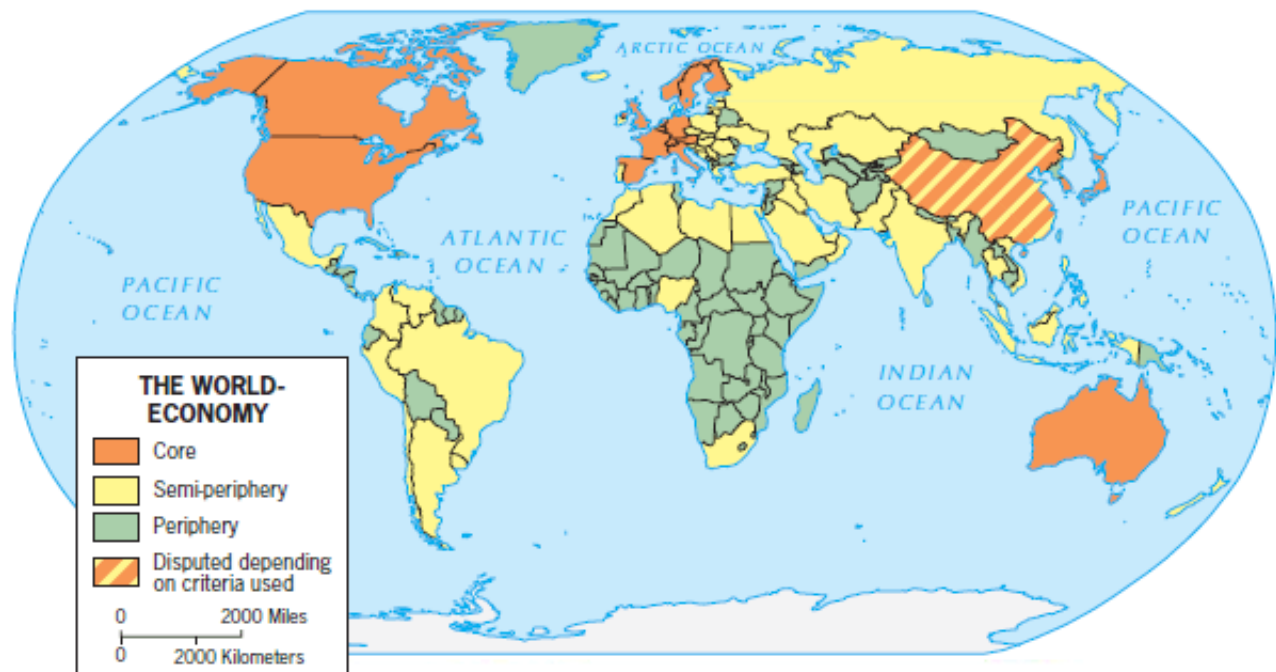
1. The world economy has one market and a global division of labor.
2. Although the world has multiple states, almost everything takes place within the context of the world economy.
3. The world economy has a three-tier structure.

According to Wallerstein, the development of a world economy began with capitalist exchange around 1450 and encompassed the globe by 1900. **Capitalism** means that in the world economy, individuals, corporations, and states produce goods and services that are exchanged for profit. To generate a profit, producers seek the cheapest production and costs. Since labor (including salaries and benefits) is now often the most expensive of these production costs, corporations often seek to move production of a good from, for example, North Carolina to Mexico and then to China, simply to take advantage of cheaper labor. In addition to the world labor supply, producers gain profit by commodifying whatever they can. **Commodification** is the process of placing a price on a good, service, or idea and then buying, selling, and trading that item. Companies create new products, generate new twists on old products, and create demand for the products through marketing. As children, none of the authors of this book could have imagined buying a bottle of water. Now, the sale of water in bottles is commonplace.

Second, despite the existence of approximately 200 states, everything takes place within the context of the world economy (and has since 1900). Colonialism played a major role in establishing this system by exporting the European state idea and facilitating the construction of an interdependent global economy. When colonies became independent, gaining the legal status of sovereign states was relatively easy for most colonies. The United Nations Charter even set up a committee to help colonies do so after World War II. But gaining true economic independence is all but impossible. The economies of the world are tied together, generating intended and unintended consequences that fundamentally change places.

Lastly, world-systems theorists see the world economy as a three-tiered structure: the core, periphery, and semiperiphery. The **core** and the periphery are not just places but the sites where particular processes take place. The core is where one is most likely to find higher levels of education, higher salaries, and more technology—core processes that generate more wealth in the world economy. The **periphery** more commonly has lower levels of education, lower salaries, and less technology—peripheral processes associated with a more marginal position in the world economy.

Figure 8.10 presents one way of dividing up the world in world-systems terms. The map designates some states as part of the **semiperiphery**—places where core and periphery processes are both occurring—places that are exploited by the core but in turn exploit the periphery. The semiperiphery acts as a buffer between the core and periphery, preventing the polarization of the world into two extremes.



### Figure 8.10 The World Economy.

One representation of core, periphery, and semi-periphery based on a calculation called World-Economy Centrality, derived by sociologist Paul Prew. The authors took into consideration factors not quantified in Prew's data, including membership in the European Union, in moving some countries from the categories Prew's data recommended to other categories. *Data from: Paul Prew, World-Economy Centrality and Carbon Dioxide Emissions: A New Look at the Position in the Capitalist World-System and Environmental Pollution, American Sociological Association, 12, 2 (2010) 162–191.*

Political geographers, economic geographers, and other academics continue to debate world-systems theory. The major concerns are that it overemphasizes economic factors in political development, that it is very state-centric, and that it does not fully account for how places move from one category to another. Nonetheless, Wallerstein's work has encouraged many to see the world political map as a system of interlinking parts that need to be understood in relation to one another and as a whole. As such, the impact of world-systems theory has been considerable in political geography, and it is increasingly commonplace for geographers to refer to the kinds of core–periphery distinctions suggested by world-systems theory.

World-systems theory helps explain how colonial powers were able to amass great concentrations of wealth. During the first wave of colonialism, colonizers extracted goods from the Americas and the Caribbean and exploited Africa for slave labor, amassing wealth through sugar, coffee, fruit, and cotton production. During the second wave of colonialism, which happened after the Industrial Revolution, colonizers set their sights on cheap industrial labor, cheap raw materials, and large-scale agricultural plantations.

Not all core countries in the world today were colonial powers, however. Countries including Switzerland, Singapore, and Australia have significant global clout even though they were never classic colonial powers, and that clout is tied in significant part to their positions in the global economy. The countries gained positions through access to the networks of production, consumption, and exchange in the wealthiest parts of the world and through their ability to take advantage of that access.

## World-Systems and Political Power

Are economic power and political power one and the same? No, but certainly economic power can bring political power. In the current system, economic power means wealth, and political power means the ability to influence others to achieve your goals. Political power is not simply a function of sovereignty. Each state is theoretically sovereign, but not all states have the same **ability** to influence others or achieve their political goals. Having wealth helps leaders amass political power. For instance, a wealthy country can establish a mighty military. But political influence is not simply a function of hard power; it is also diplomatic. Switzerland's declared neutrality, combined with its economic might, aids the country's diplomatic efforts.

World-systems theory helps us understand how Europe politically reorganized the world during colonialism. When colonialism ended in Africa and Asia, the newly independent people continued to follow the European model of political organization. The arbitrarily drawn colonial borders of Africa, dating from the Berlin Conference, became the boundaries of the newly independent states. On the map, former colonies became new states; administrative borders transformed into international boundaries; and, in most cases, colonial administrative towns became capitals. The greatest political challenge facing the states of Africa since independence has been building nation-states out of incredibly divergent (sometimes antagonistic) peoples. The leaders of the newly independent states continually work to build nation-states in the hope of quelling division among the people, securing their territory, and developing their economic (as well as other) systems of organization.

## The Enduring Impact of the Nation-State Idea

The idea of meshing the nation and state into a nation-state was not confined to nineteenth-century Europe or twentieth-century Africa. Major players in international relations still seek solutions to complex political conflicts by trying to redraw the political map in an effort to bring political and national borders into closer correspondence. Faced with the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia or the complex problems of Israel/Palestine, for example, the tendency is often to propose new state boundaries around nations, with the goal of making the nation and state fit. Drawing neat boundaries of this sort is

usually impossible and the creation of new territories can create different ethno-national problems. Regardless of the multitude of problems and lack of simple solutions to nation and state conflicts, the European territorial state idea became the world model, and that idea is still shaping the political organization of space around the world.



Imagine you are the leader of a newly independent state in Africa or Asia. Determine what your government can do to build a nation that corresponds with the borders of your state. Consider the roles of education, government, military, and culture in your exercise in nation-building.

Video: Obama and American Politics

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