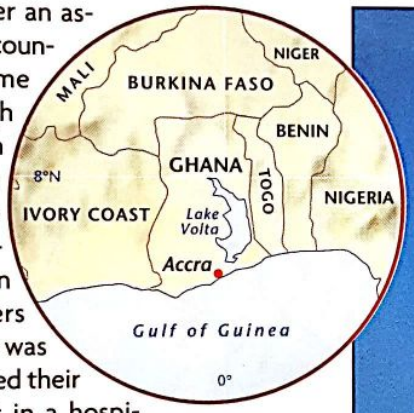
CHAPTER 8

# Political Geography

## Field Note Independence is Better Than Servitude

I arrived in Ghana just after an assassination attempt on the country's first president, Kwame Nkrumah. As I drove through the capital city of Accra in 1962, I stopped short when I saw a statue of President Nkrumah in the middle of the street. I have seen plenty of statues of leaders in my travels, but this one was unique. Ghanians had dressed their hospital-ridden president in a hospital gown and bandaged his head!




I stopped the car to take a picture (Fig. 8.1), and I read the proclamations on Nkrumah's statue. Written in English, they said, "To me the liberation of Ghana will be meaningless unless it is linked up with the liberation of Africa" and "We prefer self-government with danger to servitude in tranquility."

Ghana, the first black African colony to become independent, gained its independence in 1960. A wave of decolonization swept through Africa in the 1960s (Fig. 8.2), with hopes that decolonization would bring political and economic independence. But decolonization did not eliminate political and economic problems for Africa. Former colonies became states, reaching political independence under international law; each new country was now sovereign, legally having the ultimate say over what happened within the borders. New political problems arose within the sovereign countries. Each had to deal with a mixture of peoples, cultures, languages and religions amalgamated during colonialism. Economically, the new countries found

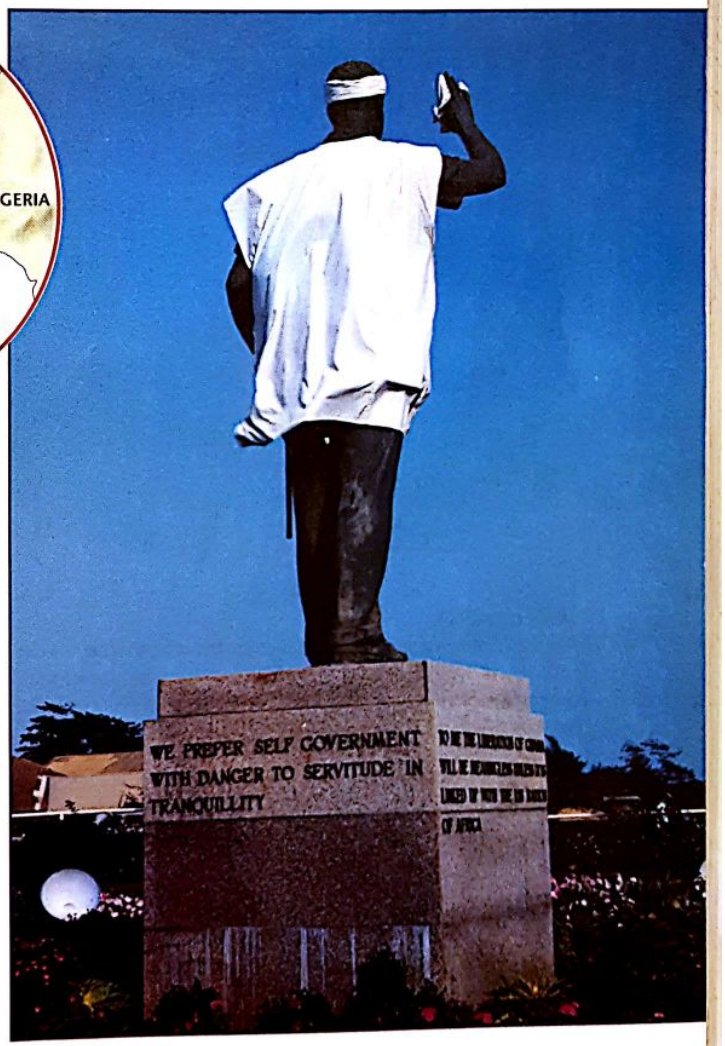



**Figure 8.1**
**Accra, Ghana.** Statue of Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana. © H. J. de Blij.

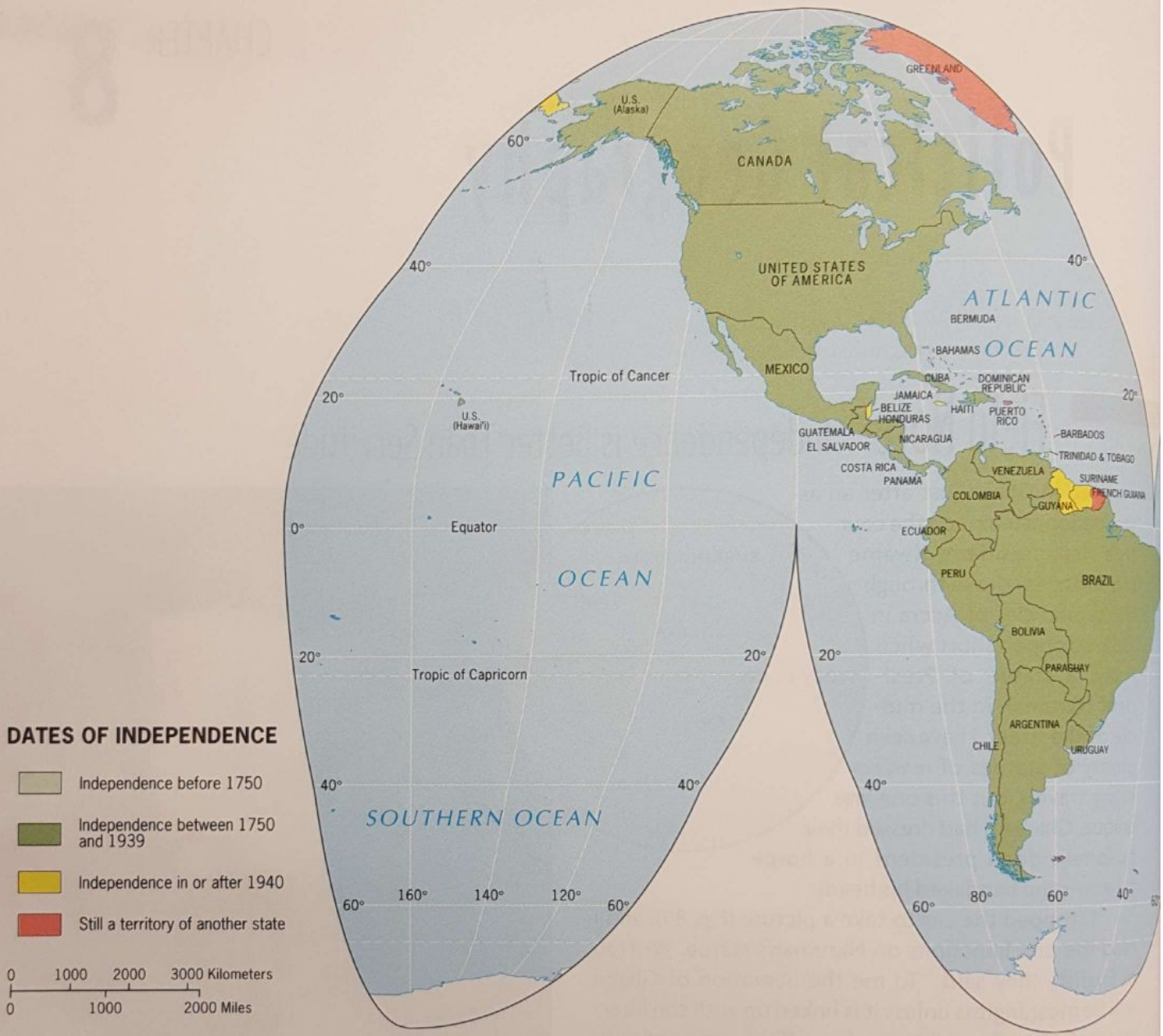



**Figure 8.2**

**Dates of Independence for states, throughout the world.** The first major wave of independence movements between 1750 and 1939 occurred mainly in the Americas. The second major wave of independence movements after 1940 occurred mainly in Africa and Asia. *Data from:* CIA World Factbook, 2005.

themselves fully intertwined in the world economy, unable to control their own economies.

For many of the new African states, Nkrumah's words rang true—independence was better than servitude, even if it meant danger instead of tranquility. Nkrumah, elected in 1960, was overthrown by the military in 1966 and died in exile in 1972.

The story of Ghana and President Nkrumah is a familiar one. After decades of European colonial rule, peoples around the world sought independence; they wanted to have their own country, and they wanted to have a say over what happened in their country. Nkrumah knew the risk was great—danger came with the quick transition and from the inheritance of a political organization that made little sense for Ghana or the people who lived there. European colonialism set the world up as a huge functional


region for Europe—one where Europe benefited the most economically. Colonialism also brought the European way of politically organizing space into independent countries around the world. This system and its lack of fit for most of the world has caused political strife, and yet, peoples still seek to become independent countries because in Nkrumah's words, they know independence is better than servitude.

Political activity is as basic to human culture as language or religion. Political behavior is expressed by individuals, groups, communities, nations, governments, and supranational organizations. Each desires power and influence to achieve personal and public goals. Whether or not we like politics, each of us is caught up in these processes, with effects ranging from the composition of school boards to the conduct of war.

In this chapter, we examine how geographers study politics, the domain of political geography. Like all fields of geography (and the social sciences, more generally), political geographers used to spend a lot of time explaining why the world is the way it is and trying to predict or prescribe the future. Today, political geographers spend much more time studying the spatial assumptions and structures underlying politics, the ways people organize space, the role territory plays in politics, and what problems result from all of these.

# Key Questions For Chapter 8

1. How is space politically organized into states and nations?
2. How do states spatially organize their governments?
3. How are boundaries established, and why do boundary disputes occur?
4. How do geopolitics and critical geopolitics help us understand the world?
5. What are supranational organizations, and what is the future of the state?

## 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. At the global scale, we have a world divided into individual countries that political geographers call 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. A mosaic of pastel colors shades more than 200 countries and territories, accentuating 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.*

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 fewer 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 is the concept of territoriality. Political geographers study territoriality across scales, cultures, and time. 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. His approach to territoriality differs from the approach social anthropologist Robert Ardrey took in *The Territorial Imperative* (1966). Ardrey argued that human territoriality is analogous to the instinct in animals to control and defend territory. Sack, by contrast, argues that human territoriality takes many different forms, depending on the social and geographical context, and that it should not be compared to an animal instinct. Instead, he calls for a better understanding of the human organization of the planet through a consideration of how and why different territorial strategies are pursued at different times and in different places.

Drawing from Sack's observations, political geographers have studied how people have changed the way territoriality is expressed and how ideas of territoriality vary over space and time. Today, territoriality is tied closely 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 the last say (having control) over a territory—politically and militarily. At the world

scale, 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 the state borders. Under international law, states are sovereign, and they have the right to defend their **territorial integrity** against incursion from other states. These modern ideas of how state, sovereignty, and territory are intertwined diffused from the mid-seventeenth century state system in Europe.

## 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 looked different in different regions of the world 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 shifting; they were not delineated on the ground. Plains tribes also held territory communally—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, the concept of sovereignty and state-like political entities also existed. In all of these places and in Europe before the mid-1600s, sovereignty was expresed over a people rather than a defined and bordered territory. A sovereign had subjects who followed (and happened to live in a place) rather than a defined space to rule.

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 several 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, governments 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 points in European history.

The event in European history that marks the beginning of the modern state is the **Peace of Westphalia**, negotiated in 1648. The treaties that constituted this peace concluded Europe's most destructive internal struggle over religion (the Thirty Years' War) and contained new language recognizing statehood and nationhood, clearly defined borders, and guarantees of security. The language of the treaties laid the foundations for a Europe made up of territorially defined states. They provided a framework through which Spain, the Dutch United Provinces, France, and the Holy Roman Empire gained regional stability.

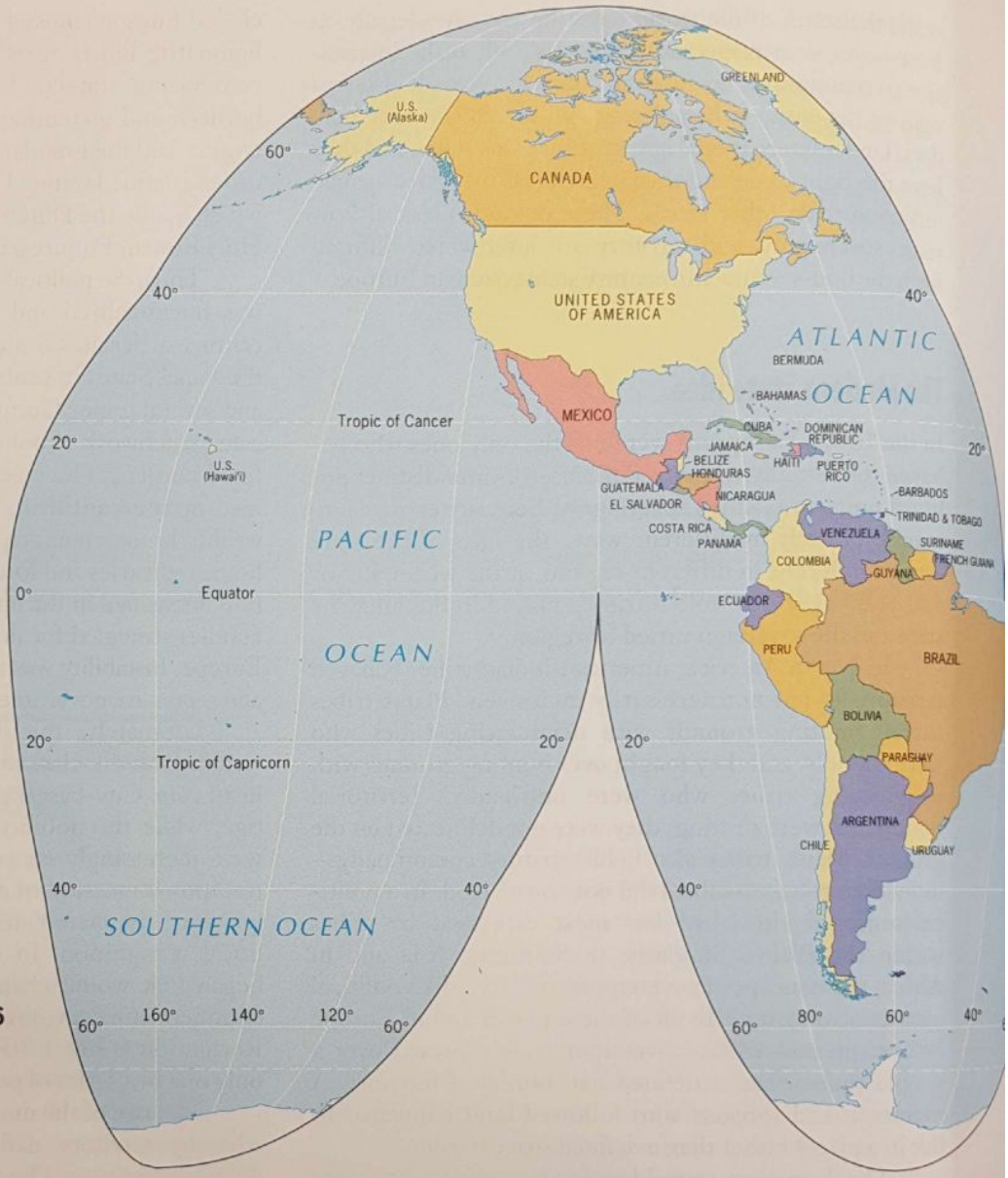
Thus, the political-geographic map of Europe in 1648 was fractionalized and evolving. In the mid-seventeenth century such states as the Republic of Venice, Brandenburg, the Papal States of central Italy, the Kingdom of Hungary, and several minor German states were all part of a complicated patchwork 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.

Ultimately, the development of an increasingly wealthy middle class proved to be the undoing of absolutist rule. City-based merchants gained wealth and prestige, while the nobility declined. Money and influence were increasingly concentrated in urban areas, and 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 would change the sociopolitical face of the continent. Overshadowing these events was the French Revolution (1789–1795), but this momentous event was only one in a series of political upheavals.

The rise of the modern state system marks a change, whereby territory defines society rather than society defining territory. The modern state system incorporates a distinctive view of territory as a fixed, exclusive element of political identification and group survival. States define exclusive, nonoverlapping territories, and they are sovereign over the territory and the people inside the territory. This particular way of defining territory and placing people in borders swept through Europe in the late 1600s. From a hearth in Europe, European colonizers exported their state idea throughout the entire world by 1900.

## Nations

The popular media and press often use the words *nation*, *state*, and *country* interchangeably. Political geographers use *state* and *country* interchangeably (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*,




**STATES OF THE WORLD, 2006**

0 1000 2000 3000 Kilometers
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**Figure 8.3**
**States of the World, 2006.**

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; here, all people who live in Germany would compose the German nation. This definition gives little explanation to how politically charged the concept of nation is.

We define **nation** as a culturally defined group of people with a shared past and a common future who relate to a territory and have political goals (ranging from autonomy to statehood). This idea allows for 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. All cultural communities 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 they claim the French nation as an identity. It is not because the French nation exists as a primordial group that has always been distinct.

People in a nation look to their past and think, "we have been through much together," and when they look to their future they think, "whatever happens we will go through it together." Because the nation shares a common


past and a common future, the nation has staying power. A nation is identified by its own membership; therefore, we cannot simply define a nation as the people within a territory. Rarely does a nation's extent correspond precisely with a state's borders. For example, in the country of Belgium, two nations—the Flemish and the Wallonian—exist within the state borders.

This definition of nation is also workable because it allows for different views of how nations came to be. Historically, scholars saw the nation as something we were born into, something natural that changes over time. The widely held theory was that all people belong to a nation and always have. Recently, scholars have argued that nations are constructed, that people create nations to give themselves an identity at that scale. One of the most widely read scholars on nationalism today, Benedict Anderson, defines the nation as an "imagined community"—imagined because you will never meet all of the people in your nation and community because, despite that fact, you see yourself as part of a collective.

## Nation-State

The European model of the state—the nation-state—became the aspiration of governing elites around the world. Literally, 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 nation-state concept lies primarily in the idea behind it. States and

the governments that run states desire a unified nation within their borders to create stability and to replace other politically charged identities that may challenge the state and the government's control of the state.

The goal of creating nation-states dates to the French Revolution, which sought control by an imagined cultural-historical community of people rather than a monarchy or colonizer. 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.

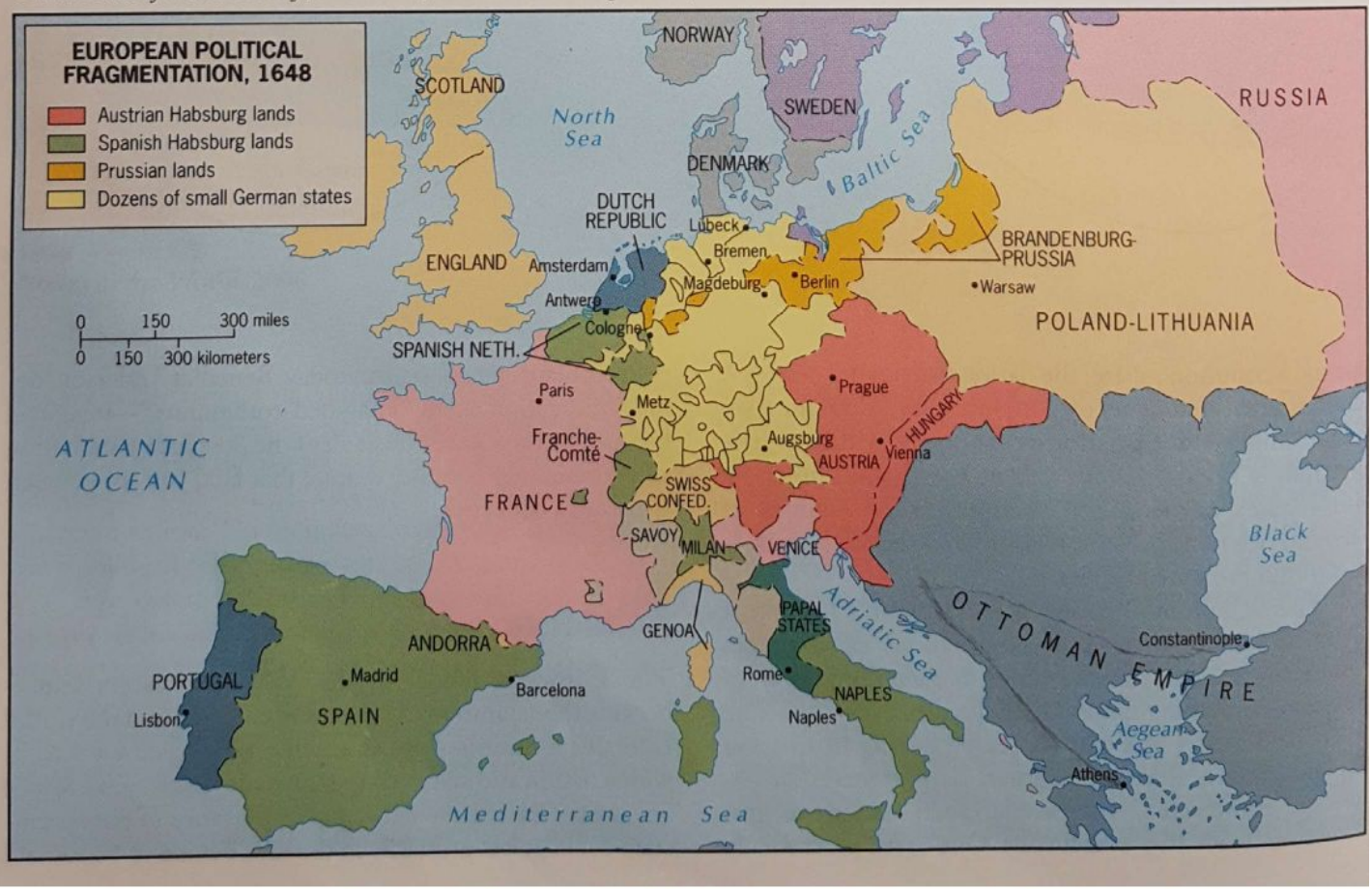
People began to see the idea of the nation-state as the ultimate form of political-territorial organization, the right expression of sovereignty, and the best route to stability. The key problem associated with the idea of the nation-state is that it assumes the presence of reasonably well-defined, stable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

In addition to striving for nation-states, the late 1700s and 1800s in Europe were marked by the rise of nationalism. We can view nationalism from two vantage points: the people and the state. When *people* in a nation have a strong sense of nationalism, they have a loyalty to the nation and a belief in the nation. This loyalty to a nation does not necessarily coincide with the borders of the state. A *state* does not have a strong sense of nationalism; rather, the government of a state is nationalistic. In this sense, the government promotes the nation, and because the government is the representative of the state, it seeks to promote a nation that coincides with the borders of the state. In the name of nationalism, a state with more than one nation in its borders can attempt to build a single national identity out of the divergent people. In the name of nationalism, a state can promote a war against another state that threatens its territorial integrity.

In nineteenth-century Europe, states used nationalism to achieve a variety of goals: in some cases they integrated their population into an ever more cohesive national whole (France, Spain), and in other cases they brought together people with shared cultural characteristics within a single state (Germany, Italy). Similarly, people who saw themselves as a separate nation within another state or empire launched successful separatist movements and achieved independence (Ireland, Norway, Poland).

**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 edition, Hammond Incorporated, 1998.



## Guest Field Note

Cluj-Napoca, Romania

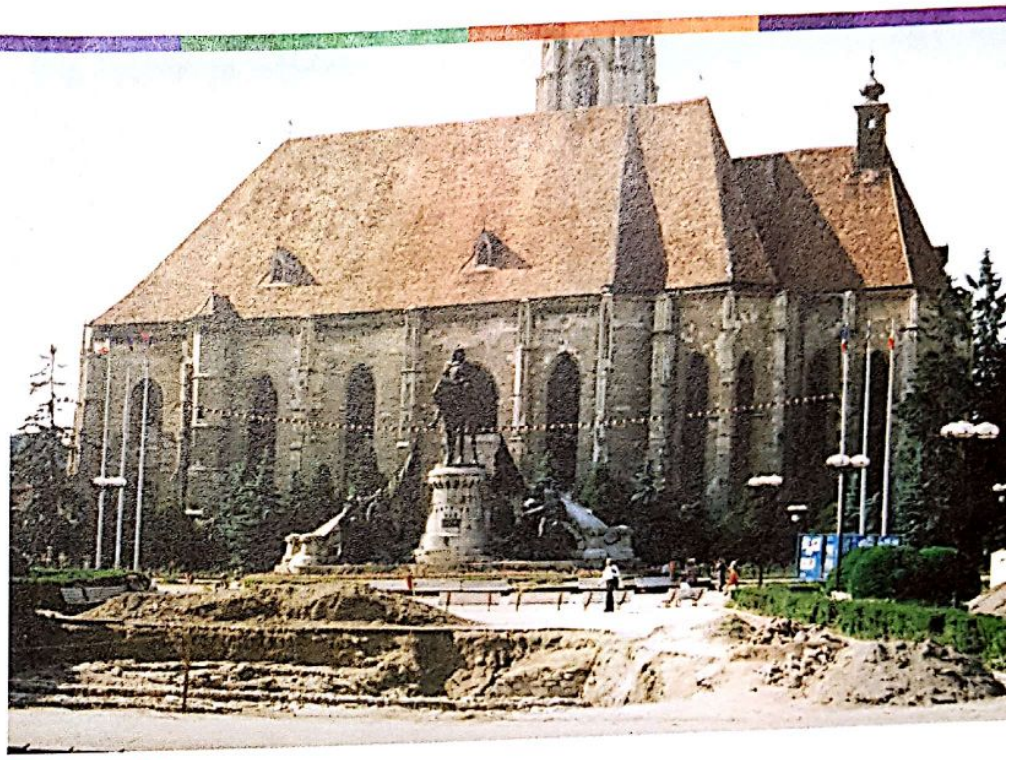


Figure 8.5

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 archeologists found Roman ruins around St. Michael's Cathedral and King Matthias' 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.

*Credit: George White, Frostburg State University*

European states used the tool of nationalism to refine the state—to make the state a more workable form of political organization for them. 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 borders.

To help people within the borders relate to a nation that meshes with the borders of the state, states provide security, goods, and services to the citizens. States provide education, infrastructure, health care, and 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 state, in their nation, in its vast colonial empire. People could identify themselves with their French, Dutch, or British nation by contrasting themselves with the people in the colonies—people whom they defined as mystical or savage. By identifying against an "other," the state and the people helped identify the traits of their nation—and in so doing, worked to build a nation-state.

## Multistate Nations, Multinational States, and Stateless Nations

The sense of belonging to a nation rarely meshes perfectly with state borders. The lack of fit between nation and state creates complications, such as states with more than one nation, nations with more than one state, and nations without a state.

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 always identified themselves as Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, or members of other nations or ethnic groups within the state or region. Yugoslavia was a state that always had more than one nation, and eventually the state 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 1991 Gulf War, the United Nations established a Kurdish Security Zone north of the 36th parallel in Iraq, but subsequent events have dashed any Kurdish hopes that one day this might become a state. The Kurds form the largest minority in Turkey, and the city of Diyarbakir is the unofficial Kurdish capital; however, relations between the 10 million Kurds in Turkey and the Turkish government in Ankara have been volatile. Without the consent of Turkey, no Kurdish state will be established anywhere in Kurdistan.

## 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 capitalist 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. Driven by motives ranging from economic profit to the desire to bring Christianity to the rest of the world, colonialism projected European power and European organization of political space into the non-European world (Fig. 8.8).

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 remain. 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 Gentile, is located to the south of Libreville, but the two cities are not connected by road or railroad. Like Libreville, Port Gentile is export-focused, with global oil corporations responsible for

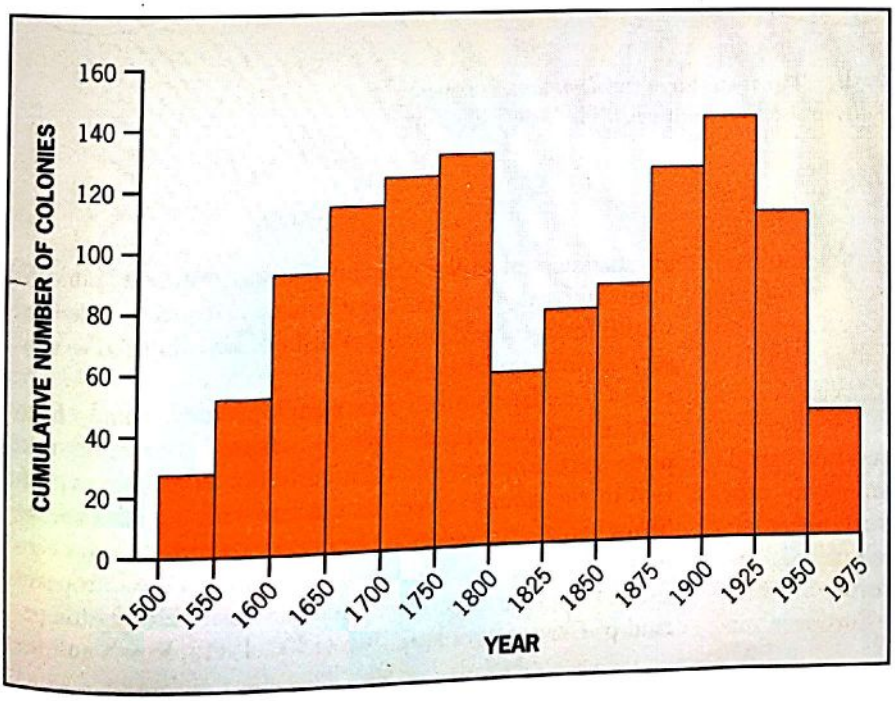



**Figure 8.7**
**Two Waves of Colonialism between 1500 and 1975.** Each bar shows the total number of colonies around the world. *Adapted with permission from*: Peter J. Taylor and Colin Flint, *Political Geography: World-Economy, Nation-State and Locality*, 4th ed., New York: Prentice Hall, 2000.

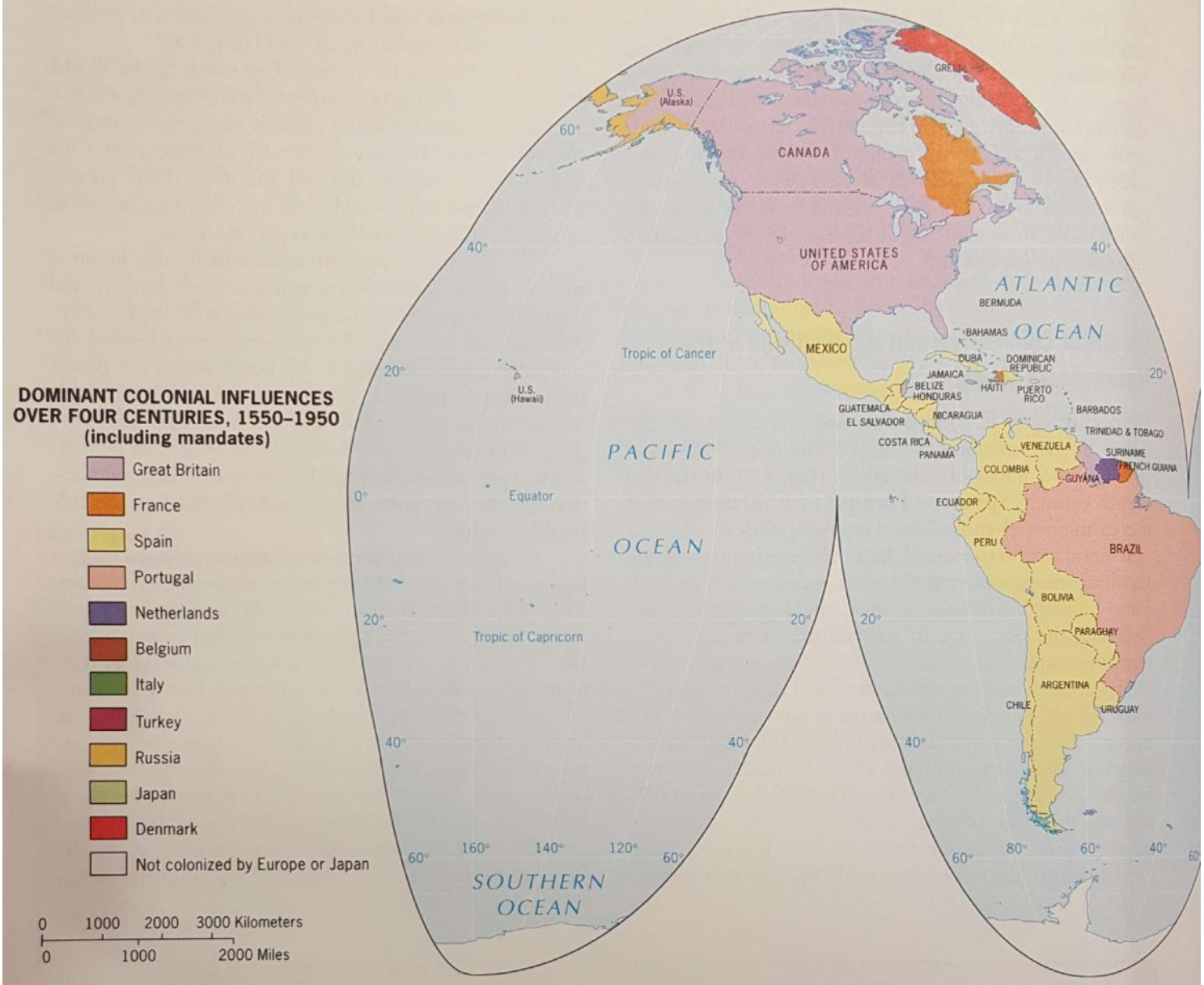


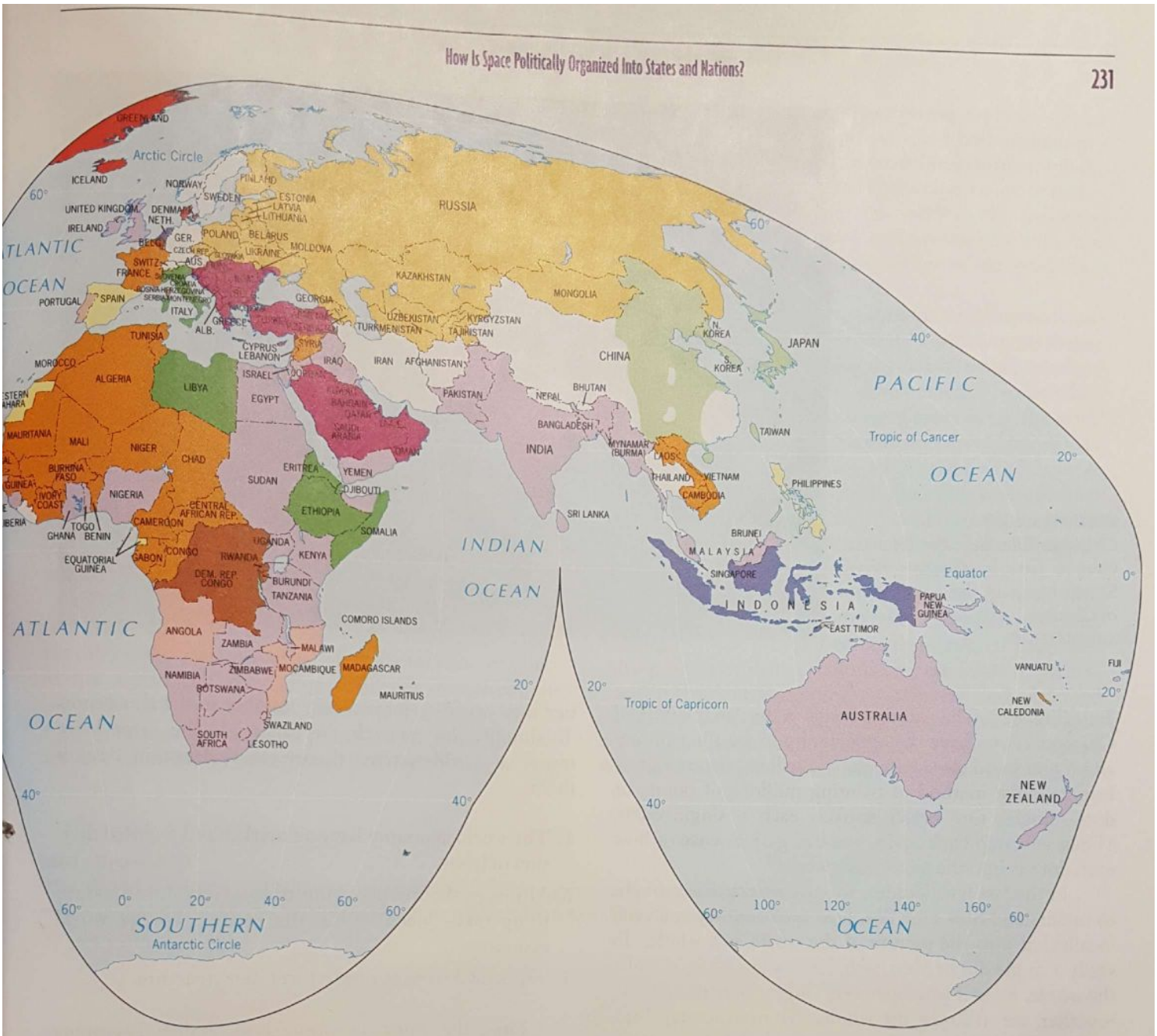

**Figure 8.8**
**Dominant Colonial Influences from 1550–1950.** The map shows the *dominant* European or Japanese colonial influence in each country over the four centuries. H. J. de Blij, John Wiley & Sons.

building much of the city and its housing, and employing most 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 established the colonized as subservient in the relationship.

Of course, not all Europeans profited equally from colonialism. Enormous poverty persisted within the most powerful European states. Similarly, not all colonizers profited to the same degree. In the late seventeenth century, Spain had a large colonial empire, but the empire was economically draining Spain by then. Neither were Europeans 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 through colonization. But the concentration of wealth that colonialism brought to Europe, and to parts of the world dominated by European settlers (such as the United States, Canada, and Australia), is at the heart of the highly uneven global distribution of power we still have today.

The forces of colonialism played a key role in knitting together the economies of widely separated areas—giving birth to a global economic order, the world economy. Wealth is unevenly distributed in the world economy, as can be seen in statistics on per capita gross national product (GNP): Haiti's GNP is only $510, whereas Norway's is $42,222. 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 learn how this country fits into 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, *A Sunday on La Grande*

**Figure 8.9**
**Chicago, Illinois.** Sunday on La Grande Jatte by Georges Pierre Seurat hangs in the Art Institute of Chicago. 

*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.[1]

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 the geographer's way of using **scale**, something geographers have done for over a century.

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 into 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.

First, the world economy is capitalist, beginning around 1450 and encompassing the globe by 1900. **Capitalism** means that in the world economy, people, corporations, and states produce goods and exchange them on the world market, with the goal of achieving profit. To generate a profit, producers seek the cheapest labor, drawing from the globe. As a result, a corporation can move production of a good from 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 everything. **Commodification** is the process of placing a price on a good and then buying, selling, and trading the good. 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, we do it all the time.

Second, despite the existence of approximately 200 states, everything takes place within the context of the

[1]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.

world economy (and has since 1900). Colonialism set up this system—exporting the politically independent state and also constructing 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 economic independence is simply impossible. The economies of the world are tied together, generating intended and unintended consequences that fundamentally change places.

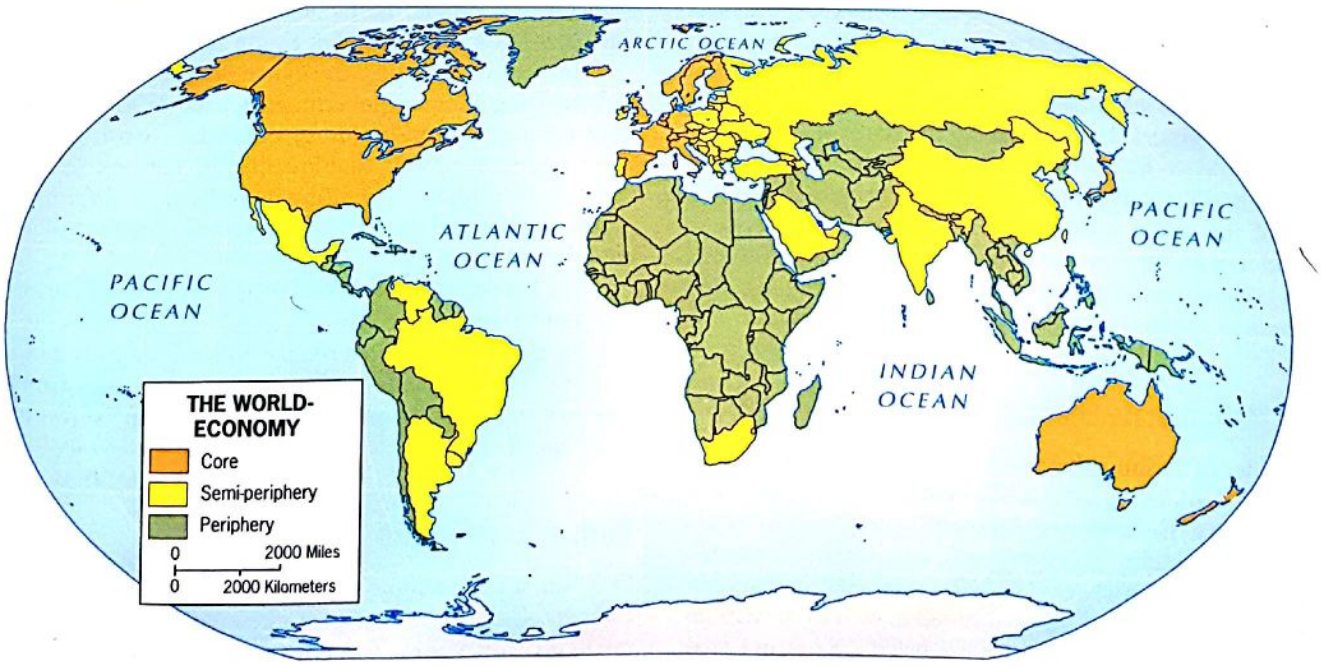
Lastly, world-systems theorists see the world economy as a three-tiered structure: the core, periphery, and semi-periphery. The core and the periphery are not just places but processes. **Core** processes incorporate higher levels of education, higher salaries, and more technology—core processes generate more wealth in the world economy. **Periphery** processes incorporate lower levels of education, lower salaries and less technology—peripheral processes generate less wealth in the world economy.

The core and periphery are processes, but these processes happen in places. As a result, some geographers have defined certain places as core and others as periphery in the world economy (Fig. 8.10). Others stress the processes and try to avoid labeling places as core or periphery because processes in places are not static and they are not confined by state borders. From the beginning, Wallerstein defined the **semi-periphery** as places—places where core and periphery processes are both occurring—places that are exploited by the core but in turn exploit the periphery. By taking advantage of its cheap labor or lax environmental standards, the core exploits the periphery. The semi-periphery acts as a buffer between the core and periphery, preventing the polarization of the world into two extremes.

Political geographers, economic geographers, and other academics continue to debate world-systems theory, with the major concern being that it overemphasizes economic factors in political development. 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 (which happened during mercantilism), colonizers established plantations in 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

**Figure 8.10**
**The World Economy.** The three tier structure of the world-economy: the core, periphery, and semi-periphery. *Adapted with permission from*: Michael Bradshaw, *World Regional Geography*, McGraw Hill.



Revolution), colonizers set their sights on cheap industrial labor and cheap raw materials.

Not all core countries in the world today were colonial powers, however. Countries such as 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. These positions were gained through the access these countries had to the networks of production, consumption, and exchange in the wealthiest parts of the world and 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 defined by sovereignty. Each state is 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 power is not simply militaristic; 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 colonies of Africa 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 (even 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 Nation-State Endures

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 see the validity of dividing nations with state borders—of creating nation-states. As players seek solutions to complex political conflicts, they continue to turn to the nation-state idea, believing that only it can bring long-term peace. In solutions drawn for the Balkan Peninsula (the former Yugoslavia) and for Israel/Palestine, the central question is how to draw state boundaries around nations—how to make nation and state fit. In all of these ways, the European state became the world model and is still shaping the political organization of space in the world.

### THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY

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.

# HOW DO STATES SPATIALLY ORGANIZE THEIR GOVERNMENTS?

In the 1950s, a famous political geographer, Richard Hartshorne, described the forces within the state that unify the people as **centripetal** and the forces that divide them as **centrifugal**. Whether a nation (or a state) continues to exist, according to Hartshorne, depends on the balance between centripetal and centrifugal forces. Many political geographers have thought about Hartshorne's theory, and most have concluded that we cannot take a given event or process and declare it as centrifugal or centripetal in isolation from the context in which it is situated. An event, such as a war, can pull the state together for a short time and then divide the state over the long term. Timing, scale, interaction, and perspective factor into unification and division in a state at any given point.

Instead of creating a balance sheet of centripetal and centrifugal forces, governments attempt to unify the state through nation-building, through structuring the government in a way that quells the nations within, through defining and defending boundaries, and through expressing control over all of the territory within those boundaries.

By looking at how different governments have attempted to unify their states, we are reminded how important geography is. Governance does not take place in a vacuum. The uniqueness of place factors in and shapes whether any possible governmental "solution" solves or exacerbates matters.

## Form of Government

One way states promote unification is by choosing a governmental structure that promotes nation-building and quells division within. Two governmental structures commonly found in the world are unitary and federal.

To address multination states, governments, even democratic governments, can and have suppressed dissent by forceful means. Until the end of World War II, most European governments were **unitary** governments: they were highly centralized, with the capital city serving as the focus of power. States made no clear efforts to accommodate minorities or outlying regions where the sense of state-scale national identity was weaker. Europe's nation-states were unitary states, with the culture of the capital city defined as the nation's culture. Any smaller nations within (such as Brittons in France or Basques in Spain) were repressed and suppressed. The administrative framework of a unitary government is designed to ensure the central government's authority over all parts of the state. The French government divided the state into more than 90 *départements*, whose representatives came to Paris not to express regional concerns but to implement governmental decisions back home.

Another way to govern a mulitnational state is to construct a **federal** system, organizing state territory into regions, substates (States), provinces, or cantons. In a strong federal system, the regions have much control over government policies and funds, and in a weak federal system, the regions have little control over government policies and funds. Most federal systems are somewhere in between, with governments at the state scale and at the substate scale each having control over certain revenues and certain policy areas. By giving control over certain policies (especially culturally relative policies) to the substates, a government can keep the state as a whole together.

Differences in culture within a country can be seen when we examine maps of culturally relative policies that are determined by States. In Nigeria, the 36 States choose their own judicial system. In the Muslim north, the States have Shari'a laws (legal systems based on traditional Islamic laws), and in the Christian and animist south, the States do not (Fig. 8.11). In the United States, the death penalty, access to alcohol, and concealed weapons are limited by State (Fig. 8.12).

Federalism accommodates regional interests by vesting primary power in provinces, States, or other regional units over all matters except those explicitly given to the central government. The Australian geographer K. W. Robinson described a federation as "the most geographically expressive of all political systems, based as it is on the existence and accommodation of regional differences . . . federation does not create unity out of diversity; rather, it enables the two to coexist."

Choosing a federal system does not always quell nationalist sentiment. After all, the multinational states of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia fell apart, despite changing to federal systems.

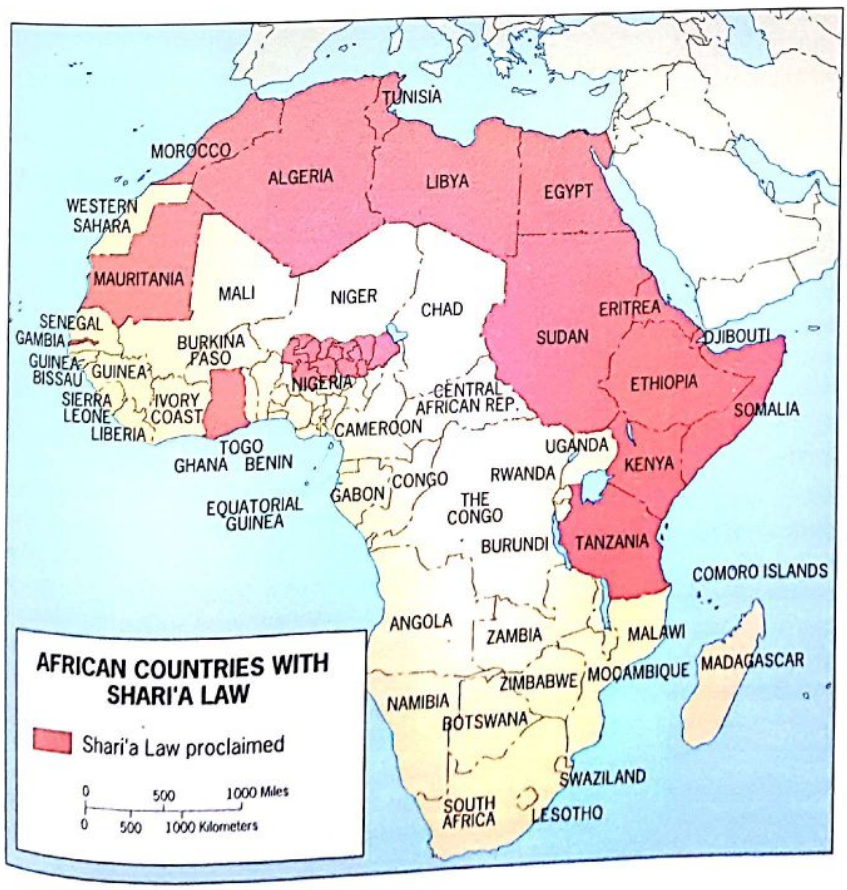



**Figure 8.11**
**Countries in Africa with Shari'a Laws (Either Civil or Criminal).** *Data from a variety of sources, including:* The United States Department of State, the CIA World Factbook, University of Pittsburgh Law School, Emory University School of Law, and All Africa.


**Figure 8.12**
**St. Paul, Minnesota.** A sign hanging on the front door of the Minnesota Children's Museum cautions visitors that the museum "bans guns in these premises." Under Minnesota's concealed weapons law, businesses that do not want concealed weapons on the premises must post signs of a certain size, font, and color at each entrance to the establishment. © Erin H. Fouberg.

## Devolution

**Devolution** is the movement of power from the central government to regional governments within the state. Sometimes, devolution is recognized as permanent by reworking a constitution to establish a federal system that recognizes the permanency of the regional governments, as Spain has done. In other places, governments devolve power without altering constitutions, almost as an experiment. In the United Kingdom, the Parliament in Northern Ireland resulted from devolution, but the British government suspended its activities in 2002. Devolutionary forces can emerge in all kinds of states, old and young, mature and emergent. These forces arise from several sources: ethnocultural, economic, and spatial.

### Ethnocultural Devolutionary Movements

Many of Europe's devolutionary movements came from nations within a state that define themselves as distinct ethnically, linguistically, or religiously.

The capacity of ethnocultural forces to stimulate devolutionary processes is especially evident in Eastern Europe. Parts of the Eastern European map have changed quite drastically over the past decade, and two countries—Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia—succumbed to devolutionary pressures. In the case of Czechoslovakia, the process was peaceful: Czechs and Slovaks divided their country along a new international border. As Figure 8.13 shows, however, one of the two new states, Slovakia, is not homogeneous: about 11 percent of the population is Hungarian, and that minority is concentrated along the border between Slovakia and Hungary. The Hungarian minority, facing discriminatory policies involving language and other aspects of its culture, has at times demanded greater autonomy (self-governance) to protect its heritage in the new state.

Compared to the constituent units of the former Yugoslavia (discussed in detail in Chapter 7), other countries shown in Figure 8.14 have dealt with devolutionary pressures more peacefully. Among these are Czechoslovakia, Lithuania, and Ukraine. Elsewhere in the world, however, ethnocultural fragmentation has produced costly wars. Ethnocultural differences lie at the heart of the decades-long conflict between the Muslim North and the non-Muslim South in Sudan, Africa. Similar forces have given rise to a seemingly endless civil war in Sri Lanka (South Asia), where the Sinhalese (Buddhist) majority has been unable to suppress or to accommodate the demands of the Tamil (Hindu) minority for an independent state. Moreover, devolutionary forces are gaining momentum in places that have long looked stable from the outside; China's far west is a case in point, where an Uyghur separatist movement is gaining momentum. The point is that ethnocultural differences are weakening the fabric of many states in today's global political framework, and if anything the trend is in the direction of more, rather than fewer, calls for autonomy, or even independence.

Ethnocultural differences can be highlighted when a state government chooses to join a supranational organization. When the United Kingdom moved to join the European Union, some Scottish nationalists argued that Scotland would be disadvantaged by such a move. Within the United Kingdom, Scotland was a major player, one of the four territorial components of the state. But with the United Kingdom being just one member of a European Union, some feared that Scotland would be relegated to third-level status. The United Kingdom joined the precursor to the European Union in 1973. In 1975, the United Kingdom held a referendum, asking citizens whether the United Kingdom should remain in the union. Over 67 percent of the voters cast ballots in favor of remaining in the union. Support came from across the country, including Scotland. Also in the 1970s, the Scottish National Party began a campaign to underscore Scotland's disadvantaged position even within the United Kingdom. If Scotland were independent, party leaders claimed, oil and natural gas revenues would flow to Edinburgh (the capital of Scotland), not London (Fig. 8.15); Scottish taxpayers' funds would serve Scotland, not the United Kingdom as a whole. Scotland's support for the European Union and its calls for independence were expressions of Scottish independence at two different


**Figure 8.13**
**Ethnic Mosaic of Eastern Europe.** H. J. de Blij, P. O. Muller, and John Wiley & Sons.

scales. Political Geographer Fiona Davidson described the balance of independence and membership: "The SNP (Scottish National Party) uses the idea of economic stability in the EU as a campaigning strategy to reduce the understandably high level of fear and uncertainty that plagues the Scottish population everty time they seriously consider independence."

In 1997, the newly elected Labor Party in London gave the Scots (and the Welsh) the opportunity to vote—not for independence, but for devolution. Both Scotland and Wales voted in favor, taking a major devolutionary step in one of Europe's oldest and most stable unitary states. In the new system, London yielded greater autonomy to the regional parliaments in Scotland and Wales.

Interestingly, Scotland's new autonomous status has not necessarily fueled greater calls for independence. Instead, Scotland's new Parliament is coming in for its share of criticism—raising doubts among some about whether Scotland would truly be better off as an independent entity. Moreover, in the wake of the European