KEY CONCEPTS IN
POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

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SAGE

KEY CONCEPTS IN

POLITICAL
GEOGRAPHY

KEY CONCEPTS
IN HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

The *Key Concepts in Human Geography* series is intended to provide a set of companion texts for the core fields of the discipline. To date, students and academics have been relatively poorly served with regards to detailed discussions of the key *concepts* that geographers use to think about and understand the world. Dictionary entries are usually terse and restricted in their depth of explanation. Student textbooks tend to provide broad overviews of particular topics or the philosophy of Human Geography, but rarely provide a detailed overview of particular concepts, their premises, development over time and empirical use. Research monographs most often focus on particular issues and a limited number of concepts at a very advanced level, so do not offer an expansive and accessible overview of the variety of concepts in use within a subdiscipline.

The *Key Concepts in Human Geography* series seeks to fill this gap, providing detailed description and discussion of the concepts that are at the heart of theoretical and empirical research in contemporary Human Geography. Each book consists of an introductory chapter that outlines the major conceptual developments over time along with approximately twenty-five entries on the core concepts that constitute the theoretical toolkit of geographers working within a specific subdiscipline. Each entry provides a detailed explanation of the concept, outlining contested definitions and approaches, the evolution of how the concept has been used to understand particular geographic phenomenon, and suggested further reading. In so doing, each book constitutes an invaluable companion guide to geographers grappling with how to research, understand and explain the world we inhabit.

Rob Kitchin
Series Editor

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POLITICAL
GEOGRAPHY

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ⓈSAGE

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INTRODUCTION

The world of politics provides plenty to whet the appetite. The anticipation of an upcoming election, the intrigue behind a *coup d'état*, and the chaos of a war zone are gripping fare for the intellectual, student and layperson alike. What unites geographers in their study of political events like these is a focus on the spatial organization inherent to them and the power relationships that underpin them. Geographers look at how politics affect spatial order, and how spatial orders inform politics.

Traditionally, political geography has used the state as a primary unit of analysis. Political geographers studied how states were organized internally, and how they interacted with other states in regions and the international system as a whole. In recent years political georaphy has added other units of analysis to its repertoire. These include not only smaller levels of analysis, such as the 'local', but also larger ones, such as the supranational. Their use has also brought renewed attention to the different ways that political actions play out *across* scales.

In many ways this change in focus reflects changes in the world around us. When the Cold War ended in 1989 there was uncertainty not only about what would happen to formerly communist states, but also what would happen to the balance of power between states. The emergence of globalization also brought new political actors to the fore, including international organizations, social movements, non-governmental organizations and warlords, among many others. How this mix of old and new actors and the changing relations of power between them will play out is yet to be seen, but political geography will be there to document, analyse and ultimately theorize them.

Political Geography through Time

The development of modern political geography was intimately connected with the colonial project (Peet 1985). These connections are readily apparent in the subdiscipline's two most formative schools of thought – environmental determinism and geopolitics. While these approaches initially made the discipline of Geography popular in and out of the academy,

they would eventually be debunked, leaving political geography fighting for its survival. A brief introduction to each is provided here. Geopolitics, which has witnessed a resurgence of interest under the label 'critical geopolitics', is also discussed in Chapter 7.

Environmental Determinism

Environmental determinism was developed in the mid-nineteenth century purportedly to explain the discrepancies in standards of living between European colonizers and their colonial subjects. Environmental determinists were influenced by social Darwinism, although most preferred to draw from Lamarckian rather than Darwinian versions of evolution (Livingstone 1992).[1] Proponents of the theory, including Friedrich Ratzel, Ellen Churchill Semple and Ellsworth Huntington, posited that climate and topography determined the relative development of a society, and its prospects for future development. Temperate climates were seen as invigorating whereas tropical and arctic climates were deemed to stunt human development. Geographers also postulated that river valleys produced vibrant societies while mountainous environments inhibited them.

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For much of the early twentieth century, especially in the United States, environmental determinism dominated the entire discipline. Even as the approach was becoming a meta-narrative of the field, scholars in other disciplines were subjecting it to withering criticism. The anthropologist Franz Boas labelled the theory simplistic and reductionist because it failed to explain how vastly different cultures could emerge in the same environments (Livingstone 1992). Eventually, geographers would abandon the theory as well. One of the first to do so was Carl Sauer who adopted culture, rather than environment (alone), as the key explanatory variable in human differentiation across space (Livingstone 1992). Half a century later, geographers would describe the discipline's fixation with geographic determinism as an imperialist impulse (Peet 1985; Smith 1987).

Geopolitics

Social Darwinism also influenced political geographers' view of the state. Most notable in this regard was Friedrich Ratzel, whose book *Anthropogeography* formed the basis for environmental determinism.

Ratzel theorized that states were very much like organisms; both had life cycles, and states, when they were young, needed *lebensraum*, or living space, to grow. Ratzel's theory of *lebensraum* was further developed in the German context by Karl Haushofer and Richard Hennig and in Britain by Halford MacKinder (Livingstone 1992). In the 1930s, Nazi ideology combined the geopolitical view of state life cycles, and the territorial imperative underpinning them, with eugenics (Livingstone 1992). After the Nazi atrocities were brought to light at the end of World War II, geopolitics looked as ill-conceived as environmental determinism had before it. As disciplinary historian David Livingstone (1992: 253) succinctly observes, these schools of thought failed to separate out 'the science of geography from practical politics'.

Theoretical Influences

In many respects, political geography is an empirically driven sub-discipline (Mamadouh 2003). Political geographers tend to employ mid-level concepts rather than meta-theories to analyse the spatial organization of politics. Historically, concepts like region, territory and scale gave the sub-discipline its coherence, with debates emerging around how these concepts should be defined and employed. The focus on regional studies during the Cold War buttressed this trend in Anglo-geography as political geographers worked to build a dossier of thick, in-depth knowledge on places deemed of political importance by the government and/or military establishment. When political geographers use meta-level theory, they tend to select from two general theoretical frames: political economy and poststructuralism.

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Political Economy

Although some of the discipline's key thinkers can reasonably be labeled Marxist geographers, most political geographers borrow from the Marxist canon rather than working fully within it. These approaches are generally termed political economy to indicate that economic structures are emphasized in the analysis of the political realm. Several schools of thought can be broadly fitted under the political economy framework. These are discussed below, although the reader should refer to Chapter 10 on Political Economy for a more

detailed account of the genesis of the term and its uses in political geography.

World Systems Theory

World Systems Theory (WST) posits that macro-level patterns govern social and economic change. Although popular in geography, WST was developed by a political scientist, Immanuel Wallerstein (1974). Wallerstein wanted to challenge conventional notions of economic development in both history and the social sciences. Drawing on the work of French historian Fernand Braudel (1993), Wallerstein argued that history was not about singular events – the start of a war or the signing of a diplomatic accord – but about materially structured ways of life (Wieviorka 2005). Understanding history required understanding the material foundations of society, not just the actions of its elites. Wallerstein's work was also informed by the work of Andre Gunder Frank (1969), who criticized contemporary understandings of modernization, or a lack thereof, in the developing world (Wallerstein 2006). Frank argued that countries did not develop (or fail to develop) simply because they had taken (or failed to take) the necessary steps; they developed (or failed to develop) because of their place in the colonial order. Wallerstein posited that the contemporary world system emerged during the colonial period and was consolidated as a world (rather than a regional) system by the early 1900s. This process created a spatial structure in which so-called core countries were able to develop economically and politically through the extraction of peripheral countries' surplus.

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Geographers who use WST tend to employ the approach in one of two ways (Flint and Shelley 1990). In the first, they use the model largely as it is, or with minor variations, to frame their analysis of political and economic change in given states or regions. Jim Blaut (2000) has used the theory, for example, to criticize historians who argue that the industrial revolution happened in Europe rather than Africa, Latin America or Asia because it possessed special features these other regions did not. Rather, the extraction of peripheral countries' surplus allowed core countries to develop, at the expense of those places whose surplus they took. In other cases, geographers have nuanced the model, examining how world systems theory can be applied at different scales. They note that the categories of core and periphery are better seen not as static places on the globe but as scalar process (Dyke 1988;

Straussfogel 1997). So conceived, apparent contradictions in the model (such as the appearance of peripheral-like places in the core – e.g. Appalachia in the US) can be explained. That is, core/periphery relationships operate not only at the global scale, but also at national and even local scales.

Regulation theory

The regulation school was developed in France by Michel Aglietta (1979) and Alain Lipietz (1992) in the late 1970s and 1980s. Regulation theory is not Marxist, *per se*, but its advocates accept the Marxist notion that the capitalist system is prone to crisis (Purcell and Nevins 2005). In particular, they argue that capitalism is subject to crises of accumulation and these will eventually lead to the collapse of the entire system. Capitalism has, of course, proven to be quite durable, and the regulation school developed to explain what has kept its collapse at bay.

Regulation theory was developed in the late 1970s at a time of crisis. The OPEC oil embargo in 1973 had flooded the world's financial system with petrodollars (the profits gained from a reduced supply and increased prices). Many of these dollars were invested in western banks, which redistributed them as loans to domestic and foreign borrowers. In the US, this extra cash helped contribute to stagflation, and led Paul Volcker, then chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, to enact sharp interest rate hikes beginning in 1979. Access to credit dried up and unemployment increased in the US and its trading partners. Meanwhile, in the developing world, many countries who were the recipients of loans financed by petrodollars saw their debt skyrocket under the higher interest rates. By 1982 several of the world's countries were on the verge of default. Regulation theorists sought to understand the crisis of the late 1970s by examining what states had done in prior periods to cultivate relative stability in the system; what Lipietz (1992) labels the 'grand compromise' between the state, capital and labour.

Geographers in a variety of sub-disciplines have employed regulation theory (Smith and Pickles 1998). For their part, political geographers have tended to use regulation theory to examine how states manage their economies in order to avoid a crisis of accumulation (Jessop 1995; Jones 2001; Purcell and Nevins 2005). Regulation theory's emphasis on managing competing class interests has also given rise to studies examining how states manufacture the consent of their populations for changes that may be unpopular, such as raising interest rates or

increasing taxes (Jessop 1997; Purcell and Nevins 2005). Political geographers have also examined how labour can win concessions in a mode of production less friendly to them than Fordism (Herod 2000).

Political ecology

Political ecology allows geographers to examine how the physical environment and processes affecting it, such as deforestation or climate change, are connected to human activity, generally, and societal modes of production more specifically (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987; Peluso and Watts 2001; Robbins 2004). A central premise of political ecology is that no ecology is 'apolitical', even though we often assume the contrary. Driving through Yellowstone National Park, for example, political ecologist Paul Robbins (2004: xv) observed that the park's presumably wild terrain has been subject to human imperatives for millennia. As he explains, Native American hunting patterns 'probably served to concentrate the elk, antelope and other animals that made the site so attractive to Anglo-Americans who later occupied the land'. Likewise, the near extinction of wolves by westward development prompted booming elk populations in the area. Park managers responded by culling the herds, which triggered protests from those who thought natural predators should do the job instead, leading eventually to the reintroduction of wolves to the park. In short, Yellowstone's 'wild' landscape is the product of all sorts of human decisions, which were themselves the product of political institutions.

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   Political ecology addresses four areas of concern: land degradation, environmental conflict, conservation efforts, and more recently environmental social movements (Robbins 2004). In all of these areas, political ecologists tend to go against the grain. For example, while mainstream analysis of land degradation places blame on the poor land management techniques used by peasants, political ecology points to state policies which often force peasants to use land more intensively in order to meet their basic subsistence needs.

Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism is a theoretical perspective that emphasizes language and the production of meaning in the analysis of societal relations. The emergence of poststructuralism in the social sciences is often referred to as the 'linguistic turn' and is associated with French scholars who came

of age in the 1960s, including but not limited to Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari and Chantal Mouffe (Howarth 2000).

The use of the prefix 'post' to describe the theoretical frame developed by these scholars is a bit misleading. Poststructuralists did not abandon structure so much as change their notion of it. In the social sciences poststructuralists often self-consciously pitted themselves against the Marxist tradition (Bondi 1993). They argued that economic structure could not adequately capture the human experience. While one's class positioning could explain some facets of exploitation, for example, it failed to take account of abuses carried out on the basis of gender, race, sexuality or national origin. As such, poststructuralists examined how the social categorization of dominant and weaker groups was normalized and rationalized through language. This focus is often referred to broadly as identity politics because the study of dominance and 'otherness' often boils down to how people are defined in society and how they maintain, resist, subvert or nuance those identities.

In this way poststructuralism also represents a critique of wider social science epistemology. That is, while traditional social science disciplines hold that the production of knowledge is neutral and objective, poststructuralists believe that knowledge production is political and so all truth claims are constitutive of the political orders of which they are a part. When leaders assert, for example, that a particular alliance is necessary or that a war is inevitable, poststructuralists deconstruct these claims rather than take them at face value. Deconstruction is a common method in poststructural analysis; it attempts to examine why truth claims are created and how they are naturalized. In geography poststructuralism has manifested in one of two broad ways – in feminist approaches and in critical geopolitics.

Feminism(s)

Some of the earliest forays into poststructuralism in geography broadly, and political geography more specifically, have come from feminists (Bondi 1990, 1993; Sharp 1996). The emergence of feminism in geography was both a political and an analytic venture. Politically, early feminists argued against the exclusion of women as geographic topics of study. In a now seminal piece in the *Professional Geographer*, for example, Janice Monk and Susan Hanson (1982) observed that while the discipline purported to describe and analyse the spatial patterns of

humans it was actually doing so only for the male half of the population. Over time, feminists turned to analytic concerns as well. In particular, they argued that societal relations were gendered. Societies from North America to sub-Saharan Africa assume certain roles for women and men, and these broadly accepted assumptions shape what people do in life and how they are regarded, especially when they step outside of expected (and accepted) gender norms.

Within political geography feminism has focused on a variety of themes. A number of feminist political geographers have contributed to postcolonial studies, a cross-disciplinary topic that deals with issues in postcolonial societies and borrows heavily from poststructural theories of difference (Pratt 2000). Relatedly, feminists in political geography have examined how 'otherness' – social categories outside normative identity constructions – is spatialized. Gil Valentine's work on lesbian geographies (1994), for example, notes that lesbians have had more difficulty than gay men in creating specifically lesbian spaces in cities so they have tended to focus on creating more informal and mobile gathering places: events at clubs, friends' houses, etc. Feminists have also worked to 'gender' classic concepts in political geography, such as nationhood (Sharp 1996). More recent interventions include Hyndman's call for a feminist geopolitics (Hyndman 2001, 2004a).

Critical geopolitics

Critical geopolitics is another avenue of exploration within political geography that has been influenced by poststructuralism (Ó Tuathail and Dalby 1998). Critical geopolitics is an attempt to 'radicalize' geopolitics. It rejects the traditional understanding of geopolitics as 'a neutral and objective practice of surveying global space' (Ó Tuathail and Dalby 1998: 2). Instead, critical geopolitics holds that all truth claims are political: that they are made on behalf of vested political interests and often in the pursuit of political economic imperatives. In this way critical geopolitics manifests a classic concern of poststructuralism to highlight the contingent and political nature of knowledge production.

While there is no thematic 'centre' to critical geopolitics, scholars working within the approach tend to focus on unpacking geopolitical claims. This has, by necessity, led to a concentration on the production of discourse. In poststructural theory discourse is more than rhetoric. It is a linguistic structure of meaning through which social, economic and political hierarchies are established and then legitimized. A number of studies of the colonial period note, for example, that the discipline of geography

helped justify colonialism by invoking neo-Lamarckian discourses on racial difference (Driver 1999; Godlewska and Smith 1994; Kearns 1993). More recent studies have examined how the imposition of free market policies in the West and in developing countries was designed to benefit financial interests over and against those of producers (Harvey 2000; Ould-Mey 1996). More information on critical geopolitics and its application to studies of colonialism and free market 'reforms' can be found in Chapters 7, 9 and 10 (on Geopolitics, Colonialism/imperialism and Political Economy, respectively).

Fault Lines in a Subdiscipline

Most disciplines contain intellectual and political fault lines. Geography is no exception. Although students can get a Bachelor, Master's, or doctoral degree in Geography, most students follow either a human or a physical track as they fulfil major requirements. And, once students have chosen a track, they are often expected to specialize in a subfield. At graduation, a human geography student with a focus on political geography may know very little about physical geography or even other human geography subfields. Perhaps not surprisingly, sub-disciplines behave in a similar fashion to the wider disciplines whence they stem. In political geography, there are a number of internal fault lines. Two of the most trenchant are discussed here.

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The Regional versus the Thematic

While all political geographers want to know the world, they often disagree on how best to know it. One of the subdiscipline's longest-standing debates has been between those who think the pursuit of geographic knowledge should be based in regions and those who think it should be thematically organized.

In the 1950s the debate came to a head when Fred Schaefer (1953) published an article in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* that rejected the then prevailing regional approach in the discipline. He argued that geographers should adopt a more scientific approach to the discipline; they should delineate the key spatial patterns associated with human behaviour and uncover the 'rules' or 'laws' that underpin them. Richard Hartshorne, who had done much to put regional geography at the core of the discipline (see Hartshorne 1939) in the

decades prior to Schaefer's article, responded by vigorously defending the need for a regional-based curriculum (1954, 1955). Within a decade of the debate, however, Schaeffer's approach was in the ascendant. Indeed, the growing sway of positivism in the social sciences during the 1960s and 1970s favoured a systematic rather than place-specific approach.

The debate has continued, albeit periodically, in the years since. The regionalist viewpoint, for example, re-emerged in the early 1980s when John Fraser Hart wrote an article for the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* describing regional geography as 'the highest form of the geographer's art' (1982). Like Schaeffer's challenge almost thirty years earlier, Hart's engendered swift and vigorous defences of the systematic approach (Golledge et al. 1982; Healey 1983). However, others in the discipline responded that the debate was 'sterile' and not particularly relevant (Smith 1987). Likewise, Mary Beth Pudup (1988: 385) argued that the debate missed a wider point – that regional geographers need a 'theory of description' to guide their 'interpretive quest'.

After the 9/11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC, proponents of the regional approach re-emerged (Toal 2003; Wade 2006). Gerard Toal (2003), for example, made a strong case for 're-asserting the regional' in political geography. He argued that the American response to the attacks represented a 'clash of ignorance'. That is, George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden held stereotypical and messianic views of one another. In the case of George Bush, the result was a simplistic geopolitics that divided the world between the 'free' and the 'evil'. Situations on the ground, in Afghanistan and Iraq, are of course much messier than such a dichotomy suggests. And that simplistic and messianic vision that underpins the so-called 'war on terror' was the Achilles' heel of Bush's foreign policy. Toal argued that only a thick, regional knowledge can help the United States come to grips with the threat posed by Al Qaeda, specifically, and with the US's changing role in the post-Cold War epoch more broadly.

While the debate between the regional and thematic approaches in geography is likely to continue, it is worth noting that many people in the discipline work every day to merge, blend or use both approaches (see Steinberg et al. 2002 for a good overview).

Politics versus Politics

For much of political geography's history, the politics under consideration was of the 'big P' variety. 'Big P' politics has traditionally dealt

with states and their relations with other states or groups of states. Geopolitics, for example, concerned itself with the way that states manipulate territory to their advantage. During the 1980s and 1990s, the influence of poststructual forms of analysis, especially feminism, ushered in a new focus on so-called 'small p' politics. 'Small p' politics includes politics by non-state actors who tend to work through social movements and other collectives rather than political parties and other state-centred institutions.

The divide between small and big 'p' forms of analysis has played out in a variety of ways. Demographically, the divide is often, though not exclusively, generational. Young scholars often cut their teeth on what Colin Flint calls 'post-1960 [political] issues' – identity politics built around gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity and the environment. However, because mainline political geography has traditionally been focused on 'big P' forms of analysis, many people doing 'small p' studies do not describe themselves as political geographers. As Flint (2003a: 618) notes, most scholars doing 'small p' work are 'not 'card-carrying political geographers' even though they are doing political geography.

The social distance between 'small p' and 'big P' studies is particularly evident among the feminists working within the political geography tradition. While a feminist political geography emerged as early as the mid-1980s, the majority of the subdiscipline has ignored, or given only scant attention to, its findings in the years since its arrival (Hyndman 2004a; Sharp 2007). As Sharp observes, of the discipline's subfields, political geography 'has been least influenced by feminist approaches and least inclusive of female geographers' (2007: 382). Feminist political geographers have explained this state of affairs in a variety of related ways. At a general level, many observe that the subfield is dominated by men and as such reflects the interests and biases of those who dominate it (Sharp 2000). At an epistemological level, Staeheli and Kofman (2004) argue that political geography is 'masculinist'. That is, the subdiscipline refuses to include gender as an important variable of political analysis, and by doing so, assumes, incorrectly, that political change only results from the actions of (male) elites. In a similar vein, Sharp (2000) argues that political geography's reluctance to move beyond the study of statecraft leads it to ignore how political change is embodied in everyday, local practices. Examining these processes is important because such practices often contradict formal discourses about the way political change is said to occur and

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can complicate our understanding of the reasons for, and the effects of, traditional statecraft.

As several scholars have noted, few political geographers have answered the feminist clarion call in the discipline (for an exception see Painter 1995). When they have addressed feminist concerns, they have often done so in a way that suggests that 'small p' concerns are not really the purview of the subdiscipline. In a 2003 forum on the state of political geography, for example, John Agnew argued:

> much of what is labeled as political geography is not very political. Often the political is read off from the economic or the cultural such that this or that economic interest or cultural identity, respectively, is more the subject of analysis than is the organizing of political agency in pursuit of this or that interest or identity. Under the influence of economistic varieties of neo-Marxism (particularly those of a heavily Leninist cast), ethnic identity politics, and essentialist versions of feminism the distinctively political (and the agency that comes with it) has disappeared into analyses that presume superorganic categories which determine political outcomes. (2003a: 604)

As these and earlier comments suggest, the gulf between feminist and traditional political geographers remains substantial. And the divide is likely to influence the shape of the subdiscipline for some time to come.

12

Organization of the Book

This book contains 28 concept chapters. Each chapter covers a key concept in political geography and is divided into three sections. In the first section, the concept is defined. In the second evolution in the concept's meaning and/or key debates are reviewed. Each chapter concludes with a case study showing how geographers have applied the concept in their research.

The 28 chapters are organized into six parts, each of which contains a group of related concepts. In Part I (Chapters 1–4), concepts of **statecraft** are outlined. Statecraft has been a central concern of political geography, and the concepts discussed here cover many of the subdiscipline's formative concepts, including governance, nation-state, democracy and sovereignty. In Part II (Chapters 5–8) concepts related to how political geographers understand **power** are discussed. The section includes chapters on hegemony, geopolitics, territoriality and

superpower. Part III (Chapters 9–15) covers many of the formative concepts of the **modern era**. Since many of these concepts are temporally based – i.e. most cover a particular period within the modern era – they are ordered to reflect this. The section begins with chapters on colonialism/imperialism, political economy, ideology and socialism, and concludes with chapters on neoliberalism, globalization and migration.

Part IV (Chapters 16–18) is focused on the **interactivity** of political spaces. Special attention is given to connections and ruptures between political units. The section contains chapters on borders, scale, and regionalism. In Part V (Chapters 19–22), concepts related to the spatial manifestations of **violence** are considered. This part includes concept chapters for conflict, post-conflict, terrorism and anti-statism. The final part (Chapters 23–28) contains chapters, broadly linked under the heading of **identity**. Many of these concepts are related to the poststructural turn in the academy. They include nationalism, gender, citizenship, postcolonialism, the other and representation. It should be noted that the inclusion of representation in this section is indicative of the influence of poststructuralism in political geography. In traditional political geography representation was defined as the mechanism by which space was divided into political units for electoral representation. In the last twenty years, however, representation has come to encompass a wider set of concerns related to the ways in which identity groups are represented by the state (and other power brokers) in society and how such groups counter these representations. The decision to cover the concept of representation in this way was made with caution because the more traditional definition of representation remains an important concern in political geography. However, since traditional understandings of representation are covered in Part I, the chapter on representation was reserved for the emergent definition of the concept.

This is both a reference book and a source of in-depth knowledge on the concepts. The organization of the chapters into three discrete parts, for example, allows students to compare and contrast concepts as well as to go straight to select information about a concept. However, each chapter is also substantive enough to provide a foundation for students interested in learning about and using a given concept in their own research. It is the authors' hope that students will come away with an appreciation of the depth, complexity and relevance of political geography.

NOTE

1 Darwin developed the idea of natural selection to describe how certain traits became dominant in a species over time. Traits that allowed a species member to live longer, and thus reproduce more offspring, tended to become more common over time than 'weaker' traits. Lamarck, by contrast, argued that species variation was a product of 'will,' environment, and habit; substantial variations could take hold in one generation, unlike the more gradual change envisioned by Darwin. Lamarck's ideas were attractive to geographers because they enabled them to describe human differentiation as the result of human agency.

Part I
Statecraft

INTRODUCTION

Carolyn Gallaher

The first set of concepts considered in *Key Concepts in Political Geography* concern statecraft. The state is one of political geography's central units of analysis. Political geographers ask and answer a lot of questions about states. Some geographers focus on how states are formed and governed. Others analyse how state power is established, legitimized and resisted in the world system. Still others examine specific forms of state organization.

In this part of the book four concepts related to statecraft are considered. The first, the **nation-state**, is a central theme in geographic research. Geographers have long noted, for example, that nations – with the nation defined broadly as a group that sees itself linked by history, language and/or culture – do not always match the administrative boundaries of modern states. The nation-state is as much an ideal type as it is a realized entity in most places. Geographers have been at the forefront of examining the tensions that arise in places where national and state boundaries do not match.

The second concept discussed here is **sovereignty**. Geographers are interested in sovereignty because the concept encapsulates how a state gains and holds authority over the people living within its boundaries and the activities they engage in. The idea behind state sovereignty – that states are the only legitimate actors on the world stage – underpins the world system and the international laws designed to govern it. However, as geographers also note, globalization has undermined the durability of this view and some even suggest that the era of state sovereignty may end.

In the final two chapters here we examine statecraft more narrowly. Chapter 3 on **governance** examines the mechanisms by which a government accumulates capital and regulates the social polity. While states are meant to represent the interests of their citizens, at times citizens will contest the mechanisms by which they are governed. As such, geographers study not only how governance structures are organized, but also how they vary across social and geographic divides. In Chapter 4,

a particular type of government structure – **democracy** – is considered. Although democracy is often held out as an ideal form of government, especially by western powers, geographers note that there is no universal definition of democracy. Governments can and do use a variety of mechanisms for ensuring some form of popular representation in government. And, each has its benefits and its disadvantages.

To get a feel for these concepts case studies are provided from across the globe, including South Africa, Mexico and the US.

1 NATION-STATE

Mary Gilmartin

Definition: A Concept's Two Parts

The term 'nation-state' is an amalgam of two linked though different concepts, nation and state. Nations are usually described as groups of people who believe themselves to be linked together in some way, based on a shared history, language, religion, other cultural practices or links to a particular place. States are usually defined as legal and political entities, with power over the people living inside their borders. In this way, states are associated with territorial sovereignty. The concept of a nation-state fuses together the nation – the community – and the state – the territory. In doing so, it provides us with a key unit of socio-spatial organization in the contemporary world. In defining the nation-state, it is important to consider its two separate components as well as the relationship between nation and state. A nation, according to Anthony Smith, is a named human population 'sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members' (in Jones et al. 2004b: 83). Smith's definition points to a number of commonalities, around territory, culture, history and memory, which may suggest that there is an essential quality to a nation. An essentialist understanding of a nation (sometimes called primordialism) suggests that it has always existed, and that it has an unchanging core.

An essentialist view of the nation is strongly contested by those who see nations as socially constructed. For example, Benedict Anderson famously argued that nations are imagined communities, because 'the members of even the smallest nation will never know their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each they carry the image of their communion' (Anderson 1983: 15–16). Nations, in this way of thinking, come into being to serve particular purposes, often economic or political (Storey 2001: 55). This approach to nation

formation may either be perennialist or modernist (the modern era is usually defined as beginning with the industrial revolution). A perennialist theory of nation formation suggests that the nation is rooted in pre-modern ethnic communities. In contrast, a modernist theory of nation formation suggests that processes associated with the modernist period – such as the development of states, the advent of mass literacy and education, or the spread of capitalism – led to the creation of nations.

The second component of the concept of the nation-state is the state. John Rennie Short observed that one of the most important developments of the twentieth century was 'the growth of the state' (Short 1993: 71). Short commented both on the increase in the number of states, from about 70 in 1930 to over 190 in 2007, and on the growth of state power. The increase in this period in the number of states is closely linked to decolonization. As empires were dissolved, particularly after World War II, imperial spatial organization (where territories were governed from the centre of the Empire, for example London) was replaced, to a large extent, with a state-based system of spatial organization. Many of these new states were based on European models, with a strong emphasis on territoriality and on the management of people and resources. Contemporary states have power and influence over both internal and external relations. Internally, the state works to gather revenue, maintain law and order and to support the ideology of the state. Externally, the state works to defend its borders and territory and to maintain favourable political and economic relations (Jones et al. 2004; Short 1993: 71) (see Figure 1.1).

The nation-state is an ideal type: it suggests that the borders of the nation and the borders of the state coincide, so that every member of a nation is also a member of the same state, and every member of a state belongs to the same nation. In practice, this is impossible to achieve. The result is a variety of combinations of nation and state. One combination is states which contain many nations, such as Spain, with minority nations such as Basque and Catalan (see Figure 1.2). Another is nations spread across more than one state, such as the Irish nation in the Republic of Ireland and also Northern Ireland (part of the United Kingdom). A third combination is that of nations without states: the Basque nation may be defined in this way, as may the Kurdish nation, living in Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq.

There are clear disagreements over how a nation-state comes into being. However, these disagreements do not extend to the influence of

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Figure 1.1 A fortified portion of the border between Mexico and the US
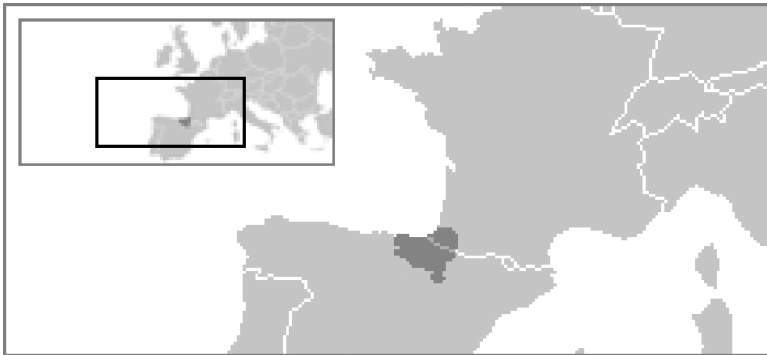
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Figure 1.2 Map of Basque provinces in Spain and France

the concept and its ability to galvanize people into action. This happens through nationalism, described by Anthony Smith as 'an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute

an actual or potential nation' (in Storey 2001: 66; for more detail see Chapter 23). Smith suggests that there is a distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism, where ethnic nationalism focuses on shared ethnic identification and commonalities, while civic nationalism focuses on shared institutions. The distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism suggested by Smith creates a hierarchy of nationalisms. This has implications for how nations and states are understood, with the creation of categories of 'failed' (and, by association, successful) states in the contemporary world.

Despite their obvious differences, the terms nation, state and nation-state are often used interchangeably. It is important to acknowledge this slippage. For example, much work in political geography highlighted the state, but was based on an implicit assumption that the state was also a nation – in other words, that its population shared a particular national identity. As such, the term 'state' implied national cohesion, but often served to mask conflict at subnational levels: between ethnic or racial groups, between regions, or around issues of power or ideology. In a similar vein, the use of the term state implied a form of civic nationalism, which again served to reinforce global hierarchies, even though the territory may well have been in the process of ethnic nation-building. The politics of naming is significant, and the assumptions underpinning the categorizations of nation, state and nation-state should always be interrogated.

Evolution and Debate: Is the Nation-state Relevant Any More?

The nation-state is one of the building blocks of political geography. Early political geographers, such as Friedrich Ratzel and Halford Mackinder, paid particular attention to the nation-state: Ratzel in his conceptualization of the state as a living organism that needed to grow in order to survive; Mackinder through his articulation of the state as a place where social and political goals could be pursued (Agnew 2002: 63–70). The state remained at the centre of political geography, so much so that Peter Taylor has argued that the focus on the state as a spatial entity distinct from social conflict led to an innate conservatism in the discipline (2003: 47). In other words, political geographers were so concerned with privileging the state as an entity that they failed to

adequately investigate the state as a site of contestation, for example between different ethnic groups living in the state.

This lack of attention to contestation within the nation-state has been addressed in recent years, particularly through a greater concern with questions of identity. On one level, this has been addressed through a focus on the process of nation-building, with particular attention to monumental, memorial and other symbolic landscapes (see Johnston 1995 and Whelan 2003 for a discussion of this process in Ireland). In recent years, political geographers have also been more attentive to questions of gender, race, ethnicity, class and sexuality, highlighting ongoing contestations over the definition of the nation-state, as well as challenges to the processes of exclusion that underpin national identities. For example, feminist political geographers have highlighted the gendered nature of nation-states and national identity and have argued for a deeper engagement with the ways in which feminized and apparently private spaces, such as the household, are central to how nation-states are imagined and work (see Staeheli et al. 2004). Similarly, recent work on sexuality within political geography has highlighted the ways in which nation-states are often heteronormative, with national identities constructed around an assumed heterosexuality. This attention to identity has most recently been articulated in relation to citizenship (for example, see the discussion of sexual citizenship in *Political Geography* 25: 8, which attempts to move the concept of citizenship beyond the political, and argues that sexuality is part of citizenship). The concept of citizenship, particularly in relation to individuated rights and responsibilities, has been the focus of much recent research on states within political geography. (See Chapter 24 for a more detailed discussion.) Postcolonial theory has been used by geographers to question the exclusionary practices of nation-states after colonialism. (See Chapter 25 for a more detailed discussion.) In addition to highlighting debates about processes of inclusion and exclusion and resulting conflicts within the boundaries of the nation-state, political geographers have also started to engage more broadly with questions of governance within the nation-state. This has included a focus on local scales, such as the changing forms and functions of local states in a globalizing and neoliberal world (see Jones et al., 2004b Chapter 4, for an overview). This has also included a focus on protest and resistance movements, as well as the state's responses to such movements (see Herbert 2007).

More fundamentally, however, the nature and existence of the nation-state has itself come under scrutiny. For some commentators, the

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nation-state is an anachronism, superseded by supranational organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union, and by processes such as globalization. John Agnew has suggested that 'the modern territorial state is now is question in ways that would have been unthinkable even twenty years ago' (2002: 112). Agnew highlights globalization, global migration, the collapse of the 'strong states' of the Soviet Union, the growth of supraregional and global forms of governance and the increase in ethnic and regional conflicts within states to support his assertion. The relationship between the nation-state and globalization has received particular attention. One school of thought is encapsulated in Kenichi Ohmae's comment that 'traditional nation-states have become unnatural, even impossible business units in a global economy' (in Jones et al. 2004b: 51). In contrast, others suggest that the nation-state remains important despite globalization (see Yeung 1998). Similar ambivalence is evident in discussions of global migration, with some arguing that the so-called 'age of migration' has led to significant numbers of transnational migrants, who maintain strong networks and links with their countries of origin as well as their places of residence. Their presence and their activities, it is suggested, challenge state and national borders and ideologies (see Nagel 2001 for an overview). Other commentators suggest, however, that the scale of global migration has led to a tightening up of state immigration policy and an intensification of border controls and surveillance. This ambivalence is also present in discussions of global terrorism and global social movements, and in debates over the extent to which states can or cannot, as the case may be, contain and control terrorist or protest activities within their borders. This has suggested the concept of a failed state, described by some commentators as a state that is incapable of asserting authority within its own borders, but seen by other commentators as a neocolonial concept applied primarily to former colonies. In short, the nation-state in the contemporary world is, despite its ubiquity, a contested concept, and political geographers are central to debates over its contested meanings.

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Case Study: South Africa after Apartheid

South Africa provides an interesting site for the study of the nation-state. During the apartheid era in South Africa, the population of the country was divided on racial and ethnic lines into separate territories. Under apartheid, South Africa was clearly not a nation-state,

Figure 1.3 Voortrekker Monument, Pretoria, South Africa

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but consisted of a number of nations – racially and ethnically defined – within one state. Those nations were socially constructed. As an example, Crampton has written of the importance of the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria in articulating a nationalist Afrikaner identity in the 1940s (Crampton 2001). The Voortrekker Monument was intended to celebrate the Great Trek of Afrikaners into the interior of South Africa in the 1840s, and Crampton considers the inauguration of the monument in 1949 as part of a broader Afrikaner nationalist project (see Figure 1.3). As apartheid ended, a variety of groups argued that South Africa needed to construct a new identity for the state through a process of nation-building. President Nelson Mandela, for example, called for a 'rainbow nation', and described his vision for this new South Africa as follows:

> In centuries of struggle against racial domination, South Africans of *all colours* and backgrounds proclaimed freedom and justice as their unquenchable aspiration. They pledged loyalty to a country which belongs to all who live in it ... Out of such experience was born a vision of a free South Africa, of a nation united in diversity and working together to build *a better life for all*. (in Ramutsindela 2001: 74, emphasis in original)