

Key Concepts in Political Geography

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define sovereignty.
2. Distinguish between a state and a nation.
3. Identify some of the impacts of colonialism on the political geography of Africa.

It is sometimes said that political geography exists because people are territorial. Most political geographers consider human territoriality to be more than an instinctive, biological

response. Instead, they see it as a complex form of behavior that is shaped by diverse social and cultural factors related to human identity.

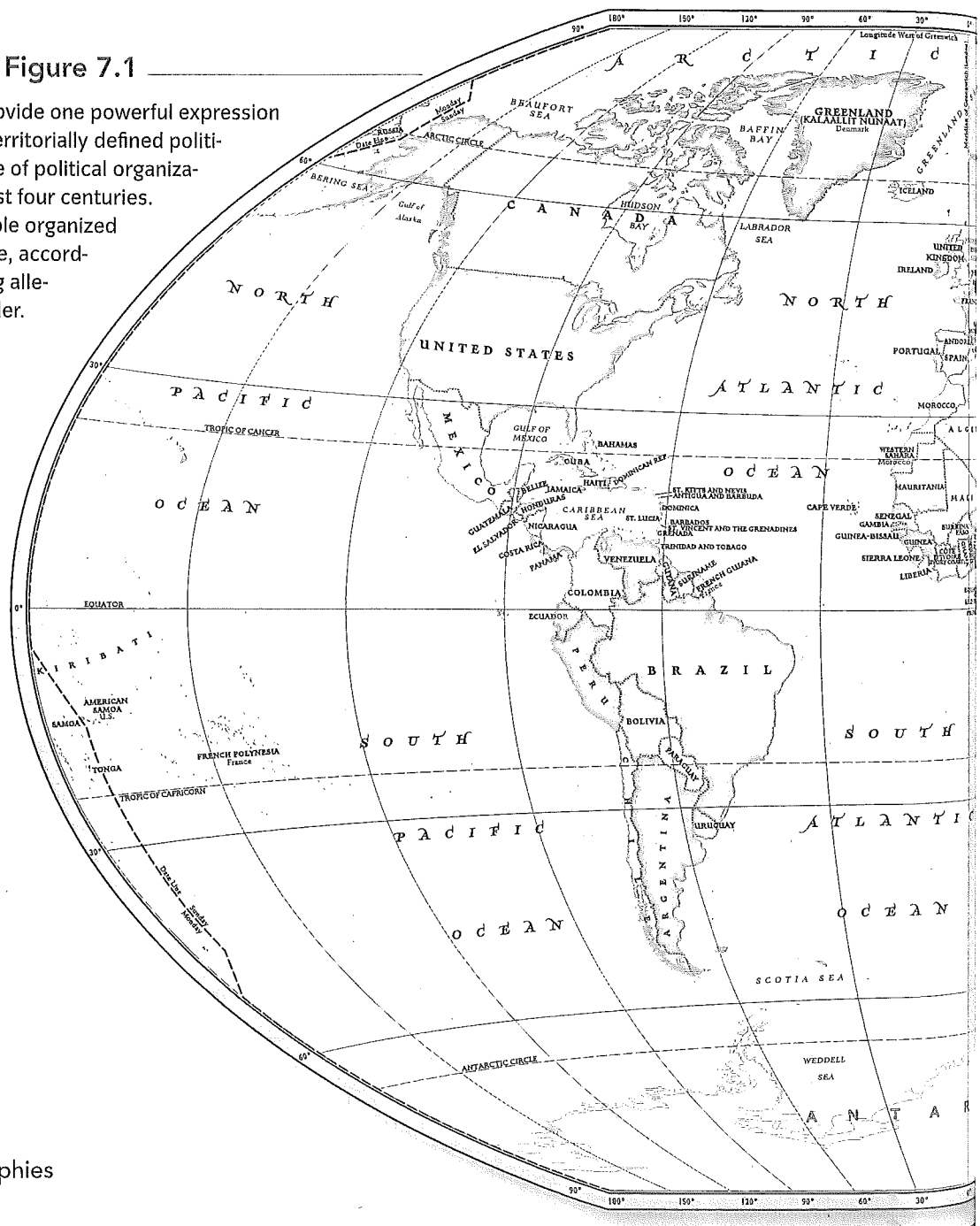
Territoriality can be expressed by individuals and by groups. The concept of personal space helps us understand territoriality on an individual level. Personal space is

political geography The study of the spatial aspects of political affairs.

territoriality Strong attachment to or defensive control of a place or an area.

Political map of the world • Figure 7.1

The 194 countries shown on this map provide one powerful expression of human territoriality. The use of such territorially defined political units has become the dominant mode of political organization around the world only within the past four centuries. Throughout most of human history, people organized themselves in different ways, for example, according to class, kinship, or as subjects owing allegiance to a king, an emperor, or other ruler.



the space around our bodies that we consider to be an extension of ourselves and therefore "our space." People differ a great deal in terms of how expansive their personal space is but are likely to feel uncomfortable when others encroach on it. The presence of political states (countries), connected with a specific territory, shows that territoriality exists among groups of people (Figure 7.1).

The Development of the State and Its Sovereignty

How did the political map of the world come about? Although the answer to this question goes beyond the

scope of this chapter, the question points to one of the key concepts in political geography: the development of the state. The practice of using territory as a basis for political organization stems from ideas about sovereignty that gained prominence following the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. This peace settlement included a series of treaties signed at the end of the Thirty Years' War, a long religious and territorial conflict in Europe. Since the mid-17th century, then, sovereignty has meant that states are distinct territorial units, that

sovereignty
Supreme authority of a state over its own affairs and freedom from control by outside forces.



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one state has no business interfering in the affairs of another state, and that states are expected to recognize the existence of other states.

For political geographers, the terms *state* and *country* mean the same thing; *state* is considered a more formal term. Therefore, a *state* exists when the following four conditions are met:

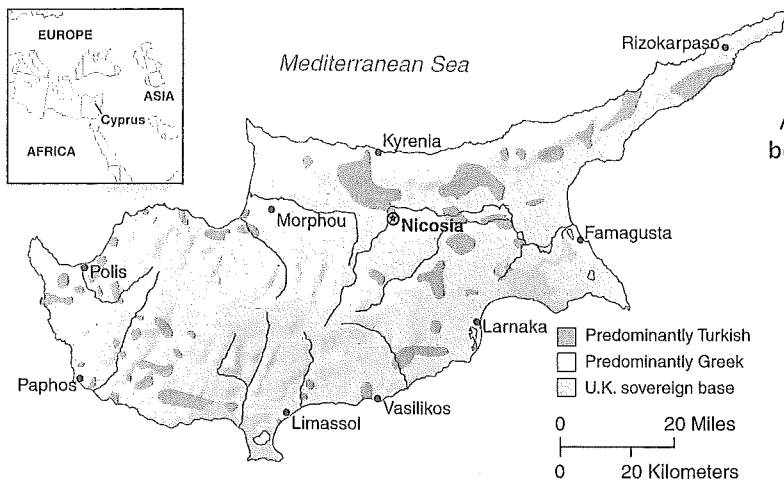
1. It consists of a specific territory with defined boundaries.
2. Its territory includes a permanent population.
3. It is recognized as a state by other states.
4. It has a government with supreme authority over its domestic and international affairs.

state An internationally recognized political unit with a permanently populated territory, defined boundaries, and a government with sovereignty over its domestic and international affairs.

Sovereignty is a fundamental aspect of statehood, but even though we have carefully defined sovereignty, the fact of the matter is that people, acting on behalf of states, use it to suit their own purposes. Thus, questions of sovereignty can become a basis for political disputes. For example, different perspectives exist concerning the status of Taiwan. The origins of this dispute date to the 1940s, when civil war broke out between the Communists and Nationalists in China. Following the war, the People's Republic of China was established. In defeat, the Nationalists retreated to Taiwan in 1949. Since that time, China and Taiwan have developed very different economic and political systems. Although the Taiwanese

A divided state • Figure 7.2

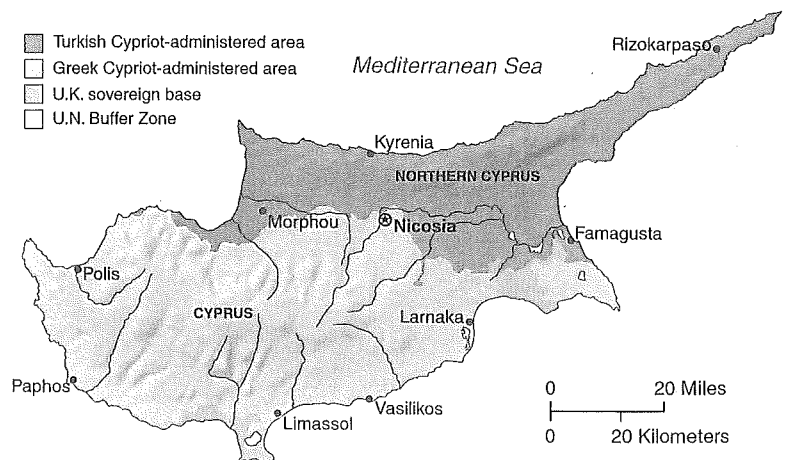
The Republic of Cyprus gained its independence from Britain in 1960.



a. Ethnic distribution, 1970
 The country's independence, however, did not heal the rifts that had developed between Greek Cypriots (78% of the population) and Turkish Cypriots (18% of the population). A degree of residential separation already existed between these groups by the 1970s.

b. Division of Cyprus

After a coup in 1974 led by some Greek Cypriots seeking unification with Greece, Turkey invaded the northern third of the island. Partition followed (compare to a), with the United Nations maintaining a buffer zone. Thousands of people were internally displaced. The Turkish Republic of North Cyprus was established in 1983, but only Turkey has recognized it.



have never declared their independence from China, the government of Taiwan represents itself as the Republic of China—a continuation of the government that existed in China before its civil war.

The Chinese government asserts sovereignty over Taiwan and considers the island to be its twenty-third province, but it does not control the island's political affairs. Thus, it can be said that Taiwan has *de facto* (actual) sovereignty because it manages its own affairs, but Taiwan lacks *de jure* (legal) sovereignty because the international community does not recognize it as a full-fledged state.

Different conceptions of sovereignty also make a simple question like “how many states are there?” more complicated than it may seem. We might reasonably ask whether Cyprus, a sovereign state divided since the 1970s between

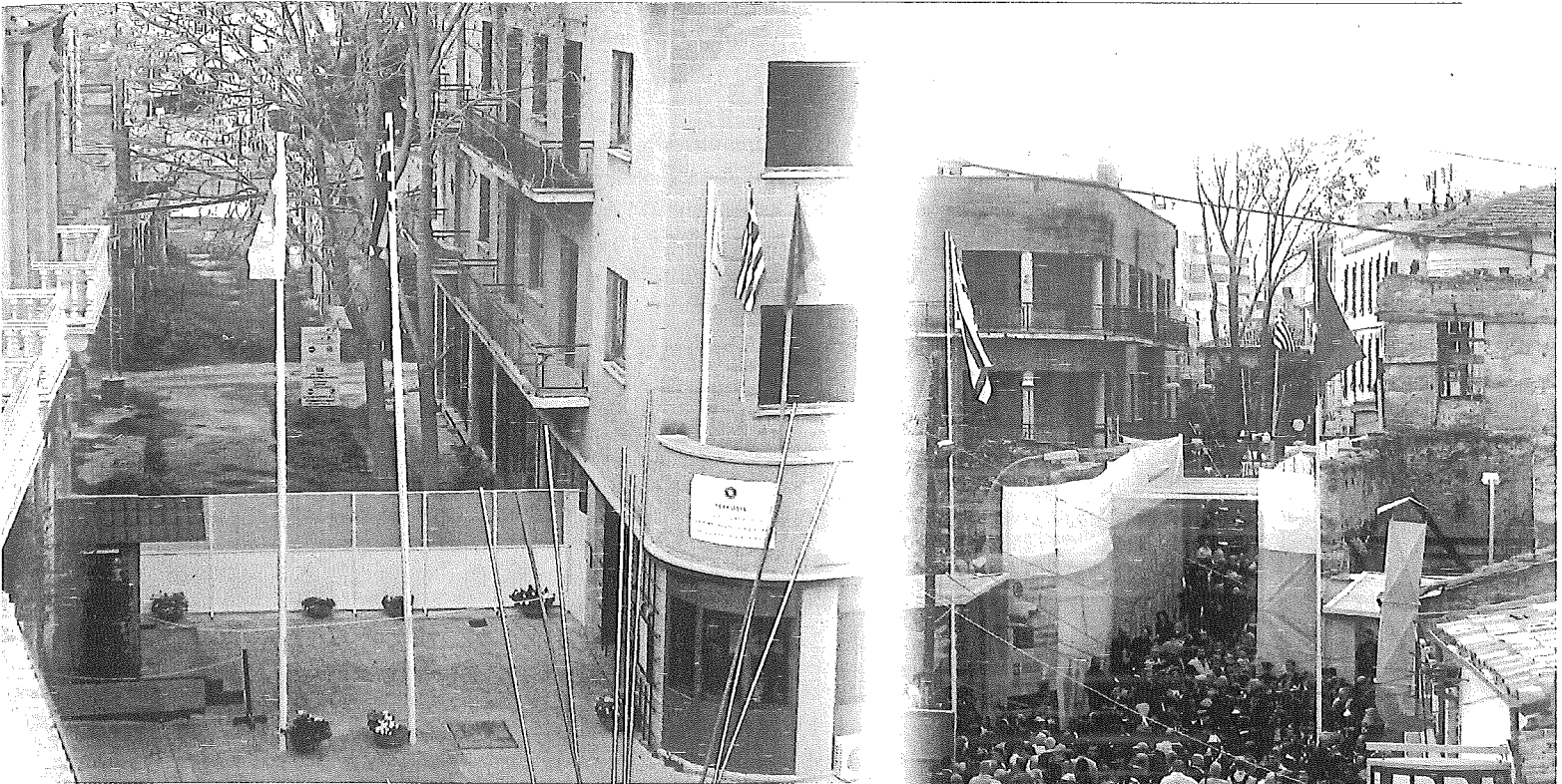
a Turkish-dominated North and a Greek-dominated South, should be counted as one state or two (Figure 7.2).

Nations and States

Thus far we have talked about states, but we have said very little about the people within them, especially those who see themselves as belonging to a **nation**.

What gives a nation its shared sense of identity? Often it is a mixture of various historical, cultural, economic, or political circumstances. Certainly the Palestinian nation has been shaped by its long struggle to gain independence and statehood, among other factors. For the French-

nation A sizable group of people with shared political aspirations whose collective identity is rooted in a common history, heritage, and attachment to a specific territory.



c. Nicosia divided

When Cyprus was divided, so was the capital city, Nicosia. Ledra Street, shown here, was blocked to prevent movement between the Turkish and Greek Cypriot parts of the city.

d. Potential resolution

In April 2008, Ledra Street was reopened in a symbolic move to build support for reunification of the island. Like sovereignty, the issue of which states are counted as states involves some subjectivity.

speaking Québécois in Canada, a shared language and experience as a minority group have shaped their national identity.

In popular usage, the terms *nation* and *state* are frequently used interchangeably, but political geographers and other scholars are careful to note that the terms are not synonymous. Simply stated, a nation refers to a people and a state refers to a political unit. *Nationalism*, then, is the expression of loyalty to and pride in a nation, whereas *patriotism* is the expression of love for and devotion to one's state.

In a **multinational state**, the population consists of two or more nations. Most countries in the world are multinational states, including, for example, Brazil, Canada, China, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, Spain, Sudan, and the United Kingdom. A **nation-state** exists when the boundaries of a nation coincide with the boundaries of the state and the people share a sense of political unity. A narrow understanding of the nation-state concept means that a nation-state possesses a fairly homogeneous population. For example, Icelanders make up 94%

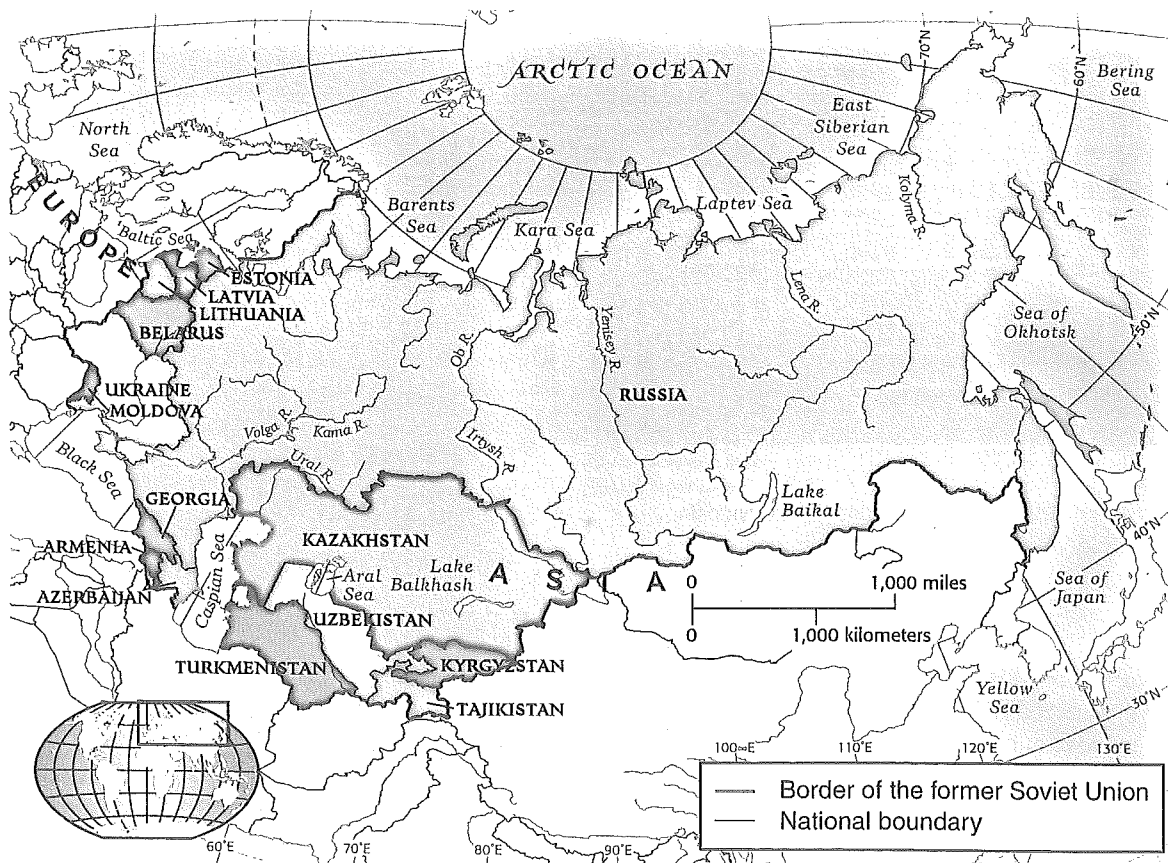
of the population of Iceland, and Japanese account for 99% of the population of Japan. But very few of the states in the world meet this strict definition of nation-state. Thus, a broader understanding of the nation-state concept helps us see that even a multinational state can develop an identity as a nation-state by socially, economically, and politically integrating its people. Let's consider the United States. Because of its Native American nations, such as the Chickasaw Nation and the Navajo Nation among others, the United States is multinational in terms of its population composition. Nevertheless, the United States functions as a nation-state through the creation of a political identity that sees the American nation and the state of the United States as identical and indivisible.

For a variety of political, economic, and social reasons, some multinational states are simply not able to successfully integrate the nations inside their borders. This is demonstrated by, among other events, the collapse of three multinational states in the 1990s: the Union of Soviet Socialist

The breakup of a multinational state • Figure 7.3

Some factors contributing to the fall of the Soviet Union were economic crises such as food shortages, poor industrial performance, German reunification, and the related fall of communism in eastern Europe. When Russia declared its sovereignty in 1990, that act significantly undermined the political legitimacy of the Soviet Union. Home to a diverse population, the Soviet Union fractured largely along internal political and national lines as 15 new states came into existence in 1991.

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Republics (U.S.S.R.), Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia. Since 1991, 24 new states have been created from the breakup of these three states. The splitting up of the U.S.S.R. alone accounted for 15 of these new states, of which Russia is the largest (see Figure 7.3).

Imperialism and Colonialism

The dual processes of imperialism and colonialism have contributed to the creation of many of the world's multinational states largely because gaining access to and control of additional territory usually brings different national groups into contact. Imperialism and colonialism are closely connected, though the terms are not necessarily interchangeable.

States use imperialism and colonialism as strategies to extend their power over other lands and peoples. In the 15th century, news of

imperialism One state's exercise of direct or indirect control over the affairs of another political society.

colonialism A form of imperialism in which a state takes possession of a foreign territory, occupies it, and governs it.

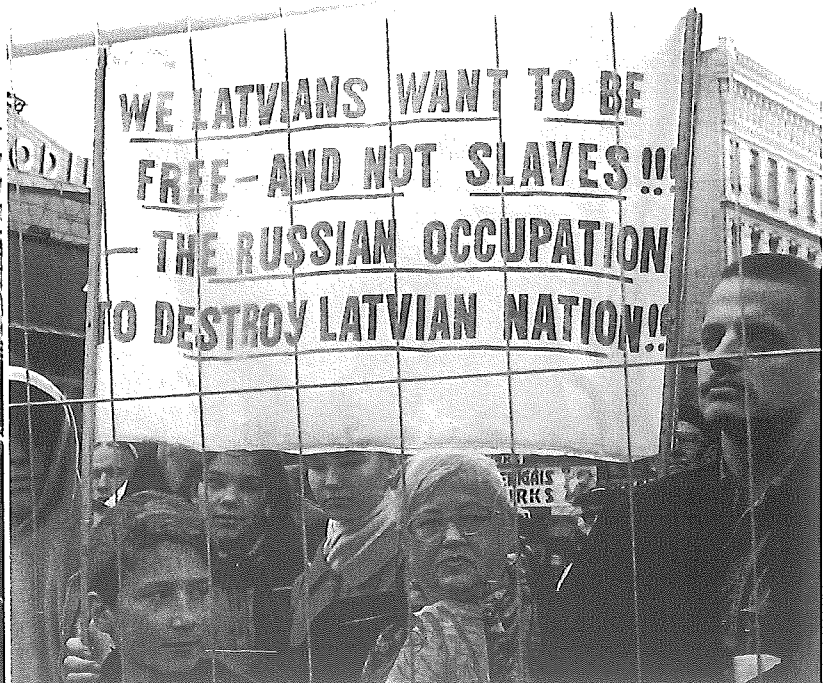
Portuguese explorations along the coast of Africa, and Portuguese and Spanish ventures in the Americas, prompted the Netherlands, Britain, and France to seek additional territory beyond their borders. Other European states such as Belgium,

Germany, and Italy followed suit, and European colonies were eventually established in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Pacific. Although most of the colonies in the Americas had gained independence by 1825, sizable portions of Africa and Asia were still controlled by Europeans in 1914. With colonies on every continent (except Antarctica), the British created the largest colonial empire in history. France built the second most extensive empire, assembling colonies across West Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. The establishment of European colonies in Africa provides a stark example of one of the largest land grabs in history, often referred to as the "scramble for Africa."

◀ a. As the rupture occurred, the boundaries of the internal Soviet republics became the boundaries of the newly independent states. For example, the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic became the new state of Uzbekistan. Tellingly, the names of these new states, like the names of the republics before them, evoke the diverse human mosaic that the Soviet Union was—for embedded in each is also the name of a prominent ethnic group: the Russians, Uzbeks, Tajiks, and so on.

▼ b. In 2008, the Georgian military attacked locations in South Ossetia ostensibly to protect Georgians living in the region, and the Russians responded by sending troops into the region. The photo shows Georgians protesting this intervention outside the Russian Embassy in Paris. Expressions of Georgian nationalism have at times invoked the idea of a homogeneous nation-state and alienated other national groups in the country by claiming that "Georgia is for Georgians."

▼ c. Banners carried by Latvian nationalists reveal their enduring opposition to Russia and Russian dominance associated with the former Soviet Union. Significantly, however, about 30% of the Latvian population is Russian. In fact, all of the states created in the breakup of the Soviet Union are themselves multinational.

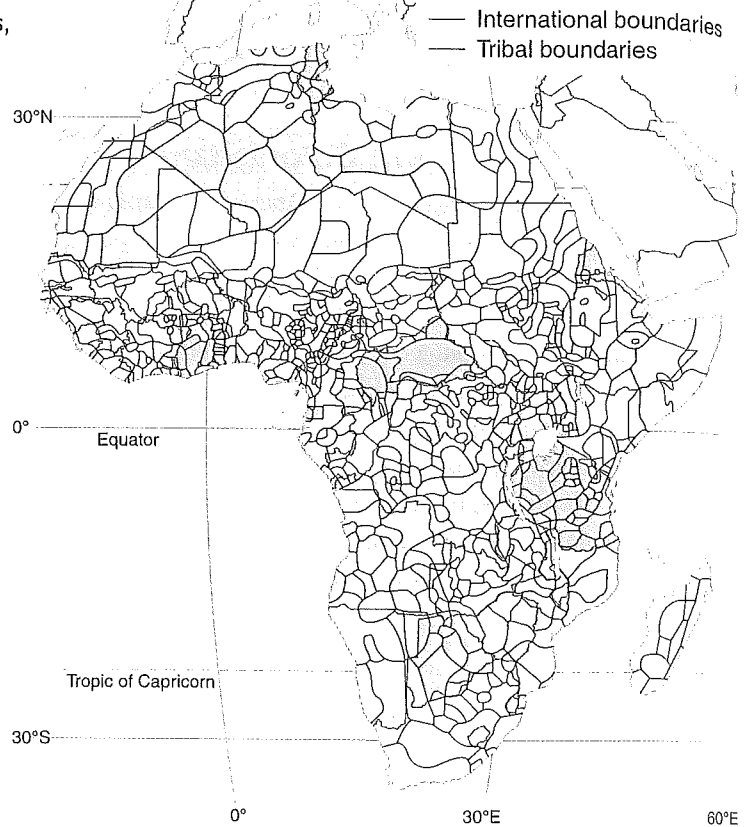
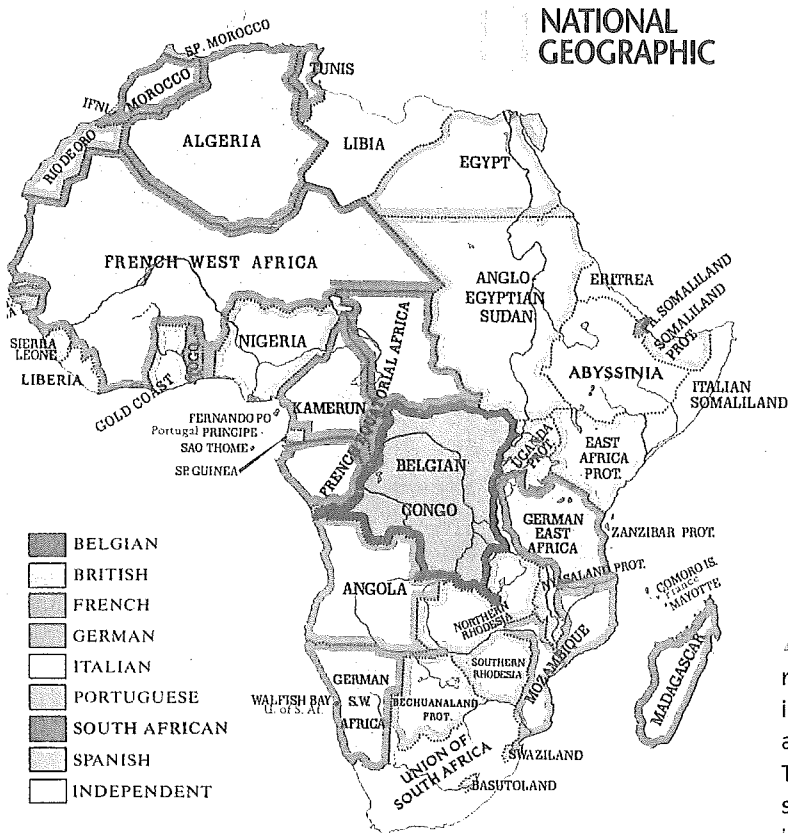


Colonial legacies in Africa • Figure 7.4

Colonialism transformed Africa. Among other impacts, it gave rise to a number of multinational and landlocked states, shaped new political identities, and built new road, rail, and trade networks.

a. Africa in 1914

The political map of Africa, as we know it today, began to take shape during the colonial period, and the first major boundary-making exercise by colonial powers took place in conjunction with the 1884–1885 Berlin Conference.



b. Africa's states and one depiction of its cultural groups

The present-day boundaries of African states more closely resemble those of the European colonies than they do the boundaries of the African peoples. But notice that this statement implies that a country should be a nation-state, in the strict sense of the term. The human diversity of the world, glimpsed via this map of Africa, suggests that the idea of creating homogeneous nation-states is impractical, if not impossible.

c. Rwandan refugees and a refugee camp

In some places, like Rwanda, European colonialists stoked animosities between local groups that have continued to the present. Rwanda descended into a horrific civil war in the 1990s. In 1994, approximately 250,000 refugees entered neighboring Tanzania in just 24 hours, prompting the establishment of substantial refugee camps. The adoption of a new constitution in 2003 ensuring a balance of power between Hutus and Tutsis has helped stabilize the country, but there are still thousands of refugees scattered across the region.



The Berlin Conference, held in 1884–1885, began the process of formalizing modern political boundaries in Africa. Representatives from the leading European powers, as well as the United States and Russia, met to discuss the partitioning of the African continent. Not a single African was present at the conference. In a boardroom in Berlin, Europeans made decisions about their control of territory in Africa almost as if they were playing a game of Monopoly in which the object was to control the most (and most valuable) land.

Boundaries separating British, French, Belgian, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, and German spheres of influence in Africa were superimposed. That is, they were often drawn as straight lines with little awareness of or concern for the different ethnic groups living there. In East Africa, for example, the Somali people lived in lands that were partitioned between the British, French, and Italians. In numerous other instances tens and sometimes hundreds of different ethnic groups were combined in a single colony.

Each of the European powers administered its colonies in different ways, but a guiding philosophy of managing colonies was rooted in the racist belief that Africans were inferior. Sometimes colonial administrators used ethnic differences to create animosities between certain Africans. In Rwanda, for example, the Germans and later the Belgians exploited differences between Tutsis and Hutus. The Belgians showed favoritism to the Tutsis, however, allowing some of the men to attend school and rewarding them with jobs handling the

day-to-day affairs of the colony. In 1962, following a Hutu rebellion, the Belgians granted independence to Rwanda, which came into existence as a multinational state with a population that was seriously divided (Figure 7.4).

Before and after World War II there was a surge in efforts by Africans and other colonized peoples to attain independence and achieve **self-determination**, the ability to choose their own political status. Globally, colonialism fell out of favor. On the continent of Africa, for example, some 32 former colonies gained their independence between 1960 and 1970. Even though European colonialism was waning, the framework for the political organization of space that exists today was cemented because the newly independent countries often retained their colonial boundaries.

CONCEPT CHECK



1. How did the concept of sovereignty change after the Peace of Westphalia, and why is this significant?
2. What are the four criteria that define a state, and how is a state different from a nation?
3. How did colonialism affect the political map of Africa?

Geographical Characteristics of States

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain how boundaries affect access to resources.
2. Compare and contrast centripetal and centrifugal forces.
3. Identify two systems of internal spatial organization.
4. Define devolution.

Barlier, in our discussion of Africa, we touched on boundaries and the role they played in transforming the political spaces of the African continent. Boundaries are regulatory devices that not only sanction territorial possession, but also help identify the contents—the people, natural resources,

and territory—of states. In this section, we first examine different types of boundaries, visualizing the ways boundaries simultaneously secure, divide, and configure political space. Then, in subsequent sections, we consider other forces that affect the spatial functioning of states such as pressures of political integration or belonging, and political separation.