

Seventh edition



POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

WORLD-ECONOMY, NATION-STATE AND LOCALITY



Colin Flint | Peter J. Taylor

Political Geography

The new and updated seventh edition of *Political Geography* once again shows itself fit to tackle a frequently and rapidly changing geopolitical landscape. It retains the intellectual clarity, rigour and vision of previous editions based upon its world-systems approach, and is complemented by the perspective of feminist geography. The book successfully integrates the complexity of individuals with the complexity of the world-economy by merging the compatible, but different, research agendas of the co-authors.

This edition explores the importance of states in corporate globalization, challenges to this globalization, and the increasingly influential role of China. It also discusses the dynamics of the capitalist world-economy and the constant tension between the global scale of economic processes and the territorialization of politics in the current context of geopolitical change. The chapters have been updated with new examples – new sections on art and war, intimate geopolitics and geopolitical constructs reflect the vibrancy and diversity of the academic study of the subject. Sections have been updated and added to the material of the previous edition to reflect the role of the so-called Islamic State in global geopolitics. The book offers a framework to help students make their own judgements of how we got where we are today, and what may or should be done about it.

Political Geography remains a core text for students of political geography, geopolitics, international relations and political science, as well as more broadly across human geography and the social sciences.

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Political Geography

World-Economy, Nation-State
and Locality

Seventh edition

Colin Flint and
Peter J. Taylor

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We dedicate this book to Immanuel Wallerstein for
his imagination, inspiration and friendship



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Preface to the seventh edition

The seventh edition appears at a time when commentators and experts are struggling to understand the dramatic changes they are witnessing and find their crystal balls to be full of cloud. The election of Donald Trump to president of the United States and Brexit were both surprises with consequences that can only be conjectured at the moment. The roles of China and Russia in global politics raise fears for some and opportunities for others. Conflicts in the Middle East continue and the emergence of the so-called Islamic State has defined the daily experiences of far too many people. In sum, there are suggestions that the very institutions, practices and assumptions that have defined the actions of countries, businesses, political parties and social movements since the end of the Second World War may be thoroughly revised in the next few years. The pressing challenges of political violence, ecological disaster, economic inequity and exclusionary and fundamentalist attitudes to nationalism and religion dominate the news and media commentary.

Similar to the context of the previous edition, we remain concerned about the state of the world and believe the framework we offer can play a role in helping students (broadly defined) make their own judgements of how we got where we are today and what may/should be done about it. Perhaps more than any edition, this one will struggle with the difficulties of interpreting a world that seems to be changing at a rapid rate. However, the historic basis of our framework and our political economy approach allow us to give particular insights into contemporary changes. Many of these insights may provide disturbing suggestions as to what is on the horizon. However, it is not *all* bad news. The political geographies of war and difference exist alongside those seeking inter-cultural understanding and reconciliation. In other words, there are political

geographies that are attempting to forge a sustainable future.

This edition is the fourth one jointly authored. Our compatible but different research agendas reflect political geography's consideration of two key processes. On the one hand, Peter Taylor's research studies the integration of the world-economy through the network practices across time and space (currently referred to as globalization). On the other hand, Colin Flint is studying the geographies of war and peace, especially the projection of military power across the globe and into all aspects of society. Both of these topics are to the fore in this edition.

To explain the many political geographies of our world we believe that a historical approach that connects economic and political processes is the most useful. With that in mind, we base the book upon a body of knowledge known as the world-systems approach. This body of knowledge is the product of the work of many scholars. However, Immanuel Wallerstein has been the driving-force behind the world-systems approach, hence our decision to dedicate the fifth and sixth editions of the book to him. We remain indebted to his vision and intellectual contribution. We explain the world-systems approach in detail, and illustrate its usefulness in explaining and connecting the geography of many different political actions. In addition, we complement the world-systems approach with the perspective of feminist geography. The result is, we hope, an explanation that is able to integrate the complexity of individuals with the complexity of the world-economy.

The seven editions of this book may be categorized thus:

1985 *Foundation* text, in which a particular theoretical perspective was brought to bear on the subject matter of political geography.

- 1989 *Consolidation* text, in which ideas were fleshed out to make for a more comprehensive treatment of political geography (notably in terms of geopolitics and nationalism).
- 1993 *Post-Cold War* text, in which arguments had to be developed that took account of the traumatic 'geopolitical transition' anticipated by the 1989 (written in 1988) text.
- 1999 *Globalization* text, in some sense returning to the original theoretical perspective, emphasized the 'global' when it was much less fashionable than it is today.
- 2007 *Empire and War on Terrorism* text, in which the processes of globalization were discussed in relation to the violent practices of terrorism and counter-terrorism.
- 2011 *Empire, globalization and climate change* text, in which we see global political change being driven by three related processes: the role of cities in economic and political networks, the problems facing territorially based notions of democratic politics and citizenship, and the ongoing spectre of war.
- 2018 *Corporatization of politics, challenges to globalization, and the increasingly influential role of China* text. The ability of world-systems analysis to connect and integrate these three topics is a strength of our framework. The dynamics of the capitalist world-economy and the constant tension between the global scale of economic processes and the territorialization of politics are explored in the current context of geopolitical change.

In this edition we have added three new sections to Chapter 2, changed the title and updated the examples. These changes reflect a disturbing resurgence of the use of the word geopolitics by policy-makers and commentators. It is sobering to reflect that the term geopolitics was created in the global tensions at the end of the nineteenth century that eventually led to the First World War. The new sections on art and war, intimate geopolitics and geopolitical constructs reflect the vibrancy and diversity of the academic study of geopolitics. In Chapter 3 we also look to the future by considering historical echoes in a discussion of the geopolitical nature of infrastructure. In our discussion of national identity we include a new section on the intersection of religious affiliation with feelings of national belonging or exclusion. The War on Terror continues, and we have updated and added to the previous edition to reflect the role of the so-called Islamic State in global geopolitics. Recent elections have produced surprising results. In Chapter 6 we discuss how the processes of corporate globalization may be causing a new electoral geography. The world-systems approach is a historical social science, but one with contemporary relevance. We hope that the integration of text explaining theory and case studies illuminating the theory's relevance enhances the book's usefulness. Though we have changed the ingredients and the cooking-style in this edition we still know, however, that the proof of the pudding is in the eating!

Colin Flint, Logan, UT, USA
Peter Taylor, Tynemouth, England
July 2017



Tips for reading this book

This book contains a number of features designed to help you. The text describes the concepts that we want to introduce to you. These concepts are ideas generated by political geography and world-systems scholars with the intention of explaining events in the world. In addition, we believe that understanding the contemporary world requires consideration of what has happened in the past. Such discussions of the historical foundations of contemporary events are also included in the main text.

Case studies are embedded throughout the book. These are intended to exemplify the concepts we introduce. Mainly, the case studies relate to contem-

porary issues. Set off from the text of each chapter in a tinted panel are short vignettes, gleaned from the media, to show that the news items you come across every day are manifestations of the political geographies we describe in the text.

Finally, each chapter concludes with suggested activities and further reading. As you will see from the text, political geography, as academic subject and real-world practice, is a dynamic affair. Your actions and understandings will maintain existing political geographies and create new ones. The activities and readings are intended to help you plot a pathway.



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Prologue: episodes in the life and times of a sub-discipline

■ Welcome to political geography

The major sub-disciplines of human geography are identified by their preceding adjectives: in alphabetical order these are cultural, economic, political and social geographies. Each has spawned its own suite of textbooks that provide various spatial perspectives on each of these human activities. This all seems neat and simple, as it is intended to be. But our world, especially the world of knowledge, is never neat and tidy because it is made by many different people; usually of an older generation, wealthy, white and male. In particular, political geography is quite different from its sister adjectival geographies. Cultural, economic and social geographies are relatively new kids on the block; by and large they developed in the second half of the twentieth century. But political geography was part of geography from its inception as a university discipline in the late nineteenth century, an age of imperial competition: it is a sub-discipline present at disciplinary creation. Thus, it has a history as long as its discipline and this makes it very different from other parts of human geography.

To a large degree, political geography had its heyday in terms of influence before the other sub-disciplines had started to seriously develop. This is both a good thing and a bad thing. It is the latter because political geography became entwined into the political turmoils that engulfed Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. In short, in its own small way, parts of political geography became implicated in some of the more unsavoury political movements of the times, not least Nazi politics. Thus is political geography's 'biography' profoundly different from all other parts of geography. This can now be treated as a good thing because it

highlights the whole contemporary issue of linking geographical knowledge to policy-making. Geography should be relevant, but relevant for whom, to whom?

So, welcome to political geography. If you have read this far it means that you are on the way to choosing to enter the exciting world of this unusual sub-discipline: the small sub-discipline with the big subject-matter – relations between space and power. We have chosen to begin this text briefly with its history because this provides one very important insight. Understanding political geography's biography enlightens how we approach our studies: past political geographies are now seen as transient; there is no reason to suppose present political geography to be any more stable. You most certainly should not consider that this book provides you with a 'final state of play', the last word on political geography! We aspire to produce a political geography for our times, nothing less and nothing more.

Knowing where we have come from is not just a matter of not making the same mistakes again. The experience gained from excavating political geography's past provides fresh insights into what is possible in political geography and what is not. Revealing the poverty of past 'political certainties' and 'presumed objectivities' leads us to the question: what sort of political geography knowledge is it possible to produce? There have been three basic answers to this question. In the light of the political geography's 'bad experiences', the simplest answer has been to avoid political controversy and produce political geography consisting of a basic list of only weakly connected topics, a description of things 'political' using maps. The dearth of theory in this approach provided a veneer of objectivity or neutrality but the product was a lacklustre sub-discipline. Another answer has been to react to the lack of coherence to produce a more theoretically

informed political geography. This has involved choosing theory from the general toolkit of social science and reinterpreting political geography along new lines. An alternative, third, position has been to build upon the diversity hinted at in the first approach but now developed through more sophisticated conceptions of space and political power. This is achieved by choosing social theory, often called 'postmodern', that celebrates variety.

In this text, we follow the middle course described above: a theoretically informed political geography is offered to provide a strong coherence to the subject-matter of political geography. World-systems analysis is the theory chosen to underpin the sub-discipline. This is a pragmatic choice based upon several decades of political geography practice. Put succinctly, we have found this particular theory, because of its specific treatment of time, space and power relations, to be especially relevant to the ongoing concerns of political geography in 'global times'. In addition, we believe this approach responds to the relevance question most directly. The key concern of world-systems analysis is the well-being of the majority of the world's population that live in poverty. In political terms, it aspires to be profoundly democratic for global times. The first chapter of the text introduces world-systems analysis as a theoretical framework, setting out the key concepts for interpreting a political geography for today. However, this prime choice of theory does not preclude incorporating important ideas from other approaches that have made political geography such a vibrant, contemporary sub-discipline in recent years. We remain eclectic in our approach but we have to begin somewhere and we have decided to use the coherent narrative of world-systems analysis as our starting point. But more about that below, let's continue with how we get from initial and early 'dark' political geographies to today's more emancipatory offerings. This biography of the sub-discipline is derived largely from Agnew and Muscarà (2012) and Taylor and Van der Wusten (2004), where you can find more details to pursue the subject further. It is, we think you will find, a really fascinating story.

■ Ratzel's organism: promoting a new state

It was in the German university system during the nineteenth century that research was added to traditional teaching functions and new disciplines were thereby created. Geography was a latecomer to this process, with geography departments being widely established only after German unification in 1871. In fact, geography as a discipline was sponsored by the state (Taylor 1985); and in its turn the state became a key research object of geography. This was consolidated by the publication of Friedrich Ratzel's *Politische Geographie* in 1897, resulting in Ratzel being commonly accepted as the 'father of political geography'.

Ratzel began his studies as a life sciences student and was deeply affected by the enthusiastic reception of Darwin's teachings in the German academic world. When he occupied a newly established chair in geography he developed a perspective that was informed by the lessons he drew from Darwin. He wrote *Politische Geographie* late in his life but he was still strongly marked by the evolutionary perspective. At this juncture Germany's unification in the Second Reich was still fresh and the forces that pushed for great power status were increasingly powerful. Ratzel was among its supporters (Buttmann 1977). Hence the matter of state rivalries was a key political concern of his, which he translated into political geography as the struggle to gain and retain territory.

What sort of theory of the state would you need as a supporter of a dynamic new nation-state? Ratzel found the answer in his Darwinian perspective by drawing on the work of Ernest Haeckel, another German professor, the man who invented ecology. As all living creatures (as species) have to find a niche within the natural environment to survive and prosper, so do nations (as states) in the world political environment. It is the fittest that survive in ecology so it will be the fittest that survive in political geography. The result of this way of thinking is the 'organic theory of the state' as a recipe for state expansion.

Ratzel ([1897]1969) set out seven 'laws of the spatial growth of states'. The crucial 'law' is the middle

one: '4. The boundary is the peripheral organ of the state, the bearer of its growth as well as its fortification, and takes part in all of the transformations of the organism of the state.' Basically, he argues that states naturally grow as the culture of the society becomes more 'advanced'. Therefore, states can never be simply bounded by lines; rather he envisages a world of fluid frontiers. Growing states envelope 'political valuable locations' in a system of 'territorial annexations and amalgamations'. Thus, a state's territory at any point in time is always only 'a transitional stage of rest for the fundamentally mobile organism' (p. 25), until cultural development ends. He sees this as a generic process of 'land-greed' in all conquering states throughout history. For his own times, he identifies two contexts for this process. First, in colonial expansion, European states expand at the expense of 'less-civilized' peoples as a natural expression of their cultural superiority. Second, in 'crowded Europe' where the unifications of Germany and Italy are interpreted as initial small states, Prussia and Piedmont, amalgamating with neighbouring smaller states to become equal with existing large states like France and Austria. In this way, according to Ratzel in the late nineteenth century, the world political map continues to be dynamic to accommodate the rise of new great nations.

It is hard to imagine a 'scientific' theory more adapted to a given state's needs as this one. Newly unified, the German Second Reich was hemmed in by older great states in Europe (Russia, Austria and France) and was a latecomer to colonial expansion: it was only just beginning to carve out its empire beyond Europe. Of course, we know now that this organism metaphor for expansion was a disaster for Germany through defeat in the First World War. Subsequently, in the later twentieth century, international peace regimes (for example, through the United Nations) were built on the basis of sovereignty and the inviolability of state boundaries so that the world political map is more stable than transient in the way Ratzel envisaged. Although there has been a great increase in states in the second half of the twentieth century due to, first, the decolonization of Western empires and, second, the break-up of communist states (USSR, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia), all the

resulting new states have kept prior colonial or provincial boundaries. The rare exception was the creation of South Sudan in 2011. In other words, boundaries have been rigorously respected: new states, but not new boundaries, have become the norm. This is the very opposite of Ratzel's state as organism which is why his theory seems so fearful to us today.

■ Mackinder's heartland: saving an old empire and much more

Sir Halford Mackinder is generally considered to be the 'father of British geography' – he lobbied vigorously for the introduction of geography into British universities in emulation of German universities – and was also a British politician, a Member of Parliament from 1910 to 1918. In both roles, he considered the threats to the British Empire from new rising states: in other words, he was also both a theoretical and practical political geographer, but his concerns were the reverse of Ratzel. Despite Britain having the largest empire ever known, Mackinder thought he had discovered potential, fatal weaknesses in its geography. The ideas he developed around this concern became much more widely discussed than Ratzel's political geography and their greater longevity made them eventually even more worrying: in the nuclear stand-off that was to be called the Cold War, Mackinder's early twentieth-century ideas were exhumed in the second half of the twentieth century to justify the Western nuclear arsenal accumulated to compensate for the USSR's supposed geographical strategic superiority. This is a frightening story of how a simple geographical pattern can travel across completely different political contexts when needs be.

Mackinder (1904; Parker 1982; Kearns 2009) initially proposed a world model of political order based upon the worldwide distribution of land and sea in relation to available transport technology. His global view was centred upon the history of geopolitical competition for control of Eurasia. Mackinder identified a 'pivot area' as a 'natural seat of power' consisting of central Siberia north of the

central Asian mountains that was out of reach by naval power, in other words, beyond Britain's military reach, its so-called 'gunboat diplomacy'. This circumstance had become critical by the early twentieth century because, with the coming of the railways, land-based power could now be fully mobilized. Thus the balance between sea power and land power was moving decisively against the former: incursions by states that dominated the pivot area into zones dominated by naval powers would become relatively easier than incursions from naval powers in the direction of the pivot area. Consequently, the road to world dominance then opens up for the political power that dominates the pivot area (see Figure P.1a). The Russians were the current tenants of that area when he first presented these ideas but in his famous, subsequent revision (Mackinder 1919), he came to fear a German–Russian alliance dominating a slightly larger area he renamed the 'heartland'. It is this 'heartland thesis' that has had a surprising longevity.

Mackinder's political geography recipe for saving the British Empire was, therefore, simply to prevent a German–Russian land power accommodation. Given that it was originally based on the worldwide extension of railways and did not take airpower into consideration, it is surprising that Mackinder's thesis should have been considered at all relevant after 1945. But the success of the USSR in the Second World War and its consequent expansion of power encompassed the heartland creating the sort of power structure Mackinder had feared. The emergence of the Cold War provided a new context for Mackinder's model, originally a guide to the British Empire's survival, to become a major strategic tool for different ends, ironically just as the British Empire was being dismantled.

The new ends were American, and the US's concern for maintaining a Cold War balance of power against the USSR. And so, after his death in 1947, Mackinder became a 'Cold War prophet' for US military strategic planners. While military infrastructure had moved on from railway mobilization to inter-continental ballistic missiles, a simple geographical pattern remained as a reason for stockpiling ever more nuclear weapons to counter the USSR's

'natural seat of power,' to use Mackinder's original words. The use of Sir Halford Mackinder's claims to justify a nuclear arms race support the claim that he has been the most influential geographer of the twentieth century.

■ Haushofer's *geopolitik*: reviving a defeated state

Leading political geographers such as Mackinder from the UK and Isaiah Bowman from the US were advisors at the Peace Conference of Versailles in 1919 where Germany suffered the confiscation of her colonies along with other economic penalties as losers of the First World War. German geographers were not so well represented at Versailles but they were important in the consequent public debate in Germany. Karl Haushofer, a retired military man, was the leading geographer in the movement to overturn the 'unfair peace' as he saw it. From his base in Munich, he established a field of Geopolitics as a body of applied or applicable knowledge aimed at the restoration of Germany's international position. The main vehicle to this purpose was a specialist journal, *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*, which he published between 1924 and 1944. Haushofer recognized Mackinder as a very important influence. The *Zeitschrift* included proposals and speculations about Germany's potential friends and foes in Europe inspired by Mackinder's heartland thesis. Haushofer also related this to *lebensraum* (literally 'living space') derived from Ratzel's organism model, again justifying territorial expansion in Europe. In addition, he made his distinctive political geography contribution by maintaining and developing a German interest in the colonial world.

The colonial world to which Germany was a latecomer at the end of the nineteenth century was a chaotic jumble of territories. This reflected the history of European imperialism with first Spain and Portugal leading the way followed by France, England and the Dutch. There was no overall structure, just accidents of history based upon state rivalries and conflicts. Surely imperial political geography could be more

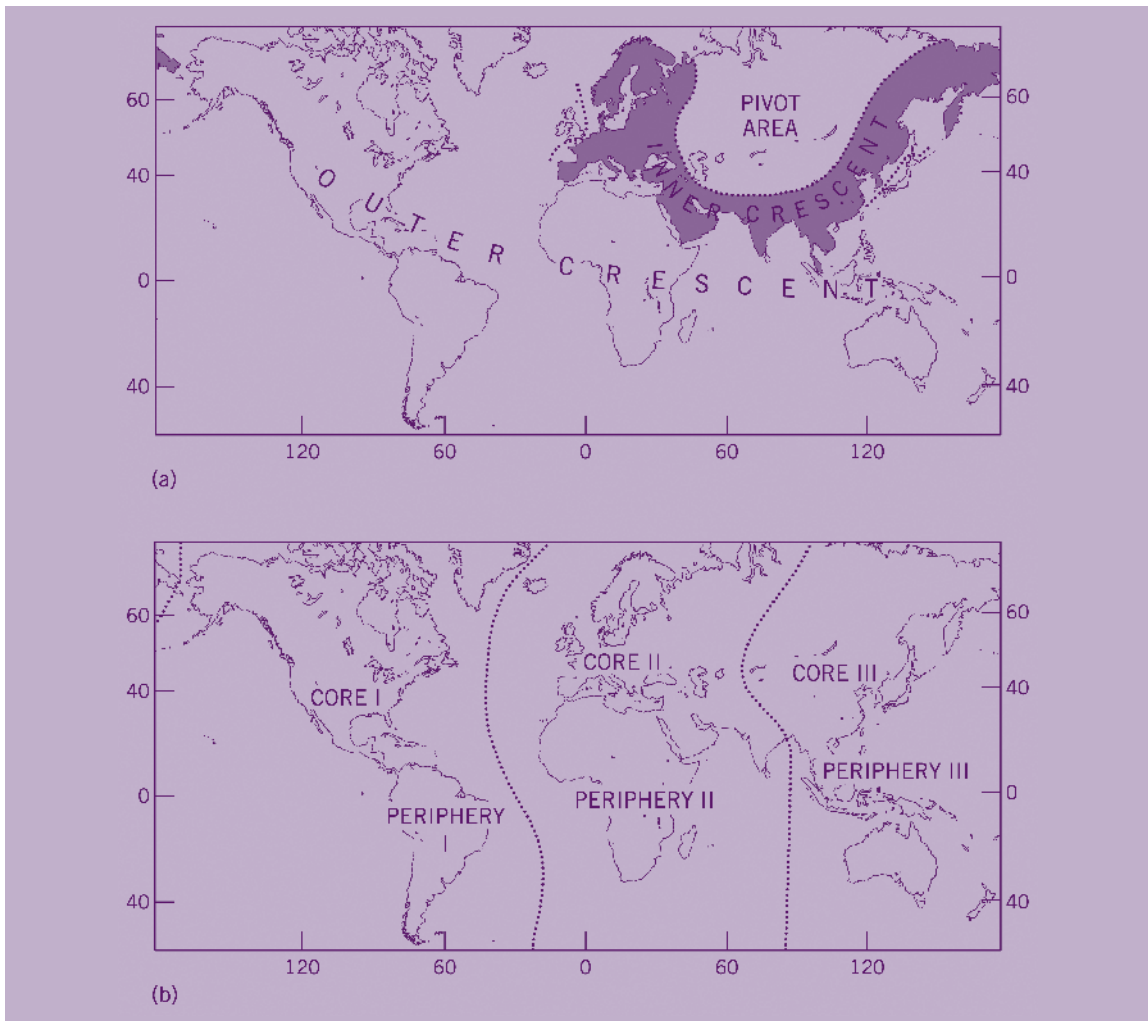


Figure P.1 Alternative geopolitical models: (a) Mackinder's original model; (b) a model of pan-regions.

rational in its spatial organization? This could be achieved, thought Haushofer, by sweeping away the empires of the old imperialists, notably Britain and France, and reorganizing world-space into new pan-regions. These would be large inter-continental 'vertical' zones (north to south) in which one leading state dominated (see Figure P.1b). The archetypal example was the Americas as envisaged by the Monroe Doctrine through which the US claimed a sort of 'military protectorate' of the Latin American states as they gained their independence from Spain and Portugal in the nineteenth century. The US did not form new colonies but nonetheless grew to

become the *de facto* leading state of the Americas. In pan-region arguments the Americas were joined by either two or three other pan-regions. These were a Eur-African pan-region dominated by Germany and an Asia-Pacific pan-region dominated by Japan, with, sometimes (depending on political alliances) between these two, a middle Russo-Indian pan-region dominated by the USSR (O'Loughlin and Van der Wusten 1990). The geographical rationale for such pan-regions was that they cut across worldwide 'horizontal' (east-west) environmental zones and thereby encompassed the whole range of Earth's natural resources in each pan-region. The basic

argument was that, since every pan-region could be economically self-sufficient, there would be no resource wars: pan-regions were a recipe for world peace. Of course, the other interpretation was that Germany was buying off the US and Japan, and perhaps the USSR, on their route back to world power status after the disaster of the Treaty of Versailles.

In the event, it was not specifically this mega-imperialist model for which Haushofer's *geopolitik* is remembered. Inevitably Haushofer's ideas became particularly relevant in Hitler's Third Reich, in particular the concept of *lebensraum* as Germany (and Japan) territorially expanded in the late 1930s. In the Second World War, Haushofer became widely known, especially in the USA, as 'Hitler's geographer', plotting to overthrow the West (Ó Tuathail 1996). American geographers, notably Bowman, tried to differentiate their 'scientific' political geography from Haushofer's *geopolitik*. But the damage was done: Haushofer's legacy to political geography was profound. In the USSR, the very term political geography was banished: as late as 1983, when the International Geographical Union formed an academic grouping of political geographers, to be accepted by all delegates, it had to call itself the 'Commission on the World Political Map' (i.e. not 'on Political Geography' per se). In the West, language restriction was more limited: it appears to be the fact that no book with the word 'geopolitics' in its title appeared between 1945 and 1975 (Hepple 1986). But can there really be a political geography without an international dimension?

■ Hartshorne's functionalism: creating a moribund backwater

The answer to the above question is apparently 'yes' and the proof can be found in post-Second World War USA, the part of the West where political geography continued to develop. To be sure, there were examples of an American continuity of the very masculine 'international political geographies' that we have just encountered. For instance, Van Valkenburg (1939) proposed a cycle theory of the

state based upon physical geography models of river valley erosion processes – states were supposed to go through successive stages of youth, adolescence, maturity and old age. These ideas were very reminiscent of Ratzel; of course, in this case, the US was deemed 'mature' with European states suffering from old age. And during the Second World War George Renner proposed a very Ratzel-like re-drawing of the European map in which small states would be swallowed up by larger ones (both the Netherlands and Belgium were to disappear) in what became the 'great map scandal' (Debres 1986). And that is the point: top-down, macho political geography was no longer acceptable in a new world where a United Nations was being built specifically to ensure respect for sovereign boundaries. As noted previously, Mackinder remained relevant as Cold War prophet but otherwise American geographers devised a new, respectable political geography largely bereft of international politics, and sometimes of politics itself. Respectability appeared to come at the expense of throwing the baby out with the bathwater!

Richard Hartshorne was the major figure in the building of this respectable political geography. There is an irony here in that his classic text *The Nature of Geography* (Hartshorne 1939) was the main transmitter of German geographical ideas into geography as a discipline. Later, in the sub-discipline of political geography his role was the exact opposite, to expunge German ideas. His means of doing this was functionalism. This approach was very popular in 1950s social sciences and provided research agendas for understanding how complicated social units are stable through the way they operate. In 1950 Hartshorne produced just such a research agenda for political geography in the form of a functional approach to studying the state.

Hartshorne's (1950) unit for study was the territorial state and its spatial integration was deemed to be 'the primary function of any state'. The success of a state was the result of two sets of forces: centrifugal forces pulled the state apart while centripetal forces kept it together. It is the balance between these forces that determines a state's long-term viability. For instance, strong ethnic or religious differences can be the vital centrifugal force that destroys a state but this

can be countered by a powerful 'state-idea' such as a unifying nationalism that supports territorial integration. In this way Hartshorne provided a simple model for analysing states one at a time in terms of the balance of forces. This approach was subsequently elaborated further as a 'unified field theory' by Stephen Jones (1954) that described successful state establishment as a chain of five steps where centripetal forces triumph (if centrifugal forces 'win', the chain is broken and the state-making collapses). These early 1950s contributions were to dominate political geography for over two decades and are reproduced in student readers in the 1960s (Jackson 1964; Kasperson and Minghi 1969), and are influential in textbooks well into the 1970s (Bergman 1975; Muir 1975).

The general problem with functionalism is that there is a conservative bias towards treating the status quo as a given so that conflict is marginalised. Clearly this is a very serious issue for political geography (Burghardt 1969, 1973). Treating states individually ignores the overall structures of power in which states operate. For Hartshorne, there are external relations of states but these are reduced to the boundary and strategic issues facing individual states. Further, he explicitly leaves out 'vertical' (social) differences within states to focus on 'horizontal' (spatial) differences thereby eliminating most of the domestic politics that occurs in all states across the world. It is for this reason that this early post-Second World War, American-led sub-discipline has been commonly dismissed as 'apolitical political geography'. Given that students and researchers attracted to studying political geography will likely be interested in politics, the functionalist approach precipitated a crisis for the sub-discipline. Its apolitical tendencies successfully eliminated the unsavoury history from research agendas but at the price of producing a politically sterile subject matter.

The result was that political geography quickly fell behind geography's other sub-disciplines in both teaching and research. Political geography is conspicuous by its absence in key texts of the 'new geography' which emerged in the 1960s: the sub-discipline does not warrant a chapter in the influential *Models in Geography* (Chorley and Haggett 1967) and

is ignored in Peter Haggett's (1965) classic *Location Analysis in Human Geography*. Geography was becoming exciting again just when political geography was anything but that: it is hardly surprising therefore, that the leader of the new geography, Brian Berry (1969), famously dismissed the sub-discipline as a 'moribund backwater'.

■ What political geography did next

Since it is inconceivable that human geography could develop and prosper without a political sub-discipline, there was, in effect, only one way forward from moribund backwater: up. This took many forms. Initially, although paying lip-service to functionalism, authors wrote textbooks that did find exciting topics that were not too constrained by apolitical prescriptions. But, by eschewing the functional framework, books lost coherence, becoming reduced to listings of different topics without clear links between them. This left the way open to arbitrary uneven growth across topics. For instance, because voting data in areal units are publicly accessible and lend themselves to statistical analysis, geographical study of elections became a major growth area in the new quantitative geography. There were, inevitably, Hartshorne-ian echoes from the past claiming that such research was 'social geography' rather than part of political geography (Muir 1975), but this new work was more generally accepted as a political geography contribution to understanding domestic politics within states. The real issue was that the emerging political geography was unbalanced in its treatment of topics, which in turn reflected the sub-discipline's theoretical poverty. Put simply, without Hartshorne's functionalism there appeared to be no effective criteria for developing new political geography research agendas.

The key problem for political geography, as clearly articulated by Kevin Cox (1979) and Paul Claval (1984), was the overall lack of coherence. Claval (1984: 8) refers to the sub-discipline developing 'in a rather chaotic manner' producing an uncoordinated political geography, described by Cox (1979: vii)

as ‘an assortment of ill-related topics’ rather than the ‘tightly organized body of knowledge to be expected of a sub-discipline’. The introduction of world-systems analysis to political geography was specifically to address this problem (Taylor 1982). As claimed earlier, this particular approach combining concern for time, space and power has proven to be a very effective means of providing coherence to the various topics that come under the aegis of political geography (Flint 2010). Contemporary political geography is a very eclectic affair engaging a broad range of topics through an ever-increasing spectrum of theories (Cox et al. 2007; Agnew et al. 2015). That this is the seventh edition of a textbook first published in 1985 is testimony that a world-systems analysis of political geography is continuing to accomplish a job well done: world-systems political geography is accepted as a key reason that the moribund backwater label has been despatched to history. But it is by no means the only reason.

The long-term revival of political geography is a large subject and this is not the place to deal with it in any detail. When the nature of the revival was becoming quite clear, John Agnew (1987: 2) provided a useful grid through which we are able to summarise on-going trends in the sub-discipline. He identified ‘three types of theoretical viewpoint’ that ‘have emerged within the field in the last 30 years’: spatial-analytic, political-economic and postmodern (the latter interpreted broadly to encompass post-structural and post-colonial). These are arrayed against ‘five main areas into which research in political geography is now conventionally divided’: state spatiality, geopolitics, political movements, identities, and nationalism (including ethnic conflict). The text below relates to this typology of three approaches against the five study areas as follows. First, as regards the study areas, these broadly describe our content: we have one or more chapters devoted to each of them. Second, in terms of approaches, world-systems analysis is firmly located in the political-economic column. But in the original spirit of Agnew we do not treat boundaries between the ‘viewpoints’ as anything but porous. Spatial-analytic evidence and ideas permeate our world-systems analysis and major ‘post-’ writers such as Michel Foucault and Edward

Said are impossible to ignore. Their contributions to understanding relations between power and knowledge, and Eurocentrism, permeate political geography thinking to such a degree that they appear embedded within texts even when not specifically quoted or referenced. Especially, the recognition of the pervasiveness of gendered and racialized power relations (Staeheli et al. 2004; Kobayashi and Peake 2000) are forms of politics that need to be addressed by a combination of world-systems theory and other theoretical frameworks. But world-systems analysis remains at the heart of our personal projects and the longevity of this textbook, now over three decades, confirms its continuing utility.

■ How do we move beyond the limitations inherent in political geography’s history?

Political geography has a history that we are loathe to build upon for fairly obvious reasons. This is why we have introduced world-systems analysis and associated approaches to the sub-discipline. This has enabled us to adhere to seven basic principles that guide our study. The principles and their key concepts are a useful starting point for thinking about how political process and its spatial context are understood.

First, it is necessary to discern the relationship between the *material* and the *rhetorical*. Images of the ‘real world’ are created so that actual political change – the continued US presence in Iraq, for example – is seen as ‘empire’ by some and the growing pains of a ‘new world order’ by others. Critical commentators and the politicians making the decisions describe the same events in very different ways. To understand our world, we must examine the actual causes and nature of current events as well as the way they are portrayed or represented. This approach has been labelled critical geopolitics and we incorporate this way of thinking throughout the book.

Second, to understand the development of political geography and understand contemporary events we

must identify the people and institutions (social scientists would say ‘actors’) that are involved, and then evaluate whether their form and roles have changed dramatically. This second path is one of the *geographical conceptualizing of politics*. To do this we need to reflect on the body of knowledge that political geography has built over the past hundred years or so while also adopting new ideas. How has imperialism, for example, been theorized and described both in the past and by contemporary scholars? What is a state and how has its sovereignty been understood and seen to change over the past decades? Only by being able to conceptualize the actors and identify how they have operated in the past can we evaluate the current situation.

Third, ‘making sense’ of political changes and the way that they are represented requires understanding how certain questions and forms of inquiry are marginalized – or *identifying the ‘silences’ of both analysis and rhetoric*. Gilmartin and Kofman (2004) highlight three such silences, or ‘blindspots’, in the content of political geography research:

- *Failure to emphasize the persistence of differences in power and wealth*. Despite the persistence of global differences, geopolitics is still focused on state strengths and border issues, for example ‘homeland security’.
- *The emphasis on elites*. A continued focus upon the state to the detriment of other scales and actors. Hence, there is a need to emphasize the everyday and democratize political geography to include the study of marginalized groups and other non-elites.
- *The gendering of geopolitics*. There is a need for a feminist geopolitical approach that focuses upon human security rather than state security.

With these goals as a driving force, feminist geopolitics has become one of the most significant components of contemporary political geography, and we integrate the approach throughout the book. From a feminist perspective, the challenge is to undermine political assumptions and that identify which geographies are the ‘most important’ and are

studied to the detriment of other power relations. In their own words:

It is important that we acknowledge women’s centrality to the day-to-day practice of geopolitics, not just in the documents that tell the stories of geopolitics, but also through their everyday lives that embrace the global.

(Gilmartin and Kofman 2004: 124)

The traditional focus on states has meant an overwhelming concentration upon the elites who control states. If one also acknowledges that it is the ‘powerful’ states of Europe and North America that have gained the most attention, then focusing upon elites means that it is the geography of the power relations of privileged white men that has constituted the core of political geographical knowledge. Clearly certain power relationships have been assumed to be more important; others are marginalized.

Fourth, not only do we need to conceptualize but we must also *contextualize*. Placing current events and changes in historical and spatial context gives them greater meaning and expands our perspective. Gilmartin and Kofman’s (2004) call to examine ‘differences’ is an example of the need for spatial contextualization: wealth, educational opportunities and freedom of expression and movement, for example, vary according to where one lives. Such disparities are local experiences within a global context. Furthermore, such differences are ‘persistent’. The broad geography of disparity of wealth, opportunity and security between the global north and south has long been a feature of the world political map.

Fifth, another means to contextualize is to *place events within the process of the rise and fall of great powers*. Competition between states to be the most powerful in the world has been a constant feature of the modern world (Agnew 2003; Wallerstein 2003). Current talk of ‘empire’ can be understood by looking at the process of the United States’ rise to power and the challenges to such power that it is now facing. Comparison with Britain’s similar experience in the nineteenth century illuminates commonalities and differences between the two periods. Yet, referring back to the redefinition of ‘security’ promoted by the

feminist approach we must combine a consideration of the power of states and the pursuit of ‘national security’ with other actors such as multinational businesses, protest groups, families and households.

Sixth, political geography has a tradition of picturing the world as a whole and analysing and *evaluating different localities as components of this larger whole* (Agnew 2003). As we shall see, the global view was an integral part of political geography’s role in facilitating imperial conquest. Indeed, seeing the world as a whole is part of the modern *zeitgeist* and not just an academic exercise. The predominance of states, national security and global politics are part of the common understanding of the way the modern world works. Academic analysis of political geography has also defined particular global views.

The latter point is important because, for all its ‘global heritage’ political geography as a sub-discipline has focused its efforts on understanding the modern

state and its relations to territory and nation. However, it is important to realize that, while contemporary globalization and the idea of ‘empire’ involve an important ‘rescaling’ of activities, this is by no means the whole story. Concern for the global should not lead to the neglect of other geographical scales, such as local and national. This is the key point for political geography, and it is relationships *between different geographical scales* that are going to be central to the political geography we develop below. Looking at the scales of the local, the household and the body necessarily requires a study of actors other than states, and of the ‘everyday’ rather than ‘grand events’ (Thrift 2000; Hyndman 2004). However, geographical scales and political actors cannot be studied independently of a theory to inform interpretation and structure the argument. This is where world-systems analysis enters the fray.

Read, learn and enjoy.

What can you do as a political geographer?



The contentious history of political geography may well beg the questions what do political geographers do, or are there career paths for political geographers? The simple answer is yes! We have introduced the idea that many actors make many political geographies. In the remainder of this book you will learn to employ theoretically informed, evidence-based thinking on a wide range of political issues; these are very relevant skills in a rapidly changing world. Hence, there are a variety of careers available. One arena is in government agencies, both those involved in domestic policies (such as planning) and international agencies involved in foreign affairs, intelligence and security. Private companies, especially those involved in international business, require employees who can understand and interpret the dynamic global context of their operations, and benefit from the skills and knowledge of political geographers. The same can be said for non-governmental organizations and think tanks.

More ideas can be found by exploring the career section of the American Association of Geographers (www.aag.org/cs/what_geographers_do) and the Royal Geographical Society (www.rgs.org/NR/exeres/9061DA5B-2D64-4B71-BB97-9CF03D3729C6.htm).