

GEOG 220  
Political Geography:  
The Nation-State

*Place Space and Identity*

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Today we turn to another aspect of political geography and in so doing come to see how “space” and “place” will help us to create ideas of “identity”

Well – that is the idea – anyway, lets get started...

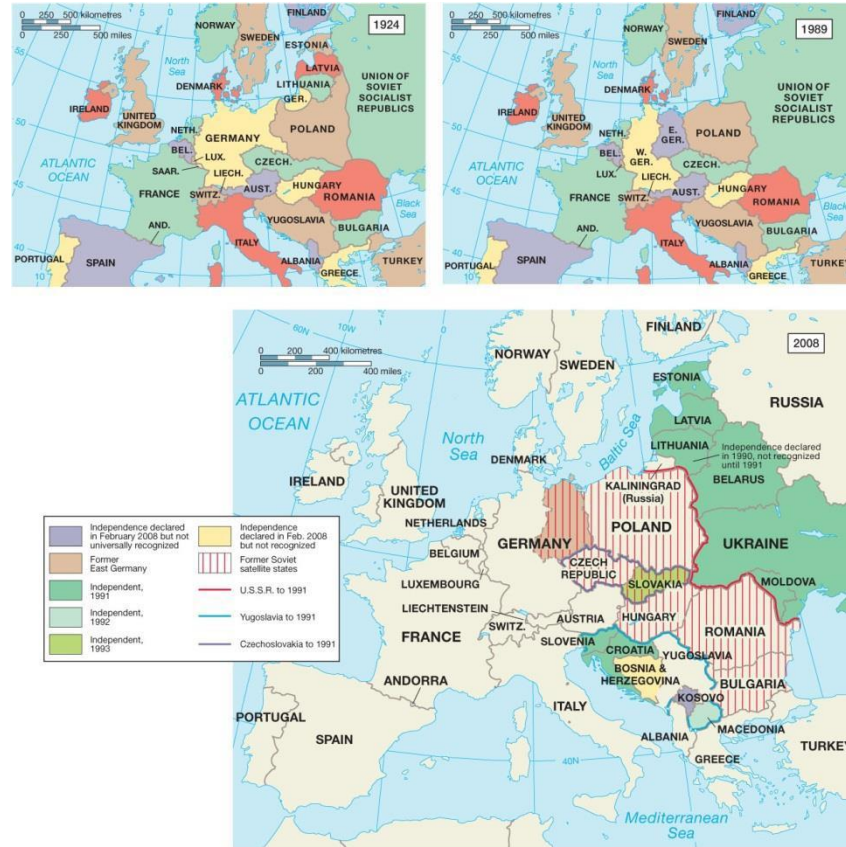
# Reading (only if interested)

A useful reading in the Encyclopedia of Human geography (ed. Barney Warf):

“Nation-state”

Remember – this encyclopedia can be accessed via the Concordia library as an ebook

# European nation-states: 1924, 1989, 2008



Note: break up  
of Yugoslavia:  
Now 7 states

**Figure 9.1 The changing map of Europe: 1924, 1989, 2008** The boundaries of the European states have undergone dramatic changes since World War I. The changing map of Europe illustrates the instability of international politics and the resultant dynamism in the geography of the nation-state system. (Source: <http://europa.eu/maps>. Reprinted with permission from Prentice Hall, from J.M. Rubenstein, *The Cultural Landscape: An Introduction to Human Geography*, 5th ed., © 1996, p. 338.)

## The rise of the nation-state – ( & our second important date in this course!)

- From the **1648 Treaty of Westphalia** (which ushered in the development of the modern era of states) until recently, the nation-state was seen as almost the “ideal” way to define a country and its borders.
- The nation-state comes to represent the “ideal” unit of countries, and political geography.

# The Rise of the Nation-State

- How did the nation-state come to become the "ideal form" of a country? [is it even the "ideal"?] – **this is our focus today**
- Perhaps the best way to think about this is to think about
  - The evolution of the idea of “sovereignty”
  - The way in which the ideas of “nation” and “state” came together

# First

Some important definitions.....

# Definition: sovereignty

- “**Sovereignty**: the exercise of state power over people and territory, recognized by other states and codified by international law”



# Another Definition

- **Nationalism:** the feeling of belonging to a nation as well as a belief that a nation has a natural right to determine its own affairs

# Yet More Definitions

- **Nation:** a group of people often sharing common elements of culture, such as religion or language, or a history or political identity
- **State:** independent political unit with territorial boundaries that are internationally recognized by other political units
- **Nation-state:** an ideal form, consisting of an homogenous group of people governed by their own state

# History of “sovereignty”

- The idea of the **state** as a sovereign body controlling space is actually quite new.
- If we go back into history, we find it was a **person** who was sovereign. Individual rulers who (through their own brute force or cunning) forged kingdoms out of groups of people who were loyal because of gifts of land/money held in return for military service (feudalism).
- The key here is that loyalty was to an individual (the sovereign) and not to a space (country or state).

# History of “sovereignty”

- Loyalty to an individual meant that medieval states could be
  - *non-contiguous* [i.e. not all in one piece – i.e. as Alaska is politically part of the USA but not physically part of it]
  - Have **overlapping jurisdictions** – i.e. people could “cope” with several different levels or types of ruler, who were the focus of different kingdoms – i.e.
    - the king (temporal) and
    - The pope (a spiritual leader)
  - So **space did not matter as much as personal loyalty did**. At least in those days

Example: the *non-contiguous* state of Brandenburg-Prussia [which eventually grows and morphs into Germany]

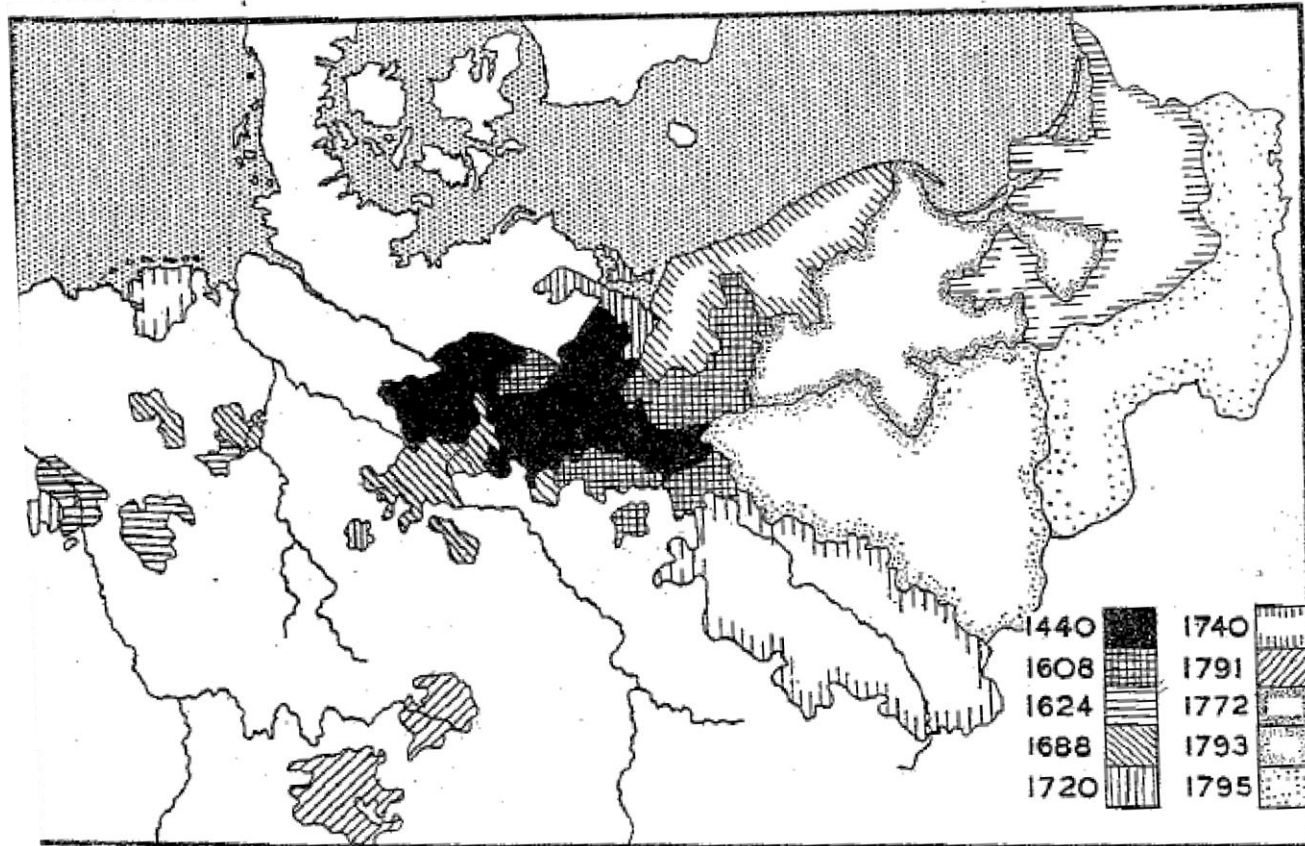


FIG. 61. THE EXPANSION OF BRANDENBURG-PRUSSIA, BEFORE 1800.

# History of “sovereignty”

- Change occurs once we see the overthrow of kings and queens (during the period of the Enlightenment): i.e.
  - The American Declaration of Independence (1776)
  - The French Revolution (1789)
- Because the person of the sovereign has been removed by these types of momentous changes
- Who are we now loyal to?

# History of “sovereignty”

- The answer who replaces the crown as the person to whom we are loyal becomes the **people themselves** – the people themselves are sovereign, the seat of all power in a country.
- But then a new problem arises – **how do we decide who are “the people”? Is it everyone living in that country?**
- Well – sadly -- The answer was no – it is only those people who are part of the “nation” [“folk” etc] – who can be part of the nation-state. [those who are not, they are those we want to exclude]

# History of “sovereignty”

- The easiest way of ensuring that the “people” excluded most of those whom were felt to be no part of the country was for the political notion of the “nation” [“the people”, “the folk”] to become as identical to the spatial unit of the “state” as possible
- And hence was born the classic “nation-state” as an ideal of political geography.



# In other words...

The nation-state tries to achieve a perfect union of (1) the political or physical boundaries of the country (“the state) with (2) the types of people who live there (“the nation”). Perhaps the easiest example of such types of people would be “ethnic groups” – so the “Nation-State” of Germany should only include the “Nation” [the ethnic group] of Germans within the boundaries of the “State” called Germany.

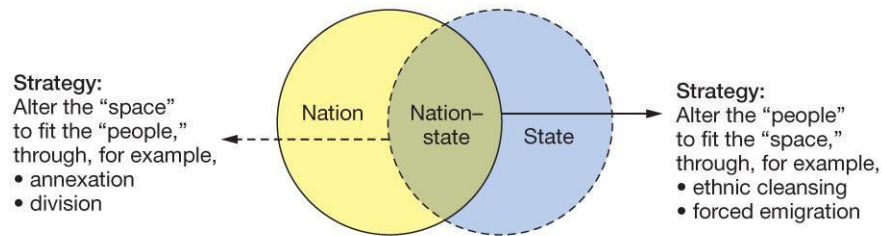
Please note in all of this that because (a) ethnicity is not a “real” category, but a social construction (b) the “nation-state” cannot really be anything other than a fiction – or “an Imagined community”.

It may help, if you think visually,  
to think of the nation-state as  
two circles – one is the nation,  
the other is the state (see next  
slide)

To the extent that the two circles can be  
made to overlap perfectly, we would have a  
perfect nation-state.

But the further apart those circles become,  
the less close to the ideal nation state the  
country becomes ....

# A model of the nation-state



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**Figure 9.11 The nation-state** This illustration shows how the nation-state is the product of two different geographical processes. The first attempts to mould the people to the state; the second manipulates the boundaries of the state to fit the space occupied by the people.

Anyway, if you don't think in diagrams, don't worry. The point is to grasp that if a nation-state is NOT created, there are two main ways of creating it:

1. Change the physical borders of the state

- 2 change the type of people included in the state

# Lets look at both options

First, altering the physical boundaries of the state

# Altering physical boundaries of the state

## (a) breakup

- Former Yugoslavia (into 7 new states )
- "Kurdistan" and
- Basque country [both would have to be created from other states]

## (b) expansion of previous state

- German "lebensraum"
- Turkish annexation of parts of Cyprus

## (c) redefinition of current borders

- South Africa under apartheid – the homelands such as Bophuthatswana (see slide below) – were declared not part of the state of S.Africa
- Israel/Palestine boundary issues

# Break-up of former Yugoslavia



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**Figure 9.28 Map of the former Yugoslavia**

Today, the former Yugoslavia consists of six nations: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the new Yugoslavia (made up of Serbia and Montenegro), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the newly separated state of Kosovo. For the most part, the boundaries of the Yugoslav states were laid out only in the twentieth century, across segments of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires that had acquired a complex mixture of ethnic groups. The history of these boundaries has also been the history of ethnic conflict revolving around claims to territory as well as intolerance for religious differences. As this map shows, with the exception of Slovenia, the new states are home to a mix of nationalities. (Source: Redrawn with permission from Prentice Hall, from J.M. Rubenstein, *The Cultural Landscape: An Introduction to Human Geography*, 6th ed., © 1999, p. 260.)

# An aside ....

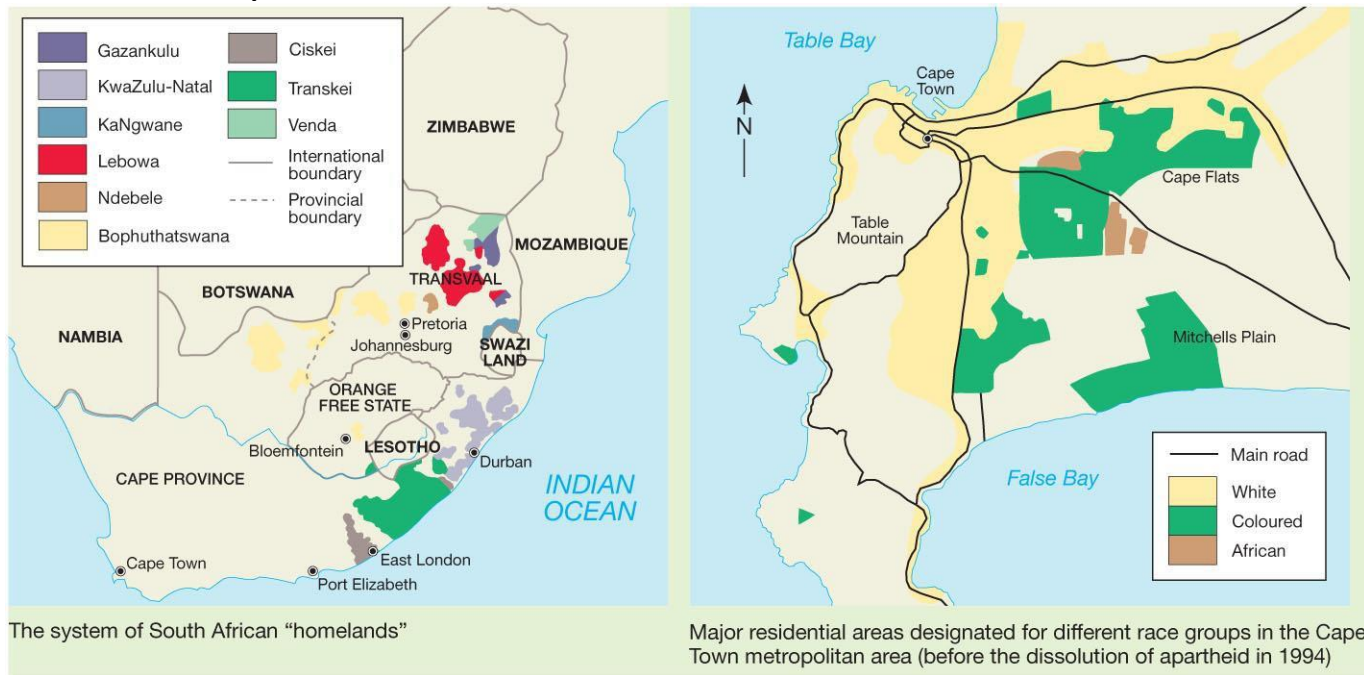
We are all doing things to get through COVID. I have started on very long books – one I finished recently is by Rebecca West, called Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey through Yugoslavia (1941; republished by Penguin Books in 1982). With the background of a person who fell in love with the country and learned a great deal of its history and politics, in this book she deals with a trip she took throughout the region in 1937.

It is 1,181 pages long (if you include the index)



# Apartheid in South Africa

Note that the international community did not recognize the attempt to make the Homelands not part of South Africa



**Figure 9.1.1 Homelands and post-apartheid South Africa**

(Source: D.M. Smith [ed.], *Living under Apartheid*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1982; figs. 2.1, 2.3, and 2.5; pp. 26, 34, and 40.)

## 2. Altering who are “The People”

- (a) to create
- USA (assimilation, or melting pot)
- Canada’s assimilation policy towards First Nations (native schools)
- Quebec nationalism
- Create a shared story of “people”/folk
- (b) to remove
- Ethnic cleansing (Balkans)
- Nazi policies v Jews
- Rwanda, Burundi genocides
- The Roma people (“gypsies”)

So as the last examples show, we can create “nations” by either the sad process of eliminating those we don’t want in our state (which could include refugees, the homeless or those of different ethnic groups than our own)

Or we can create a nation in a more positive way – I guess – by us all agreeing on some shared set of identity through the creation of national myths, stories etc – and in this, all of the stuff we have learned in cultural geography is important – we can use the cultural markers of the region (folk housing, folk songs, local cuisines, dialect and language etc ) -- all of this creates a “nation” – if you want to.

A very important example of this  
is the idea of the nation as an  
“imagined community”

see next slide...

# Create a story of “people”/ “folk”

- **Benedict Anderson:** his idea of the ***Imagined Community*** – we cannot meet everybody in “our country” but we are prepared to accept them as our people because we share common history.
- **Pierre Nora:** his concept of ***lieux de mémoire*** -  
- sites of memory – places we commemorate because they are the site of some important event in a shared “history” (which may or may not be “true”, but it is now the story we have all agreed upon)

As geographers we know how “place” and “space”  
are socially constructed

- So – it is clear that all of the tools and concepts we have learned about place-making and place marketing can be brought to the table when we are thinking about how to create “myths” of a shared history or collective identity as a “people” or “folk”:
  - Even simple things like folk housing, music, language, local foods can create a “folk”

# And non-places?

Sadly, as geographers, we know about non-places and this concept can be relevant here too –

International law can only protect people if they fall under its jurisdiction. You might think that everyone in the world does

But no – there are holes:

Exceptions are; (1) those in places like Guantanamo Bay – see work of geography Derek Gregory

Other cases are those people like (2) refugee claimants in international waters, or an (3) international airport, who are denied help by countries because they are not – technically -- in their jurisdiction

And where countries have not signed international treaties – on (4) extradition; or (5) on the prevention of torture

Various “holes” in the system of international protection have been used creatively by all sorts of people – Assange (Wikileaks), Edward Snowden – over the years

And historically recall older ideas of exile, and sanctuary

# “The Invention of Tradition”

- Is a title of an edited book by two historians, Eric Hobsbaum and Terence Ranger
- In it, there are some good examples of the process:
  - i.e. the creation of a Scottish collective identity actually occurs in the nineteenth century [and not before!!]
    - Invention of the different kilts, highland games etc as “shared myths” to forge a nationalist identity.



# The future?

- Countries such as Canada are not (and may be never were) “nation-states”
- So what is it??
  - Is it a multi-cultural country ....
  - What do you think...?
- Most political geographers see the nation-state as a concept whose time has past.

# The future?

- May be the future lies with states that either favour
  - **A post-modern world** – i.e. one in which there are no universal human rights, and we recognize local difference (i.e. every state can have its own laws without any international court of justice over-ruling its sovereignty).
  - This gives rise to a more restricted set of *rights of citizenship* (these rights include health care, education) – a concept originally advanced in the 1950s by a guy called Marshall
    - Which leads to a debate over “spaces of exclusion” - this time WITHIN the state itself -- for those left out (the poor, homeless, refugees)

- Or a world with far greater rights of *universalism*
  - *Best example might be the expansion of the European Union as a political and legal entity*
  - *Another example has been the UN's gradual move to directly intervene in war-torn countries on behalf of refugees, and in so doing over-ride that state's political sovereignty*
    - Which leads to a debate over ethics of overseas intervention (to prevent rights abuse) vs. respecting local difference [a key concern of postmodernism]

Twinning: many European towns have links to other cities around the world



Beginning after the World War II in Europe, the “twinning” of towns and cities provided one way to promote peace and understanding among once-warring countries of that continent. In this example, the small town of Menaggio in northern Italy is twinned with places of equivalent population size in France, Germany, and Brazil, and illustrates how twinning is now becoming a worldwide phenomenon.

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Note: Wilbur Zelinsky showed that most “twinning” was only with cities in W. World