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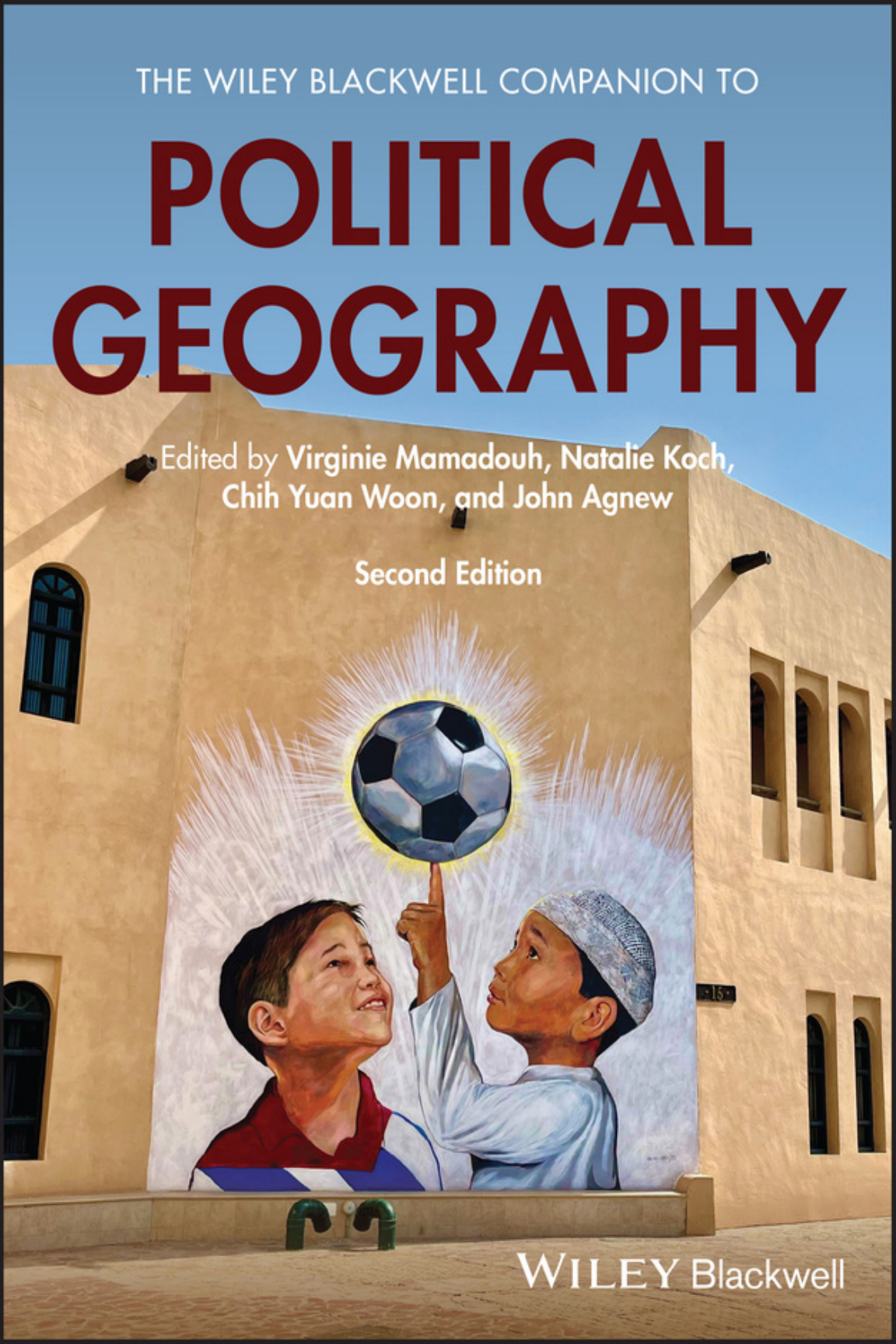
Edited by **Virginie Mamadouh, Natalie Koch, Chih Yuan Woon, and John Agnew**

Second Edition



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The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Geography

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Contents

List of Figures and Tables

Figures

Table

Cover Concept

Natalie Koch

The picture on the cover was taken when I was visiting the Katara Cultural Village in Doha in February 2023, shortly after the 2022 FIFA Men's World Cup was hosted in Qatar. Opened in 2010, Katara was a government project to position the State of Qatar as a "cultural beacon" and to create spaces for new forms of cultural exchange. Katara regularly hosts special events, including for the country's annual National Day celebrations, which for the past 10 years have emphasized the unity of Qatari citizens and non-Qatari residents. The football mural painted on this Katara wall ahead of the FIFA World Cup is the work of the Cuban artist Máisel López Valdés and is entitled *Los amigos cubano y catarí* (The Cuban and the Qatari friends). It illustrates how the venue was folded into the state's celebratory story of global exchange at the 2022 event.

It also shows how the nationalist story of citizen/noncitizen friendship was an essential element of that positive story – the two boys serving as icons of both groups. But just as FIFA so often does in promoting the men's championship as its premier event, women and girls are quietly excluded from this nationalist image. They are perhaps subtly appealed to as mothers, but agency is ceded to the young boys who will grow up to embody the ideals indexed here – of friendship, cooperation, joy, and delight in common experiences like football. The Katara mural thus highlights this book's concern with what is visible *and* invisible in how political geographers approach politics, space, and identity across many scales and contexts. And it reflects our goal of provoking deeper questions about what immediately meets the eye.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

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On July 26, 2024, the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Paris showed the usual tension between the celebration of the movement's values of "excellence, respect, and friendship" on the one hand and nationalism-infused competition between states on the other. Yet the opening was also innovative: for the first time, the parade of national sports delegations was staged outside a stadium, replaced by a fleet of vessels of various shapes and sizes crossing the city on the Seine River. In this way, Paris's urban spaces were used to invite the Games' global audience to feel included in the spectacle to a new and remarkable degree. But political divides were not cast off in the Seine display. As with all events since the modern Olympics began in 1896, the alleged political neutrality of the Games was ambiguous: national sports federations are organized territorially but some are states and others are not. The US territory Puerto Rico, for example, has had its own Olympic team since 1948, and in 2016 the International Olympic Committee introduced a Refugee Olympic Team. And as in years before, 2024 saw certain delegations deprived of their national flag. These anomalies originated in international sanctions (e.g., against Russia and Belarus) or national vetoes (e.g., the People's Republic of China accepting Taiwan's participation as "Chinese Taipei," but with a strict ban on all Taiwanese flags and symbols at Olympic events and surrounding public spaces).

The intersection of sports and politics is well established (Koch 2017). Mega sporting events like the Olympics vividly demonstrate how national sentiments are

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galvanized among sports participants and supporters alike. Sometimes they can be the source of national unity; other times, they can kindle or reignite national divides. A month before the Olympics the 2024 UEFA European Football Championship tournament saw the spark of various nationalist flashpoints. Fans from Serbia screamed about Kosovo during their games, even though Kosovo was not a participant. They were remembering the still-rankling secession of largely Albanian Kosovo as they attended what was supposed to be a football game, not a political rally. Scottish fans played nice everywhere, but when their team was eliminated in a loss to Germany, England fans celebrated in excess. The football festivities in the summer of 2024 remind us that Europe's football fans, self-selected as they may be, firmly grasp the nationalist sentiments that still haunt Europe nearly 80 years after the end of World War II. The irony is that many of the players of Europe's national teams are first- and second-generation immigrants, whose very presence in Europe is an issue that excites contemporary nationalism more than the traditional animosities, such as England versus Germany.

Pundits and academics alike have asserted that the recent revival of nationalist sentiments is a response to the excesses of globalization, including the decline of the welfare state, the loss of supposedly preferable manufacturing jobs, and the seeming collapse of national-ethnic homogeneity in the face of dramatic increases in international migration – at least in the United States and Western Europe. Nostalgia for lost golden ages, such as the 1950s postwar boomtimes in the United States and Germany, and waning hope for a brighter future in the local places people call home, have also been identified as significant factors. Fictive as it may be, reinstating national territorial sovereignty is cast as a solution in this reactionary nationalist storyline. In the United States this has manifested in the "Make America Great Again" campaign of the far-right former president and president-elect Donald Trump, and in the United Kingdom it fueled the ill-fated Brexit decision, which saw Britain leave the supranational community of the European Union (EU).

This trend to what can be called "national populism" mobilizes particular geopolitical imaginaries in the United States and Western Europe, but it is far more widespread. From India to Brazil to Russia, Argentina, Israel, South Africa, and China, similar sentiments are on display. The commonalities include increasing hostility to international cooperation and the so-called liberal international order, suspicion about foreign investors and foreign aid, anger toward US hypocrisy about the integrity of only *some* national borders, fear of foreign interference in national affairs, and defensiveness against liberal cultural trends emanating from the so-called West that challenge "traditional" norms about gender, religion, and social hierarchies.

The reactionary spirit of today's national populism is hardly new. But it has taken on new life following a series of major geopolitical shifts, including the global financial crisis of 2008–2009, the Arab Spring movements beginning in late 2010, the 2015 refugee crisis in Europe, and the Covid-19 pandemic. In each

case, populist politicians reacted to events by playing to the anger and resentments of populations experiencing poor employment prospects, facing corrupt elites cashing in on political ties, and threatening cultural shifts. And in many cases, immigration and territorial borders became an easy focus for populist attacks, even though populists seldom acknowledge that contemporary migration stems from the legacies of colonialism and neocolonial interventionism, and the authoritarianism of governments and corporations alike.

For example, the 2015 influx of refugees in Europe was largely the result of the Arab Spring uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa – some of which toppled US-backed authoritarian regimes (as in Egypt and Tunisia) and others of which led to prolonged civil war (as in Syria and Yemen), but none of which has since brought democracy and civil liberties, let alone economic prosperity, to their countries. This failure is not a failure of vision on the part of the Arab democracy activists: their fight may have started by attacking an oppressive regime, but they found themselves fighting a structure of oppression facilitated by Western empire, past and present, in the region. This includes a long history of militarism, most recently reflected in the disastrous results of the United States' interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan in the so-called War on Terror (from 2002 onward).

But as with the British and French colonial undertakings in the region in the previous century, American war-making in some places was accompanied by supporting their autocratic neighbors, as in Egypt. Yet European narratives about the 2015 immigrant "invasion" did not reflect on these imperial histories and presents, instead preferring sensational stories that blamed the victims. Similar victim-blaming attacks on migrants and asylum seekers have been seen at highly politicized border crossing points between the United States and Mexico, Myanmar and Bangladesh, Syria and Turkey, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and Sudan and Ethiopia. Politicians fueling populist agitation consistently overlook the fact that the individuals crossing these borders are fleeing civil war, genocide, unemployment, and failed states – and sometimes all of these – instead framing their national communities as righteous defenders of their homelands. Nationalist protectionism, enacted through xenophobic rhetoric and harsh border security measures, was already on the rise before the Covid-19 pandemic began in early 2020, but that gave yet more fuel to this fire.

Covid-19 showed that planetary problems invariably cross territorial borders, but many political leaders around the world intensified their commitment to the dream that closed borders were the solution. The result was ill-coordinated global responses that led to a set of disparate and ultimately deadly outcomes. In many countries, border closures revived the sense of being alone in the world and increased calls for national autonomy and even autarchy, rather than encouraging a deeper sense of global community. This spur to reterritorialization was enhanced by the perception of vulnerability to the vagaries of global supply chains shipping goods halfway around the world, including those necessary for dealing with Covid-19 like personal protective equipment. On top of disturbed supply chains

due to work and transport stoppages, one of the most iconic pictures from the pandemic is of the gigantic container ship the *Ever Given* stuck in the Suez Canal in March 2021. Behind it, hundreds of other ships sat waiting to make the trip through the canal, while hundreds of others rerouted to older, longer shipping lanes around Africa. The call to domesticate production was not an unsurprising result of both the supply-chain backups and the price increases that followed. This period was a turning point when retreating behind familiar borders looked like a solution for many.

The wars erupting in Ukraine in 2022 and Gaza in 2023 would also seem to suggest a revival of nationalist imperatives enacted at territorial borders. Both can be viewed as border disputes, but they are also much more than that. Each involves competing claims to parts or the whole of some other national territory. There are many places where such conflicts could now erupt, for example between China and Taiwan, the two Koreas, Sudan and South Sudan, or Venezuela and Guyana. There also many devastating so-called civil wars, often with external sponsors, such as those in Myanmar, Yemen, and Sudan, as well as countries in which the writ of central government does not hold in regions and localities dominated by narco-gangs and insurgents, such as Mexico, Haiti, Ecuador, and Colombia. All of this is occurring in a geopolitical context in which the United States is politically polarized over its precise role in intervening in international territorial disputes, but is nonetheless wary of ceding its global leadership to states like China and Russia.

Territorial questions continue to be at the center of geopolitical metanarratives today, but economic questions are never far away. For example, economic hegemony is a fixture of the perennial prophecies of a "new Cold War" between the United States and China (Schindler et al. 2024). Such speculations attend to recent shifts away from the hyperglobalization of the period 1990–2010, but the fact is that the world remains economically and socially integrated to an extent that would have been unthinkable 100 years ago. And the United States and China remain economically entangled in ways that the Soviet Union and the United States never were during the Cold War from 1947 to 1991. Capital and information flow relatively freely worldwide. If political elites from the United States or any other country tried to impose major limits on the open world economy, it would be costly for all concerned – not just for consumers facing steep price hikes resulting from tariffs and shortages due to poorly performing domestic producers, but also for the bottom lines of companies that have built their strategic-economic advantage and profitability on globalizing their operations. Even as sanctions have become a favorite tool of American and Western indirect interventionism (for example, sanctioning Russian politicians and companies instead of getting militarily involved in the war in Ukraine), they are fundamentally designed to maintain the global economy's status quo of deep integration.

Massive planetary problems must be addressed through global cooperation, ranging from climate change to global health, food and water security, satellite

infrastructure, telecommunications and artificial intelligence (AI), labor rights, and more. But we are in a fraught era in which a contest between "nationalists" and "globalists" is underway. So far, the outcome is unclear. Recent elections from Brazil and India to France and Britain suggest a standoff in which the hard-core nationalists have had some setbacks. Even in the face of rising nationalisms, the EU remains popular across most of its member states, partly perhaps because of the failed example of Brexit. According to the pollster YouGov in June 2024, a referendum on membership in the EU would result in a crushing victory for "Remain" in each of the largest member states. And as the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party expanded its electoral victories across Germany in 2024, millions of anti-AfD protesters responded by filling the streets of nearly every German city, chanting *Nie wieder ist jetzt!* ("Never again is now") and holding signs reading *Faschisten sind keine Alternative für Deutschland* ("Fascists are *no* alternative for Germany"). It is in this context that future political geography might well be made and what the chapters in this book hopefully offer in understanding how we got to this point.

Traditions and Transitions in Political Geography

This book is a new edition of the *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Geography* published a decade ago (Agnew et al. 2015). Two former editors (Agnew and Mamadouh) and two new editors (Koch and Woon) make up the editorial team of this volume and it is hoped that this change will bring different synergies, experiences, and knowledges to approaching and thinking about (contemporary/recent developments in) political geography and engage a more diverse set of authors. We also bridge generations, as our training in political geography fell both before and after two key junctures for the field: the Cold War and the critical theory turn. The term "political geography" was coined in 1751 by the French economist and statesman Jacques Turgot, and inscribed in academia through Friedrich Raztel's seminal text *Politische Geographie* in 1897, but the discipline was truly revolutionized after the 1980s with the end of the Cold War and the reimagination of political geography through critical theory.

Changes in the field had deeper roots, of course, as political geography, born at the time of interimperial rivalries and developed in the interwar period, was strongly curtailed after its implication in the conduct of World War II (see Muscarà, this volume; Sidaway, this volume). Seeds of change were first seen in the 1960s, when a renewed political geography was premised on developing a spatial science of electoral geography (see Johnson and Warf, this volume). By the 1980s, however, critical approaches, including Marxism, postmodernism, and Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory, began to enrich the subdiscipline by bringing into view questions of power, inequality, and social justice (Taylor 1982; Smith 1984; Flint & Taylor 2024). As political geography research gained momentum, debates and theorizations around borders, territory, political

identity, power, and resistance started to flourish. At the same time, geopolitics was revived in policy-making and academic circles in the US through the politicking and visions of Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski in the 1970s and 1980s.

The "revival" of geopolitics, as Leslie Hepple (1986) called it, was instrumental in shaping geographical engagements with the topic in the 1990s, albeit from a critical perspective that focused on "disrupting the hegemonic practices of statecraft, challenging the taken-for-granted specifications of the world in various mappings by elites and academics" (Dalby 2010:281; see also Ó Tuathail 1996; Ó Tuathail & Agnew 1992). This strand of critique proliferated, producing new fields of study including popular geopolitics (Sharp 1993; Dittmer 2010), feminist geopolitics (Dowler & Sharp 2001; Dixon 2015), alter-geopolitics (Koopman 2011), and subaltern and liminal geopolitics (Sharp 2013; McConnell 2017). These approaches all reflect the infusion into political geography of feminist and postcolonial/decolonial theories, which have foregrounded the voices and subjectivities of marginalized groups. The feminist perspective that today characterizes much of political geography – especially visible in two of the newest textbook surveys of the subfield (Smith 2020; Squire & Jackman 2023) – explicitly challenges the masculinist biases in the subdiscipline and reorients the field from state-centric analyses to consider a wider, multiscalar set of issues, including everyday spatial practices.

In fact, for over three decades now political geographers have worked to show that the state is not a mere container of political processes and events (Agnew 1994; Paasi 1996). *How* they do so takes many forms. For instance, research on state capitalism interrogates the geoeconomic agency of the state (and corporate allies), which has produced the geopolitical, economic, and financial processes pertaining to the secular development of global capitalism (Alami & Dixon 2020; Mallin & Sidaway 2024; Potts, this volume), as well as the diverse ways in which state and nonstate alliances are shifting in the face of the climate crisis, such as greening state capitalism (Koch 2022). Other political geographers have eschewed interrogating solely the nature of the state, instead zooming in on how state effects have permeated space, place, and society through quotidian and prosaic means (Painter 2006; Benwell & Dodds 2011; Jeffrey 2013). The state, in this perspective, is "peopled," (re)produced by different actors and their networks, rather than being an abstract, amorphous political entity (Medby 2018).

Territory likewise continues to animate a great deal of research in political geography, moving well beyond traditional approaches that considered it as part of a great state–nation–territory triad (Gottmann 1973; Knight 1982; Paasi 1996) to open up deeper reflections on its diverse logics, expressions, and constitution. Beginning from Thongchai Winichakul's (1994) seminal book *Siam Mapped*, political geographers not only acknowledge territory to be a Western construct, but also aim to spotlight alternative, contextual, and Indigenous approaches to the concept (Daigle 2016; Palmer 2020). The multidimensional nature of borders