INTRODUCTION

Frontier temporalities: exploring processes of frontierisation, defrontierisation and refrontierisation in Indonesia and Africa

Michaela Haug, Kristina Großmann and Timo Kaartinen

ABSTRACT. Initially introduced by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893 to denote the specific situation of the territorial conquest of the American 'Wild West', the concept of the frontier is currently used in anthropology as an analytical means to understand highly insecure and dynamic processes that arise in marginal areas as a result of population transfers, resource extraction, national security interests and nature conservation. This special section draws on recent dynamic and processual understandings of frontiers to explore their temporal dimension by analysing historical processes of establishing and dissolving frontiers, related images of the past and the future, and the sometimes astonishing and contingent afterlife of earlier frontiers.

The concept of the frontier has repeatedly been used as an approach and heuristic device to analyse interwoven social, economic, political and environmental transformations, processes of exclusion and inclusion, and the expansion of control, settlers or capitalism into peripheral regions (cf. Eilenberg 2014:161, Cons and Eilenberg 2019a:6). Initially introduced by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893 to denote the specific situation of the territorial conquest of the American 'Wild West', the concept has since been taken up by many scholars in different fields of study, including, for example, history (Webb 1952, Lattimore 1968, Rieber 2015), geography (Korf, Hagmann and Doevenspeck 2013), political ecology (McCarthy 2006, Peluso and Lund 2011, Watts 2018) and anthropology.[1] The concept has thereby been removed from its initial, regional context and its equation with a geographical or national border. The idea of a colonial power or a nation state extending its control into new territories has consolidated the understanding of a frontier as an (advancing) border and several scholars use the concept for the study of actual borderlines or border regions.[2] However, frontiers are not necessarily and not always situated along geographical or national borders. As Rasmussen and Lund aptly put it: 'A frontier is not space itself. It is something that happens in and to space' (2018:388). Many scholars, like us, thus prefer to consider the frontier as a framing that can be placed upon any region. Frontiers and borderlands may coincide, but we see this 'as a special constellation rather than a definitional criterion for "frontierness"' (Geiger 2008:95). This is also reflected in the contributions to this

---

[1] Kopytoff (1987), Tsing (2005), Li (2014), Cons and Eilenberg (2019b)
[2] See, for example, Prescott (1987), Donnan and Wilson (1994), Baud and van Schendel (1997), Rösler and Wendl (1999).

special section. Exploring the temporalities of border formation between Europe and Africa, only Paolo Gaibazzi investigates frontier dynamics along actual borders, while the research locations of Greg Acciaioli, Christian Oesterheld and Timo Kaartinen represent interior areas of the Indonesian Archipelago, which represent classical frontiers of control, extraction and settlement, although they do not constitute national borders.

In current anthropological usage, 'frontier' is thus widely used as an analytical means to explore the highly insecure and dynamic processes that unfold in marginal areas as a result of population transfers, resource extraction, national security interests and nature conservation. These situations recall the nineteenth-century American frontier in generating frontiers in which space is vacated by pre-existing social orders to make way for claiming land as property and natural resource extraction. In significant contrast to the classic notion of the frontier, however, many contemporary resource frontiers involve the simultaneous creation of such things as frontiersmen and citizens, or open-access space and territoriality. The results are new, aleatory forms of territoriality, sovereignty and governance that forces us to consider the different time-scales of frontier events, as well as the temporal perspectives of the different people who take part in them.

This collection of articles draws on recent dynamic and processual understandings of frontiers to explore their temporal dimension. It compiles empirical studies of Indonesia and Africa, which analyse historical processes of establishing and dissolving frontiers, related images of the past and the future, and the sometimes astonishing and contingent afterlife of previous frontiers. The introduction starts by exploring different approaches that emphasise the processual and dynamic dimensions of frontiers in more detail, revealing two major shifts within the usage of the frontier concept. First, we demonstrate how the frontier has increasingly been detached from designating a particular geographical location, now being understood instead as a framework attached to a particular place, at a particular time, related to a particular aim. We further show how the conceptualisation of the frontier has changed from the initial image of an advancing line that would lead to a clearly defined closure to contingent assemblages that evolve, dissolve and partly re-emerge. We then explore the different frontier temporalities that emerge in the making and unmaking of frontiers before closing with a brief overview of the contributions to this special section.

Cyclical and interstitial frontiers

Turner originally used the notion of frontier as a metaphor that mapped the historical expansion of American society in geographical space. Whether the frontier is imagined as an advancing tide of civilisation washing over barbarism or a periphery transformed by complex processes originating in the centre, the idea of frontier space tends to suggest a stage of colonisation and extraction by outside agents. When the frontier is

imagined as a surface on which history happens, critical distance from its constituting narrative is lost. The frontier ends up being thought of as nature modified by wilful human acts, which is how it has been perceived by those who conquered and exploited it.

This is the reason for asking how people in the frontier situate their actions in time. A focus on frontier-time, or the multiple temporalities of the frontier, acknowledges that the frontier is not an empty space but a narrative about space. Questioning the habit of thinking about space as a surface, Doreen Massey (2005:4) suggests space be approached instead as something produced by the meeting-up of histories. While Massey's primary concern is to rethink the supposedly homogeneous space of globalisation, her suggestion is also helpful in recognising the frontier as a dynamic condition, something produced by the multiple narratives and imaginations of those who are involved in its production.

The aim of this collection is to develop a dynamic, processual view of frontiers by analysing the epistemic and political operations that underlie the making of frontiers and the various human actors in them. Instead of approaching the frontier merely as space, the authors stress the knowledge and discourse about people and space that revolves around the opposition between nature and organised society. Mattias Borg Rasmussen and Christian Lund highlight the interwoven and dynamic aspects of frontiers: 'Frontier dynamics are not linear, but a-rhythmic and cyclical, and the corresponding territorialisations are equally provisory' (2018:390). They thus reject the image of a frontier 'moving forward in time and space, and hence reaching a definite end' and instead argue that 'frontiers can emerge and vanish' (2018:390). With this approach, it is possible to question the view of the frontier as a product of linear historical development and address it instead as a plural field of managing, legitimising, enabling and repressing various activities. The processual approach to the frontier builds on Danilo Geiger's (2008:90) reformulation of the frontier concept that detached it from its specific reference to American history and sought to apply it to broader processes of expansion, inclusion and exclusion beyond the colonial era. Geiger sees frontiers as a consequence of state-making projects which are continuously in progress. He notes that frontiers can further advance or recede in relation to the changing demand for particular commodities. This means that frontiers are 'cyclical rather than lineal phenomena' and that the same region can be repeatedly defined as a frontier (Geiger 2008:93).

The view of the frontier as process is also informed by Igor Kopytoff's (1987) account of pacification and inculturation in the spaces between different kingdoms and princely policies in pre-colonial Africa. In his account, which is widely accepted today, especially among scholars exploring African frontiers and borderlands, Kopytoff describes how settlers, herdsmen, farmers and run-away slaves split off from existing centres and started occupying spaces at the margins of such centres or in the spaces between them. Here, the frontier is thus 'cyclical, dynamic and reversible' (Korf, Hagmann and Doevenspeck 2013:35), providing an opportunity for new social formations to arise, grow into new centres, and finally lose some parts of their populations as the

latter head off to new frontiers. Paolo Gaibazzi's contribution in this special section refers to this approach to frontiers as being in-between and cyclical. He contextualises Kopytoff's concept of interstitial and internal frontiers in his exploration of the complex political geography and temporality of border formation in the Euro-African zone. He shows that the externalisation of the European border to Africa creates an interstitial frontier of ambivalent, plural and emergent authority.

Frontierisation, defrontierisation and refrontierisation

The cyclical and dynamic conceptualisation of frontiers has been taken up by present anthropological usage, in which the frontier is a useful concept for analysing how new territories emerge as a consequence of new patterns of resource exploration, extraction and commodification (Li 2014, Tsing 2015, Peluso 2017). In this regard, Greg Acciaioli and Akal Sabharwal (2017) introduce the notion of 'defrontierisation', which allows the agency of the local (indigenous) populations of frontier areas to be recognised. According to them, the salience or relevance of a particular frontier frame at different historical periods shifts with a 'reconceptualization of frontiers as trajectories of frontierization and defrontierization' along the four dimensions of control, extraction, settlement and conservation (Acciaioli and Sabharwal 2017:35). Accordingly, in his contribution to this special section, Acciaioli explores the dynamics of frontierisation and defrontierisation among the To Lindu of Central Sulawesi from pre-colonial times until today, emphasising how the To Lindu successfully enacted defrontierisation in the interests of furthering their local sovereignty. Here assertions of agency and control by indigenous people and their efforts to reverse the frontier's asymmetries of power become the defining criteria of defrontierisation and thus allow those who have been neglected in the initial frontier-making project 'to emerge once more in accounts of frontiers as people with a history' (Acciaioli and Sabharwal 2017:42). The agency of local people and their active involvement in processes of frontierisation also becomes particularly evident in the contribution of Christian Oesterheld, who shows how local people and their aspirations for the future, as well as their ways of remembering the past, shape the making and re-making of frontiers in Indonesian Borneo.

While Acciaioli and Sabharwal promote an understanding of frontiers as the dynamic and partly overlapping processes of frontierisation and defrontierisation, Jason Cons and Michael Eilenberg (2019a) go a step further. They introduce the concept of 'frontier assemblages', which they define as the 'intertwined materialities, actors, cultural logics, spatial dynamics, ecologies, and political economic processes that produce particular places as resource frontiers' (2019a:2). The term 'assemblage' comes from the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1988:332) who use it for the combination of innate and learned elements in territorialising behaviour, such as birdsong. In Timo Kaartinen's contribution to this special section, oil-palm agriculture, conservation, and

'salvage botany' – the practice of transplanting forest plants into gardens and yards – exemplify assemblages that combine the 'innate' characteristics of natural and cultivated species and the value that people learn to ascribe to them when observing their territorial effects. According to Kaartinen, the mono-cultures and other cultivated and conserved landscapes of West Kalimantan are not simply 'closed frontiers' but open up to other territorialising logics. As Cons and Eilenberg put it, assemblages are 'contingent collections of things, whose coming together itself is not the precondition, but rather the object of inquiry' (2019a:5), recalling the constantly shifting networks of relationships at the centre of actor-network theory (Latour 2005).

The view of the frontier as an assemblage is also present in the writings of Anna Tsing (2003), who emphasises the contingent and arbitrary nature of the frontier and sees it as 'a series of historically nonlinear leaps and skirmishes that pile together to create their own intensification and proliferation' (2003:5101). Tsing stresses that in frontier assemblages the frontier may be neither a place nor a process, but an 'imaginative project capable of moulding both places and processes' (2003:5102). Such projects can result in situations where several types of frontier are imposed simultaneously on a particular region. This idea is followed by Christian Oesterheld in his contribution on a dynamic frontier 'assemblage' on the upper Mahakam in Indonesian Borneo, where recent processes of refrontierisation are linked back to historical processes of frontierisation. Oesterheld refers to the metaphor of the palimpsest to depict the different layers of frontier heritage that are rediscovered (and reinscribed) in the context of regional autonomy and decentralisation. Currently, a 'frontierisation in the second degree' is emerging in which historico-cultural identity and corresponding visions of the future are negotiated afresh.

Time and the frontier

From the beginning, the frontier has been associated with historical and social discontinuity or rupture and a new, distinct sense of space and time. In Turner's (1893) account, the expanding North American frontier society developed its own individualistic, future-oriented mind-set once it had been separated from the eastern cities of North America by the Appalachian Mountains. The values of frontier people diverged from those of the metropolitan society, even as their activities were oriented to the productive use of untapped resources, which ultimately helped them master the wilderness. Tsing, however, points out that modern salvage frontiers are not an outcome of the linear expansion of capitalism. As she puts it, frontier time 'moves so quickly that results precede their causes' (2005:33). In today's salvage frontiers, organised markets, roads and state control hardly have enough time to reach the frontier before people have already fallen into debt and the forest lies in ruins. Frontiers, and particularly resource frontiers, often imply massive transformations of landscapes and the relationships that

exist between them and the people, animals and plants that live within them (Hall, Hirsch and Li 2011). The after-effects of extractive activities are thereby extended over different periods of time, for example, through the construction of new infrastructure, the establishment of new land and property relations and irreversible changes in vegetation and forest cover. In this special section, Timo Kaartinen illustrates this vividly by comparing the impacts of oil-palm expansion and the extension of a new conservation frontier in West Kalimantan, which not only offer different development paths to local people, but also situate their relationships and activities in time differently as well. Similarly, Greg Acciaioli points to the rupture and reversal of capitalist frontierisation at Lindu (Indonesia) due to changes in environmental governance. He describes how, despite the intensified exploitation of resources by the developmentalist New Order, the government also increased its attention to environmental issues, including the declaration of numerous areas as protected. Taking this opportunity, the indigenous To Lindu gained control over land and resources in the process of defrontierisation.

Unlike in Turner's account, frontier-time is not necessarily future-oriented, but inherently unstable. This is because frontiers are hostile to state bureaucracies and productive institutions that normally mediate between conflicting representations, technologies and rhythms of social time (Bear 2014:7). The 'assemblages' that replace socially constructed orders produce contingent, intense effects (Cons and Eilenberg 2019a:5), for instance when the excavated, flattened soil of an oil-palm estate fails to retain water, or when settlements are destroyed by flooding. By replacing previous social forms with the open-access conventions of liberal capitalism, frontier-making also inhibits the accumulation of the abstract property claims that are the basis of financial security in the metropolitan society (Tsing 2003:5103). Any activity on the frontier is inherently risky, and this confronts frontier-making agents with tragic decisions, for instance, whether or not to accept devastating short-term risks in order to extract wealth over the long term (Cons and Eilenberg 2019a:11). Frontier-time is not merely defined by the cycles of actual resource exploitation but by the fact that the frontier's untapped potential can itself be priced as equity in the financial marketplace. Such techniques of time bring into being the natural resources that exist for future extraction (Bear 2016:486), interfering with the physical rhythms and social cycles that orient frontier actors in the present.

From this perspective, frontier-making expresses capitalism's functional need to resolve the over-accumulation of assets in the centre by displacing them into peripheral spaces through investment in the control of natural resources. The areas that contain these resources are then represented as wilderness or 'nature'. But as Cons and Eilenberg (2019a:11) point out, financialisation is not the whole story of frontier-making. The control of frontier spaces and assets must be defended by rendering the frontier void of competing interests and by affirming property claims and sovereignty over it. This means that governance and territoriality are crucial elements of the frontier, not its opposite, even if they take less than coherent, uniform and predictable forms (Cons and Eilenberg 2019a:15).

Paradoxically those authors who emphasise the analytical importance of multiple temporalities or 'qualities of time' are also known for foregrounding space as a key to understanding the organisation of contemporary capitalism. Doreen Massey argues that 'space is the dimension which poses the question of the social, and thus of the political', as well as being 'the sphere of coevalness, of radical contemporaneity' (2005:99). This approach, which Massey calls 'heterochrony' (2005), is the reverse of foregrounding the dominant narrative of temporal or historical events and thinking about space as the background, or 'landscape'. Paolo Gaibazzi, in his contribution to this special section, also points out the interrelation of the dimensions of space and time in his approach to dynamic interstitial frontiers. This frontier of externalisation expands and is retrenched over time, reacts to shifts in transnational and regional geopolitics and therefore neither follows an evolutionary course nor is irreversible.

There is no agreement over which of the two approaches is more productive in studying frontiers. Thinking about the frontier as a landscape implies that it has been shaped by a succession of different inhabitants, livelihoods, inequalities and framings of exploitation and power. A temporal, historical development is foregrounded when people imagine and reflect on their position in the world, shaping the possibilities and constraints of their agency. Indigenous groups that are equipped with such agency can conceivably resist and undo frontierisation, as shown by Acciaioli and Sabharwal (2017). Approaching the frontier as a timescape highlights another kind of agency, one that is grounded in the necessity of living beings to create and negotiate the space they share with other beings and actors on the frontier. Tsing describes this frontier agency as the ability to accept and handle the inherent risks and vulnerabilities of all ecological relationships, thus moving the focus from historical time to the multiple, unfinished stories that emerge in frontier encounters (Tsing 2015).

The contributions to this special section

Greg Acciaioli traces the intersection of control, extraction, settlement and conservation in processes of (de)frontierisation across historical periods in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. In doing so, he shows how the To Lindu indigenous group was able to enhance its agency in the frame of the conservation defrontierisation process. They regained control of their homeland and increased their local sovereignty against the dominance of other groups, thereby reversing their subjugation.

The evolving agency of local people is also stressed by Christian Oesterheld, who refers to a palimpsest of frontier heritage in East Kalimantan (Indonesia) that is currently being rediscovered in the context of regional autonomy and decentralisation. He argues that frontiers have an afterlife and that a new process of 'frontierisation in the second degree' is emerging in which new cultural and political hegemony prevails.

Paolo Gaibazzi describes the externalisation of European borders as a frontier of control advancing into Africa. Linking to Kopytoff's notion of the internal frontier, he describes the creation of an interstitial, dynamic frontier. Considering temporalities of migration in Africa he illustrates this dynamic frontier through the example of the repatriation of transit migrants in the Gambia.

Moving again to Indonesia, Timo Kaartinen captures forms of agency in the frontier spaces of oil-palm estates and nature-conservation projects in West Kalimantan. He stresses that, in the process of defrontierisation, people carve out space through 'salvage botany', thereby countering unequal power relations and avoiding becoming landless workers. In this way, he argues, spaces of defrontierisation are not in opposition to the frontier, but intertwined and connected with strategies to cope with uncertain futures.

By carving out the temporal dimension of frontiers, all the authors stress the fluctuating and dynamic processes of frontierisation, defrontierisation and refrontierisation. In their contributions, frontiers are described as particular imagined or experienced moments in time which are in flux, yet have an immense effect on peoples' actions, imaginations and practices. The authors show that in processes of defrontierisation, those who have been subjugated are able to extend their agency and thus reveal that processes of territorialisation and capitalisation are far from being linear.

References

ACCIAIOLI, Greg and Akal SABHARWAL
2017   "Frontierization and defrontierization: reconceptualizing frontier frames in Indonesia and India", in: Jaime Tejada and Bradley Tatar (eds.), *Transnational frontiers of Asia and Latin America since 1800*, 31–46. London: Routledge

BAUD, Michiel and Willem VAN SCHENDEL
1997   "Toward a comparative history of borderlands", *Journal of World History* 8(2):211–242

BEAR, Laura
2014   "Doubt, conflict, mediation: the anthropology of modern time", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 20:3–30
2016   "Time as technique", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 45:487–502

CONS, Jason and Michael EILENBERG
2019a   "Introduction: on the new politics of margins in Asia: mapping frontier assemblages", in: Jason Cons and Michael Eilenberg (eds.), *Frontier assemblages: the emergent politics of resource frontiers in Asia*, 1–18. Oxford: Wiley

CONS, Jason and Michael EILENBERG (eds.)
2019b   *Frontier assemblages: the emergent politics of resource frontiers in Asia*. Oxford: Wiley

DELEUZE, Gilles and Felix GUATTARI
1988   *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*. London: Athlone Press

DONNAN, Hastings and Thomas WILSON (eds.)
1994   *Border approaches: anthropological perspectives on frontiers*. Lanham, MD: University
          Press of America

EILENBERG, Michael
2014   "Frontier constellations: agrarian expansion and sovereignty on the Indonesian-Malay-
          sian border", *Journal of Peasant Studies* 41(2):157–182

GEIGER, Danilo
2008   "Turner in the tropics: the frontier concept revisited", in: Danilo Geiger (ed.), *Frontier
          encounters: indigenous communities and settlers in Asia and Latin America*, 75–216. Co-
          penhagen: Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research North-South and Inter-
          national Work Group for Indigenous Affairs

HALL, Derek, Philip HIRSCH and Tania LI (eds.)
2011   *Powers of exclusion: land dilemmas in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: NUS Press

KOPYTOFF, Igor
1987   "Introduction: the internal African frontier: the making of African political culture", in:
          Igor Kopytoff (ed.), *The African frontier: the reproduction of traditional African societies*,
          3–84. Bloomington: Indiana University Press

KORF, Benedikt and Timothy RAEYMAEKERS
2013   "Introduction: border, frontier and the geography of rule at the margins of the state", in:
          Benedikt Korf and Timothy Raeymaekers (eds.), *Violence on the margins: states, conflict,
          and borderlands,* 3–27. New York: Palgrave MacMillan

KORF, Benedikt, Tobias HAGMANN and Martin DOEVENSPECK
2013   "Geographies of violence and sovereignty: the African frontier revisited", in: Benedikt
          Korf and Timothy Raeymaekers (eds.), *Violence on the margins: states, conflict, and bor-
          derlands*, 29–54. New York: Palgrave MacMillan

LATOUR, Bruno
2005   *Reassembling the social – an introduction to actor-network-theory.* Oxford: Oxford Uni-
          versity Press

LATTIMORE, Owen
1968   "The frontier in history", in: Robert A. Manners and David Kaplan (eds.), *Theory in
          anthropology: a sourcebook*, 374–385. Chicago: Aldine Publishing

LI, Tania
2014   *Land's end: capitalist relations on an indigenous frontier.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press

MASSEY, Doreen
2005   *For space.* London: Sage

MCCARTHY, John
2006   *The fourth circle: a political ecology of Sumatra's rainforest frontier: contemporary issues in Asia and the Pacific.* Stanford, California: Stanford University Press

PELUSO, Nancy
2017   "Plantations and mines: resource frontiers and the politics of the smallholder slot", *Journal of Peasant Studies* 44(4):8348–8369

PELUSO, Nancy and Christian LUND
2011   "New frontiers of land control: introduction", *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38(4):667–681

PRESCOTT, John
1987   *Political frontiers and boundaries.* London: Allen and Unwin

RASMUSSEN, Mattias Borg and Christian LUND
2018   "Reconfiguring frontier spaces: the territorialisation of resource control", *World Development* 101:388–399

RIEBER, Alfred
2015   "Frontiers in history", *The International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences.* Second edition, Volume 9:464–469

RÖSLER, Michael and Tobias WENDL (eds.)
1999   *Frontiers and borderlands: anthropological perspectives.* Frankfurt: Peter Lang

TSING, Anna
2003   "Natural resource and capitalist frontiers", *Economic & Political Weekly* 38(48):5100–5106
2005   *Friction: an ethnography of global connection.* Princeton: Princeton University Press
2015   *The mushroom at the end of the world: on the possibility of life in capitalist ruins.* Princeton: Princeton University Press

TURNER, Frederick Jackson
1893   "The significance of the frontier in American history", *American Historical Association, Annals for 1893*:199–227

WATTS, Michael
2018   "Frontiers: authority, precarity, and insurgency at the edge of the state", *World Development* 101:477–488

WEBB, Walter Prescott
1952   *The great frontier.* Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press