

Turner in the Tropics: The Frontier Concept Revisited

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ABSTRACT

Boundaries in various guises are a mainstay of classical social science theory and have generated a fair share of empirical research. The tremendous transdisciplinary interest in state borders and borderlands that has been apparent since the late 1990s was matched in recent years by a similar upsurge in empirical (and, though to a lesser degree, theoretical) work on frontiers, i.e. loosely-administered spaces rich in resources and therefore coveted by non-residents. Freeing the frontier notion from an exclusive association with the past age of Caucasian colonialism and the pioneer lore of settler nations, the present thesis advances the frontier concept as a frame of analysis for the contests for property and resources and the struggles for cultural dominance which take place at the internal peripheries of developing nations. It insists that these peripheries are very unlike the center, and pinpoints the characteristics that render them highly peculiar geographical, political, social and cultural spaces.

The frontier concept being an instance of spatial theory, the thesis sets its object alongside and distinguishes it from related spatial concepts – „borderland“, „periphery“, „margin“ and „tribal zone“ – which the geographical, historical and anthropological disciplines have developed to make sense of the world-historical processes unfolding at the edges of states. Frontier theory as laid out in the present work sketches the particular institutional conditions that characterize and delimit state agency at state margins. It enables us to develop generalizations on, among other things, the moral economy that guides the utilization of resources and the use of violence. Regardless of the cast of outside actors in a particular case, the concept helps us jump scales and move with ease from the macro to the micro level of analysis: Its predictions apply both to the policy priorities of state governments and the social and economic behavior of individuals, families and business companies. Likewise, by systematically linking local sociopolitical conflicts, contending forms of social and political organization, mythical representations of the ethnic „Other“ and his/her natural habitat, as well as patterns of environmental exploitation and change, frontier theory lays bare connections between seemingly disparate, but intimately related phenomena that otherwise remain unexplored.

Confronting the historical legacy of the frontier concept, the thesis, of course, takes American historian Frederick J. Turner (1861-1932) to task for passing off settler nation founding myths as scientific truth. At the same time it finds that some of the man's propositions (notably his idea that the opportunities of the frontier are a formative influence in the rise of national elites and national political cultures) do in fact hold considerable explanatory power for students of current-day politics of the developing world. Significantly, however, the present book also recommends reconnecting the field with another strand of frontier theory based on the frontier experience of Europe and East Asia which threatens to go amiss in less careful accounts of the history of the field. Only by reincorporating historical frontier understandings which put a prime on more durable and balanced forms of inter-ethnic coexistence than those described along 19th century European settlement frontiers, the thesis argues, will we be able to cope with the rich diversity of situations abounding on present-day indigenous domains in the global South.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	8
2.	THE TURNERIAN FRONTIER AND ITS DISCONTENTS	13
3.	RECLAIMING THE “F” WORD: BEYOND THE TURNERIAN FRONTIER	20
4.	THERE TO HERE: FROM COLONIAL TO POSTCOLONIAL FRONTIERS	23
5.	TWO OR THREE THINGS I KNOW ABOUT THE FRONTIER (INCLUDING A DEFINITION)	28
6.	HOW TO RECOGNIZE A FRONTIER WHEN YOU MEET ONE	44
6.1	Characteristics of contemporary frontiers in the developing world	44
6.1.1	Relatively low population densities	45
6.1.2	Absence of full-blown civil administration and routine state control	49
6.1.3	Pronounced presence of non-native private actors	55
6.1.4	Tendency for the state and private actors to deny indigenous inhabitants’ ownership claims to land and natural resources	58
6.1.5	Tendency of the state and private actors to define indigenous inhabitants as standing outside the moral universe by symbolically associating them with “untamed nature”	65
6.1.6	Tendency of resource management on the part of the intruding society to be wasteful and destructive	72
6.1.7	Tendency for economic relations between intruders and indigenous inhabitants to be predatory or, at the least, based on unequal exchange	76
6.1.8	Failure of the state to establish or credibly assert its claim to the monopoly of violence	80
7.	“NATIONALIZING SPACE”: THE STATE’S AGENDA AT CONTEMPORARY FRONTIERS	88
7.1	Characteristics of the politics of “nationalizing space”	89
7.1.1	Extending state institutions throughout the national territory in order to homogenize political practice	89
7.1.2	Disseminating cultural forms, moral values and possibly language and religion of politically dominant ethnic groups in order to homogenize cultural practice	91
7.1.3	“Developing” the frontier’s natural wealth to strengthen the material base of the state and provide extra profits for national elites	92
7.1.4	Facilitating the settlement of migrants from politically dominant groups in order to change the frontier’s ethnic profile and support the desired cultural and economic transformations	94
7.2	Nuances, please! Are frontiers withering away where resource dependency has lessened?	95

8.	REPORT FROM THE SETTLEMENT FRONTIER	101
8.1	Introduction	101
8.2	Four comparative observations	106
8.2.1	indigenous people as settlers	106
8.2.2	indigenous people as stakeholders in state-building	109
8.2.3	inverted capabilities for violence	111
8.2.4	internal differentiation of settler society and indigenous peoples	115
8.3	explaining the variability of interethnic relations at the settlement frontier	121
8.3.1	politico-legal frameworks	122
8.3.1.1	laws that facilitate colonist intrusion	125
8.3.1.1.1	“integrated displacement”	125
8.3.1.2	laws that acknowledge indigenous rights nominally or in actual substance	130
8.3.1.2.1	“protective pretense”	130
8.3.1.2.2	“partial empowerment”	132
8.3.1.2.3	“citizen-denizen” constellations	148
8.3.1.3	evaluation and summary	157
8.3.2	extent of state support for settlers	163
8.3.3	settlers’ relative temporal position in a migration process	170
9.	ABOLISHING THE FRONTIER	177
10.	THE ADVENTURES OF THE FRONTIER IN THE LATE 20TH AND EARLY 21ST CENTURIES	179
11.	SUMMARY	195
	REFERENCES	203

LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1: The misgivings about Turner in a nutshell
- Figure 2: Foundations of a post-Turnerian frontier concept
- Figure 3: Defining characteristics of contemporary frontiers in the developing world
- Figure 4: Example of a local “frontierness” profile
- Figure 5: The politics of “nationalizing space”
- Figure 6: Case studies of NCCR research project “Indigenous Peoples and Settlers: Resource Conflicts in Frontier Regions of South and Southeast Asia” (2001 - 2005)
- Figure 7: Typology of indigenous responses to the settler challenge (sources: Baker 2000; Keesing 1992; Winzeler, ed., 1997; Scott 1977, 1985, 1990)
- Figure 8: Politico-legal frameworks in the case-study regions at different points in time
- Figure 9: Politico-legal frameworks and degree to which they manage to safeguard individual (“land”) and communal land rights (“territory”) as well as political participation (“voice”) of indigenous peoples
- Figure 10: The argument for the successful “taming” of the frontier
- Figure 11: The argument for the persistence of the frontier

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1. INTRODUCTION

The study of indigenous¹, non-state societies – known as “tribal” or “primitive cultures” to earlier generations of scholars – has been the traditional mainstay of social anthropology. While, to the benefit of our profession, the discipline’s list of legitimate subjects of inquiry has grown longer in recent decades, the work of many of its practitioners continues to revolve around aspects of indigenous peoples’ lives, often framed in terms of their survival in a world of nation-states and the borderless operations of globalized capital. My own research experience and topical interests as an anthropologist reflect this preoccupation. Socialized in the field among a group of Philippine shifting cultivators, I soon took an interest in indigenous peoples’ movement politics (Blum and Geiger 1991, Geiger 1993), tried to get an idea of the structuration of ethnicity among minority populations (Geiger 1994), looked at ethnic rioting between indigenous people and colonists in the western part of Indonesian Borneo (Geiger 1999, 2008b), and worked comparatively on the issue of settler colonization on indigenous domains in South and Southeast Asia (Geiger, ed., 2008; Geiger, ed., forthcoming).

Like many students investigating the urgent plight of the world’s aboriginal populations, I groped for an explanatory framework that would organize and give coherence to a mass of otherwise intractable material. All the theoretical fields that I crossed in the course of my queries – migration studies, political ecology, environmental economics, ethnicity, the politics of identity and collective violence, to name but a few – offered valuable clues to the different aspects of the grand theme,

¹ Although it does not make for elegant introductory lines here, the term “indigenous” requires extensive clarification. It has no fixed meaning; like other key concepts in the realm of anthropology and international law, it is “essentially contested” (Lukes 1974) and has been the object of continuous debate and skepticism. Especially pronounced is the fiery resistance against the notion on the part of states – both in the developed and the developing world – because under emerging international law, conferring “indigeneity” upon a group may imply binding rights which can be enforced against the states in question (Gray 1995:41; Keal 2003:11). Although there is no single accepted definition that captures the global diversity of indigenous peoples, the usual reference point for any discussion of “indigeneity” is that of the UN’s Special Rapporteur José Martínez Cobo (Cobo 1986). The definition states that “indigenous communities, peoples and nations” are

“those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop, and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories and their ethnic identity, the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems” (ibid.:Add. 4, paragraph 379).

Cobo’s definition stresses five key interrelated factors: being (or having been) subjected to colonial invasion and settlement; historical continuity with pre-invasion or pre-colonial societies; an identity which is distinct from that of the encapsulating society; non-dominance, the situation of being out-of-power locally and on the national level; and a concern with the preservation of the group’s ethnic identity, cultural traditions and territorial rights. Complementing these five key factors is the criterion of self-definition (ibid., paragraph 381). In a recent article that addressed the difficulties that arose when applying Cobo’s definition to conflicts between settlers and indigenous communities in South and Southeast Asia, I proposed to add “tribal” essence (notably the absence of traditions of statecraft) and a group’s will to articulate its political aspirations in the appropriate international fora to the list (Geiger 2008c). Still, some sticking points remain also in the context of the present study, as a closer look at the cases presented in chapter 8 will reveal. One of them is the issue of indigenous migrants (is “indigeneity” innate in a person, or is it contingent on continued residence on the ancestral territory?), and a second question arises where indigenous communities are accorded substantial political representation by an institutional order – in extreme cases to the extent that rival groups are excluded from power. For the purpose of the present study on frontiers I have decided to include both politically empowered groups and migrants with an indigenous background in the coverage of the term, albeit the Cobo definition does not sanctify this usage. Because of the awkward German connotation of the term “peoples” (“Völker”), I prefer to refer to “indigenous communities” instead of “indigenous peoples” throughout this thesis.

but a common thread, a more embracing theoretical insight lacked sorely. How best describe in a systematic, theoretically-grounded manner the way in which, in the cases at hand, stronger peoples, nations, institutions overpower weaker ones, and how unveil most convincingly the ideologies that they are inventing to justify that fact (Maybury-Lewis 1984:128)? How convey in macro-scale terms what I thought was happening to the individual local societies that I knew first-hand, how show the peril and destruction that I had encountered without negating the complexity and ambiguity of many of these same situations? What theoretical edifice would help me draw lines between different spots on chronological and geographical templates without running the risk of over-generalization? And, in particular, where was the concept that would bring out the distinctive traits of the ongoing “second conquest” (ibid.:129) of the world’s indigenous peoples – a process that has the governments of the present-day developing world as its main agents – while insisting on that process’ basic similitude to the original conquest model which had involved European colonizers?

Luckily, science denied me such an almighty theory of the indigenous condition, so I had to put up with something more moderate, because more closely circumscribed. The concept of the “frontier”, of which I had first become aware through John Bodley’s classic “Victims of Progress” of 1975, had little to say about, say, the structures of domination in the bigger part of the realm where indigenous peoples have long been subjected to central control. It does, however, give a good account of the techniques of state rule in zones where the leviathan is not yet a familiar, everyday presence, but a hegemon constrained by the remnants of political and partly even military autonomy on the part of local indigenous societies. While durable systems of ethnic domination are not its theme, the frontier concept describes them *in the making*. Its privileged subject, in other words, is the process of indigenous peoples’ step-wise engulfment by (or “encapsulation” in) states before they become fully “administered peoples” (Coates 2004:198).

When a scholar settles for a certain theory, he/she owes us, I believe, some information on how that theory speaks to his/her personality or connects with his/her view of the world. In my case, I confess that I fell for the concept’s unashamed romanticism. As frontiers evoke an ongoing expansion, they also imply resilience and defiance, a “not yet”, and thus the continuing existence of lifeways that have not yet been fashioned in the image of western modernism. Just as it describes the raw edges of state domains, the frontier notion also connotes residual wilderness. Very often, nature is still a potentiality to be reckoned with at the territorial limits of the state. “Bringing to mind the enchantment of distance and isolation” (Wyman and Kroeber 1965:xiii), the concept portrays, as one pair of writers would put it, “some of the few remaining ‘places’ where man must confront what he did not create” (Gradus and Lithwick, eds., 1996, “Preface”).

However, the concept offers more than emotional consolations. Importantly, it describes the interactional dynamics between indigenous people, third actors (such as settlers) and the states – colonial and postcolonial – that engulf them as a function of the territorial *space* in which the interactions are being played out. As such, it rivals and complements other spatial concepts that the geographical, historical and anthropological disciplines have developed to make sense of the world-historical processes unfolding at the edges of states². In step with recent thinking on citizenship (see e.g. Ong 1999), the frontier concept asserts that modern states do not wield power uniformly across their territories, but allow different legal standards and public political cultures to coexist

2 I will explore these concepts and their relation to the frontier notion in a subsequent chapter (chapter 5).

side by side. It insists that the tribal periphery of developing countries is very unlike the center, and pinpoints the characteristics that render that periphery a highly peculiar geographical, political, social and cultural space (Kopytoff 1987:9). Frontier theory sketches the particular institutional conditions that characterize and delimit state agency at state margins (Swift 1978:6-10, Bodley 1990:24-38), and enables us to develop useful generalizations on, among other things, the moral economy that guides the utilization of resources (Colombijn 2002:744) and the use of violence (Duncan Baretta and Markoff 1978, Dentan 1992) by non-state intruders into indigenous domains. And, as an important final point, the frontier concept highlights the systematic significance of the rural periphery in shaping social and political institutions in the colonizing centre (Nyerges 1992:861). By insisting that practices at the margins shape the state itself, it returns these margins to their rightful place as not peripheral, but, in fact, crucial to the state's everyday functioning (Das and Poole 2004).

Settler colonization is (and has historically been) an important activity on many of the world's frontiers, and has attracted considerable analytical interest. In substantial parts, the frontier concept focuses on mobility and its organizational and environmental consequences (Nyerges 1992:861). Where settler colonization is the issue, the frontier notion offers interesting clues to questions such as why it is that the intrusion of migrants is boding ill for natural environments (Margolis 1977, Pichón 1996), why settler-indigenous relations have the propensity to turn violent (and the violence to turn so characteristically ferocious and cruel, Fearon and Laitin 2001), and why the state seems to stand by idly or support the settler part as natives and newcomers clash (*ibid.*). Regardless of the cast of intruders to the frontier, furthermore, the concept helps us jump scales and move effortlessly from the macro to the micro level of analysis: It makes predictions that apply both to the policy priorities of state governments and the social and economic behavior of individuals, families, and companies (Colombijn 2002:744). Likewise, by systematically linking local sociopolitical conflicts, contending forms of social and political organization, mythical representations of the ethnic "Other" and his/her natural habitat, as well as patterns of environmental exploitation and change (Nyerges 1992:861), frontier theory lays bare connections between seemingly disparate, but intimately related phenomena that otherwise remain unexplored. In this capacity, therefore, the frontier concept may serve as a heuristic device for the identification of spaces across the globe where the interaction between states and local contenders for scarce resources is structured along similar lines (Hennessy 1981:11), and represents a tool for the comparison of structurally related manifestations of migration-induced conflict and intrusive resource exploitation at the rural periphery (Jacobs 1971, Lamar and Thompson 1981a, b). This thesis seeks to trace the intellectual history of the frontier concept, adapt it and put it to use for the comparative study of processes of conquest at contemporary state fringes in the developing South.

In the most general sense, frontiers are areas remote from political centres which hold strategic significance or economic potentials for human exploitation, and are contested by social formations of unequal power (see Hvalkof 2008:219). For the bigger part of the past two centuries – as for today –, frontier-making has in essence been the expansion of the nation-state or of fragments of its population into the domains of indigenous peoples, whose assertion of autonomy, among other things, prevents the state from implementing full administrative control in the frontier zone. In a nutshell, therefore, frontiers are loosely-administered spaces rich in resources, coveted by non-residents³. In the public mind, the study of frontiers in scientific terms is closely associated

3 For a more detailed definition, see chapter 5.

with one specific historical context – the American West in the 19th century – and one particular school of historiography – that of American exceptionalism, developed in the footsteps of Frederick Jackson Turner (1861-1932). For good or for bad, any effort to endorse the frontier concept as a respectable tool for comparative analysis has to start with a critical evaluation of Turner’s work. Accordingly, I will begin by introducing the main lines of the Turnerian “frontier hypothesis”, explore its extraordinary appeal as a celebratory account of America’s pioneer past, and show why it fell from grace once Western history had started to embrace – among others – the environment and Native American rights (chapter 2). Its chauvinist overtones and social Darwinist leanings aside, Turner’s frontier narrative also explicitly discouraged comparison; the following section (chapter 3) reinstates the frontier concept as a powerful framework for the comparative analysis of conquests and colonization at state fringes. Taking its clues from the biases and omissions of Turner’s frontier notion, the section outlines the minimal conditions for re-endorsing the “frontier” as helpful for an understanding of comparative conquests. My inquiry then (chapter 4) proceeds to evaluate different schools of comparativist reformers who rejected Turner’s parochial concern with the American condition. Choosing between those who associated frontiers with the past age of European colonial expansion, and those who have argued that frontier-making can be a feature of contemporary “Southern” forms of colonialism, as well, I side with the latter.

My protracted shoot-out with Frederick Jackson Turner, this singularly troublesome ancestor of frontier studies, will be followed (chapter 5) by a presentation of my own version of the frontier concept, one which allows for the comparative analysis of contested state peripheries across time and place – including, in particular, those of developing nations in the contemporary South. The section adds on and enlarges the sketchy and preliminary frontier definition that I have supplied at the beginning of this paragraph. As a frontier concept that transcends Turner will have to fit a broader range of phenomena than those on which he theorized, the three principal frontier types – “frontiers of settlement”, “frontiers of extraction” and “frontiers of control” – will be outlined in some detail. The section contains, furthermore, a discussion of salient aspects of frontier situations as I perceive them, including reflections on conflict-generating individual and state strategies, a part on how to think about power in frontier settings, and some thoughts on the tricky question of agency and accountability at the margins of the state.

I then proceed to outline from a comparative perspective eight – as I perceive them – generic properties of contemporary frontiers in the developing world (chapter 6). This lengthy exercise in developing diagnostic criteria for “frontier-spotting” is followed by an exposition of the “politics of nationalizing space”, a cocktail of policies which I hold to be representative for the agenda of contemporary states at their contested peripheries, and as such to a large extent responsible for the high levels of conflict characteristic for these zones (chapter 7, and notably 7.1). Having suggested that mischief at the frontier can largely be traced back to opportunistic development priorities and the near-pathological dread of cultural and political difference inherent in postcolonial nation- and state-building in the South, I then examine deviations from the standard pattern. In particular, I want to know if frontiers cease to be a reality where a country has chosen to reduce its dependency on frontier resources – usually by scaling down agricultural expansion (chapter 7.2).

In the chapter that follows (chapter 8), I am trying to add depth of field to my sometimes – by necessity – uncomfortably generalizing account of the frontier. Using fresh empirical material from a recent comparison of settlement fronts in six locales in South and Southeast Asia, I will draw the reader’s attention to the complexities of real-life frontiers. There, contrary to received wisdom,

settlers may turn out to be of indigenous backgrounds, local indigenous societies possess a military edge over the settler “intruders”, and indigenous leaders, rather than organizing resistance, reveal themselves as trustworthy allies of the fledgling state and the migrants that come with that state’s blessings. The main part of my report from the settlement frontier contains a detailed exposition of how, for one, different politico-legal frameworks play into the picture, and to what extent, secondly and thirdly, gradients relating to the amount of state support that settlers enjoy, and their being early or late arrivals at the frontier, do influence their reception by indigenous host societies.

In the vein of the currently-popular policy recommendations which so thrill development planners, I then (chapter 9) deliver a prescription for mitigating the frontier syndrome, which centers on eliminating the destructive frontier traits outlined earlier, and abandoning the “politics of nationalizing space” which have produced them. I am concluding my book with reflections on the challenge which recent global trends towards democratization and the ascension of the discourses of minority rights and environmental protection are offering to my proposition of the durability and thus the continued analytical importance of the frontier at the beginning of the 21st century (chapter 10).

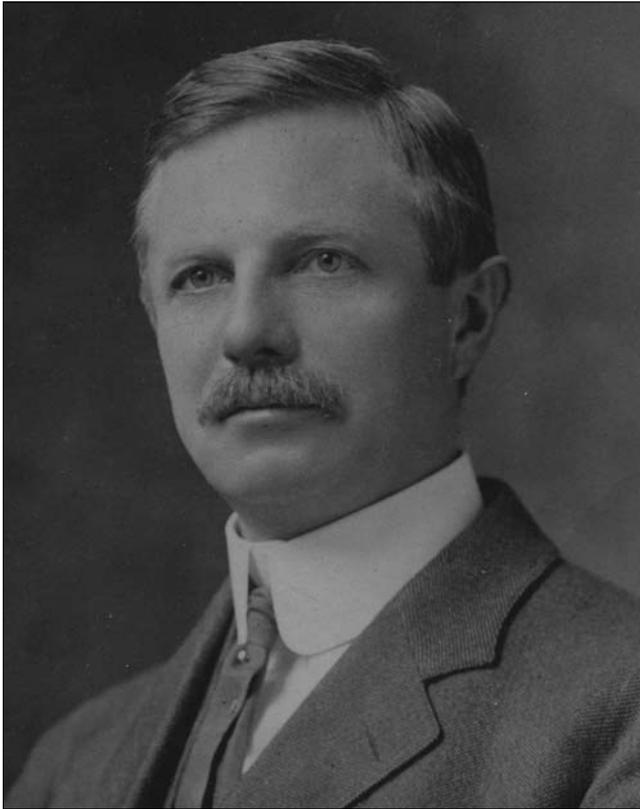


Photo 1: Frederick Jackson Turner, ca. 1911 (Wisconsin Historical Society, Image ID 28356)

2. THE TURNERIAN FRONTIER AND ITS DISCONTENTS

American anthropologist Anna Tsing (2005:31) has perceptively noted the seemingly trivial fact that the “frontier” is not a native category; indigenous people usually do not use it to denote aspects of their plight. When it arrives in material form, along with it come “many layers of previous associations”, shaping conditions “to the model of other wild times and places” (ibid.). The fact that in their comments on the discovery of gold or savage ethnic clashes on the island of Borneo, domestic Indonesian voices invoke images of the Californian gold rush and the Indian Wars, bears out that the frontier is actually a “traveling theory, a foreign form needing translation” (ibid.). No version of that theory has traveled further than that of the US-American West, and no one has recounted it with more vigour and with better timing than Frederick Jackson Turner. Because of the truly global influence it commands among ordinary consumers of popular science, and the hostility which it evokes at the same time in many of the world’s history and anthropology departments, a closer look at Turner’s frontier narrative is warranted.

In July 1893, at a meeting of the American Historical Association that flanked the Chicago World’s Fair, Turner delivered a paper that rapidly made him the most prominent American historian of his era and even now a major figure in the pantheon of the profession (Nobles 1997:5). A slim 29 pages, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (Turner 1893) earned the young Wisconsin college professor vast influence and near indiscriminate acceptance in academia. Besides American historiography, his ideas made their imprint on fields ranging from economics to sociology and even literary criticism. Turner’s appeal reached into politics, as well, as leading American statesmen from Theodore Roosevelt to John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan borrowed

from him in designing both foreign and domestic politics (Bassin 1993:510, Limerick 2000:79-83). Today, more than a century after its formulation, the stringent critique to which the frontier hypothesis was subjected since the 1930s – I will turn to it in a moment – has diminished the authority of Turner’s imagery and organizing ideas in the scholarly community, but has hardly affected their standing in the American public and the world at large (Limerick 2000:74-92). The irresistible simplicity of Turner’s concept, based on the easily-understood logic of environmental causation, continues to exercise a powerful attraction, and it can be fairly stated that no other inside-theory of American nation-building is as widely known or appreciated (Bassin 1993:510). Yet what was it that Turner said?

His major proposition – the famous “Turner thesis” or “frontier hypothesis” proper – was that the centre of American history was actually to be found at its edges⁴. The movement of European immigrants and New Englanders to the interior of the North American continent was, said Turner, American history’s single defining experience in that it shaped both the American “national character” – whose cardinal virtues Turner took to be individualism and egalitarianism – and American political institutions, democratic to an extent the professor thought was unequalled by any European nation. The distinctive features of American society could be explained, Turner said, by the “existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of (...) settlement westward” (Turner 1963:27). The trajectory of the moving frontier signified not only geographically a steady movement away from Europe and the pioneers’ origins, but also progressively freed them from the influence of Europe’s political institutions and steep social hierarchies (ibid.:30). The frontier, in other words, was a great “seedbed” for the growth of American democracy (Mikesell 1960:62), and shaped the pioneer nation to an extent that dwarfed the influence of imported European values and practices⁵.

In Turner’s argument, the frontier was an environment which rewarded character traits such as frugality, inquisitiveness, optimism and a belief in self-help (Turner 1963:57). To cope with the harsh conditions of the “wilderness” and the “primitive” societies that considered it their home⁶, European colonists had to strip off the veneer of “civilization” of their European origins, rediscovering their racial energies and reinventing both their character and egalitarian society in the process. Gradually, the settlers turned the “wilderness” into “civilization”, but in the process, they themselves became genuine Americans (ibid.:29). This double “metabolic change” (Simonson 1963:9) repeated itself as the frontier moved westward. Turner described this westward movement as a succession of different frontiers: first, that of the trader and trapper; then, that of the rancher and miner, followed by that of the farmer, and, finally, that of the townsman. When one frontier moved west, it was replaced by another (Turner 1963:35).

Basic to Turner’s 1893 essay and, indeed, his whole academic persona was his insistence that the nation’s pioneer stock and the social and political community which it created made America exceptional, and that uniqueness flowed from the frontier experience (Nobles 1997:7f.). While Turner’s predominant interest was to explain why American society was so much more egalitarian

4 The formulation is Patricia Nelson Limerick’s (1987:20).

5 Prior to 1893, the story of the settlement of North America had emphasized the European tradition, which ascribed the nation’s foundations to the “germs” of European, specifically Teutonic, society. In the forests of bronze-age Germany, so the theory went, the ancestors of the Anglo-Saxons had developed forms of social and political organization that influenced the development of England and, by extension, the American colonies (Nobles 1997:5f.).

6 Not coincidentally, among the most famous lines of Turner’s article was his definition of the frontier as “the meeting point between savagery and civilization” (Turner 1963:28).

than Europe (save for France after 1789), he also wanted to demonstrate why the country had been spared violent class conflict of the sort that led to revolutionary upheavals elsewhere. Again, the frontier provided the answer: Besides fostering economic and social equality in the West proper, it also softened the edges of the antagonistic labour relations which industrialization had produced in the eastern heartlands of the new nation. By absorbing population from Northeastern America's crowded cities where work was hard to find and the potential for class conflict great, and by focusing these migrant proletarians on community-making and farming, the frontier acted as a safety valve which provided an alternative outlet for what might otherwise turn into dangerous political passions (Turner 1932:41, 44; Billington 1967:7).

Finally, Turner made yet another, somewhat tangential point, as well, which added more than just a touch of nostalgia to his text. In a report about the recently-published national population census of 1890, the Census Bureau had concluded that it was no longer possible to draw a "frontier line" on the map of the United States. Population in the West had reached the mark of 2 persons per mile² (0,8 persons per kilometer²), the basis for calling an area settled. White settlements, large and small, now so thoroughly dotted the map that the "frontier" had ceased to be a living force and, possibly, a meaningful idea (Turner 1963:27). With the Census superintendent's pronouncement, Turner rather pathetically declared, a formative and glorious phase in the nation's life had come to a close, boding ill for America's future (*ibid.*).

The idea that the pioneer heritage defined the individual and the nation had been present in American writing since the middle of the 18th century (Cronon 2000), which renders Turner's thesis less original than is generally admitted⁷. Turner's achievement was to have tapped into a widely popular notion, fashioned it into a brilliant text, and given it academic legitimacy (*ibid.*). For many Americans, his 1893 essay represented the central narrative synthesis of all of American history. The reasons for its extraordinary popularity are not too difficult to point out. Turner's way of explaining the new nation's distinctiveness sat well with a people who "felt instinctively that they had created more than they had inherited and that they owed little to the old world" (Mikesell 1960:63). Of equal appeal was Turner's representation of American history as a creative act in which rich and poor had participated equally (*ibid.*). "The Significance of the Frontier...", in brief, was a piece of writing that gave ordinary Americans a "usable past" (Simonson 1963:20f.). Others, however – fellow Americans and critics of other nations – found the past of Turner's making less usable. While the Wisconsin professor's disciples managed to keep his legacy more or less intact throughout the first half of the 20th century, the chorus of the critics grew louder with the passing of World War II (Barnhart 1999:1). The challenges that were raised ranged from mild revision to outright (and often outraged) rejection; as the decades passed, academic careers were increasingly built on the refutation rather than the affirmation of the "frontier hypothesis" and what it stood for. Finally, a century after the article's publication, historian Kerwin Klein (1996:180) was forced to note in retrospect that "the ritual flagellation of Frederick Jackson Turner has become a popular scholarly pastime".

7 Besides the fact – often overlooked in appraisals of Turner's significance – that the ideas which the Wisconsin professor broached were very much in the air in his time, it deserves to be mentioned that before him, non-American scholars had already theorized on the effects of an open settlement frontier on the national "mentality" and developmental history. Notable among them is above all the Russian historian of Zarist times, Sergei Mikhailovich Solo'vov (1820-1879), who – interesting enough – arrived at conclusions that were radically different from Turner's. Solo'vov proposed that the opportunity for easy movement to the steppes of Inner Asia and the tundra of Siberia had worked to the detriment of the intellectual and social evolution of Russian society, and the constant confrontation with hostile natives had helped the institutionalization of serfdom and led to a pervasive militarization of the body politic (Bassin 1993).

For many, Turner's propositions were muddled and contradictory, and thus flawed as an analytical tool. His definition of the frontier, for instance, was fuzzy and changing. He incessantly revised his original 1893 article, and by the time his first book, 'The Frontier in American History' (Turner 1920) appeared, meanings and synonyms for "frontier" had multiplied. Thus, it was one time rendered as "the West", another time as "the hither edge of free land", and in some third case as "the line of most rapid and effective Americanization". Additional renderings were "a migrating region", "the mere edge of settlement", "the belt of territory occupied by frontiersmen", and "a form of society rather than an area" (Klein 1996:185, note 7). Yet other uses of the word were "a state of mind", "a stage of society rather than a place", and "the region whose social conditions resulted from the application of older institutions and ideas to the transforming influences of free land" (Billington 1967:7)⁸.

To just as many, even more objectionable was the fact that the thesis' arguments were fraught with error. Thus, American democracy had not begun at the frontier: Westerners, rather than inventing the American character, had borrowed most cultural values and political ideas from Europe and the older settlements in the original Atlantic colonies (Simonson 1963:19, Cronon, Miles and Gitlin 1992:4). Turner's view of that democracy was immature and rather mystical: He credited it with a numinous "spiritual essence by which persons can achieve their full measure of individuality and dignity" (Simonson 1963:19) and overstressed the egalitarian nature of American society (ibid.:19f.). The emphasis on the frontier as the single most critical force in American history was misplaced; other factors such as urbanization, trans-Atlantic immigration and industrialization were equally – if not more – important. Rather than by movement to the West, the history of the nation was crucially determined by conflict in the East, i.e. the violent tension between industrial capitalism on the East coast and plantation slavery in the confederacy (Beard and Beard 1927, Beard 1941, Nobles 1997:9). In glorifying the rugged, self-sufficient pioneer, Turner had downplayed the role of the federal government in financing railroads, fielding the cavalry when necessary and negotiating Indian treaties when opportune (Martin 1964:51, quoted in Nash 1991:77, Limerick 2000:25). Many of those who settled the West did not fit the description of the quintessential frontier hero of Turner's writings – white, Anglo-Saxon and male. Systematically overlooked by traditional frontier historiography was the significant contribution of African-, Mexican-, Asian-Americans and pioneer women to the making of frontier history (Nash 1991:79-87). And finally, the aspirations that these pioneers harbored were in a large number of cases unachieved, defying Turner's central conviction that frontier settlement promoted freedom and opportunity. While thousands of people helped conquer the frontier, thousands more were conquered by it (Fite 1966:285)⁹. While a first strand of critique thus questioned the validity of the proposed effects of frontier expansion on the westering individuals and the national body politic, a second challenge focused

8 In defence of Turner, however, it should be pointed out that from the outset, his piece had been layed out as an impressionistic essay rather than a full-blown analytical edifice with a testable hypothesis and easily operationable definitions; in their zeal to disprove (or support) his concepts, many scholars lost sight of that fact (Savage and Thompson 1979:4).

9 Thus, nature often conspired against the settlers, as when droughts in the Great Plains sent many homesteaders back to the Middle West or East (Simonson 1963:18). More often, unscrupulous land speculators and railroad monopolists forced them off their land. By 1890, 24% of all American farmers were tenants on somebody else's land; in 1900, the figure was already at 35% (ibid.). A large number of North American settlers had to realize that "grim realities had turned their daydreams into nightmares" (Fite 1966:285), leaving them no freer than pennyless mill workers or indentured rural labour. They shared this experience with pioneers on many later settlement frontiers (see e.g. Edgerton 1983:156 on Bukidnon province, Mindanao, the Philippines, and Cowell 1990:122-128 on the Brazilian Amazon).

on its repercussions – unreflected by Turner – on that which (and those who) stood in its way. Quite clearly, Turner’s preoccupation with what the frontier did to the colonizing society had prevented him from seeing what that society did to the frontier – namely, to its indigenous communities and the environment they inhabited (Lattimore 1962d:490). Revisionist historians – though few of them Native Americans¹⁰ – charged Turner with negating the genocide and ethnocide visited upon the continent’s indigenous peoples while celebrating its perpetrators. In his treatise, they were pictured “as if they were some kind of geographical obstacle to the westward movement of whites” (Jacobs 1971:307), freak creatures on the sidelines of the great epic that was the “winning of the West”. Turner’s frontier notion was ethnocentric in the extreme, and had meaning only from the perspective of the colonizing culture. Thus, native Americans *did* play an active role in shaping if not the larger course, then at least important aspects of frontier history (White 1991a, b; Cronon, Miles and Gitlin 1992:10f.). Seen through their eyes, the westward movement of Euro-Americans was hardly the positive process as which Turner had celebrated it. For the Indian, rather than freedom and opportunity, it held displacement, destruction and death in store (Nobles 1997:12), so its history had to be recounted as one of holocaust, not of the spread of civilization (Barnhart 1999:3). Ascriptions of savagery were not entirely out of place, but should be attached, if anything, to the party of the colonizers¹¹. The “free land” in Turner’s account of the frontier was nothing of the sort, having passed into European hands only through the (near) annihilation of its erstwhile Indian owners (Cronon, Miles and Gitlin 1992:4). Not progress and development, but conquest, colonization and invasion were the terms in which frontier processes in the American West had to be narrated (Limerick 1987).

Thus, by the 1970s, the Turnerian canon struck many as racist and imperialist in its depiction of America’s “legacy of conquest” (Limerick 1987); it was also, as specialists in environmental history have pointed out, ecologically innocent. Contrary to the master narrative, frontier expansion to the semi-arid plains had ushered in a “ruthless assault on nature”, powered by predatory forms of primitive accumulation (Worster 1991a:18). Central to the pioneers’ economic behavior was the belief that land and natural resources were abundant and infinite – an attitude which facilitated the wanton destruction of Western ecosystems (Hague 1977). The real significance of the frontier lay in the enormous wastefulness it had fostered and the attendant degradation of the natural resource base of the nation (Clark 1972).

Finally – and closest to my concern here –, Turner’s work was taken to task for its narrow and exclusive interest in the American condition, and the grounds on which he declared the American frontier – and, by extension, any frontier – gone were questioned. In his attempt to finally put the “American” in American history, it will be remembered, Turner had told his story in a way

10 Two loose “schools” of American historians are connected with the attack on the ethnocentrism and racism of Turner’s master narrative. The so-called “New Indian History”, whose main works appeared in the 1960s and 1970s (see e.g. Forbes 1962, Jacobs 1971 and 1973, Jennings 1975) endeavored to present a Native-American perspective of events. It prepared the ground for the “New Western History” which embraced a multitude of themes, yet hesitated to endorse subaltern advocacy as explicitly as the “New Indian Historians”. Today, “New Western History” is the dominant paradigm in American frontier studies (see Limerick 1987, 2000, Limerick, Milner and Rankin, eds., 1991, Cronon, Miles and Gitlin, eds., 1992).

11 The fact that from an Indian point of view, the savage lands of the Turnerian narrative did not get savage until the white folks arrived, is nicely captured in Nobles’ (1997:12) ironic suggestion to redescribe Turner’s frontier as “the meeting point where otherwise civilized people often exhibited savage behavior”. Note, however, that neither before nor during the conquest, Native Americans qualified as saints of non-violence and passive resistance, and brutality – like nobility – was hardly the exclusive property of any side in the Indian Wars (Limerick 2000:44).

Figure 1 The Misgivings about Turner in a Nutshell**An “Unsubtle Concept in a Subtle World”?****Drawbacks of the Turnerian Frontier Concept**

- *narrow in explanatory concern*: preoccupation with the impact of frontier conditions on the colonizing core (institutions, mentality)
- *narrow in choice of diagnostic criteria*: defines frontier conditions in a way that rules out the possibility of diagnosing frontiers in the present
- *mythical*: idealizes frontier as a „gate of escape“ for the poor and the oppressed; understates the role of government in frontier expansion; overstates the formative influence of frontier ‚spirit‘ and relations on the formation of the national political system
- *parochial*: overstates American exceptionalism, discourages comparison
- *strongly ethnocentric*: negates the involvement of an indigenous counterpart in the frontier process
- *triumphalist*: celebrates “victory” over nature and original inhabitants of frontier

that emphasized the uniqueness of the national experience¹². The great majority not only of his disciples, but also of his detractors had followed him in this, as they dug their trenches defending or assaulting the sage. In a major survey of the field, Mikesell (1960:64) called the neglect of comparative research the “principal failure of Turner”; not only did one forego the chance to illuminate the frontier experiences of other settler nations, but without a comparative perspective, even the significance of the American frontier itself would have to remain obscure (ibid.; see also Hayes 1946, Heaton 1946).

On a different note, some scholars discounted Turner’s belief in the “end” of the frontier in the American West, and questioned the wisdom of defining frontier conditions solely in terms of a population density ceiling reached and a process of settlement concluded (see e.g. Limerick 1987:23f.). The West, they insisted, had not lost its distinctiveness as a region, as many of the issues that framed frontier expansion up to 1890 – land sales, gold rushes and oil booms, as well as bitter struggles between Indians and whites, speculators and settlers, ranchers and farmers, bureaucrats and taxpayers – had by no means been put to rest (Nobles 1997:16). Turner, however, had stressed discontinuity and made every effort to exclude twentieth-century events from the category “frontier” (Limerick 1987:24). By rendering the term “useless as a guide for the present and future” (Lamar 1968:63f.), the Turner school wasted its explanatory force on rather antiquarian concerns and gave away the chance to study frontier processes in global, comparative terms.

In sum, then, the balance sheet of the frontier of Turnerian vintage looks terrible (see figure 1, above).

¹² Looking back on millenia of well-documented history in his study area, China scholar Owen Lattimore quipped: “Communities with short histories (...) seem instinctively to seek to compensate for the shortness of their history by emphasizing the particularities of their society” (Lattimore 1962d:489).

Turner's gaze was clearly the gaze of the white, male Anglo-Saxon, and his tale was a tale of praise for the perseverance of the pioneer who turned wilderness into civilization. The indigenous Other was written out of the picture; in his refusal to address the conflict between conquerors and conquered, and his denial of the fact that the Europeans had slaughtered their way across the continent, Turner's was an apologetic settler discourse. Though elegant in form, the famous "frontier hypothesis" was at its core a rather crude prop for an ongoing nation-building effort (Lamar and Thompson 1981a:4), and as such deserves to be deconstructed. Thus, a number of vocal American critics of Turner's carried their misgivings about his ideas to the point of dismissing the frontier concept itself as too tainted by its association with evolutionary ethnocentrism to be helpful as an analytical tool (see Limerick 1987, Worster 1987, 1991b, White 1991a, b). Probably the most stylish epitaph is from Patricia Limerick (1987:25) who concluded that "the frontier is an unsubtle concept in a subtle world".

However, while some recommended ditching the "frontier" as an explanatory framework, an equally vocal group of scholars has chosen to retain important elements of the concept, while rejecting the underlying ethnocentrism of Turner's formula (see e.g. Cronon 1987, Aron 1994, Jacobs 1994, Klein 1996). And, hacking away at the intellectual isolationism and the narcissistic tendencies that define Turner's frontier as a uniquely American legacy, a growing number of anthropologists, historians and practitioners of other disciplines felt justified in exploring the frontier as a more general phenomenon, illuminating through comparative research the experiences of diverse peoples in a multiplicity of environments at widely differing times (see e.g. Wyman and Kroeber, eds., 1965, Bohannan and Plog, eds., 1967, Miller and Steffen, eds., 1977, Savage and Thompson, eds., 1979, Lamar and Thompson, eds., 1981, Wolfskill and Palmer, eds., 1981, Kopytoff, ed., 1987). Predictably, my sympathy is with this latter group of revisionists who have deposed Turner, but not the concept on which he had tried his hand.

3. RECLAIMING THE “F” WORD: BEYOND THE TURNERIAN FRONTIER

It is probably true that to revive the frontier as a serious field of study and embrace it for understanding comparative conquests, we have to free ourselves, as historian Susan Armitage (quoted in Nobles 1997:11) has put it, from the “dead hand of Frederick Jackson Turner”. Hackneyed, ethnocentric and bound up with notions of Manifest Destiny¹³, the “frontier hypothesis” is of a piece with 19th century thinking, and becomes a liability for my 21st century concern with indigenous contestations of expansive designs at the edges of states.

Figure 2 Foundations of a Post-Turnerian Frontier Concept

“Reclaiming the ”F” Word”: Resurrecting the Frontier as an Explanatory Concept

- if it is to regain meaning and significance, the frontier concept must be understood as a framework for the *study of inter-ethnic relations*
- the attempt to develop a more meaningful and relevant frontier concept must include a *focus on the environment* and the *characteristic patterns of resource use* by non-native frontier actors
- such a concept is conscious of and addresses the characteristic *power disparities* between invaders and invaded
- it addresses these power disparities by analyzing interactions in terms of *conquest* and *colonization*
- it acknowledges and accounts for *active historical agency* of those invaded, and the *reciprocal nature of interactions* at the frontier; it does not, however, see the zone as the “neutral, bicultural borderland of peaceful give and take” which some recent scholarship makes of it
- it is alive to the fact that invaders and invaded entertain different (and possibly opposite) notions of a frontier system’s lay-out: One group’s civilizational center may constitute the periphery in the other group’s cosmology. Frontiers *must be seen through the prism of both the expansive, modernizing and the traditional, local society/societies*
- it recognizes the *mythical dimensions* of conventional frontier historiography as a source of strenght and inspiration, as they point to powerful cognitions guiding non-native frontier actors at world frontiers

¹³ “Manifest Destiny” was a political catch phrase coined in the middle of the 19th century, expressing the belief that by expanding from the Atlantic seabord to the Pacific Ocean, the United States were fullfilling some sort of historical calling (see Borden 1970). Later administrations used the slogan to justify other territorial acquisitions of the young nation, e.g. on Cuba and the Philippines towards the end of the 19th century.

“Reclaiming the ‘F’ Word” – the programmatic title of a widely-quoted article by Kerwin Klein (1996) – without celebrating its subject as the locus of pioneer independence, nobility, grandeur and adventure, requires, first and foremost, that we use it as a frame for the study of inter-ethnic relations (Seymour-Smith 1986:125). As its value for getting to the bottom of “national characters” is, at best, dubious, we better put it to use to elucidate the interpenetration of different ethnic groups – as a matter of course frictional in character – that occurs when one of them intrudes into the domain of another (Leach 1960:50, Lattimore 1962d:469, Lamar and Thompson 1981a:7f). Next, the frontier concept has to be reframed to focus not only on ethnic and sociopolitical conflicts at the periphery, but also on patterns of environmental exploitation and change there (Nyerges 1992:861). Once it is informed by a genuine concern for the periphery as a habitat for those who flock to it and those whose ancestral home it has been since time immemorial, the frontier concept sheds light on characteristic forms of resource use by the former, both on the level of state policies and the behaviour of the individual colonists – or logging and mining companies, for that matter (Colombijn 2002:744)¹⁴. Third, a revamped frontier concept needs to be conscious of and address the characteristic power disparities between invaders and invaded. Basic to frontier situations is an expansive moment, the fact of a “projection of power into the domain and life space of other peoples” (Friedmann 1996:15; see also Colombijn and Wadley 2001:8). In the contemporary age – late modernity –, at least, the invading groups owe their dominance not to any supposed superiority in culture or social organization, but to the fact that they are attached to states that command military and logistical resources vastly superior to those of the invaded (Swift 1978:7; see also my discussion in chapter 5). Fourth, our value-added, post-Turnerian idea of the frontier addresses the power disparities just mentioned by analyzing interactions in terms of *conquest* and *colonization* (Forbes 1962, Limerick 1987). (I will explain in the next chapter how such a terminology can be defended in an age that claims to have no knowledge anymore of colonies and colonization). Fifth, even where the coercive conditions of conquest and colonization are putting sometimes narrow limits to the choices open to the indigenous party/parties in the frontier encounter, we need to remind ourselves that indigenous people are not (and have never been) passive recipients of outsiders’ aggression (Thompson 1981:2). If it aims to be more than a simply-knit morality play that turns Turner’s cant of pioneer heroics on its head, the comparative study of frontiers will acknowledge and account for the active historical agency of those invaded, and the – basically – reciprocal nature of interactions at the frontier (Wolf 1982, Nobles 1997:12). Given the range of possibilities afforded to actors on both sides, the frontier becomes a multidimensional world of consort *and* conflict rather than one of immutable antagonism between cultural monoliths (White 1991b, Faragher 1994:232)¹⁵. Sixth, if the concept is to rid itself of the colonist- and colonizer-centered spin that Turner gave it, the

14 In fact, the environmental consequences of mobility and “development” went not unremarked by Turner, either, when he explored the dynamics and characteristics of the American settlement frontier. He rightly stated that the allure of the frontier was the availability of natural resources – beasts for the hunter and trader, immense grasses for the rancher, and virgin land for the farmer – and the financial windfalls to be made in a situation of limitless abundance, when only production costs, but not replacement costs of the respective resource had to be taken into account. While he felt no sense of berievement about the destruction of Native American societies in the course of frontier expansion, there are indications that Turner bemoaned the fact that the formative years of American history came at the price of irreparable environmental destruction (Turner 1920:18-22; Colombijn 1997:315f.).

15 However, recasting frontiers as sites of mutually shrewd interaction across porous ethnic boundaries, and thus “common worlds” of natives and colonists (see notably White’s [1991a] notion of the “middle ground” and Aron’s [1994] idea of the “intersection”) carries the serious danger of downplaying the element of force, the unequal distribution of power and the larger context of conquest and colonization. As sane as it may be to refashion indigenous people as actors in their own right, we must not lapse into thinking of frontiers as “neutral, bicultural borderlands of peaceful give and take” (Friedmann 1996:14f.).

frontier should be re-conceptualized as a zone that can (and must) be seen through the prism of both the expansive, modernizing *and* the traditional, local society/societies. The two (or more) societies involved will locate centre and periphery in a very different manner. Significantly, for the members of most indigenous societies, the frontier zone is not the outer edge of an expanding civilization, but the centre of the universe (Gray 2001:395f., Hvalkof 1989:137-142 and 2003:7). And seventh (and last), our re-calibrated frontier notion tries to make productive the discovery that the frontier as Turner had described it was largely mythical (see chapter 2 above, as well as Smith 1950, Hennessy 1981:11, Nash 1991:197-257). Rather than an accurate description of social facts, Turner's frontier narrative is a mirror reflecting the collective imagination of settler nations. Therefore, being settler discourse, the Turner thesis has its usefulness in pointing to cognitions which guide non-native frontier actors at other world frontiers, including those in contemporary countries of the developing South. Beliefs in pioneering as an avenue to prosperity and status, in the abundance of land and natural resources in the new locales, in the absence of rightful owners of these coveted things, and the beastly nature of native contenders as they eventually emerge, have been (and continue to be) powerful forces that drive the conquest of indigenous peripheries globally, colouring and shaping the modalities of frontier encounters (see below, chapter 6).

The seven conditions for the safe use of a post-Turnerian frontier notion that I have just outlined are summarized in figure 2 (above).

4. THERE TO HERE: FROM COLONIAL TO POSTCOLONIAL FRONTIERS

Frontier studies are more than the story of American exceptionalism that Turner's frontier school has made of them. After the end of World War II, a rapidly-growing number of researchers ventured out to explore "other wests" (Heaton 1946) than that of the American prairies and deserts, using the frontier concept as their central organizing idea. Far from the noisy debates over the semantics of the Turner thesis, historians, geographers and anthropologists compared processes of settlement in the United States with those in other former British colonies (see e.g. Alexander 1947, Price 1949, Sharp 1955, Allen 1959, Burt 1965, Cross, ed., 1970, Jacobs 1971, Lamar and Thompson, eds., 1981), the former French dominions in North America (Burt 1940), Hispanic and Portuguese America (see e.g. Zavala 1957, Hemming 1978, Hennessy 1978), the German expansion into the eastern parts of Europe in the late middle ages (see the sources mentioned in Gerhard 1959:219-224) and the Russian conquest of Siberia (see e.g. Lobanov-Rostovsky 1957, Treadgold 1957, Wieczynski 1976). Moreover, daring generalizations were developed which conceived of all New World colonies as parts of a "great frontier" of the European metropolis (Webb 1951, 1952). Some of these studies closely followed Turner in their concern with the influence of frontier legacies on national institutions, while others (see notably Price 1949, Jacobs 1971, Hemming 1978) turned the looking glass around to focus on the encounter between invaders and indigenous peoples, as well as its impact on the latter. Realizing that there can be no understanding of colonies without an understanding of their empires, their authors all emphasized the *connectedness* of frontier areas more than their isolation. "The frontier that Turner portrayed as 'isolated'", wrote New Western Historians Cronon, Miles and Gitlin (1992:9), "was instead part of the worldwide expansion of European economies and nation-states that traces back to the fourteenth century and before. As such, we can best know the history of the American West if we read it as a chapter in the much larger history of European colonialism".

Thus, the attempt to reconstruct the frontier notion in the perspective of world history (Wyman and Kroeber 1965:xix) and liberate it from the shackles of intellectual isolationism, had borne valuable first fruits: A growing body of research had established that across the globe, the occupation *by Caucasians* of vast and supposedly "empty" spaces could be profitably compared by help of the frontier concept. Even more significantly, as Turner's American example was put in its proper, larger context and the analytical perspective expanded, other types of frontiers came into view on which Turner had had little to say. As the gaze widened, there appeared alongside his "frontier of settlement" – rapidly moving and generative of violent change in its voracious appetite for land – a kind of frontier which was much more stagnant and tranquil, a zone of long-term culture contact decidedly more characteristic for large parts of Europe and Asia than the "tidal wave" type that the Turner school had described (see e.g. Lattimore 1940, 1962a, d, Gaubatz 1996). To direct one's attention exclusively to the latter, as Gregory Bateson (1935:180), an eminent student of culture contact, scathingly remarked, would be comparable to researchers of gravity who choose to restrict themselves to the study of houses collapsing in earthquakes. Indeed, the inclusion of Central Asian and European case material helped students of comparative frontier history rediscover the fact that the word "frontier" had a range of meanings far richer than Turner had allowed. Linguists have traced the term back to medieval Latin (*frons*, meaning "forehead"), and then forward through several centuries of semantic change. The word worked its way into English and other European languages

as a term for the militarized border regions of a political entity, a zone where states came up against other states or non-state peoples (Juricek 1966: 10ff.)¹⁶. Until roughly the mid-nineteenth century, Americans, too, had understood frontiers to be the more or less fortified outer edges of the colonies and, in extension, of their state and nation; use of the term showed a preoccupation with defending rather than advancing what was designated (*ibid.*:14, 16). In decreeing frontiers to be the outer edge of “unsettled” land, Turner eclipsed this earlier meaning, and his erasure of such previous usages was predicated on the elimination of Native Americans as a political and military force (Faragher 1994:239). Since to medievalists and other scholars of European political history, however, the term could not but mean political borderlands, lexical usages and academic understandings branched, unnoticed except by the few who had a command of both literatures (Power 1999:1ff.).

Thus, as comparative frontier studies comprehended the American West as part of something larger, they understood that more encompassing thing to be European colonial expansion. Locating the frontier wherever white colonists established themselves certainly meant a vast improvement over Turner’s exclusive concern with the Trans-Mississippi West. At the same time, however, it also implied that the full potential of the frontier concept as a framework for the comparative study of conquests was not realized. If the frontier is a phenomenon that attaches to colonies in general, then why confine the search for world frontiers to the epoch of old-world colonialism? Unwittingly, the first wave of revisionism had endowed the general image of the frontier with the peculiar characteristics of European colonization, and ruled out the possibility of describing matters in terms of the concept where the expanding state was not European and colonial, but Asian, African or Latin American and postcolonial. In the view of these early globalizers of the frontier thesis, the frontier had a definite historical moment – the colonial era –, and it had a definite, normally short life span as frontier processes everywhere were carried to their inevitable conclusion by the colonial hegemon. According to the Turnerian narrative and the cant of those who charged it with neglecting other European world frontiers, such frontier processes were of necessity lineal and irreversible. As the story went, frontiers opened but once in a given colony, dissolving sooner or later into regular administrative units as a result of the irresistible power of colonial gifts and guns. That is quite obviously a fallacy, an ill-advised shortcut through history.

Over the past decades, scholars from a host of disciplinary fields have registered their objection to the idea that “at least half of the frontier equation be European or Euro-American” (Klein 1996:208, note 40), arguing that frontier-making forces – conquests and invasions – did not depend on Caucasian cast; they had already been a feature of the pre-colonial world (Leach 1960, Lattimore 1962d:469-472, Scott 1998a, b, Colombijn and Wadley 2001) and could still be encountered after decolonisation, too (see e.g. Lamar and Thompson 1981b:314, Nobles 1997:xii). Most pertinent to my concern here, it was pointed out that old World colonial rulers had been succeeded by regional counterparts who embarked on similar and at present still ongoing projects of conquest and exploitation. In dealing with the tribally-inhabited margins of their national territories, many sovereign nation-states of the South have reproduced colonial-type economic and political relationships (see e.g. Nietschmann 1987, Harrell 1995:36, Stea 1996:31, Coates 2004:21ff.); as a consequence, being indigenous still refers to the experience of being colonized and subordinated, but in a context which is nowadays primarily local (Sills 1993:10)¹⁷. No longer imposed by colonizers external to the

16 Other helpful sources on the etymology of the frontier notion are Kristof (1959) and Febvre (1973).

17 This formulation should not obscure the fact that such local processes of subjugation and exploitation are embedded in a context of global markets and the transnational forces of late capitalism.

region, such colonialism has been called “internal” (González Casanova 1965, Stavenhagen 1965, Hechter 1975, 1985) or “intramural” (Meinig 1969:214), and the frontiers it generates may usefully be distinguished as “internal frontiers” (Yiftachel and Fenster 1997:255)¹⁸.

There are many reasons why first-generation proponents of comparative frontier studies stopped short of discovering postcolonial conquests at national peripheries as a congenial and legitimate field of enquiry. Besides a creeping eurocentrism and lack of reflection on the part of some of the most vocal proponents of the idea of studying “other wests” in frontier terms (see notably Webb 1951, 1952), the logic of comparison played a crucial role, as did the failure to see that one was theorizing on the basis of a very narrow sample of cases. In search of a useful foundation for generalization, the pioneers of the field restricted themselves to examples which suggested easy comparability, involving culturally-related groups of colonists, vast open spaces, and a sufficiently large military edge which the colonists enjoyed over their indigenous adversaries (Mikesell 1960:65). Frontier processes were analysed from the narrow premise of settler societies which had their base in metropolitan, industrializing countries and brought a tremendous economic and military advantage to bear in the colonial encounter. Such processes could not possibly be open-ended, but were pre-determined to result in the frontier’s rather rapid “closure”. Backed up by robust states, white colonists in North America, Southern Africa, Australia and New Zealand all managed to suppress tribal resistance and break up tribal autonomy relatively swiftly and at low costs, thereby reducing their indigenous adversaries to helpless wardens of the state. Where Caucasian colonial powers opened “frontiers of settlement”, indigenous resistance to the encapsulation by settler society was usually not of long duration, and frontier conditions indeed rather soon gave way to the regular administrative control of fully-subjugated populations¹⁹. Everywhere else, however, colonial frontiers were not of the “tidal wave” type. Rather than putting a premium on the implantation of white settlers, the colonial agendas were either bent on controlling trade routes or simply deterring neighbouring states, or else focusing on the surgical exploitation of certain natural resources of the territories concerned (Wolf 1982:195-261, Watson 1984). The literature refers to the first of these two alternative types of frontiers as “frontiers of control”, and to the second as “frontiers of extraction”; rather than involving the removal or extermination of the native population, both of them were often depending on the continued presence of vital indigenous communities, making them the site of a more stable, longer-term interaction between invaders and local communities (see the more detailed exposition below, chapter 5). Large parts of lowland South America, the Northwestern and Northeastern rims of British India, the hills and mountains of British Burma, the Dutch Indies’ Outer Islands and vast stretches of French West Africa were examples of hybrid combinations of “frontiers of control” and “frontiers of extraction” where the writ of colonial

18 The failure to notice the family resemblance between metropolitan and autochthonous “Southern” forms of colonialism, as Stevan Harrell (1995:36) points out, has serious political and moral implications. As most scholars have chosen to reserve the label “colonial” exclusively for the study of European colonial domination, the destructive consequences and problematic ideological foundations of autochthonous imperial projects are usually underrated by policy makers and the general public. Scholars working on lesser-known varieties of colonial processes, Harrell contends, must help prevent that the academic community prematurely close the case on the indictment of colonialism as a form of rule over the periphery:

”[We] have it incumbent upon ourselves to begin making our voices heard in the growing scholarly community discussing civilizing projects generally; it would be ironic if a community dedicated to deconstructing the ethnocentric formulations behind its own colonialism ended up excluding colonialisms of other centers” (ibid.).

19 For a contrary point of view, see e.g. Klein’s (1996), Limerick’s (1987, 2000) and Nobles’ (1997) argument for the persistence of the frontier in the American West.

law was perennially challenged by truculent indigenous societies, many of whom were subdued and subjected to substantial forms of state domination only in the first half of the 20th century (Anderson 1987:4, Urban and Shertzer 1991:3, Winzeler 1997:1, Scott 2008).

Thus, the idea of the frontier as something short-lived, called into existence just once and necessarily with a European colonial cast, fails to account for two important manifestations of the colonial frontier, where “frontierness” proved much more resilient. The canon of the linear, irreversible frontier process is even less persuasive where non-western imperial colonizers or postcolonial governments of the developing South expanded to tribal peripheries, thereby creating “internal frontiers” of remarkable temporal persistence. Imperial China’s Inner Asian frontiers have been documented at least since the time of the Han dynasty (Gaubatz 1996:17), moving back and forth over time (“oscillating” in Lattimore’s [1940] words) in response to the alternating dominance by the empire and its nomadic neighbours. The history of Southeast Asian statecraft shows a picture of downriver or coastal kingdoms controlling ports and fertile, wet-rice producing alluvial plains, projecting their power with shifting luck to the adjacent hills and mountains, and thus resigned to live with highly unstable and perennially re-negotiated frontiers (Scott 1998a:50-54). Africa, as well, had autochthonous frontier dynamics which followed a trajectory much different from the “tidal wave” type typical for the colonization process in North America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Igor Kopytoff (1987) described the characteristics of what he called the “interstitial” frontier, where herdsmen and farmers in search of greener pastures regularly split off from petty kingdoms to occupy the politically “open” spaces in the interstices between established princely polities. As these frontiersmen were not the advance agents of a metropolitan expansion that produces culturally and politically homogenous space, these offshoots transformed into new, independent polities and ethnicities and in time became the motor of new frontier processes at their fringes. This perpetual reproduction of local frontiers by countless small-scale migrations has patterned much of Africa’s cultural history up to this day, says Kopytoff, and he concludes that frontiers can be a force for cultural-historical continuity and conservatism just as well as for sweeping cultural transformation (ibid.:8-16).

Most crucially, the perception of frontier processes as linear and irreversible fails to explain why so many postcolonial governments to this day are engaged in the very same business of pacification and administrative subjugation of tribal peoples at their fringes that their colonial predecessors thought they had closed the books on once and for all (see Strathern 2000, Helbling 2006:294). Northeast India, Burma’s tribal areas, the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, the interior of Borneo, Aceh and West Papua in Indonesia are cases in point where colonial regimes never established full administrative control, and thus left their postcolonial successor governments a legacy of still-open frontiers.

To make a long point short, frontiers are as characteristic of many present-day developing countries as they were of yesterday’s colonial empires. They are cyclical rather than lineal phenomena in that they move back and fro, “close” and “(re-)open” in response to a twin logic. *First*, in their capacity as loosely-controlled space characterized by a tension between hegemonial state designs and indigenous autonomies, frontiers are made and unmade in keeping with the expansion and contraction of states and the force they can muster to control the fringes of their influence. In that sense, frontier conditions, rather than belonging to a past age of Caucasian pioneers, are being constantly reproduced to this day in many of the former colonies, a fact to which the discourse on “failed states” and “state collapse” in the Southern hemisphere testifies (see e.g. Zartman,

ed., 1995, Shultz 1995). Frontiers and frontier conflicts are still with us, because they are not the ephemeral side-effects of European expansion, but the consequence of state-making projects in general (Scott 1999:45).

Nation-state expansion and contraction, however, is not the only determinant of the emergence, efflorescence and demise of frontiers. While states – notably those that were founded and consolidated in the postcolonial period – are clearly powerful actors, they have historically often followed rather than preceded individual exploits of outsiders at the frontier. In their capacity as places of bounty, frontiers – *second* – form, flourish and desintegrate in tune with the cycles of exploitation of valuable resources by invaders acting on their own or in loose association with the state. To that effect, frontiers recede and advance in relation to changing demands for frontier commodities on regional and world markets (Hennessy 1981:10, Little 2001:1-4); if and where agricultural land is the dominant commodity sought after by outsiders, the changing pressures originating from national (and sometimes even regional) structures of land use and distribution determine the dynamics. One and the same area may see frontiers arise and vanish again serially, as the “discovery” and depletion of one resource is followed by similar “boom and bust” cycles spurred by the interest in different forms of frontier wealth (Little 2001:3). In the light of the logic of demand-driven and market-bound interest in territorial peripheries, too, frontiers emerge as durable and resurgent phenomena rather than one-time occurrences which owe their existence to a particular world-historical constellation.

5. TWO OR THREE THINGS I KNOW ABOUT THE FRONTIER (INCLUDING A DEFINITION)

A frontier concept that wants to be of use for the comparative analysis of contemporary frontier dynamics has to avoid the biases and omissions of the Turnerian frontier notion. More significantly still, it has to encompass a larger scope of phenomena than those which Turner and first-generation students of comparative frontiers based their reflections on. It is such a concept that I am proposing here.

In the most general sense, a frontier is *an area remote from political centers which holds strategic significance or economic potentials for human exploitation, and is contested by social formations of unequal power* (see Hvalkof 2008:219). Frontiers have existed since millenia, making frontier studies the turf not only of anthropologists and other investigators of present matters, but also of historians and, importantly, archaeologists (see e.g. Green and Perlman, eds., 1985, Lightfoot and Martinez 1995, Parker 2006). While most scholars see them arise at the seams of states, others (see Lattimore 1962b:25, Colombijn and Wadley 2001:8) have posited that any articulation of more centralized societies with less centralized human communities can give birth to frontiers. In our time, the era of late modernity, *the social formations* referred to in the definition *come in the shape of a dominating and expansive national society and one or more locally-situated, non-dominant indigenous societies* (see Hvalkof 2008:219)²⁰. The lure of natural treasures – land, minerals and other natural resources – and national interests in territorial control notwithstanding, *state penetration of these spaces is comparably weak, while the indigenous societies in question have retained a considerable degree of autonomy*²¹.

Although the definition should make this abundantly clear, emphasis needs to be placed on the fact that frontiers connote space rather than lines. This is by no means trivial as the vernacular use of the term usually refers to a “line of advance” (in the United States)²² or the dividing line that is the territorial boundary between modern states (in Europe) (Mikesell 1960:62, Wolfskill and Parker 1981:x, Weber and Rausch 1994:xiii). The frontier concept is a spatial concept that tries to capture social dynamics through elucidating the properties of geographical and geopolitical space. As such, it has a family resemblance with other concepts of space that social anthropology and the historical

20 Equally pertinent here is Norman Whitten’s (1984:50) formulation according to which a frontier, while also being an area unto itself, is in essence “a region defined by a distant centrality. Today that distant centrality has two dimensions: nationality and statehood”.

21 See e.g. Li (1999:12), stating that frontiers – while lying clearly within national boundaries – are areas “not fully enmeshed in state-defined institutions and processes”. Somewhat less precise and less convincing when applied to the age of the nation-state, Ferguson and Whitehead (2000b:3) refer to areas “continuously affected by the proximity of a state, but not under state administration”. The *autonomy* with which I am crediting frontier-dwelling indigenous communities is indicated by 1) the perpetuation of autochthonous notions of power undergirding local leadership practices and social control (Whitten 1984:55-60, 1985:179-187); 2) the persistence of local systems of conflict management; 3) the limited penetration of market relations, or, put differently, an incomplete process of “peasantization” (Helms 1969); and 4) the persistence of collective identities rooted in distinctive lifeways, cosmologies and ontologies.

22 As pointed out in chapter 2, Frederick Jackson Turner, who both reflected and shaped popular American thinking about the subject, had himself conceived of the frontier as a line. Among his many part-definitions, there featured – beside the already-quoted notions of the frontier as the “line of most rapid and effective Americanization” or the “meeting point between savagery and civilization” – wordings such as the “thin red line” or the “barometric line that recorded the advance of settlement” (Jacobs, Caughey and Frantz 1965:8, 13, quoted in Wolfskill and Palmer 1981:x).

sciences have developed (see chapter 1). Four of these are documented in the literature, and it is worthwhile pointing out how they relate to the frontier concept.

The first of them, the *periphery*, designates economically dependent, underdeveloped domains of developed and developing nations. Consistent with the analytical priorities of world system and dependency theory from whence the concept originated, economic aspects of the subordination of these areas were foregrounded, notably the fact that they are the source of primary products only, but not of manufactured goods. Detached from regional and global centers, they lack economic and political power, and have limited access to markets, services and means of production (Friedmann 1972, quoted in Lithwick, Gradus and Lithwick 1996: 145). An assessment of the “periphery” concept would have to stress that while it brought out well the economic dimensions of colonial relations, it offered no understanding of the forms of identity that this engendered among “peripheral” subjects, nor of the cultural resources that they had at their disposal. The frontier notion, in contrast, appears more versatile and will not stop short of exploring cultural meanings.

The second, the *margin*, is considerably more ambiguous in meaning and less developed as an analytical device. Thus, beside geographically distant zones of the state’s territory, a recent edited volume dedicated to the study of the “margins of the state” (Das and Poole, eds., 2004) considered also – and prominently – the interstices between legal and extralegal forms of state power and regulatory practices, liminal “events” such as at-gunpoint-controls on military checkpoints, and “states of exception”, such as states of emergency declared by authoritarian governments, or the rule of terror by paramilitary forces in self-declared civil war situations. Vacillating between the territorial and symbolical, the material and the immaterial, between place and social action, the concept of “marginality”, as developed by Das and Poole, is at once more and less than a concept of space. The very breadth of its possible applications across a broad range of social situations seems to me to limit its utility as a frame for the analysis of the rural backwaters that are frontiers.

More clearly anchored on space and territory is the third concept, *borderlands*. Borderland studies, a burgeoning new subfield in social anthropology and the historical sciences, investigate regions around modern international borders (see e.g. Sahlins 1989, Baud and van Schendel 1997, Wilson and Donnan, eds., 1998, Rösler and Wendel, eds., 1999, Parker 2006), and the zonal boundaries between colonial domains, respectively (Adelman and Aron 1999). By focusing on territorial sections on both sides of a given state border, borderland studies usually take a cross-border perspective, tracing the social networks that reach across the territorial boundary, documenting the emergence of common identities between people this and that side of the border, and investigating the traditions of cultural hybridization and creolization that mock state discourses of distinctive and sharply-bounded national cultures. By virtue of the fact that some, but by no means all, frontiers are straddling international borders, borderland studies are of immediate relevance to the study of frontiers.

Proximate, but not co-extensive with the frontier notion is the semantic field also in the case of the fourth concept, the *tribal zone*. Developed by R. Brian Ferguson to sustain his argument that, rather than representing something pristine, patterns of warfare in stateless societies – as described by modern anthropologists – had all been significantly influenced by expanding states, the concept designates areas “continuously affected by the proximity of a state, but not under state administration” (Ferguson and Whitehead 2000b:3). Historically, the tribal zone, says Ferguson, created “tribes” by amalgamation from less hierarchical forms, mainly as a result of the state-

induced intensification of warfare, and modeled tribal political and military affairs through the ravages of epidemics, the vagaries of trade good flows, differential access to iron and firearms, and incitement to proxy wars. As a zone beyond formal state jurisdiction, the tribal zone can pass as a frontier of colonial times when imperial boundaries were ill-defined and administrative reach restricted, but the postcolonial present, clearly, has no room for frontiers that are defined as non-state spaces (Das and Poole 2004:6; see also this chapter below). Although the authors make every effort to peddle their concept as relevant for the contemporary world (Ferguson and Whitehead 2000a), its only reasonable application is historical.

Returning to the details of my definition of the frontier, we find that it stresses the basic ingredient of conflict – sometimes manifest and open, sometimes latent and submerged – in frontier situations, and points to the vast discrepancy in power that characteristically separates intruders and frontier-dwelling indigenous communities – a point which has tended to go amiss somewhat in recent revisionist takes at the North American frontier (see e.g. White 1991a, Faragher 1994:239). Furthermore, it posits that frontiers are distant places, and foregrounds the quest for land and other natural resources and, alternatively, politico-military motives which animate intrusion into and occupation of them. Allow me to dwell on these last two points for a moment.

Though often associated with remoteness and forbidding terrain²³, frontiers are not confined to physically inaccessible parts of national territories. True enough, they are “out-of-the-way-places” (Tsing 1993), but in more and, significantly, in other terms than just geographical distance. The distance that separates frontiers from the centralities that determine national political processes and development dynamics is in crucial ways a socio-cultural distance, and one in symbolic worth and respect accorded to their inhabitants by the dominant centre. Being the abode of communities with tribal lifeways, differences in culture and sociopolitical organization are to some extent objective and tangible. However, equating these lifeways with a low civilizational standing, national elites in the city centres proceed to define frontier habitats as the far ends of civilization (see e.g. Kristof 1959:270), thus adding an element of racial hierarchy to the immediate, profane spatial distance. In many instances, in fact, that spatial distance is much smaller than usually assumed. Frontiers may be found just a few dozen kilometers distance from major cities (see Bakels 1990 on the Badui of West Java, Keesing 1992:3 on the Kwaio traditionalists of Malaita, the Solomons) or situated within bustling export processing zones (see Chou and Wee 2003 on the Orang Laut in the “Growth Triangle” comprising parts of Singapore, Johor [Malaysia] and Riau [Indonesia]). While in the popular mind, frontiers refer back to a pre-modern social environment, they are known to co-exist easily with international space centres (see Collomb 2006 on the Kali’na and other groups in French Guiana), technologically-advanced mining operations (see Connell and Howitt, eds., 1991 on various Australasian cases) or the military bases of the globe’s single remaining world power (see Shimizu 1989 on the Aeta of Zambales, the Philippines).

Furthermore, while frontiers are peripheral spaces, they are not necessarily and not always situated along national borders. When frontiers are borderlands, we are dealing with a special constellation rather than a definitional criterion for “frontierness”. Salient examples of countries with frontiers in non-border spaces are the archipelagic states of Southeast Asia (Philippines, Indonesia) where island interiors, not border-straddling redoubts on a continental land mass were historically the locus of indigenous autonomies (examples: Mindoro and Mindanao in the Philippines, Sulawesi

23 Scott (2008:12), for instance, characterizes Southeast Asian frontiers as being situated in mountains, swamps, on mangrove coasts, in deserts or river deltas.

and Seram in Indonesia). Mainland Southeast Asia, too, harbors examples for non-border frontiers: Vietnam's Central Highlands are an expansive territorial enclave that borders only in the case of Kon Tum province on a neighbouring country.

Still, for all our explanatory efforts so far, some questions as to the geographical situation of present-day frontiers remain and await clarification. Their precise location in relation to national borders notwithstanding – are frontiers maybe synonymous with the settlement areas of indigenous peoples? And if so, can we find them both in the developing South and the industrialized North?

Lest it be forgotten, my frontier definition hinges on the presence of indigenous peoples in the spaces that I portray, in the above sense, as “remote” and contested. It is my interest in the conflict component that prompts me to deal, centrally, with indigenous peoples. “Remote” spaces which are of economic interest to outsiders – and thus possible objects of contestation – are either entirely devoid of human habitation (like the antarctic), or else likely to be inhabited by indigenous peoples (Higgins 1996:143, Coates 2004:206).

However, this does not imply that the presence of indigenous people alone is a reliable indicator for frontiers. It is not only the fact that since the 1970s and 1980s, an increasing number of indigenous individuals have migrated to cities and towns – the antithesis of the frontier –, which gives credence to this assertion (see e.g. González 1983, McCaskill 1997:54, IWGIA 2000:26-29, Coates 2004:197, and the articles assembled in the recent issue of the IWGIA periodical *Indigenous Affairs*, 3/07, “Migration”). Even when we leave labour migration and the urban and peri-urban sector aside, many rural indigenous communities do no longer live in frontier conditions. Often enough, the line that divides frontier zones from areas of regular state presence runs right through the settlement area of a given indigenous people. In Southeast Asia, but also in Melanesia, it is common for indigenous groups to be spread across more than one ecological and edaphic zone. While the fringe settlements in the foothills or the plains, being part of densely-settled, regularly-administered and infrastructurally well-connected state space, are situated outside of the frontier zone, the major settlements in the hills or mountains can properly be called frontier places. Usually, but not always, the distinction corresponds to differing degrees of acculturation, as everyday interaction with settler society and the vicinity to major population centers leads to major social and cultural transformations in the fringe settlements, while remoter villages in the hills are exposed to less severe acculturative pressure (see e.g. Keesing 1992:3f.)²⁴.

Where settler colonization is underway, the frontier is typically moving, leaving exhausted territories – variously called “old” (Amanor 1994) or “hollow” (James 1942, quoted in Sawyer 1984:197) frontiers, but in truth no longer frontiers in the proper sense of the word – in its wake. In the process, entire regions lose their frontier character, and so do the resident indigenous peoples. Thus, to name only one example, the coastal states in the south and southeast of Brazil (Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Santa Catarina, Paraná, and Rio Grande do Sul), where colonization and extractivist raids into the hinterland started as early as the 17th century, still boast of numerous small Indian reservations (*The Economist* 2006a), but its frontier days are long gone²⁵. In Kenya,

24 Significantly, the definition of the frontier stresses the (relative) autonomy that it affords the resident indigenous communities (see this chapter above). Acculturation (as it has been described for many such fringe communities) diminishes a group's will to be different – probably the most essential precondition for autonomy –, and thus signals the closing of the frontier.

25 Since World War II, the country's Amazonian states have replaced the South as the main magnet for settlers.

decolonization has led to a “centering of the margins”, as national elites began to be recruited from certain strategically-located indigenous populations. In the process, groups such as the Kikuyu who dominated the struggle against the British and later large parts of the economy and politics of the independent national polity, benefited from major development inputs, which pushed the frontier further afar. Similar processes have been described for Papua New Guinea, where coastal groups such as the Motu from the vicinity of Port Moresby rapidly emerged from their frontier existence to become the major recruitment base first for the colonial police forces and later for the postcolonial state elite. Thus, while there can be no frontier without resident indigenous peoples, indigenous people – in part or as entire polities – can very well exist outside frontiers²⁶.

Together with a string of other scholars, I am of the opinion that frontiers are not confined to the developing South. Being, in essence, resource-rich out-of-the-way places coveted by non-residents, they may be found as well in industrialized countries of the North (see e.g. Burger 1987, Fleras and Elliott 1992, Young 1995, Howitt, Connell and Hirsch, eds., 1996, Gradus and Lithwick, eds., 1996, Paine 2000). The central Australian desert, Canada’s Northlands, Alaska’s Arctic slope and Israel’s Negev are just as likely to exhibit frontier characteristics as the mighty rainforests of the Amazon, the hills of self-isolating Burma or the interior of Borneo and New Guinea. Given the fact that both the theory and the practice of the state’s treatment of indigenous peoples differ considerably between the rich, developed world and the majority of developing states of the South, these characteristics will not be identical with the ones which I believe to be representative for contemporary Southern frontiers (see chapter 6)²⁷. Nevertheless, if subject to the same general definition, Northern frontiers broadly correspond to the Southern variety.

Given the impressive diversity of frontiers through the ages, as well as their many regional idiosyncrasies, it is difficult to advance plausible generalizations on their nature and functioning (Power 1999:2). The field of comparative frontier studies has long suffered from propositions which, while claiming universal relevance, reflected concern with only a fraction of the scope of frontier phenomena (ibid.:1f.). Thus, we have found that Turner reified one frontier variety to the point of eclipsing all others (see chapter 4); the same, but in reverse, goes for some historians and political geographers who have hardly taken note of the class of specimen that Turner was describing (for a good example, see Anderson 1996). To a large extent, the diversity of frontier phenomena hinges on the specific prizes which particular frontiers hold out to those who set out to conquer them. It

As some of these states now have, since the 1980s, higher rates of out-migration than of in-migration, the same process repeats itself in the Amazon. Thus, Sawyer (1984:195ff.) declares the frontier gone in Goiás and Mato Grosso do Sul, states with substantial Indian populations which have, in the case of the latter, been made world-famous by leading 20th century ethnographers such as Claude Lévi-Strauss.

26 This is an important distinction which often threatens to go amiss in scholarly writing on the frontier – mine included. Wherever possible, I have tried to avoid bold, generalizing statements that may make it appear as if indigenous peoples in general, or even only single, yet entire, ethnic groups were “frontier dwellers”. Occasional slips of the tongue, however, will have occurred; they should be read with these remarks in mind.

27 The only explicit attempt to identify the salient features of frontiers in the developed North that has come to my attention is Paine’s (2000:98, based on Furniss 1997). Paine’s propositions, though, highlight the mythical aspects of frontiers at the expense of their tangible, material sides, and do not seem to be more than preliminary in character. According to him, frontiers in industrialized countries have the following general features: 1) “The frontier myth consists of a distinctive set of narratives, metaphors and images”. 2) “Its power exists not in its use to support the authority of the (...) state, but in its colonization of a national consciousness”. 3) “[The myth built around a frontier directs attention to] the complex relationship between colonialism, power and ‘common sense’”. 4) “Native territories are imagined as vast and (...) geographic distance is equated with cultural distance”.

makes sense, therefore, to distinguish frontiers according to the major uses which the invading individuals and the states in their backs intend to make of them. Scholars of comparative frontier history have arrived at a rough classification of principal frontier types all of which can be assumed to have been present in antiquity, the immediate pre-colonial and the colonial period, and can still be made out in the present postcolonial age (Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis 1995:3, Friedmann 1996:1f., 10-19; Gaubatz 1996:21)²⁸. They are:

1) “*frontiers of settlement*” (variously referred to as “settlement frontiers”, “colonization frontiers”, “land frontiers” or “agricultural frontiers” in the literature): Here, state power roots itself primarily through agricultural expansion. Frontiers of settlement arise wherever colonists advance in substantial numbers from the consolidated heartland of a state’s territory to its more thinly-populated margins (Friedmann 1996:1f.). Characteristically, large numbers of outsiders set up permanent residence at the indigenous periphery, dispersed across the rural areas where they commonly displace, or at least disrupt, local settlement and subsistence (Gaubatz 1996:21). Frontiers of settlement’s most distinctive feature, however, is that they are mobile and fleeting, often consuming large tracts of land along with the resident indigenous communities in their rapid advance; more often than not, they are sites of acute conflict and violent change (Wendl and Rösler 1999:4). As the preceding sections will have made clear, the legendary 18th and 19th century exploits of European pioneers in North America, South Africa (and to a lesser degree in Australia and New Zealand) exemplify these “moving” settlement frontiers in their most dramatic form, and have provided the main context for comparisons in early attempts to expand on Turner’s work.

Significantly, this frontier type appears in two important varieties: *primary settlement frontiers* comprise a region’s best agricultural lands and typically attract outside settlement early on in the process (usually – but not always – already in colonial times). This type of settlement frontier has today largely ceased to exist, as it has become incorporated into the agricultural and administrative core of the region (and countries) in question. Still to be found in many countries of the developing South, however, are *secondary settlement frontiers*, which are both harder to penetrate and less desired by migrants because they are made up of agriculturally marginal land (Prescott 1987:36-43). Secondary settlement frontiers, then, are the main arenas of struggle between indigenous peoples and settlers in contemporary times.

2) “*frontiers of extraction*” (or, as some authors prefer to call them, “extractive frontiers”, “frontiers of exploitation”, or “resource frontiers”): Frontiers of the extractive type are formed when the main reason for invading the thinly-populated margins of a state’s territory is not to establish settler colonies, but to prospect for and extract natural resources (Friedmann 1996:2). Depending on the resource concerned, profitable operations at the extractive frontier need not necessitate the presence of a large workforce from outside. Where extraction is highly capitalized, as where deep-laying sub-surface seams of precious metals or diamonds are mined, the presence of outsiders is often confined to small numbers of well-trained specialists encamped at the work compound (see e.g. Kennedy and Abrash 2002 on the operations of Freeport MacMoRan near Timika, West Papua). Where no trained labour is needed, the bulk of the workforce may be recruited locally from indigenous groups (as in the infamous case of forced labour on the rubber plantations in the

28 Frontiers have also been classified according to the dominant commodity exploited (“agricultural frontier”, “mining frontier”, “coffee frontier”, “soy frontier”, “logging frontier”, etc.), or defined in terms of their dominant institutions (“military frontier”, “mission frontier”, etc.) or occupational type (“trapper’s frontier”, “farmer’s frontier”, “miner’s frontier”, etc.) (see e.g. Hennessy 1981:11).

Peruvian Amazon at the beginning of the 20th century, see Taussig 1984) or be drawn from the migrant population. Not infrequently, therefore, frontiers of extraction co-exist and overlap with frontiers of settlement²⁹.

However, of particular notoriety and historical fame are those manifestations of extractive frontiers which entail not the comparatively discrete presence of a few well-earning white-collar workers, but the sudden, massive influx of impoverished soldiers of fortune. Notably gold rushes have in many corners of the globe become a romanticized part of the regional frontier folklore, their often devastating consequences for local ecosystems and human communities notwithstanding.

Like frontiers of settlement, frontiers of extraction are of a dynamic nature, since extractivism is typically transient. When local ore, oil or timber reserves have been exhausted, the frontier entrepreneurs – corporate and wildcat alike – break up tent and operations are shifted to more promising locations, closing the frontier at least momentarily. Often, a new bonanza follows as there is a demand for a different resource that is locally available³⁰. The dynamics of extractive frontiers, therefore, respond to cyclical booms in highly-priced commodities (Hennessy 1978:12, 1981:10) which may express themselves in successive “cycles of conquest” (Hvalkof 1989:130-133 and Hvalkof 2008:231).

3) “*frontiers of control*”: At frontiers of this type, neither settler colonization nor the exploitation of minerals or other natural treasures are a major objective of the state; the latter confines itself instead to the control of major towns, infrastructure and trade through what is essentially a pragmatic system of indirect rule (Gaubatz 1996:21, Haines 2004:539f.). Such pragmatism may be motivated by the fact that resident indigenous communities have retained their military capacities, restricting the state’s capacity to implement more ambitious policies; however, administrative restraint is just as often by design rather than default. At frontiers of control, the state’s gaze is often directed outwards, towards the adjacent domain of a rival state, rather than towards its own – often truculent – frontier-dwelling populace and the extractivist potentials of its own frontier territory. Frontiers of control are the quintessential borderlands, zones of territory lining the boundaries of states which, as a subject, have attracted considerable scientific attention in the course of the past decade (see e.g. Donnan and Wilson, eds., 1994, Donnan and Wilson 1999, Rösler and Wendl, eds., 1999, Horstmann and Wadley, eds., 2006). Like settlement frontiers, however, they do not by themselves exhaust the range of constellations that the frontier notion stands for.

In pre-colonial times and throughout most of the colonial period, the preoccupation with the military security of the realm frequently dictated a policy of non-interference with tribal polities residing in the belt of territory that lay between the boundaries of formal jurisdiction and those of effective administrative control (Embree 1989:82). The frontier of control was a line (or, more precisely, a zone) of defence where pre-modern and often incompletely-subjugated polities served the same purpose that obstacles of nature (rivers, mountains, deserts, marches) served elsewhere:

29 Indeed, contemporary development planners often open frontiers of settlement with the more or less explicit purpose of providing a labour pool for existing or planned extractive ventures in the colonization area. A notable example for such “multi-purpose” frontier colonization was (and still is) the Indonesian *transmigrasi* programme (see e.g. Hoshour 1997, 2000).

30 Thus, the long list of natural resources extracted between the 17th and 21st century by invaders in indigenous territories of the Brazilian Amazon includes (in chronological order) gold, quinine, rubber, Brazil nuts, petroleum and kaolin, and gold again (Little 2001:234).

they effectively impeded foreign invasion and conquest. In imperialist theory, tribal peripheries made perfect *cordons sanitaires* which insulated the zones of genuine fiscal interest to the colonial state from the spheres of influence of neighbouring powers (ibid.:83)³¹. In the current age of nation-states, military elites usually resort to more proactive strategies. To discourage foreign invasion, frontier zones along international borders are fortified with military garrisons, their road systems expanded, air fields and helipads constructed and, possibly, population numbers raised through colonization schemes (see e.g. Albert 1992, Allen 1992, Girot and Nietschmann 1993, Luithui-Erni, forthcoming). As areas where state agency is either tempered by armed indigenous might or a concern with fickle neighbours, frontiers of control can still be encountered, among others, in some of Burma's minority areas (Lintner 2003), Pakistan's Northwestern Frontier Province (Hart 2001, *The Economist* 2006c), Jemen's Hadramaut (Naumkin 1989), large parts of Tchad (Azevedo 1998), Acholi territory in Northern Uganda (Finnström 2003) and the Shuarä-inhabited areas along Peru's border with Ecuador (Little 2001:222-228).

The three types of frontier do not represent mutually-exclusive categories; rather, they frequently overlap in a particular place, rendering it difficult (and sometimes rather arbitrary) to distinguish "dominant" from subsidiary forms of outside use of a frontier. Typically, changes in relative importance of invaders' interests in a frontier lead to a transition from one type to another.

Frontier types can differ tremendously from each other with regards to the numbers of intruders that they bring to frontier lands, the possibility for longer-term co-existence between these intruders and indigenous communities, and the trajectory and intensity of state involvement in frontier expansion. With regard to the last point, for instance, it has been observed that the interest of the state at extractive frontiers tends to be spasmodic, "growing and ebbing in response to large-scale economic processes in the metropole" (Brown and Fernandez 2000:176), while it is more constant and calculable at settlement frontiers and frontiers of control; there, the support for settler colonies and the imperatives of holding and consolidating national territory commit the state to a modicum of policy continuity.

Nevertheless, all three types share the essential quality of being geographical regions with peculiar political, economic, social and cultural characteristics which are not found in the core areas of state control (Kopytoff 1987:11, Gaubatz 1996:4) – a proposition which chapter 6 is going to illustrate. Basic to these distinctive character traits is the texture of governance, the way in which the state is being run and its laws and principles of rule enacted. Frontiers are, to borrow a metaphor from meteorology, administrative low-pressure areas where institutions of government are rudimentary when compared with those that secure domination in the more-firmly controlled areas, the very idea of the state and of citizenship have not sunk in with a large part of the resident population, and rival forms of collective identity remain strong. Here, at the indigenous fringe, the leviathan is engaged in an ongoing project of establishing control, and its presence is often precariously fragile; not fully master in its own house, its policies are to a large extent geared towards changing this (see chapter 7, notably 7.1). At its core, therefore, the frontier is a political fact, an outgrowth of states' purposive utilization of geographical space (Kopytoff 1987:11)³².

31 Inasmuch as, in this instance, the frontier is managed in ways that enhance its qualities of deterrence against a neighbouring state, it becomes a "frontier of separation". If, on the other hand, an area's physical qualities and a state's way of managing it enable trade, commerce and social relations between adjacent state polities, it is referred to as a "frontier of contact" (see Prescott 1987:43 and Haines 2004:548).

32 This tallies well with Aihwa Ong's (1999:217) observation that contemporary states of the developing South

Furthermore, irregardless of their specific type, frontiers are – as hinted at by the definition – notoriously conflict-ridden. Conflicts over the control of “meaning, space, territory and power” (Hvalkof 2008:277) are woven into their very fabric. While violent contention does also often pit one occupational group or social strata of sojourners and settlers to the frontier against another (see chapter 6.1.8), the main and most volatile fault line runs between what can be seen as a coalition between settler society and the state³³ on one side, and the indigenous communities native to the frontier on the other. The basic fact that frontiers are, as Ferguson and Whitehead (2000b) have expressed it³⁴, the “violent edge of empire”, suggests the high conflict levels commonly arising from the dialectics of conquest and resistance. It is, however, possible to move beyond such trifle generalities, and pinpoint with more precision that which renders the actions of the state and intruding individuals so highly conflictive. Thus, the agency of states and freelance individuals have in common that they are conflict-engendering because frontiers are *zones of de-regulated economic activity* (see chapter 6.1.6). Such licence is greatly helped by the fact that both *the state and settler society define frontier-dwelling indigenous communities as standing outside the “moral community of the nation”*, and thus neither deserving of human compassion nor having a legal personality (see *ibid.*, part e). And maybe most basically, state agency at frontiers stands out as being generative of conflict because, other than in areas subject to regular control, it is *not bound by the need to win local citizens’ allegiance, but aimed, instead, at securing control over coveted territory and resources* (see chapter 7.1). Here, at the state’s remote ends, *concerns for state- and nation-building outweigh considerations for political stability, biodiversity conservation or, for that matter, local communities’ rights*. At its margins, *the state does not shun conflicts but accepts them as inevitable and even necessary*. To national decision-makers, it may be argued, *violence and the loss of life in frontier conflicts over state-sanctioned development (including, of course, settler migration) appear not as the lamentable breakdown of social order, but as the noble beginning of it*.

To raise another important point in this general introduction to frontiers, many authors – myself included – have emphasized the fact that the ground on which conflicts at the frontier are fought is everything but level. Of the two systems that meet (and clash) at the frontier, one is dominant, the other marginal (Swift 1978:6); the two are separated by a “vast discrepancy in effective power (...)” (Friedmann 1996:15). Yet, again, such a statement is hopelessly broad and bordering on platitude. How exactly is the dominance of settler society being played out on the ground, and what are the resources on which the power of frontier actors – superior and inferior – is based? The following account of power at the frontier draws mainly from anthropologist Marianne Schmink’s and sociologist Charles H. Wood’s (Schmink and Wood 1992:13-18) work on the Brazilian Amazon in the 1980s and early 1990s, and is complemented by Norman Whitten’s – another anthropologist’s – insights on autochthonous indigenous notions of power, foregrounding power sources that are usually overlooked by conventional analyses of frontier systems.

deploy power differentially across the national territory, and do not invest equally in all of its parts. Sovereignty is, in her words, “graduated”, as different sectors of the population are subjected to “different regimes of valuation and control” and are accorded “different kinds of rights, discipline, caring, and security” by the ruling state elites. For present-day Malaysia, she identifies – beside the frontier (“aboriginal periphery” in her diction) –, five more “zones of graduated sovereignty”: The low-wage manufacturing sector, the illegal labor market, the refugee camp, the cyber corridor, and the growth triangle (*ibid.*:218).

33 However, this formulation should not be taken to imply that the unity of purpose and overlap of interests between the state and settler society are absolute, unconditional and unchanging. For more on this, see my discussion of agency and accountability at the frontier in this section below.

34 It should be noted, however, that the authors, while suggesting a similar meaning to the one advanced here, prefer the term “tribal zone” to the notion of the frontier.

Following Max Weber, power can be understood as the capacity of an actor to impose his or her will successfully on another (Weber 1964:152). The relative power that contestants command in a dispute is assembled from multiple sources. In a frontier context, the most tangible bases of power are economic wealth and direct, physical force (Schmink and Wood 1992:14). Compared to indigenous people who have entered the monetary economy only recently and generally on unfavorable terms, the more affluent among the invaders (e.g. cattle ranchers and plantation owners) command vastly superior economic resources; the average colonist, on the other hand, can be said to be economically more or less at par with them. As evidenced by the Amazon's cattle ranchers, economically powerful intruders to the frontier frequently rely on hired gunmen who help them secure access to land through violence or the threat of physical harm (*ibid.*). When they do not field hired killers or private militia to scare off rival users of coveted soil, members of the dominant strata are often able to deploy the army or police on their behalf (*ibid.*:14f). Given the ease with which economic might can buy goon muscle and firepower both from private and public sources, some authors have claimed that at the frontier, violence is the basic mechanism of social control and the privileged means for achieving subordination and exploitation (see e.g. Gordon 1992:209).

Other sources of power are indirect, such as the power garnered from access to, or control over, important parts of the state apparatus (Schmink and Wood 1992:14). The economically powerful among the intruders to the frontier tend to be well-connected politically, and are thus able to influence the allocation of public funds for road-building, development projects, and tax and credit incentives in their favor. Similarly, they often have the means to manipulate the rules and practices that mediate intergroup conflict (e.g. the legislature, courts and administrative institutions) (*ibid.*). Time and again, ranchers, mining companies and plantation owners have shown their capability to lobby national and state parliaments against passing progressive legislation that protects indigenous land and resource rights, or to bend existing laws, if progressive legislation is indeed in force. In many cases, even lowly colonists benefit from the composite effects of what one scholar (Lopez 1986:85-121, 1987) has called the "integrated displacement" of indigenous communities. In many polities of the developing world, state policies and an ethnically-biased, corrupt bureaucratic apparatus assist incoming colonists in helping themselves to indigenous land. Protected by settler patrons in local government and facilitated by superior knowledge of laws or the skills of make-believe, settlers often enjoy a decisive competitive advantage over indigenous communities.

The least direct source of power is the ability to construct or draw upon certain ideological discourses that confer varying degrees of legitimacy upon competing claims to frontier resources (Schmink and Wood 1992:15). In competition over them, different actor groups formulate and strategically deploy values and ideas suited to strengthening their position. In the case of the Brazilian Amazon, the overwhelming majority of these legitimizing discourses are borrowed from outside rather than invented locally. Some of the contestants appeal to the values of modernity, as when ranchers invoke "economic rationality" to justify their ownership of large landholdings, or mining companies cite "efficiency" in their effort to drive away independent small-scale miners (*ibid.*). In the great majority of countries of the south during most of the post-independence period, such ideological positionings have proved effective, as they "resonate with dominant values and assumptions within the state apparatus and in society at large" (*ibid.*). The armed forces, especially where frontiers are located at international borders, tend to employ a discourse that appeals to patriotic notions of national security, the sanctity of national borders, and the sovereignty of the fatherland (*ibid.*). Indigenous communities the world over invoke their alleged ability to manage natural resources more sustainably than others, reinforced, among other things, by notions of the sacredness of certain

features of the landscape. Conservationists *avant la lettre*, they successfully extoll the wisdom of traditional culture, a script that not only endears them to the global environmentalist movement, but in many cases seems to have been itself inspired by it (Turner 1991, Conklin and Graham 1995:699, 704). Colonist peasants, on their part, appeal to the “virtues of self-sufficiency and the dignity of fulfilling God’s mandate to make the earth produce” (Schmink and Wood 1992:15f.) – inferring, of course, that indigenous cultivators do not engage in proper “production” worthy of that name.

The fact that power at the frontier is multi-dimensional – physical, economic, political, ideological – implies that a particular group might be well-endowed in one field, but less so in another (Schmink and Wood 1992:17). In the case of the Brazilian Amazon of the early 1990s, for instance, gold miners clearly had an edge over indigenous people and subsistence-oriented agricultural settlers with regards to coercive capability, yet their ideological resources were meagre (*ibid.*). As for indigenous actors, alliances with domestic and international human rights and environmentalist organizations empowered them both ideologically, materially and with regards to political clout, a support that failed to come forward for peasant settlers and gold miners (*ibid.*). Thus, in the case of indigenous communities, a tangible empowerment has resulted from the ascension in the 1980s and 1990s of the discourses of minority rights and environmental protection, balancing out – at least to some extent – their economic weakness and exposure to violence from outside actors of different shades; small-scale settler agriculturalists, on the other hand, have benefited in modest measure from the increasing importance of a more general human rights discourse, yet have so far found little recognition in the ranks of those professing environmentalism (see also Campos 2008:428). To posit, as my frontier concept does, that contemporary state margins are at least partly defined by indigenous autonomy, implies that in these zones, crucial parts of indigenous social, political, economic and ideological systems have so far refused to yield to acculturative pressures from the encapsulating national society; received notions of power are among these resilient features of indigenous society (see this chapter, note 21), challenging and possibly neutralizing the forms of power which I have sketched above. In his attempt to conceptualize power at the margins of ethnically-plural nation states in general and in Amazonian Ecuador in particular, Norman E. Whitten (1984:55-60, 1985:179-187) has stressed the pervasive “duality of power patterning” that characterizes the manner in which ethnic systems operate in frontier settings. In these settings, two different, yet interlinked power spheres exist; each of them is informed by culturally-specific notions of power. In Whitten’s Ecuadorian case, settler society defines power as flowing from the control of capital (money) and influence which affords an individual access to the bureaucracy and politicians. In inter-ethnic situations, to share in “modernity” and possess the industrially-manufactured goods that epitomize it, also confers “power” over others which cannot make a similar claim. For an indigenous person (notably the Canelos Quichua among which the ethnographer worked), however, power derives first and foremost from the ability to tap cosmic forces through shamanic knowledge; that same knowledge usually makes a person the centre of a kindred that controls a segment of community territory (Whitten 1984:59). Crucially, Whitten demonstrates that the general dominance of settler society does not necessarily lead to a situation of total hegemony, i. e. the replacement of the indigenous by the settlers’ concept of power. Both remain in force as the epistemic nodes of separate spheres of power which exist side by side. Even if recourse to bureaucratic connections and monetary resources decides many concrete situations of inter-ethnic confrontation, the power of shamanic knowledge can still be harnessed by many Canelos Quichua, and brought to bear in the arena dominated by settler actors.

To demonstrate the need for a multi-voiced account of power in frontier arenas, Whitten describes the case of Sicuanga, a shaman who got himself into trouble over a bank loan which he was unable to repay as he had used it to fulfil social obligations. He was summoned to a meeting with bank officials where he was publicly harangued and made to promise to repay the money instantly or else forego the collateral of 50 has of community land to which he had agreed. He walked away defeated, and painfully realized that the “new capitalist order of existence” had come to control his life (Whitten 1984:49). To keep from despairing, he disappeared in the forest to engage in the quintessential pastime of Canelos Quichua men, hunting. Out in the forest, he entered into conversation with the spirit masters of trees, water courses and animals, replenishing his shamanic strength and feeling his confidence surge as he roamed his group’s ancestral territory. His new-found trust in himself and the mighty powers that he mastered communicated itself to his relatives and his kindred. Sicuanga’s resurgence as a man of power “generated a revitalized sense of collective capacity to respond” in his community (ibid.:59). The community, invoking “shaman-controlled warrior imagery”, forwarded a note to the bank officials that threatened the bank with violence for the case that it insisted on appropriating community territory. In the end, behind-the-scene negotiations of members of Sicuanga’s kindred with bank representatives secured a compromise that involved a re-negotiation of the debt on long-term repayment terms without interest (ibid.). Just as the “duality of power patterning” in this Ecuadorian case forced representatives of settler society to de-escalate a conflict with indigenous actors, it may in other cases prevent settler individuals from starting it in the first place. Where belief in the efficacy of indigenous forms of power is also shared by substantial portions of the settler population, the threat to use such power may act as a deterrent against the theft of field fruits and moveable property, and force colonists to be careful with land grabbing, as Fulcher (1983:112f.) demonstrates with regards to the widespread fears of Dayak black magic practices (*ilmu-ilmu*) among Javanese transmigrants in the Indonesian province of East Kalimantan³⁵.

A final, pivotal issue in this attempt at providing a first, general sketch of frontier phenomena and their dynamics awaits clarification. Frontiers being at base loosely-administered spaces, the question of how we are to judge the discrete presence of the state and its role in the quest for coveted resources in the zone, is imposing itself with great urgency. Are states, we may ask, failing to subject frontiers to effective administrative control (and impose legal restraints on the actions of settlers, miners, loggers and other private intruders) because they lack the means thereto, or because they lack in political will?

The issue of agency and accountability at the frontier is a difficult one, defying, I believe, bold generalizations. Present-day postcolonial frontiers differ heavily with regards to the strength of the states within whose boundaries they are situated, the population pressure emanating from the core agricultural areas, and, indeed, the particular resource endowment of the periphery which may or may not make state involvement in frontier expansion imperative. The same incommensurability stands in the way of brash generalizations on the weight of state policy at colonial frontiers and frontiers in antiquity. Consequently, scholarly opinion on how far states should be held responsible for what goes on at their margins is divided, and positions should be read to reflect single case or regional conditions rather than global truths. On top of this, different researchers often disagree in their interpretation of one and the same case, indicating that a scholar’s theoretical and political inclinations rather than presumed case-study peculiarities may dictate arguments on states and

frontiers. In what follows, I shall outline the pros and cons in that debate, without attempting to decide it in favor of one or the other side. Too absolute an insistence on the frontiersmen's structural autonomy of the state, I believe, conceals the obvious parallelism of interests that so often connects the two, and plays into the hands of state elites eager to escape the blame for environmental mayhem and human rights abuses at the frontier. On the other hand, positing that pioneers and other non-native non-state actors are always and by necessity strawmen of the government is to indulge in naïve phantasies of the power of the state at the margins of the world system.

Conventional frontier historiography, following the example of Frederick Jackson Turner, stresses the lack of laws, rules and institutions at the frontier, emphasizing instead the role of the enterprising individual and the pioneer value of self-reliance (see e.g. Billington 1967:7). The North American settlement process, the story goes, was unplanned and chaotic, and time and again, the federal government and the army found their treaty policy towards particular groups of Native Americans thwarted by the clandestine, illicit advance of colonists and gold diggers into Indian territory. Atrocities committed by settlers and frontiersmen and their use of force and deception as they appropriated Native American land, labor and minerals were beyond the government's power to prevent, whose agents as a rule arrived after the fact (see e.g. Prucha 1962:156).

The same line of argument has been advanced for the conquest of Siberia by Tsarist Russia. The driving force of Russian expansion beyond the Ural mountains (ca. 1580-1650), write Goehrke and Scheidegger (1980:25), were private entrepreneurs of the likes of the Stroganov dynasty who, attracted by Siberia's fabled wealth in pelts, recruited and equipped expedition forces consisting of cosacks – battle-hardened frontiersmen specializing in hunting and trapping. Notably in the second half of the 16th century, the tsar tried everything to reign the Stroganovs and their cosack conquerors in. The government, embroiled in a costly war in what is today the Balticum, was anxious to avoid new military commitments in the east, and threatened to hang the cosack leaders and fine their financiers for having ventured into Siberia without authorization (ibid.:23). Rather opportunistically, official troops moved in after major routs by the cosacks, and secured the area in question (ibid.:24). The state, then, limped behind the trapper's frontier, and contented itself with building a network of fortified garrisons in its wake, whose troops could be used to secure supply lines, control the natives and extract *jassak* (a tribute in pelts) from them (ibid.:25).

A number of scholars have criticized the view that colonial authorities played but a minor role in developments at their frontiers and thus could not be held responsible for them, as innocent and morally as well as factually wrong. Nobles (1997:14f.), for instance, explicitly rejects the Turnerian proposition that the North American frontier was set into motion by masses of impoverished individuals who sought to better their lives, positing instead that frontier advance “depended on the participation, even the active promotion, of the national government”, and was therefore a “fundamentally political, not merely demographic” process. While admitting that the relationship between settlers and the state was often troubled, even tumultuous, and the former's hunger for land at times clashed violently with the government's preference for an “orderly” settlement process, Nobles sees pioneers and policymakers in ultimate respect as “allies in a process of conquest”, and North America's colonization – even in its early stages – as unmistakably “state-sponsored” (ibid.:15).

In many cases, the proposition that colonial states tried hard to establish a monopoly of violence and

firm administrative control in its wake at the first chance, does not stand up to historical scrutiny. As Rodman (1983:7) argues for insular Melanesia, the interests of the labour trade that provided indigenous manpower to British-owned plantations in Queensland were best served when the state kept a low profile and attempted neither to advance the pacification of indigenous societies (because that would have eliminated the local demand for weapons which were the de-facto currency of the trade) nor to regulate the singularly brutal practices of the labour recruiters. Enforcement of the “Pax Britannica” only became imperative for the colonial government once the yields from the extraction of key natural products (e.g. sandalwood and birds’ nests) had fallen and the labour trade drawn to a close. Drawing on his Central Asian material, Lattimore (1940, 1962a, cited in Gaubatz 1996:19), too, argued that colonial empires consciously kept frontiers marginal, incorporated with the core only through alliances with intermediate groups – compradors – in native societies that secured the dominant group its access to coveted goods. Bodley (1990:30), comparing evidence from different colonial domains, comes to the conclusion that “lack of control has been a deliberate policy on many frontiers”, a fact that, as he underlines, committees of inquiry into settler misdeeds and massacres have pointed out to colonial publics in several countries as early as the 1830s.

John Bodley (*ibid.*:29f.) and Jeremy Swift (1978:6, 9) have taken the discussion to contemporary postcolonial frontiers. Bodley (1990:30), arguing on the basis of data from Brazil and Paraguay, maintains that the murders and massacres of indigenous people which he documents would not have been committed “if local officials had not cooperated in them”. Swift (1978:6), citing evidence from the Amazon, posits that associating the frontier with rambling, freewheeling individuals and an altogether impotent state may serve to “excuse the serious human rights abuses – murder, forced labour, theft of land – that characterize modern frontiers (...)”. Sponsel (1994:39f.) makes the same claim in his examination of one of the most notorious gold rushes in recent memory – the invasion (1980 to the mid-nineties) of the Yanomami territories in Brazil by an estimated 40,000 gold panners³⁶. The Roraima gold rush as a direct result of which some 1500 Yanomami are considered to have died, could have been halted in time, Sponsel (*ibid.*:40) wrote, if the government had bothered to intercept the traffic of mining personnel, equipment and supplies at the state capital of Boa Vista. Instead, the army allowed the miners to use Air Force and mission station airstrips in the interior (*ibid.*). Sponsel, therefore, holds that “ultimately, the provincial and federal governments (...) are responsible for the Yanomami crisis, either indirectly through apathy (...) or directly through covert support of the mining operation” (*ibid.*).

State connivance in the private projects of non-state actors at the margins is still more pronounced in the case of agricultural pioneers. Colonial expansion often entailed the arrival of colonists in native lands before the army and the administration established their presence (Barnes 1990:107), and the latter usually provided only rudimentary forms of support to the pioneers. In contrast, many contemporary developing countries have until the most recent times allocated considerable funding to colonization programs that offered ample benefits to settler recruits, often covering transportation costs, housing, credits, cleared plots (complete with land titles), farming implements and food rations (see e.g. Jones and Richter, eds., 1982 on state-sponsored colonization in Southeast Asia). While only a fraction of contemporary migration flows to the frontier is directly funded and organized by governments, most of them facilitate what is mistakenly called “spontaneous migration” by a variety of means of which road-building into hitherto inaccessible parts of the territory is but one (Partridge 1989, Colchester 1993a:6; see also chapter 8.3.2). In controversies

36 See also chapter 6.1.8, note 82.

on the reasons for the high rates of deforestation in frontier zones in which impoverished farmers have a major role, state elites have made shrewd use of that category error, claiming that migrant flows are, as a matter of fact, unstoppable and irreversible (Moran 1983:300). Critical analysts, however, see them as premeditated and therefore predictable, and refuse to absolve states from the responsibility for the havoc wrought by migrants on contemporary settlement frontiers (see e.g. Myers 1991, cited in Pichón 1996:349, Colchester 1993a)³⁷.

Clearly enough, the frontier concept itself, if used uncritically, becomes a vehicle for the exculpation of state planners and managers, hiding behind the supposed anomy of frontier processes. Swift (1978:6) thus demands that the analytical focus in comparative frontier studies be shifted from individuals to institutions and “broad economic and political processes”. The frontier, he maintains (ibid.:9), creates special roles and institutions of its own. I will examine some of them – the settler patron and the indigenous broker – in the chapter that follows (chapter 6.1.3), while a third one – that of the religious mission – will be dealt with shortly in chapter 7.1.2. In that same section (chapter 7), I am endeavouring a rough sketch of the policies that a majority of developing countries of the South pursue in their attempt to integrate frontier zones more firmly into the national body politic.

Therefore, rather than being “non-state spaces”, as Scott (1998a:52ff., 1999:45) calls them, contemporary frontiers are spheres of administrative practice – however meek and makeshift it may be in some cases – and, importantly, the site of often ambitious state- and nation-building projects. State designs are making themselves felt with vigour and the influence of state policies and regulations on the lives of those who inhabit the margins – indigenous and non-indigenous alike – can be considerable. If the state’s posture at contemporary frontiers is discrete in comparison with national heartlands, this is so, as political geographer John Prescott (1987:36) maintains, because the state deems it convenient, not because it is unable to be more imposing. Prescott has little doubt that while colonial and early postcolonial frontiers still marked the actual limits of state authority, “the political authority of modern states extends beyond the (...) frontiers and can be exerted when necessary” (ibid.).

Nevertheless, we should not overstate the case for the hidden hand of the state behind private enterprise at the frontier. Many developments are not willed by the government and the social forces representing its base. In spite of their seeming lack of political clout and material resources, subaltern frontier actors have in a number of cases successfully resisted state plans that excluded them from the utilization of frontier resources. A number of critical scholars have supplied examples of non-state actors thwarting state objectives for frontier management by invading indigenous territories which were meant to be administered in the manner of “frontiers of control”, rather than conquered in the manner of “frontiers of settlement”. Schmink and Wood (1992:7) state the case of the discovery of gold deposits in southern Pará (Brazilian Amazon) in the 1980s. With the official development policies – since the mid-70s – favoring the expansion of large-scale capitalist ventures like mining, plantation agriculture or cattle ranches, the massive influx of self-made small-scale miners provided a real and unforeseen challenge to the military regime. Like no other occupational or ethnic group on Pará’s frontier before them, the *garimpeiros* effectively contested corporate claims to land and mineral resources which the administration was determined to uphold. They not only confronted Kayapó Indians over access to reservation land, but also competed with

37 For a more detailed discussion of the role of settlers in territorial expansion and other state designs, and a closer look at the debate on migrants and deforestation, see chapter 6.1.

mining companies that held rights to gold deposits on state lands. “Unlike in the confrontation between peasants and ranchers”, Schmink and Wood (*ibid.*) maintain, “even the most powerful mining companies generally found themselves on the losing end of battles with *garimpeiros*, whose growing political and economic power added a formidable new voice on the frontier”. The central government’s strategy of resolving certain disputes in favor of the gold seekers – and against the mining companies whose existing licenses they had challenged –, and to allow the *garimpeiros* to go about their business as long as they submitted to military supervision, failed; in 1980 in the Serra Pelada, the *garimpeiros* reneged on an earlier compact with the government and took the rich gold deposits into their hands, from whence they could not be taken anymore later (*ibid.*:7f.). The presence and obstinacy of gold miners who had spontaneously flocked to the gold rush areas of Southern Pará was one of the factors that finally threw the military’s plan to “nationalize” the Amazon frontier into disarray (*ibid.*: 8).

In Pará, yet other groups of frontier actors – whatever the circumstances that had initially brought them to the frontier – openly contest the state’s claim to land and resources. Government lacks the means to lastingly subdue them, or expel them to areas where they can no longer challenge the state’s hegemony. Pioneer farmers and rubber tappers in the Brazilian Amazon are one of the most glaring examples. “Beneficiaries” of early state-sponsored settlement programs or spontaneous arrivals, they have been (and still are) embroiled in their tens of thousands in partly violent resistance against land speculators, agribusiness operators or cattle barons who deprive them – supported by the administrative apparatus and police force of the (local) state – of their unofficially-established rights to land which they had cleared (see Foweraker 1981).

Finally, while it is true that they can critically influence frontier settlement in a variety of ways, governments do not entirely control migrant decisions for or against migration. Rising world market prices for agricultural commodities (cash-crops) which can be cultivated in frontier areas can exact a powerful pull on settlers, luring thousands to areas hitherto regarded as too remote or otherwise too difficult for colonization. This can generate “land frenzies” which are not directly of the making of the state, even if, of course, enabling state legislation provides the backdrop against which such population movements have to be viewed. An example for the interplay of larger market forces and a facilitating national politico-legal framework are the Vietnamese Central Highlands. In the 1980s, the region was opened for spontaneous migrants when the government lifted earlier, tight rules on residency (McElwee 2004:202). In the 1990s, the world market price for coffee rose sharply, prompting thousands of people to set out for the Central Highlands in search of the profits to be made from “black gold” (*ibid.*). Confronted with the rising environmental and socio-political costs of uncontrolled immigration, local authorities have since called for a stop to migration of any sort to their provinces, but the political centre proved unable to reimpose restrictions on free movement on a peasantry unbound (McElwee 2004:203).

6. HOW TO RECOGNIZE A FRONTIER WHEN YOU MEET ONE

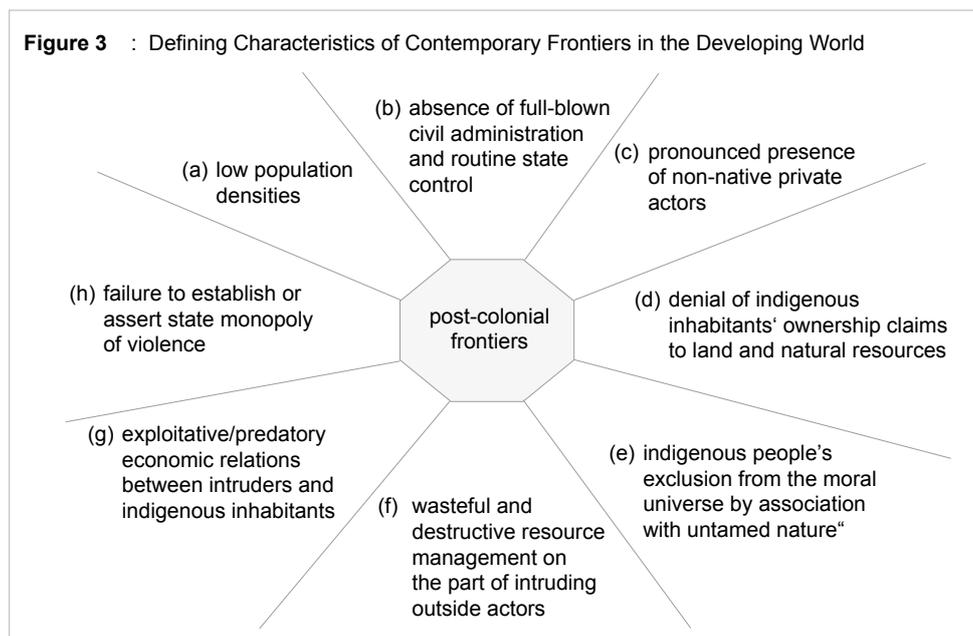
In this bulky section, I will try to substantiate my claim that the frontier is a geographical region with peculiar political, economic, social and cultural characteristics not usually encountered in the core areas of state control. Scholars have proposed a multitude of different definitional approaches to the subject, some of them tailored to a single type of frontier and a specific time period, others with a claim to broader, comparative applicability that spans across a wide range of situations and epochs of world history. Many of those who have worked with the concept have given it a rather narrow meaning by choosing a single indicator for the “opening” and the “closing” of the frontier. Thus, Lamar and Thompson (1981a:7) have focused on the military and political sphere, assuming frontiers to come into existence once the first representatives of the intrusive society have arrived, and expiring when “a single political authority has established hegemony over the zone” (see Hennessy 1981:12 and Dentan 1992:223 for closely-related understandings). Turner’s definition, as I have explained, was more slippery, but its pivotal element was the availability of free land (Turner 1963:28), and he declared the frontier gone when an area’s population density surpassed a certain threshold – in the case of the Trans-Mississippi West 2 persons/mile² (see Webb 1951:25, Billington 1967:7, Eder and Fernandez 1990:94 and Nyerges 1992:861 for similar approaches). Other authors have advanced single-criterion definitions that hinge on the absence or presence of “development” (Stea 1996:27) or the government’s ability to put a lid on violence in the area under consideration (Duncan Baretta and Markoff 1978:590).

A less monochromatic picture of the frontier emerges from the studies of scholars such as John Bodley (1990:24-41), Jeremy Swift (1978), Norman Whitten (1984, 1985:44-54), Rodolphe DeKoninck (2000), Paul Little (2001:1-10, 229-239) and Anna Tsing (1993, 1996, 2005), who all propose frontier concepts that rest on more than one leg; among others, they have drawn attention to the salience of the limited interference by state governments in such spaces (Bodley 1990:25, Swift 1978:6); the preponderance of private actors (Swift 1978:9); the lack of clearly-defined rules of interaction (e.g. binding and unequivocal laws) (Little 2001:8); intruders’ use of force and deception in the quest for land and resources (Bodley 1990:25); their routine denial of indigenous ownership rights (*ibid.*); their proneness to degrade the environment (Swift 1978:12, DeKoninck 2000:11f., Tsing 2005:27-54); and violence and terror as a standard means to get things done at the frontier (Tsing 1996).

6.1 Characteristics of contemporary frontiers in the developing world

I have tried to combine the insights of the above-mentioned forerunners on the frontier trail of my preference and am proposing a list of eight generic properties that distinguish present-day frontiers in the developing South (see figure 3).

I will argue my case based on accounts by ethnographers and other researchers, complemented, where available, by information from media sources. Owing to the geographical focus of this volume and my own expertise as an ethnographer and political anthropologist, the main part of the supporting data is from insular and mainland Southeast Asia, the Amazon and – to a lesser extent – Melanesia. Regions such as Africa, Central Asia and Polynesia are only marginally represented in the literature that has informed this article. Evidently, therefore, the claim to authority of the frontier formula that is proposed here is less than global.



Frontierness, I contend, is multi-dimensional, as the consequences of the conquest of national peripheries reverberate in the political, economic, social and cultural domains, affecting not only the human societies involved in the confrontation, but also the natural environment whose riches represent the prize of that confrontation. Similarly, the interaction between state and non-state actors at the margins of the state has both material and immaterial, cognitive aspects, which need to be accounted for in a list of characteristics of frontier space. On the single count of a state's establishing "political control" or "hegemony" over a slice of the periphery, most if not all frontiers could safely be pronounced dead today; however, notwithstanding the presence of people in uniform and the pretense of regular administration, the experience of communities and individuals at the frontier is that of living in a world apart. Governance is of an entirely different quality at the state's margins, and so are many aspects of the moral, social and economic behavior of those who have come to set up shop here – temporarily or for good. Only by including other parameters of structure and agency can we hope to grasp the complex and multi-layered peculiarities of frontier space.

A frontier is a frontier when a majority of the eight characteristics can be shown to be present in sufficient strength; frontier closure is indicated when a majority of the proposed general traits fail to materialize in strong form. Absence of one or two of them does not mean that an area has lost its frontier character, and, conversely, the presence of only a small fraction of the total collection of traits does not make a place a frontier. By assessing the empirical evidence for the presence (and relative strength) of the entire scope of frontier characteristics in particular locales at a particular time, we may attempt to construct well-grounded and multi-faceted frontierness profiles (see figure 4).

Let me elaborate on the details of the canon by introducing the characteristics one by one.

6.1.1 Relatively low population densities

Throughout the ages, expanding societies have pictured frontiers as wide, unsettled places where the vastness of the territory is only matched by the sparseness of human habitation. References to

the (presumed) absence of human settlement at the frontier, the (comparatively) low population densities – or low man-land ratios –, and the resulting “abundance” of natural resources that characterize frontier space, are legion in the literature (see e.g. Billington 1967:7, Friedman and Alonso 1969, quoted in Feinman and Nicholas 1992:76, Swift 1978:6, 12, and Strassoldo 1980, quoted in Feinman and Nicholas 1992:76). Turner’s own frontier definition, as already mentioned, hinged first and foremost on the population density criterion when he declared in unison with the US census authorities that the 0,8 persons per kilometer²³⁸ counted in the trans-Mississippi West in 1890 represented a threshold beyond which an area ceased to be a frontier (Turner 1963:28f.). Such attempts at setting a limit for frontier status in absolute demographic terms are, I believe, futile and of dubious scientific standing³⁹. Nevertheless, it remains a fact that national peripheries do attract agricultural pioneers for the reason that they are – or appear to be – comparatively loosely settled and offer them the hope of acquiring idle land (Eder and Fernandez 1990:94, Nyerges 1992:861, DeKoninck 2000:9). Where the frontier is one of extraction rather than of settlement, we can equally assume low population densities. If that were not the case, the supply of precious natural resources that make the area attractive for outsiders would either have been depleted long ago, or could not be accessed except at high political and military costs as numerically strong and locally-concentrated indigenous populations would likely resist their expropriation (Swift 1978:13).

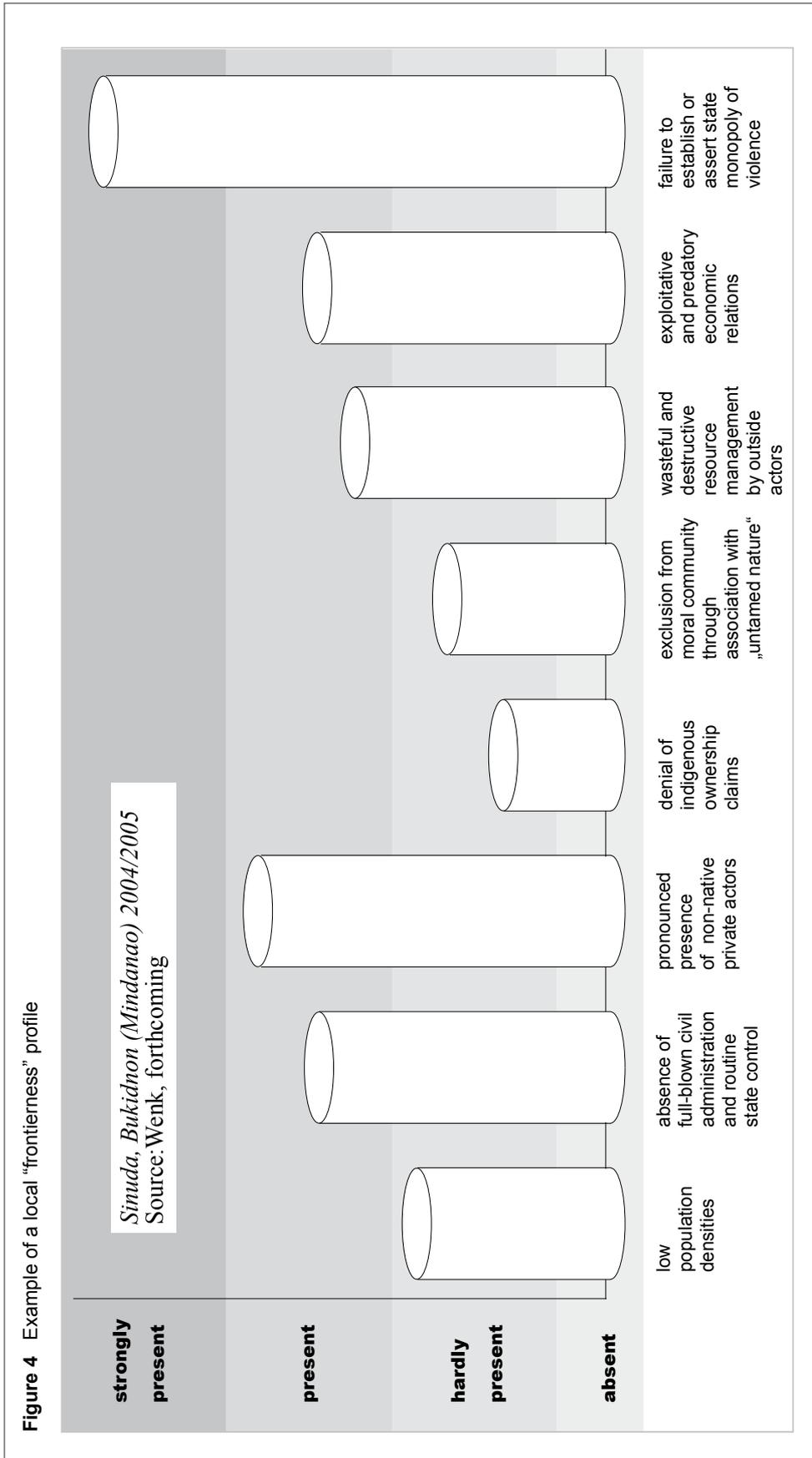
However, at the risk of undermining my own credibility, I would like to warn against putting too much emphasis on the first of our frontier criteria. For one, reference to low population densities can only be included if qualified as being so not in an absolute sense, but in comparison with and contrast to other zones of state sovereignty. Thus, for instance, with population densities of 50 persons/kilometer² and more, the carrying capacity of the land in Vietnam’s Central Highlands has been reached and even surpassed⁴⁰ (McElwee 2004:199). Nevertheless, the Highland frontier’s appeal to landless Kinh farmers is undiminished – unsurprisingly, if we consider that population densities in the areas where most settlers are hailing from – the Red River delta – on occasion exceed 1200 persons/kilometer² (ibid.).

Second, there is ample reason for distrusting state authorities’ figures on population numbers at the frontier from whence density estimates are derived. Population counts at state margins are notoriously unreliable, as they often either lack data on indigenous populations or assume ridiculously low figures for them (see this chapter below, 6.1.2). Thus, the Philippine government’s statistics for the 1980s overlooked an approximate 3.5 mio. indigenous people and an ever higher number of other upland dwellers, leading to grossly-distorted ideas on local and regional population densities (Blum and Geiger 1991:42). In certain cases, the proposition of the frontier being unsettled or sparsely inhabited may reveal itself as a strategic lie on the part of national governments, diverting attention from the fact that the territory is home to groups that might dispute outsiders’ ownership claims to land and other resources. The issue of the biased

38 In American measurement units 2 persons/mile².

39 Just how vain it is to tie frontier conditions to an absolute demographic threshold, is indicated by the fact that the US census authorities themselves moved that threshold from one census report to the other. While in 1890, they considered densities of 0-0,8 persons/kilometer² as indicative of frontiers, for the period 1870-1914 2-5,4 persons/kilometer² were deemed appropriate (see Wishart, Warren and Stoddard 1969, cited in Lamar and Thompson 1981a:8, note 17).

40 At least for shifting cultivation, the dominant mode of cultivation under traditional circumstances. In his influential study on integral shifting cultivation systems, Harold Conklin (1961) estimated the carrying capacity to be between 27 and 34 people/km².



representation of land ownership matters in the context of frontier expansion – the *tenurial myth* – will be taken up again later in this chapter (ch. 6.1.4).

Thirdly, the proposition that land and resources abound at the frontier is sometimes being disconfirmed in the course of the rapid advance of the settlement frontier. New arrivals are ever so often waking up to the realization that even the most undesirable plots already have their owners, and that these defend their property by use of arms, if need be (see e.g. George 1980:121 and May 1992:128ff. on Mindanao). In many cases, the open settlement frontier has become a fiction that barely veils the reality of a wild, uncontrollable land market and inexorable, sometimes violent territorial struggles. It is intriguing to see how in such cases, the myth of the inexhaustible land supply at the frontier often lives on in the densely-settled heartland, apparently resistant to the fact that the frontier's potential for settlement has been quite literally crowded out. Often, this myth of redemption in a land replete with rich soils and free of competitors – Hennessy (1981:13) calls it the *agrarian myth* – has been found to animate peasant immigration for two or three generations past the moment where the chances of succeeding have vanished (Barbora, forthcoming, on Central Assam, India). Thus, it is crucial to distinguish between the material and the discursive reality of low population densities in promised frontier lands; only if we include the imaginary do present-day conditions at the world's frontiers warrant inclusion of this criterion.

A fourth argument against overestimating the assertion that frontiers are by necessity loosely-settled will round up this exercise in self-critique. If it is true that, as I contend, frontiers are frontiers because of their economic potential for an expanding society, that potential's exploitation will draw in outsiders in great numbers, with the effect that the area's population density rises⁴¹. Patricia Nelson Limerick (1987:23) points out that if low population densities were decisive, the emergence of cities, towns or even mining camps – a regular feature in frontier histories – would close the frontier. Yet very much to the contrary, she remarks, frontiers – as e.g. in gold rushes – have often been *opened* by sudden surges of populations, and closed again by the latter's departure after the valued resource had been used up (ibid.). Thus, at the micro-level at least, we may argue with some justification that population minimums characterize a pre- (as well as possibly a post-) frontier state, while frontiers themselves require at least some population infusion from the outside. Once the place concerned – emptied of the commodity that drove the boom – reverts to its original state of low population density, it will have reacquired its former “backwater” qualities (e.g. absence of government services, unavailability of all but the most basic goods for consumption, bad infrastructural connectivity, etc.)⁴², and ceased to be a frontier.

To sum up, the reference to low population densities may suffice as a *relational* proposition, but upon close scrutiny, is rather difficult to operationalize.

41 Thus, Paul Little (2001:1) for instance has population expansion built into his very definition of frontiers, characterizing them as “areas (...) that experience accelerated rates of *demographic*, agricultural, or technological change” (italics mine).

42 A case in point would be the Rio San Juan at the border between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. One and a half centuries ago, the Rio San Juan – situated at the isthmus between the Carribean and Pacific coast – was the fastest connection from Europe and the southern and eastern parts of the United States to the Californian gold fields. At the time, state-of-the art steamboats plied the route several times a day, transporting hundreds of would-be gold diggers. Today, travelers on the river have to see to it not to miss the lone, half-weekly, run-down boat. While it takes a contemporary traveler 56 hours to cross the isthmus, Mark Twain, traveling at the heels of the fortune-seekers, needed only 40 hours for the same journey (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2005g). In frontier days, then, the Rio San Juan was probably more densely populated and more “developed” than it is today.



Photo 2: Out-of-the-way places: New Tribes Mission landing strip in Banwaon country, Binikalan, Agusan del Sur, Mindanao, Philippines (photo: Irina Wenk)

6.1.2 Absence of full-blown civil administration and routine state control

In frontier areas, the state is engaged in an ongoing project of establishing control; its presence is, therefore, fragile. It maintains a reduced presence of administrative personnel, tax agents, and often, but not always⁴³, police and military forces. Full-blown civil administration is absent, and with it routine state control, allowing us to speak of an institutional vacuum at the frontier (Kopytoff 1987:16). Among others, this has the effect that private actors are hardly restrained or monitored in their dealings with indigenous inhabitants of the zone.

Where the frontier sits at an international border, or where tribal resentment against the state has taken the form of an active insurgency, political authority normally resides in the army barracks and police headquarters. On a great number of Southern frontiers, the chances of encountering soldiers, border patrols or armed forest guards are many times higher than those of sighting a civil servant (Swift 1978:8)⁴⁴. Another indicator of the lack of routinized government is the

43 Numerous, of course, are cases where the region attracts extra attention of the military authorities because of the presence of indigenous resistance movements or daily range wars between settlers and indigenous people. Where political or territorial conflicts are seen to present a challenge to “national security”, military and police presence may be raised to extraordinary levels. Militarization is also common at frontiers in proximity to state borders (see below).

44 Although millions of citizens worldwide would rather see fewer than more civil servants in their lives, their absence at the frontier impairs the state’s chances of achieving legitimacy among frontier dwellers. While in military terms, the state “may be a significant force to reckon with” at its margins, writes Sanjib Baruah (2002:4178) of Northeast India, “it remains a remote entity, of limited relevance to urgent everyday needs, (...) and with little claim to the hearts and minds of the people”.

predominance of military personnel in frontier administrations, as in Assam (Baruah 2001) or Kalimantan (on Central Kalimantan, see van Klinken 2002:71, on West Kalimantan, Davidson 2002), where throughout most of the postcolonial period, governors were army generals. One of the reasons why the principle of the supremacy of political over military institutions is so often being flaunted at the indigenous periphery is that central state elites seem to find it hard to trust the local indigenous leadership, even when it has been fully enculturated in the national political system. "Supervision" by the army will most efficiently prevent it from taking chances. Thus, in the Indonesian province of Central Kalimantan, a province which was established in 1957 with the aim of giving self-rule to the indigenous Dayak, Suharto's New Order regime systematically undermined Dayak political control by putting army officers as secretaries to the side of the Dayak governors (1965 – 1983), and later by entrusting the highest administrative office directly to Javanese (van Klinken 2002:ibid.).

As mentioned earlier (chapter 5, note 32), many present-day states of the developing world fail to achieve uniformity in administrative methods across their territory – a commonplace feature of the modern western state (Embree 1989:80). In the past as in the present, frontier management has often relied on the granting of special administrative status to indigenous areas. Under such statutes, states declared their authority over the frontier to be limited and the rights of the local population to be restricted – notably the right to some semblance of self-rule. In British India, a complex system of administrative zones ('restricted areas', later 'Inner Line' areas) existed which served to delimit the reach of the legal code that governed the rest of the country, and curtailed the mobility of ordinary subjects with regards to travels to and settlement in indigenous areas. After independence, the Indian government retained colonial legislation for separate administration essentially unchanged (Lynch and Talbott 1995:117ff.). In the Philippines, the American colonial government introduced a system of reservations in the tribal hinterland, most of which lasted through the commonwealth period (1935-1945) and the post-independence era, where they have been administrated until recently by successive offices tasked with looking after the welfare of the country's indigenous peoples (see Macdonald 1995). In yet other cases, states had to – and still have to to this day – concede in their very administrative codes that the writ of the law did not reach to the frontier. Thus, Moroccan royal administrators famously distinguished between the *bilad al-makhzan* (or *bilad al-hukm*), the area of jurisdiction of the governmental bureaucracy where the state ruled supreme, taxes were collected and the law obeyed, on one hand, and the *bilad as-siba*, the zone of tribal dissidence and, from the centre's perspective, lawlessness, on the other (Hart 2001:15-19). Finally, in contemporary Papua Niugini, approximately 25% of remoter administrative units such as the Gulf Province, are marked out as "non-councillor areas", i. e. areas where contact between the provincial authorities and the local population is too feeble and sporadic to allow for the adjudication of disputes in courts, or even the election of village councillors – the lowest level of local government (Hanser and von Trotha 2002:18f.).

Specialized minority offices have served (and continue to serve) governments as a convenient tool for frontier management. Such agencies have typically been tasked with establishing relations with yet "uncontacted" indigenous groups, administering reserves, acting as official legal representatives for members of indigenous communities, and helping to integrate them into mainstream society. Famous examples of such offices are the Fundação Nacional do Índio (FUNAI) in Brazil (see Ramos 1984:90-97), and the Presidential Assistant on Tribal Minorities (Panamin) in the Philippines during Marcos times (see Rocamora 1979).



Photo 3: Areas under separate administration: state border of Arunachal Pradesh, India, where the restrictive Inner Line regulations apply, 2004 (photo: Christian Erni)

Sanjib Baruah (2003a:921) has observed that in frontier regions, the “routine practices that reproduce the consent of the governed in a modern democracy” are either absent or present only to a degree. They are: tax payment, voting, and the provision of “key services” such as “guaranteed public order” (ibid.). The state’s failure to provide security is going to be addressed in sub-chapter 6.1.8 below, so let me say a word on the subject of taxes – their collection (or failure to collect them) being a good measure for the presence (or absence) of the frontier. Weak state penetration is indicated by the state’s inability (or lack of determination) to collect taxes according to tax laws. Not only are indigenous producers and the immigrant frontier population usually rarely taxed by state authorities, but on certain frontiers, the state’s monopoly on tax collection itself is actually being challenged by insurgents who finance their operations in varying degree through more or less voluntary “donations” from the local population (see e.g. Marks 1996 on Thailand, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Peru). Often brandished by the governments in question as being wicked forms of extortion, such taxation by non-state actors may be seen analytically as a just reward for the provision of security which the state itself fails to offer (Baruah 2002:4180 on Northeast India). Often, such “revolutionary taxes” are being levied under the very eyes of powerless or disinterested local authorities. In the restive district of Karbi Anglong in Assam, for instance, hardly 200 kms from the bustling state capital of Guwahati, local officials admit that in recent years, ethnic Karbi and Dimasa rebels have become ever more daring, as indicated by the fact that “earlier, the notice for taxes used to come secretly, now they deliver it by bike” (Asian Centre for Human Rights 2005:23).

At the frontier, government services are available, if at all, in reduced quality and quantity. Administrative personnel and teachers are often ill-motivated to serve in a – in their view – boring and primitive backwater. Service in frontier locations not only fails to confer prestige and future career opportunities on bureaucrats, but, indeed, is by itself an indicator of low standing in the internal hierarchy of the apparatus. Consequently, recruitment to frontier area posts is chronically difficult for the central administration, and those who are finally posted to such locations see their nomination as a punishment (see e.g. Hanser and von Trotha 2002:17, 188 on Papua Niugini's Gulf Province, Baruah 2002:4181 on Northeast India).

A good indication of the discrete posture of the state at the perimeters of its domain is the often restricted capacity to provide basic infrastructure such as roads from state means. Notably at the extractive frontier with its outstanding opportunities for private profit, roads that penetrate hitherto inaccessible corners with high resource potentials are often built with private rather than public funds. Just as often in these cases, private interests also define where the road passes and where it leads to. In Peru around the turn of the millennium, lumber patrons in the Selva Central and the Upper Ucayali revived old state plans – shelved for a lack of finances – for connecting the provincial town of Atalaya in that resource-rich area with the Andean foothills. In a matter of three years, the road was built with funds from the logging companies' coffers, along a route that would give the financiers access to the rich mahogany stands of the Gran Pajonal, but left the only small town in that area unconnected (see Hvalkof 2008:251f.). In the *selva* of Ecuador, a road network that connects oil blocks with regional administrative centres has been built by oil companies, while Guyana's southern penetration road was constructed by a (Brazilian) mining company (Colchester 1993a:7)⁴⁵.

Partly as a function of the thin presence of civilian administrators, partly as a reflection of pervasive government neglect, many of the emblems of high modernity – cadastral surveys, the systematic certification of birth, death, and marriage, population counts, tax rolls and voters' lists (Scott 1998a, 1998b) – are absent or minimal at the frontier, rendering the state's knowledge about its local citizens grossly incomplete. Often governments do not know the population size – not even in faint approximation – of particular indigenous peoples (see e. g. Clarke 2001:427 on the situation in Southeast Asia), a fact which, tragically enough, often only comes to the awareness of the world when it is forced to take stock of the casualties from natural disasters or political strife. Thus, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which studied the period of political violence (1980-2000) in Peru's poverty-stricken and partly remote highlands found that nearly twice as many people had died during the insurgency than had been estimated before (69,000 instead of 35,000). The Commission rightly condemned as scandalous the fact that the death toll among the largely indigenous inhabitants of the erstwhile war zone had been that grossly underestimated; to explain why the society at large had failed to notice the disappearance of tens of thousands of fellow Peruvian citizens, it pointed to the “near total exclusion” of the country's *indígenas* from the moral community of the nation (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2003b).

45 The fact that their construction is often sponsored by private interests is only one among several things that makes roads an excellent indicator of frontierhood. Roads that have been driven into the indigenous periphery often continue to bear the signs of frontier expansion long after they were built, epitomized in the customary practice of naming settlements along their course prosaically after the number of kilometers (or miles) that separates them from the road's point of origin. Thus, people get born and die in settlements such as ‘Kilo 13’ (‘kilometer 13’), or ‘100 Mile’. My thanks for having drawn my attention to this point go to Irina Wenk.



Photo 4: Precarious legitimacy: mural exhorting citizens to co-operate with the police to enhance security, police station, Wamena, West Papua, 1996 (photo: Danilo Geiger)

If population counts are unreliable for the frontier, the registration of landed property is highly selective, if not inexistent in many areas. In Indonesia, for example, cadastral surveys and land titles are almost unknown in the uplands, “and territorial control is exercised most directly through forest law and policy” (Li 1999:15). While the state does indulge in map-making and the classification and staking of frontier space, such exercises in territorialization rarely produce unequivocal results. Again for Indonesia, Anna Tsing (1999:190) has found that “official mapping offers contradictory views about the status of any given plot (...). Territories officially classified as ‘forests’, i.e. government-controlled land, may include entire districts and multiple towns and villages with their agricultural terrains. Government departments often map areas differently, such that potential transmigration sites, production forests, and nature reserves may be found, in different maps, on precisely the same site”. Forest territories, in other words, may simultaneously be committed to settler colonization, commercial logging and conservation without the different government line agencies being aware of this overlap (Tsing 1993:304, note 12).

It would be tempting to conclude that where state personnel is thinly-spread, state legislation, as well, is absent; indeed, we often find reference to the “lawlessness” of the frontier (see e.g. Billington 1966:69-73, Bodley 1990:24-41, Gray 2001). However, nothing could be more misleading than the assumption that frontier space is unregulated by state laws. At its indigenous periphery, the state comes into being through territorialization, a technique that aims at dividing the state’s territories into political and economic zones, “rearrange people and resources within these units, and create regulations delineating how and by whom these areas can be used” (Vandergest and Peluso 1995:387). States, then, project control by promulgating laws which allow certain forms of

land use while outlawing others; declaring some areas wildlife protection areas or national parks while giving private companies access to others which contain resources whose exploitation is said to be of national interest; and endowing either itself or – as it also happens – local communities with the right to own or utilize land. However, the presence of laws is characteristically deceiving. At their margins, states create forms of law and (dis)order which they would find intolerable in the national heartland (Watts 1992:117). At frontiers, a state's laws are "more honoured in the breach than the observance" by most everyone (Bingling 2000:13), including those who are meant to enforce them; passed by a distant centre, legislation is either interpreted opportunistically or ignored altogether.

Political power at the frontier, then, is only partly mediated by laws, and much less still by constitutions (see chapter 5 for a more detailed exposition of power). Here, informal positions and power relations are often more determinative of political processes than formal ones. At its margins, the state is often a "shadow state" (van Klinken 2002:82); it may have all the formal institutions of local government, but – as mentioned before – decision-making is with the remote centre. Often, informal parallel governance structures exist which ensure that strategic decisions remain with those institutions that guarantee the paramouncy of "national security" over other policy goals (and thus the supremacy of the army), and the continued alimentation of the responsible institutions by the proceeds from frontier resource exploitation. The activities of national political parties which compete for local votes as everywhere else may give the appearance of thoroughly "nationalized space" (see chapter 7), but on close inspection, the competition for political office at the national margins is little else than a continuation of the frontier's predatory economic contest (see chapter 6.1.7 below) by other means. Locally, power may be with large landowners or logging and mining tycoons who hope to translate economic into political capital by assuming elected offices in provincial and often national legislative assemblies (see e.g. van Klinken 2002:76). Under the conditions of the "shadow state" at the frontier, "hidden lines of influence connect elite business interests with ethnic and party vehicles" which articulate national with local-level politics (*ibid.*).

The institutions of local government, to the extent that they exist, are subservient to the interests of the economically powerful (Santos-Granero and Barclay 2000:4). Monbiot's (1993:152f.) account of the interface between the central and the local state in the Brazilian Amazon shows this drastically: State governors depend on the support of landlord mayors; the governors control the police and the judiciary, who therefore do the landlords' bidding in the latter's near-constant conflicts with smallholder farmers or indigenous communities. To make matters worse for peasants and Native Amazonians, little help will come from the federal government or the national parliament, who might have been in the best position to overrule the states' corrupt authority: A significant portion of ministers and assembly members are themselves part of the landed elite and will not undermine the interests of their local peers.

As the boundaries between legality and illegality, public and private ownership, violence and law are so characteristically porous and forever shifting, some authors have found it useful to describe frontier governance in paradoxes: No institution demonstrates more blatant a disregard for the law than the judiciary; the arrival of the police in a village is tantamount with the arrival of criminality; the authorities do their best to protect those least in need of protection, while persecuting those who are most vulnerable; and in the aggregate, the government engenders anarchy (Monbiot 1993:153; see also Schmink and Wood 1992:349, Tsing 2005:33). The ethics of governance at the far ends of



Photo 5: Reminders of a distant authority: poster with Indonesian state philosophy, “pancasila”, and portrait photographs of Suharto and his vice president in a Dayak longhouse, West Kalimantan, 1997 (photo: Danilo Geiger)

the state reveal themselves in acerbic clarity in the Brazilian proverb: “For our friends everything; for our enemies the Law” (Monbiot 1993:153).

6.1.3 Pronounced presence of non-native private actors

The allure of the frontier with its high economic windfalls and loose government control brings in – depending on the nature of the frontier’s particular economic potential – cattle ranchers, planters, settlers, gold panners, gunslingers, lumber jacks, traders, oil workers, dam builders, and bio-prospectors who operate beyond the pale of formal state control (Swift 1978:9, Bodley 1990:24-41). Missionaries, anthropologists, daring tourists and people in search of alternative lifestyles flock to the frontier, too, looking for raw materials of a different kind (Lewis 1988, Young 1995:xi, Meiselas 2003). Standing in a long line of intrepid freelancers on the frontlines of expanding empires and states⁴⁶, these adventurer-entrepreneurs are the main cast at what John Bodley (1990:24-41) calls the “uncontrolled frontier”. It is the “combination of free resources and free enterprise”, he points out, which is responsible for much of the devastation that frontier expansion visits on human societies and nature (ibid.:25). At the frontier, conquest is no longer the prerogative of kings and the mighty, but something to be had by even the lowliest of men, provided they have strong hands and an enterprising mind (Orizio 2001:99); as a result, rugged individualism and sometimes a pronounced hostility to outside control can be encountered among freelance frontier actors (Baker

46 Virtually all settler nations trace their origins (and national mythologies) back to the exploits of such frontiersmen. Among the more famous specimen are the trackers and pathfinders of the US-American West, the French-Canadian *coureurs de bois*, the *voortrecker* stockfarmers of the Cape Colony, the *cosacks* who spearheaded the advance of Tsarist Russia into Siberia, the *gaucho* cattlemen of the Argentinian pampa and the *bandeirantes*, the Brazilian expeditionaries of the 17th and 18th centuries who sought slaves and gold.

2000:173). The frontier's resources seem inexhaustible and its confines, geographical *as well as moral*, are non-existent (Orizio 2001:99f.). Enterprising individuals who operate at state peripheries "seem to feel that doing business in this frontier land means a holiday from whatever moral codes exist in the heartland" (Baruah 1999:207), an attitude that endows the frontier with a political culture entirely its own.

Frontier entrepreneurs often assume administrative functions locally, as in the Ecuadorian and Peruvian Amazon, where local government often consists either in a pioneer patron or the padres at the mission centre (Salazar 1981:590, Brown and Fernandez 2000:191). In the small towns of the Peruvian *montaña*, colonist patrons follow their own rules and laws, sometimes openly mocking the authority of the central state and its system of justice (Hvalkof 1998:88)⁴⁷. Thus, as Igor Kopytoff (1987:12) has pointed out, the frontiersman can "literally *construct* a desirable order" at the perimeters of the state domain, as the frontier is defined by an all-encompassing *institutional vacuum*.

An intrinsic part of that autonomous order and an institution that characterizes the negotiation of power across ethnic lines at the frontier are the twin characters of the patron and the ethnic broker. Indigenous people often attach themselves to individual frontier entrepreneurs to secure access to goods, favors and relationships which are unavailable in their own society, but essential in an environment which is moulded by the intruding society. Members of influential colonist families, cattle ranchers, shop owners and traders with extensive business connections and friends in the administrative centres act as brokers of state-derived power and largesse (such as financial support and credit in times of need, yet also subsidies, licenses and land rights) (Li 1999:19). Though usually cloaked with notions of reciprocity and moral obligation on both sides, anthropologists have often described such relationships as utterly unbalanced and exploitative, involving ludicrous terms of trade for indigenous labour and produce (see Lopez 1983:39-42 and Gibson 1986:47f. on the Buhid of Mindoro, the Philippines). Where the state machinery is weak and its representatives few, frontier entrepreneurs' links to some state institution, senior officials and, indeed, the idea of "the state" itself provide them with power in and over the periphery – power which they both personify and help operationalise (Li 1999:19). Patronage is thus one of the distinctive ways in which power works at the margins of the state; as an institution, it articulates the category "core state area" with that of the "frontier" (ibid.:20).

The indigenous ethnic broker is the flip side of the settler patron coin. At all contemporary frontiers, state-appointed village heads, tribal councillors or indigenous representatives in provincial parliaments act as conduits of power and goods between the two societies. As leaders who owe their position to the outsiders, their role is complex and contradictory; they may conduct themselves as mediators of foul compromises and agents of exploitation, or see their job in mitigating the worst excesses of the development process (Swift 1978:10). Indeed, it is not uncommon that local leaders broker land to outsiders, or otherwise betray the trust of their kin and co-villagers in favor of building alliances with the newcomers (Li 1999:19). This reminds us that at the frontier, there is no easy fit between ethnic identity and class status, as its advance and consolidation bring into their own collaborations that transcend the boundary between conquerors and conquered (ibid.; Tsing 2005:35; Lattimore 1962c:137).

A crucial group of actors on many frontiers are agricultural pioneers – together with other types of

⁴⁷ Thus, when anthropologist Søren Hvalkof made his first appearance in the town of Atalaya on the Tambo river, the owner of the hotel where he stayed received him with the exclamation: "Welcome to the Republic of Atalaya!" (Hvalkof 1998:88).

settlers the focus of this volume. Agricultural expansion has, of course, been a central feature in the history of mankind; on all continents except Australia, migrations of population groups in search of more or more fertile land date back for millenia. Much of the near-constant spatial spread of intensive forms of cultivation as which the history of agriculture appears, was the aggregate result of countless individual and group decisions to exchange old homes for new in an attempt to secure precarious livelihoods, escape the yoke of oppressive and greedy rulers, or both. But the opening of forests for farming was (and still is) not only a function of consumption needs and peasant survival, i.e. economic factors; historically, it remains inherently linked to *political* developments, not the least of which is state formation (DeKoninck and Déry 1997:1). In every major region of the world, the formation of states and the consolidation of their borderlands have at least partially relied on the peasantry. The imperial histories of Rome and China and that of the European Middle Ages are essentially accounts of how the states in question secured their territories by implanting military colonists in regions beyond their control, thus acquiring at their peripheries both living defences and a territorial spearhead that pointed into the domains claimed or contested by neighbouring powers (DeKoninck 1996:231ff.).

Historically, then, an altogether different, second *persona* of the pioneer emerges – that of the perennial subaltern who subjects his and his family’s aspirations for a better life to the geo-strategic concerns of the monarch⁴⁸. In unbroken continuity with pre-colonial practice and the role models of antiquity, says DeKoninck (ibid.:232), today’s colonists in countries such as Vietnam and Indonesia are entering into a Faustian bargain with the state when they volunteer for a guided population transfer programme. In what he calls the “territorial compromise”, state-builders take possession of coveted areas, but at the price of only loose control over the personnel – the peasants – that they employ for this territorial expansion. Viewed from the opposite angle, the peasant settlers have to shoulder the costs of colonization and defence, but they are compensated through the acquisition of considerably large tracts of land and a clean start into a life unencumbered by feudal lords and oppressive authorities (Duncan Baretta and Markoff 1978:590f.). The list of countries in the South with a relatively recent track record in strategically-motivated, organized land pioneering includes Brazil and other Latin American countries, and practically all of Southeast Asia (DeKoninck 1996:232f.; see also Hardy and Turner 2000:3). A surprisingly large number of states, therefore, have up to the most recent past used territorial expansion by means of settler-colonizers as a cheap and efficient means of expanding and consolidating territorial control, defusing social tensions in overpopulated core areas, and spreading over the entire national territory the cultural values that make the nation.

This basic structural ambiguity of frontier colonists as an actor group is reflected in recurrent, heated discussions on how to value their role and that of the state in matters such as deforestation and the displacement and destruction of indigenous societies (Colchester 1993a:2-11). Taking the example of the first of these two themes, forestry experts agree that from the Amazon to the Outer Islands of Indonesia and the Central Highlands of Vietnam, impoverished farmers are the principal agents of forest loss (ibid.:4). However, to blame them directly for deforestation as has become popular e.g. among Latin American government officials would mean to overlook both the role that uncontrolled logging has played in opening the frontier for settlement (ibid.) and to divert

48 Interestingly, the suggestion that colonists were historically indeed pawns in the game of state rulers is for example supported by the etymology of the French word ‘*pionnier*’ which seems to derive from old French ‘*pion*’, the lowest of chess figures (DeKoninck 1996:233).

attention from the forces that have deprived colonists of land and other means of subsistence in the first place: A skewed land distribution in their regions of origin and a continuing bias in favor of large land owners and mechanized, capital-intensive agriculture on the part of governments and international lending institutions (*ibid.*:9-13; Colchester 1993c).

Furthermore, to point fingers at migrants for their alleged responsibility for ecocide and the predicament of indigenous frontier-dwellers would also imply that we underrate the overall role of states in frontier settlement. While it is true that for every person re-settled in official settlement programmes, probably two more move into the forest on their own initiative⁴⁹, the infrastructure for colonization was laid down not by the peasants, but by the government (Monbiot 1993:159; Colchester 1993a:5ff.). Much of what passes as *spontaneous* settlement in less careful discussions of frontier migration is spontaneous only in the sense of not being organized and assisted as part of a comprehensive and publicly-heralded state settlement policy. It is not spontaneous in the sense of being unpredictable or surprising, because in pursuance of frontier development, states often create direct incentives and a supportive environment and infrastructure for migration (Partridge 1989; Colchester 1993a:6). States facilitate settlement in sometimes more and sometimes less oblique ways, be it by building roads to hitherto remote frontier locations (Ledec and Goodland 1989), by creating attractive economic niches for migrants (Partridge 1989), by crafting legislation that provides outsiders with land or use rights on easy terms (Ledec and Goodland 1989), or by not enforcing legislation that excludes outsiders from the right to trade, settle, or have access to land (Lynch and Talbott 1995).

In the light of this evidence, it is no surprise that one prominent analyst offers the view that settlers are to be held no more responsible for felling the forest than soldiers are for fighting wars (Myers 1991, cited in Pichón 1996:349), as they are subject to a host of forces – economic, social, legal, political – that they are little able to comprehend, yet alone control (Pichón 1996:349). Other authors have tried to foreground the economic plight of the migrants and the survival aspect of frontier settlement, and have suggested to flag this home by labeling all such settlement “self-rescue migration” (van Schendel 1986, 2005:211). Although there are exceptions, indigenous communities who have to put up with large numbers of settlers in their domains, have by and large remained unimpressed by such considerations. In their great majority, they prefer to see the settlers as unwelcome competitors for land, resources and – yes, why not: state affection (see e.g. Fearon and Laitin 2001).

6.1.4 Tendency for the state and private actors to deny indigenous inhabitants’ ownership claims to land and natural resources

It is an essential characteristic of frontier expansion that colonizing societies define the spaces to be conquered as “lacking any legitimate political institutions” and “open to legitimate intrusion and settlement – this even if the areas are in fact occupied by organized polities” (Kopytoff 1987:11). It is still common among governing elites and the general populace of developing countries to locate indigenous societies below the civilizational threshold; often depicted as “nomadic”, they are said to lack notions of territoriality and the means to uphold order or resolve conflicts internally

⁴⁹ The estimate is based on figures from one of the best-evaluated programmes of guided population transfer, the Indonesian *transmigrasi* scheme, which is held to be representative for such programmes in general (Colchester 1993a:6).



Photo 6: Spearhead of the state or faultless proletarians? Settler family on their way to town, Agusan del Norte, Mindanao, Philippines, 2003 (photo: Christian Erni)

(see e.g. Duhaylungsod and Hyndman 1993:59, 68). The implication, of course, is that from such a “state of nature”, no rights can flow which have to be taken into account in the process of expansion. From the perspective of the expanding state and the individuals who set out to establish themselves at the frontier (or mine it and then leave), the situation is one of occupation, not of conquest, since no third party’s prior rights are thereby extinguished. The frontier is essentially an empty space (Burger 1987:132, Fisher 1996, Howitt 2001:234), and as such it appears on the maps of government agencies on the basis of which logging contracts, mining concessions and the likes are given out and settlement schemes planned (Cowell 1990:124, Tsing 1993:45, Fried 1995:76-79). Somehow, aerial surveys, even if based on satellite images, fail to record indigenous settlements, swidden fields and orchards, sanctioning the issuance of leasehold permits to large plantation companies on the grounds that the area is uninhabited state domain (Djuweng and Dove n.d.:10f. on West Kalimantan, Indonesia), and the planning documents for development schemes big or small remain silent on the presence of indigenous communities in the project domains, even though it is amply documented by ethnographic works and attested to by the governments’ own minority agencies (Schröder 1993:110 on Brazil’s giant Grande Carajás project in the 1980s). State authorities either presume the land and natural resources at the frontier to be freely available, or arrogate the right to allocate them according to their needs and priorities (Swift 1978:6, Bodley 1990:25, Tsing 2005:30).

Underlying the legal attitude of so many postcolonial governments are centuries of colonial theory and practice, and it has received the unqualified support of generations of academics, both metropolitan and from the South, writing on frontier affairs. Famously, the prevalent – though never uncontested – legal view that guided European monarchs in their drive to acquire overseas

territories from the “age of discovery” in the late 15th and early 16th centuries throughout the 18th and even 19th centuries, was that these territories were vacant lands, deemed “terra nullius”, to which Europeans could freely take title (Wilmer 1993:61, Richardson 1993, Niezen 2003:149f.). According to one legal opinion during that time, the “terra nullius” doctrine applied in all cases where the peoples encountered in “new lands” had either “no civilization at all” or “a civilization inferior to the standard prevailing in Europe” (von Glahn 1981:316). Mediated through colonial law, the doctrine found its way into virtually all national constitutions of the decolonising South.

Notably in the settler nations which originated from Europe’s colonial expansion, historians and social scientists often assisted the nation-building endeavor by providing accounts of frontier processes which, from today’s perspective, have to be read as having a strongly apologetic, legitimacy tinge. Most prominent, of course (and endlessly castigated for it) was Frederick Jackson Turner, for whom indigenous societies, being “savage”, were no legal subjects, but an intrinsic part of nature (see above, chapter 2). Walter Prescott Webb, another eminent historian of the west, even surpassed the founder of American frontier studies by defining a frontier in varying formulations as “an area inviting entrance” for its gifts of land and minerals, or “inherently a vast body of wealth without proprietors” (Webb 1952:2, 13). Other scientists, too, have compromised their work by omitting mention of indigenous rights, without having an immediate stake in nation-building; representative for them is American historian Catherine LeGrand (1984:29) who introduces Colombia’s Caribbean Coast in today’s province of Antioquia – a region containing numerous indigenous peoples – as “vast expanses of public lands to which no one claimed ownership”. Consequently, frontier expansion translates as the “incorporation of public lands into the national economy” (ibid.).

Present-day governments’ refusal to acknowledge indigenous rights in the contest for frontier resources comes in various shades and nuances of argument, and private actors often embrace “folk” versions of these official rationalizations of conquest and displacement⁵⁰. Undeniably, public discourse on these matters has also undergone changes in the past two decades, reflecting the growing influence of the twin ideas of minority rights and the value of cultural and legal pluralism. In some countries at least, the emphasis has moved from the outright denial of rights to the position that indigenous communities may have rights, but rights which have to be rated as inferior to those of the nation and the settler citizen. Noting a basic conflict of rights, reference is made to the “higher good” of the national collectivity to resolve it. Thus, bureaucrats may justify frontier colonization by supplying statistics that show excessive population densities in majority areas and land abundance at the frontier, suggesting that it is the majority’s “manifest destiny” to fill up the latter, as Christopher Duncan writes in his introduction to a recent edited volume on official minority policies in Southeast Asia (2004:13). In Bangladesh’s Chittagong Hill Tracts, where a Peace Accord stipulates the restitution by settlers of illegally-acquired land, representations with the authorities to demand appropriate action are often met with the comment that by wanting to keep their land to themselves, indigenous people behave selfishly, as they possess so much of it, and settlers so little (Roy and Halim, forthcoming). The suggestion that indigenous frontier-dwellers occupy far too much land in relation to their numbers, and therefore should relinquish their rights

50 See e.g. Gray (1987:311ff.) who documents “hardline” and “soft-line” perspectives among the colonists pushing into the ancestral domain of the Harakmbut of the Madre de Dios area in the Peruvian *montaña*. The latter, for instance, does not outrightly deny indigenous rights to land and resources. It holds, however, against ethnohistorical proof that the Harakmbut had migrated to the area quite recently, and therefore their claims to the land were not automatically superior to those of the colonists.

to it, is as old as John Wayne's famous *Playboy* interview where he justified the dispossession of Native Americans by the odd man-land ratio that obtained among them⁵¹.

Some authors have interpreted states' refusal to acknowledge – and sometimes even make out! – indigenous ownership rights to contested frontier resources to be purely opportunistic (see e.g. Jennings 1971, 1975). While not denying the obvious truth that to shape the “Other” in an image that casts him as a legal minor does away with the need for justifying his expropriation, I suspect the reasons for the proliferation of state-held stereotypes of indigenous peoples to be of a deeper, because epistemic nature. As James C. Scott (1998a, b) has shown, the modern state depends for its reproduction on the systematic assimilation of local economic forms and practices; it dreads difference and diversity and trains its personnel to level it unexplored, replacing it with standardized forms (“simplifications”) that facilitate the more efficient management of the realm. Local agricultural practices and tenurial forms such as shifting cultivation and communal property remain “illigible” to state managers and bureaucrats, they are but “raw”, idiosyncratic forms – Scott speaks of “hieroglyphs” – that have to be transformed and reduced to satisfy the craving of state elites for scientific and technical progress and the “rational” design of the social and economic order (Scott 1998b:1-8; 11-52).

Indigenous communities' experience, then, is one of pervasive invisibility in the eyes of the state. Their property systems, even if acknowledged to exist, fall below the radar, so to speak, of state operators, for whom there can be only two types of property – state or private. Alternative regimes of land tenure in use in indigenous communities – notably communal property – are poorly understood by planners and bureaucrats, regarded as provisional (because bound to evolve) and maligned as ecologically harmful. With regard to the latter charge, Hardin's famous “tragedy of the commons” (Hardin 1968) has provided a welcome argument, albeit at the cost of a serious misreading of what community rights to land mean. Hardin proposes that common property resources are bound to be overexploited when populations grow, because there is a situation of “open access” which does not allow to exclude users (or usages) which prime short-term yields over concerns for resource regeneration. Underlying the argument – or, rather, its application to indigenous communities – is the notion that indigenous communities have failed to evolve rules that efficiently regulate land and resource use among their ranks. (It goes without saying that this idea in its turn has emanated from the more archaic notion – discussed in this chapter – that indigenous societies are policies without authority and therefore ways of ordering their internal affairs). A huge body of anthropological literature documents that it is wrong to equate communal property regimes with “open access”, and therefore automatic resource degradation when population densities rise. Under traditional conditions at least, indigenous foragers, swidden cultivators and fisher folk alike have been found to practice sophisticated common property regimes that efficiently mediate access, use and transfer of resources. Many of the studies in question maintain that, if “open access” indeed exists on contemporary indigenous territories, the situation in fact has come about not as a result of the communal rights system, but because the state involved has refused to grant indigenous communities the same right of closure and sanction against outsiders which they traditionally exercised against free-riding community members (see e.g. Palsson 1998 on fisheries; Laungaramsri 2005 on the ironies of the Thai government's policy on shifting cultivation).

51 The quote is: “I don't feel we did wrong in taking this great country away from them, if that's what you're asking. Our so-called stealing of this country from them was just a matter of survival. There were great numbers of people who needed new land, and the Indians were selfishly trying to keep it from them” (John Wayne, in Lewis 1971:82, quoted in Fleming Mathur 1979:121).



Photo 7: Dispossessed by settlers: Chakma man in front of his former property, now occupied by Bengali settlers. (photo: Christian Erni)

On a more experiential level, indigenous communities have seen pleas for compensation for the destruction of their orchards by caterpillars ridiculed with the argument that in the jungle, there are no trees planted by man (IWGIA 1996:165), and – as mentioned above – have witnessed bureaucrats “reading” aerial photographs of their territories in a way that neither settlements nor fields were said to exist⁵². As “the only legitimate landscape is that which has been planned and layed out by the state” (Djuweng and Dove n.d.:7), state authorities routinely deny the obvious – that forests and other presumably “chaotic” natural environments are social landscapes, produced and modified by a variety of human practices for decades, centuries and sometimes millenia (Zerner 2003:6)⁵³.

52 For reasons of space, I have not listed here those cases where state authorities misread – with equally serious consequences – social and ergological traits of indigenous cultures; the subject of traditional housing styles may exemplify this. In Suharto-time Indonesia, the state targeted the traditional longhouses of the Dayak – where these still existed – for elimination, on the grounds (among others) that they were reminiscent of “communism” (Dove 1985:29). In Vietnam, where the state is pursuing a policy of sedentarizing shifting cultivators, the authorities have classified many groups’ traditional bamboo or thatch houses as “shabby” and “provisional” structures, with the result that the groups in question were enlisted in resettlement programmes. The background to this seemingly bizarre consequence of administrative prejudice is that the official definition of “nomadism” hinges on the “permanence” of a group’s vernacular house type (McElwee 2004:208, note 21).

53 It is in fact possible to argue that not only indigenous ways of life are invisible to the eye of state elites and the average citizen, but indigenous societies as a whole, and, indeed, the frontier zone as a region. Because frontiers are “zones of not yet” (Tsing 2005:28) which still have to be made to resemble the national core, they usually fail to be represented in the iconography of the state, as Little (2001:47) demonstrates for Ecuador. The country’s national flag shows a snow-covered Andean peak that represents the ancient civilizational centres of the *altiplano*; its waters flow down into the wide coastal plain, the country’s principal agricultural and industrial region. The Amazon Basin which



Photo 8: State simplifications: rectangular grid of transmigration settlement, viewed from the air, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia (photo: Danilo Geiger)

To resume what I have so far said, states may disenfranchise indigenous communities by either denying them the status of societies with politics, and refusing to accord them any ownership rights to land and resources; or acknowledge them as legal subjects, but define their rights as being of a lower order. Just as often, however, states pragmatically refrain from applying and enforcing laws in frontier areas that in fact protect local landowners and outlaw outside encroachment on community territories and natural resources. In some cases, Latin American and Asian countries afford themselves the luxury of progressive land laws which in theory at least prioritize the rights of indigenous forest occupants over most other claimants (see e.g. Maybury-Lewis 1991:220, 227 on Brazil, Hvalkof 2008 on Peru and the *montaña*, and Padilla 2008 on the Philippines). Forests are protected by law from illegal logging, and extensive areas have been classified as protected areas or national parks (see e.g. Zerner, ed., 2000). However, the vastness of the frontier makes it difficult to enforce forestry regulations (Pichón 1996:350), and on top of it, government and bureaucrats lack the political will to enforce them when indigenous communities and other politically and socially marginal groups are concerned. Too often, laws are only “remembered” by agents of the state when they are forcefully invoked by the locals, and even then the outcome of a dispute depends entirely on the relative negotiating power of the parties involved, not on the legal facts. As in most cases local communities are ignorant of the law, the frontier becomes in essence a lawless domain, a legal enclave where existing rules don’t hold and aggrieved locals often have no other recourse than the resort to violent means of asserting their rights. At the heart of land-related violence – which need not always, and not even principally involve

is located behind the Andes range and makes up the largest – if most despised – part of Ecuador’s cultural diversity, is strikingly absent on that stylized map of the nation (Little 2001:47).

indigenous communities, but may take place between different groups of colonists – is a chaotic land tenure situation in which informal use rights compete with titled property rights and traditional collective ownership regimes of indigenous communities (Pichón 1996:350). While states theoretically do have the means of peacefully regulating what are actually quite common situations of legal pluralism, this becomes difficult in a zone where state agents are not only few, but also notoriously tempted to benefit personally from the bounty of the frontier. As a result, we find that in this land where “nothing is as it seems”, the “boundaries of law and theft, governance and violence, use and destruction” are notoriously confused (Tsing 2005:27). Informal arrangements and relationships guide land transactions and access to landed property, brokered by public officials whose venality is setting infinitely broad limits to the interpretation of the law. Thus, in transmigration sites in the Indonesian province of Riau (Sumatra), intense competition for land between population transferees from Java and Bali (the main islands targeted for resettlement by Indonesia’s population redistribution program) on one hand, land-strapped peasants from the adjacent province of North Sumatra, and local indigenous and peasant communities on the other hand has led to an all-out scramble for plots in the transmigration schemes (so-called *packets*). As it has become standard practice for transmigration projects to allocate one in five *packets* to “local” transmigrants – either people directly displaced by the schemes, or “locals” in the broader sense of being from the region that hosts the transmigration scheme –, the intense demand in land and secure livelihoods quickly gave rise to an illegal market for the letters which documented participation in the transmigration scheme and tenure rights on on-site plantations. False promises by unscrupulous agents and government officials tricked many applicants into making down payments for letters that they never got to see. Middlemen purchased most of the letters, reproduced them and proceeded to re-sell them to multiple buyers. In one transmigration site, this practice resulted in over 2000 claimants for less than 200 *packets* of land. Violent assaults by failed applicants on local officials (because they were suspected of implication in the fraud) or on local landowners (because they had been compensated with *packets* for land affected by site development, and were rumoured to have sold them to middlemen) occurred repeatedly (Hoshour 1997:562f.).

This description of the situation in Sumatra, however, pales in comparison with the following account of fraudulent practices on the land market in the Brazilian frontier state of Pará. Probably nowhere else on the planet have intruders devised such ingenious ways of forging legal evidence for land claims, winning the region the distinction of having “maybe the unruliest property market in the world” (*The Economist* 2004b:44). Allow me to quote Foweraker’s (1981:109ff.) lines if not in full, then still at considerable length:

“In Pará, the story was much the same [as in the two other states studied by the author, Paraná and Mato Grosso, D. G.]. Small-holders, companies and economic groups were in the rush to buy land, and if it was already ‘private’ property, there was no limit to the area that could be bought in any one transaction. But many of the titles were false or contested, and again the state administration might be responsible. (...) [Officials indulged in] the pernicious practice of double and treble titling, by which two or three estates might ‘legally’ exist under different names, but cover approximately the same area of land⁵⁴. (...).

The indiscriminate issue of titles by the state is essential to this ‘bureaucratic’ speculation in land, but it would be misleading to suggest that the bureaucracy is uniquely responsible for the speculation. Many private interests take advantage of the legal confusion to forge their own documents, and titles to land, in order to take control of the frontier. In other words, deliberate cheating over land is added to bureaucratic malpractice and to the anyway tangled legal histories of these regions; and certain regions, such as Paragominas in Pará, are notorious for the incidence of forged titles. The forgeries are carefully accomplished, and, in the case of ‘old’ titles, the paper carefully yellowed by ‘age’. The speculators, or

54 Throughout the Brazilian Amazon, the practice is known as “double baptism”.

grileiros (practising *grilagem*⁵⁵) can often find willing accomplices in the private real estate offices which flourish wherever frontiers expand. These offices, manned by a peculiar breed of parasitic land lawyers, are as much interested in profit from land as the speculators themselves. (...) Stories in Pará tell of such lawyers who have worked within the Federal land agencies, and, having created sufficient land problems through the bureaucracy, then set up their own offices in order to solve them. *Grilagem* contributes to the legal conflicts which afflict the frontier regions, and while it is a predominantly private practice, it could not continue without the at least occasional collusion of the state and Federal administrations. (...)

In these conditions, all appearance of legal normalcy breaks down. Every possible piece of paper laying claim to land is registered and negotiated as title; instances are recorded of children as young as three ‘applying’ for title to land, and having their signature duly ‘witnessed’ in the land office (...). The result is that title to the land is no real guarantee of ‘ownership’. Moreover, title does not represent the only right to land on the frontier, which may also be legally claimed by the fact of its occupation or *posse*⁵⁶; and with titles to land appearing increasingly invalid, *de facto* occupation rather than legal documentation begins to define the process of frontier expansion⁵⁷;

6.1.5 Tendency of the state and private actors to define indigenous inhabitants as standing outside the moral universe by symbolically associating them with “untamed nature”

Some 300 years ago, accompanying his ruler on a military campaign, Mullah Darvish of Herat left us the following description of the strange, unknown lands and forests of Assam into which his party had ventured (Elwin 1959b:15):

“This land is not like our land,
its sky is not like our sky.
(...)
The seasons all begin here at the time of
their conclusion elsewhere.
Here there is heat in our winter and chill
in our summer.
Its roads are frightful as the path leading
to the Nook of Death;
Fatal to life is its expanse like the
unpeopled City of Destruction.
Its forests are full of violence like the
heart of the ignorant.
Its rivers are beyond limit and estimate
like the minds of the wise (...)”

Unlinked from their immediate temporal context, the lines from the Mullah’s chronicle convey certain common experiential truths about the frontier which invariably impress themselves upon the

55 *Grilagem* is a related trick which consists in leaving a land deed to crickets who in time will make it look venerably old.

56 *Posse* is a tenurial right guaranteed by the Brazilian constitution; it stipulates that a squatter (*posseiro*) has the legal right to any land he has cultivated and lived on for more than five years, regardless of the fact that he lacks a title deed (Cowell 1990:139, 145).

57 Foweraker’s account is by no means outdated; in 2004, the *Economist* ran an article (*The Economist* 2004b) that suggested that the land frontier in the area has lost none of its momentum in the two decades since.

itinerant visitor and the one who has come to settle down for good. Frontiers, first of all, are likely to irritate and confuse those who enter them unprepared. Similar to initiates in rites of passage, by venturing into the frontier zone, they cross a threshold to a symbolic domain which is “*in but not of the world*”, a so-called “liminal zone” (Turner 1974). To the intruder, frontiers are zones where the laws of nature (and, we should add, social life) as we know them are suspended and all meaning collapses (Tsing 1993:182), making them areas of fundamental unpredictability. Where nothing can be taken for granted anymore, fear and apprehension reign. Nature is awe-inspiring, potentially lethal, and the fact that it is inhabited by human societies is in no way comforting. In a loose way, the present section will explore some of these themes.

In the collective imaginary of conquering societies, utopian fantasies of the frontier and its potential co-exist with dystopian visions that construct it as a zone of danger and death (Taussig 1984:74-83; Brown and Fernandez 1991:4). Thus, the notion of a paradisaical Eden where man can commune with nature and find the secret of human happiness, the great agrarian myths that have propelled so many past and present migratory movements to areas at the edges of the known world, and the hypnotic call of precious metals and other treasures resting in or growing on its soil, have always had to assert themselves against images of a dark and menacing frontier. Often in a perpendicular movement, frontier optimism has alternated through history with representations of these spaces as places of violence, cultural perversity and natural perils driving once-civilized men to barbarism (Hennessy 1981:13, Little 2001:ix, Tsing 2005:31). In fact, dystopian elements are an integral part of the dream of frontier redemption: The settler, trader and wildcat logger knows that it is only against great hardships and by overcoming the mortal dangers of savage nature that a more prosperous existence can be secured or a fortune can be made in these places. As so many aspects of the frontier, its dangers are at the same time imagined and real (Tsing 2005:29). Thus, at the edge of the pioneer front in Rondônia (Brazilian Amazon) in the early 1980s, settlers lived in the knowledge that they or their children could meet their deaths any time from malaria or an Indian arrow or club. Yet that was the price for the chance of restarting their lives free from the shackles of class and inherited misery: “To own something, you have to endure the tiger’s breath”, said a colonist’s wife. “Before we only lived on the land of others. One year here. One year there. They never gave us land to plant. In Rondônia, we’re suffering in the jaguar’s mouth. But even if we fall, perhaps we’ll come out winners in the end” (Cowell 1990:119).

The phantasmagorical dimension of the perils of the frontier, on the other hand, is indicated by the fact that the fear which the latter inspires seems to grow proportionally with distance, striking fiercest in the hearts of those who have never seen the forest or the bush. In New Caledonia, France’s former penal colony, an overwhelming majority of *caldoches* (white settlers) today lives in the islands’ urban and mining centres, leaving very few genuine *broussards* (rural settlers). In the average settler mind, the “bush” looms darkly as “a mysterious frontier, dangerous and far away, where most of them have never gone” (Guiart 1983:238-244, quoted in Chappell 1993:310).

As mentioned before, the fact that most of the wilderness as which the frontier environment is imagined is inhabited by organized polities – indigenous communities –, is ignored. Historically, for the state and the individuals it continuously ejects into the periphery, frontiers have always been liminal and subversive, both in a practical and a symbolic sense. Such spaces and their inhabitants

have served (and continue to serve) as “exemplars of nature, barbarity, rudeness, disorder, immorality and irreligion against which the culture, civility, sophistication, order, morality and orthodoxy of the centre could be measured” (Scott 1998a:54), confirming thus the more general observation that frontiers help colonizing cores define their own cultures and identities (Lattimore 1940, 1962a, quoted in Gaubatz 1996:18)⁵⁸. Historically, state rulers have had good reasons for painting their realms’ frontiers in dark colours. In pre-colonial times, they were the privileged sanctuary for rebels, bandits and princely contenders, and took in great numbers of defected subjects who had grown tired of the burdens of tribute and *corvée* labour (Scott n.d.:8ff.). The colonial frontier attracted a similar cast of runaways and dodgers and served violent nationalists for arms caches, as an operation base and recruitment area (see e.g. Lan 1985). In the postcolonial era of the present, finally, state margins are absorbing and provisioning coup-plotters, insurgents and secessionists (Duncan Baretta and Markoff 1978:593-602, May 1992:145, note 61). Through all times, in addition, frontiers have served empires and nation-states as dumping places for undesirables; where penal colonies for criminals and dissidents were installed, public perceptions of the periphery as peopled by outlaws and the unruly were, in a rather ironical way, reinforced (see e.g. Bobrick 1992 and Forsyth 1992 on Siberia, Tyler 2003 on Xinjiang, Venkateswar 2004 on the Andaman Islands and Chappell 1993 on New Caledonia).

Most of all, however, the frontier is home to indigenous peoples with cultures, modes of production and social orders that are alien, if not totally illigible to the intruding society (see previous chapter). Indigenous modes of production are stigmatized as “primitive” and an epitome of underdevelopment (see e.g. Bodley 1990, Dove 1985, McCaskill 1997, Duncan 2004). The fact that many rainforest shifting cultivators, pastoralists, “sea gypsies” and land-based hunters-and-gatherers have so far at least in part eschewed effective administrative control and refused to submit to the modernizing imperative, has earned them the distrust and contempt of the elites of the nation-states claiming jurisdiction over their territories. Because they embody the historical possibility of autonomy and resilience to state rule, Anna Tsing (1993:101) explains,

”such groups have quietly become icons of the archaic disorder that represents the limits and test of state order and development. From the perspective of the elite, ‘primitives’, unlike communists, are not regarded as seriously dangerous but rather as wildly untutored – somewhat like ordinary village farmers, but much more so. Disorderly yet vulnerable, ‘primitives’ are relatively scarce, and their taming becomes an exemplary lesson in marginality through which the more advanced rural poor can be expected to position themselves nearer the center”.

The prescription, usually, is “development”, with the main aim of raising these groups’ level of “civilization” through social engineering (Duncan 2004:3)⁵⁹. Colonists (and sometimes other

58 In fact, the literature on many colonial frontiers shows that negative stereotypes were not only attached to indigenous people, but to certain groups among the non-native frontier society, as well. On Latin America’s cattle frontiers, for instance, the *llaneros*, *gauchos*, *charros* and other frontiersmen shared the Indians’ precarious moral and legal status as the landed elites and urban middle class regarded them as outcasts who did not belong to civilization (Duncan Baretta and Markoff 1978:593-599). Their later celebration as early incarnations of national virtues often stands in sharp contrast to the reality of their social exclusion at the hayday of frontier expansion.

59 The conclusion, however, that only when state elites embrace ultimately western notions of “development” will they cast indigenous peoples as “uncultured” and “primitive”, is erroneous. Orientalisms – phantasies about the mysterious otherness of non-western peoples – are not necessarily of European making. “Barbarians” – that is, societies constructed as being of lesser civility – have long peopled (and are very much still peopling nowadays) non-Caucasian frontier imaginings (see e.g. Tyler 2003:xi-xii and Harrell 1995 on China).

intruders to the frontier) have appropriated the developmentalist ideology of the state as part of their personal adaptive strategies (Little 2001:219f., Hvalkof 1989) and use it as a charter upon which an ethnic hierarchy can be established locally, with themselves on top and the indigenous at the bottom – creatures of nature whom the settler helps domesticate (Lopez 1986:108-111). It is one of the major ironies of the frontier as a sociological subject that a formerly powerless and socially marginal group – most, if not all settlers have left their former homes because of poverty and lack of perspectives – emancipates itself by putting another group, the indigenous, in its place. In their new surroundings, not only can colonists acquire relative economic prosperity, but the alchemy of conquest affords them a degree of power and prestige which they could never even dream of in their former lives⁶⁰. It is the existence in frontier lands of an indigenous “Other” lacking all signs of colonist-defined “civilization” which transforms yesterday’s social outcast into a person of considerable repute and influence.

The metonymic bond between “savage” autochthonous populations and “untamed nature” dates back for millenia, and so, of course, does the attribution of “wildness” to wayward frontier-dwellers (see e.g. Kristof 1959:270, Jennings 1975, Wolfskill and Palmer 1981:xi, Dentan 1992:226, Gray 2001:393, Peluso and Harwell 2001, Ludden 2003) The perilous qualities of the natural environment (life-threatening deserts, intractable rainforests, rugged mountains) that conquerors and explorers of all ages encountered are reflected in their perceptions of the human societies populating these wilds – uncultured, savage brutes with queer and often revulsive customs⁶¹ who have to be shunned or annihilated if one is to survive⁶². As indigenous peoples melt and become one with the hostile environment, subjugation rather than peaceful co-existence imposes itself as the logical course of action (Gordon 1992:210). Most scholars of frontier affairs agree that the demonization and reduction to inhuman status of native populations in the course of conquest has always had an important strategic dimension to it: by providing approval for behavior that would otherwise be considered immoral or illegal, it removes inhibitions against the use of deception, intimidation and violence as the most effective ways of appropriating indigenous land and resources (Jennings 1975, Wolfskill and Palmer 1981:xi, Bodley 1990:26-38, Dentan 1992:226, Sponsel 1995:268f., Gray 2001:393). By classifying the communities encountered as “backwards” and “primitive”, acts of expropriation become feats of civilizing mercy. By defining the frontier as a zone of legitimate intrusion and indigenous peoples as undeserving of human compassion, frontier society and its state backers create conditions conducive to a high level of violent ethnic conflict over contested resources. A direct and lethal connection, therefore, exists between the racist invective “*bugre*”

60 Historical parallels impose themselves. Many of the famous names in the history of colonialism experienced a phenomenal rise from dregs to kings thanks to their exploits overseas; the list includes, among others, Claudio Pizarro who, before leading the conquest of the Inka empire, had been a pig herdsman, and John Sutter, the domineering figure in the early phase of the settlement of California, had left his native Switzerland a bankrupt merchant.

61 Ironically, from the perspective of the “savage” autochthones, it is often the intruders who appear “savage” and dangerously anti-social. Thus, the Buhid of Mindoro (Philippines) suspect Christian lowlanders of secretly devouring human flesh (Gibson 1986:199), and the Waorani of the Ecuadorian Oriente have long held that mestizo settlers are cannibals (Yost 1981:697). Many Dayak in Indonesian Kalimantan periodically experience headhunting scares following rumours that government authorities have commissioned killers to hunt for heads (Tsing 1996:199-202). To many of the less warlike indigenous frontier-dwelling groups, outsiders are by nature predators who threaten them with irrational violence, leaving dispersal, hiding out and appeasement as the only options for survival (ibid.:190-195).

62 To some authors, the combination of a frightening natural environment and scary native inhabitants is the core criterion for the presence of a frontier. Thus, as Patricia Limerick (1987:25) has formulated, the moment when a physical frontier environment starts to attract rather than deter people, and the local “savages” are reconstructed as fascinating and picturesque, the frontier has expired.



Photo 9: where “civilization” meets “savagery”: lowland vendors deriding a Buhid marketgoer (squatting), Oriental Mindoro, Philippines, 1985 (photo: Christian Erni)

(“savage”), the settler term of reference for Native Amazonians in use in the Paulista West of Brazil in the 19th century, and the craft of the *bugreiro*, the professional Indian killer (Dean 1981:60), or between the label “vermin of the *veld*” for the Bushmen in the German colony of Southwest Africa, and the atrocities committed by settlers and the *Schutztruppe* when the colony was formed, and later when labour discipline had to be established on the farms (Gordon 1992)⁶³.

Today in most countries of the South, as military conquest is no longer a necessity, violence powered by dehumanizing stereotypes has become less frequent and conspicuous a feature of frontier relations. A globalized political correctness has removed the most blatant expressions of racism from the vocabulary of settler society and state administrators⁶⁴. Nevertheless, indigenous communities have undoubtedly remained a thorn in the side of most nations. Unless thoroughly reformed, national elites and, indeed, a large number of citizens are loathe to admit them into the “moral community of the nation” which defines itself through its embracement of “development”

63 Contemporary examples of savage settler strategies for frontier expansion are recounted in von Graeve 1989:46-59, 81-135; and Cowell 1990:93-135).

64 Yet, racism itself is still a phenomenon to be reckoned with in many places. In South America, for instance, racist contempt for indigenous people is rife in the bureaucracy and the general population alike. In Colombia, white urbanites can be heard regretting in private that the Spanish conquerors stopped short of exterminating indigenous peoples wholesale, confiding that they consider the survivors a liability for the country’s “development” (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2006c). In Ecuador, local-level civil servants of the Ecuadorian Institute for Agrarian Reform and Colonization (IERAC) refuse to carry out demarcation and land titling activities on behalf of the Shuar although required by law, justifying their obstruction with the argument that native “animals” are unworthy of any kind of state attention (Corry 1985:65).

and “modernity” (Wilmer 1993:64-67)⁶⁵. The legacy of the ascription of “backwardness” and “primitivity” and the various forms of exclusion that it mandates still has a powerful presence, as Duncan (2004:1) asserts for Southeast Asia: “Classifying minorities as primitives helps strip them of political identity and discourages them from participation in larger state projects”, and governments, he reminds us, “actively use these pejorative labels to exclude and deny autonomy to indigenous minorities at the same time as they can claim to be developing these populations”.

Let me now still turn to a final, generally less well appreciated aspect of the subtle cerebral dimensions of the frontier, with manifestations in the past and the present. Implicit in the notion that the indigenous inhabitants of the frontier are a part of nature is the conviction that they share in nature’s occult powers, derived from knowledge to which “civilized” man has no longer access. In many instances, it has been found that settler stereotypes identify indigenous people not merely as naïve and primitive rustics, but also as dangerous sorcerers and, depending on the particularities of the case, also people with unbroken warlike proclivities (see e.g. Murphy 1960:47, Lopez 1986:155f., 159, Gordon 1992:212-216, Tsing 1993:179). Their uninterrupted linkage with “traditional” culture and the jungle, desert or mountain environment at the same time makes them people to be despised and feared. The illegibility of the indigenous frontier-dweller’s knowledge, thus, becomes the source of its awful power – “the power”, as Tsing (1993:182) formulates for the South Kalimantan frontier, “of a black hole that [sucks] up civilized subjectivity, leaving unwary citizens defenseless”. Conversely – once more in Tsing’s lucid words – “literacy, piety, hygiene, bureaucracy – all [lose] their power in these backwood places” (ibid.).

The curious mixture of derision, disdain and awe with which frontiersmen perceive the indigenous “Other” is a manifestation of the pervasive “liminality” of frontier spaces. In the context of the study of religious rites for which it was developed, the term designates a threshold between two known cognitive states which correspond to an initiate’s former and future social being; as he passes from one to the other, he crosses a realm “*in* but not *of* the world”, where things are notoriously ambiguous and meanings shifting (Turner 1974). As “areas of dawn” (Kristof 1959:270) between the realm of darkness and unreason (the yet untouched native sanctuaries) and the heartland where state rule shines brightly, frontier spaces and all they contain embody liminality in the true sense of the word.

But how then, we may ask, do such lofty cognitive structures influence ground realities at the frontier? The ambiguity of the conquerors’ construction of their indigenous counterparts as both pathetically primitive and ignorant *and* dangerously powerful, I think, can fall both ways. It can, on one hand, counteract the usually superior leverage that intruders to the frontier enjoy in the competition for land and natural resources. Alternatively, it may amplify frontiersmen’s determination to violently pacify the perilous frontier, and remove rather than strengthen inhibitions against abuse, murder and genocide.

In several reported instances, indigenous people were able to turn the fact that settler society attributed mystical powers to them to their advantage. Fulcher’s (1983:112f.) account from East Kalimantan (Indonesia) documents that the threat to use such power may act as a deterrent against the theft of field fruits and moveable property, but also against land grabbing on the part of colonists. Javanese

⁶⁵ On the notion of the “moral community” in general and exclusion from access to it as a basis for differential treatment, see Opatow 1990.



Photo 10: where “civilization” meets “savagery”: Peru’s former president, Fujimori, posing in native garb together with a group of Yine (Piro), 1992 (photo: *Der Spiegel*)

transmigrants’ fear of black magic (*ilmu-ilmu*) – a practice widely attributed to the indigenous Benuaq and Tunjung Dayak in Fulcher’s research area – normally keeps them from “pressing complaints or potential conflicts too far” (ibid.:113). Every transmigrant can recite a string of cases of death, illness or misfortune in the settler community which he interprets as the result of revenge or anger on the part of the Dayak. The Dayak are careful not to deny such accusations. On occasion, they even take credit for deaths or illnesses in the settler camp, or make pointed threats, thereby manipulating Javanese fears of the mystic potency of indigenous frontier-dwellers (ibid.)⁶⁶. My own case study contribution in this volume on anti-settler violence in the western part of the same island comes to similar conclusions. When they furiously lashed out against the Madurese migrant minority in the late 1990s, the Dayak made productive the lingering trope of the unreformed Dayak headhunter which is part of the stigma of backwardness and primitivity that attaches to Borneo’s indigenous peoples to this day. By fashioning their attacks on the settlers in ways reminiscent of the headhunting practices of old, they tapped fears, still widespread in Borneo, of the occult powers of an ancient warrior culture. Rumours about terrifying instances of war magic greatly enhanced the efficacy of Dayak violence, as both government soldiers and the Madurese victims fell under their spell.

Rather than assuming that the ambiguous construction of the indigenous “Other” aids the latter in negotiations of power at the frontier, some authors suggest that it constitutes a basic condition for their cruel and sadistic repression, thus turning the frontier into an arena of terror (Taussig 1984,

66 For a South American example for the leveling of power differentials as a result of settler beliefs in indigenous magic, see Salomon 1983 (quoted in Atkinson 1992:315).

1987; Gordon 1992:212-220, Morris 1992) In his work on the interface between traumatic political histories and local forms of power and healing, Michael Taussig (1984, 1987) has shown how phantasies of the in-born savagery and the magical potency of the indigenous inhabitants of the Amazonian frontier provided the ground for atrocities and cruelty justified as self-defence on the part of settlers and planters. In a re-evaluation of the drama of rubber extraction in Peru's Putumayo region between 1900 and 1915, he finds that the systematic torture, starvation, and execution of indigenous labourers was driven by the managers' and foremen's deep-seated fear of acts of treason, ambushes and attacks by indigenous locals which colonial representations had stereotyped as war-mongering cannibals (Taussig 1984:492f.). A cross-cultural "trade in terrifying mythologies and fictional realities" established the frontier as a "space of death" where the "metamorphosing images of evil" which the planters entertained of the indigenous "Other" became "a social force of horrendous and phantasmic dimensions" (ibid.:492, 494). Taussig's impressions from the Peruvian frontier in the days of the rubber boom are of immediate applicability to many present-day frontiers elsewhere where in an air of "magical realism", the violence of the present feeds on phantastic narratives of past violence and savagery (Tsing 1996:188).

6.1.6 Tendency of resource management on the part of the intruding society to be wasteful and destructive

The main allure of the frontier are the great financial windfalls to be made there, when only production costs, but not the costs for the replacement of a diminished natural resource have to be taken into consideration. "Resource consumerism" and an exploit-and-move-on mentality are the hallmark of the economic rationality guiding most types of non-native frontier actors (Colombijn 1997:315f.). Blinded by the illusion of an inexhaustible resource supply, frontier interlopers select what biologists have called "fugitive strategies", behaving in ways similar to those described for non-human species when they occupy new ecological niches (see MacArthur and Wilson 1967:82, cited in Margolis 1977:42, 58ff.). Through such strategies which prime the flexible, rapid and distinctly temporary exploitation of local potentials, as Anna Tsing (2005:38) has noted with characteristic irony, "natural treasures themselves become fugitive", flowing out via unpaved logging roads and improvised landing pads. Frontiers attract rent-seeking, south-based national elites and corporate interests from the industrialized north, who benefit from the absence of clearly-defined and officially-enforced property rights. Nowhere else in the national territory are resource rents captured so painlessly (Barbier 2005a:324). Ruthless disregard for future economic prospects in the locales targeted for exploitation is evident with extractive industries like mines (Howard 1988, 1994/95, MacMillan 1995, Howitt, Connell and Hirsch, eds., 1996, Ballard and Banks 2003), oil companies (Haller et al., eds., 2000) and logging businesses (Dañguilan Vitug 1993) which can operate without the environmental and social constraints imposed on them in metropolitan areas. Construed as wilderness devoid of human (i.e. "civilized") habitation, and far removed from the homes of the urban elite, frontier ecosystems are considered dispensable; the fact that they have repeatedly been selected for hazardous experiments with military technology bears this out dramatically. Only recently, Brazil's government revealed that in the era of military rule (1964-1985) the army had secretly entertained a nuclear program which foresaw tests in the eastern Amazon (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2005d; on nuclear testing in the Taklamakan desert of China's Xinjiang province, see Tyler 2003:151, 153).

To say that the nature of the frontier as a *zone of deregulated exploitative activity* has severe environmental impacts is to state the obvious. As resources are mined in this "dusty battle of man

against man, and of man against his environment” (Edgerton 1983:159), frontier ecosystems are often irrevocably destroyed, in some cases with far-reaching and catastrophic consequences that make themselves felt at a regional and even global level (Sponsel 1995:266). Locally, once-intact forests, tundras and mountain fastnesses become the scene of environmental disasters normally associated with densely-settled areas, threatening resident human communities with mudslides, insect pests, floods and droughts, depending on the season. Deforestation in tropical rainforest habitats is among those instances of environmental depredations at the frontier that have received the widest attention (see e.g. Hurst 1990, Colchester and Lohmann, eds., 1993, DeKoninck 1998).

The resource-use patterns of settler agriculturalists have often been found to be unsustainable and therefore an undisputable factor in resource depletion and deforestation at the frontier (Margolis 1977, Pichón 1996, 1997, Sierra 1999, Cassels, Curren and Cramer 2005). The land-use practices of “shifted cultivators” – migrants to the frontier – can generally be said to be improvident and destructive compared with those of native shifting cultivators, although forestry laws and policing practices continue to persecute the latter for the harm that they are said to bring to forests and the sensitive catchment areas of rivers (for a recent assessment of the adaptivity of shifting cultivation, see *Indigenous Affairs* 2/2005, edited by Christian Erni). Being generally unfamiliar with non-intensive agricultural techniques, settlers are forced to be opportunistic in their use of resources, with the result that forests are quickly denuded and soils degraded (Browder 1995, Begossi 1998, Tyler 1999:266f.). In rainforest environments, plough-based, intensive agriculture is unsuitable because the soil is nutrient-poor and quickly leached-out once the protective forest cover has been removed. Furthermore, in contrast to forest-dwelling indigenous people who have the knowledge required for selecting more fertile areas and avoiding less productive soils, settlers usually lack such selective ability (Goodland 1982:18). In his work on the Brazilian Amazon, Adrian Cowell (1990:124) has aptly captured the average colonist’s disorientation as he/she is forced to cope with the jungle environment at the pioneer frontier:

“(…) I began to think of the colonists (…) as people walking backwards into the forest. They were entering a completely new environment, but the colonists barely seemed to look at it. When a colonist arrived at his title-deeded rectangle of virgin *hilaea*, what he saw was a European-type farm, which he had usually left behind in the south of Brazil, and which he could regain here in Amazonia, if only he could get the tropical vegetation off it”.

Typical, too, is it for settlers to have an expansionist attitude that prioritizes the clearing of new land over conserving the fertility of plots already cultivated. Such an attitude fails to consider the long-term effects of resource extraction (Pichón 1997, World Bank 1992a). Various writers have blamed environmental degradation in pioneer zones on the settlers’ supposedly footloose lifestyles, lack of deep-rooted ties to the land, and, as a consequence, a lack of concern for sustaining its fertility (see e.g. Bowman 1931, Allen 1959).

However, in discussing the sustainability of settler agriculture, we must guard ourselves against brazen generalizations and purely mentalistic explanations. Migrants’ time horizons in frontier locales and their readiness to invest labour and capital in measures that limit the erosion and restore the fertility of farm plots seem to depend crucially on their relative affluence or poverty, and on the type of agriculture practiced by them. A third factor, finally, seems to be whether or not a region’s supply of available land allows farmers to evade the consequences of land degradation by moving away.



Photo 11: “the dusty battle of man against his environment”: abandoned gold mine, Davao del Norte, Mindanao, 1995 (photo: Danilo Geiger)

The poor and the hungry have more reason to over-harvest and degrade their environments than the more affluent farmers whose immediate consumption needs are not so pressing; they find themselves locked in a downward spiral of environmental degradation that leads to increased poverty (Leonard 1989). Poverty may also drive lowland cultivators to become so-called “truck farmers”, linking their fates to urban-based frontier entrepreneurs who ferry them on trucks to the primary forest, equipping them with chainsaws for felling trees and seeds for planting along the roads that loggers drove into the forest. Albeit not producing for their own sustenance, such indentured labourer-settlers are notorious for the destructivity of their slash-and-burn practices (Dove 1988:16).

Furthermore, cash-crop farming has a much worse environmental record than subsistence production. Only where migrants produce for regional and international markets, thus adding a second factor to the general frontier condition of vast “available” cultivable lands, does the mix of incentives for overuse become devastating in the aggregate. The Buginese pepper-farming migrants at the East Kalimantan frontier (Indonesia) are a case in point. Vayda and Sahur (1985:105f.) characterize the rationality of their resource management practices as directed to the sole aim of profitable production. Because the average Buginese pepper farmer is a transient cultivator, moving to wherever new forest has been opened, he is not hemmed in by considerations for the long- or even short-term maintenance of the soil fertility of particular plots

of land. Buginese cash-crop-cultivating pioneers stand in sharp contrast to local peasant farmers and Dayak shifting cultivators “who, dependent on local resources and having no appreciable mobility, try to avoid destroying these resources and, in the process, destroying themselves” (ibid.:106). Often in history, cash-crop cultivators were the main agents of frontier expansion and its attendant environmental consequences; examples are the Amazonian rubber boom at the beginning of the 20th century, the forest-devouring palmoil plantation economy in Southeast Asia (ongoing since the 1980s), and recently the spectacular advance of soybean production from Brazil’s savanna belt into the Amazon – a development which environmental activists and researchers have identified as being the single biggest hazard presently threatening the region’s rainforests (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2003a)⁶⁷.

The extent to which settlers practice opportunistic and unsustainable forms of land-use, finally, depends crucially on their opportunities for mobility (Margolis 1977:47). In so-called “old” or “mature” frontiers (see Amanor 1994), these opportunities are severely restricted, as all fertile and large tracts even of more marginal lands are already occupied. When the costly transfer to still active colonization fronts outside the region is the only available “exit” option, migrants have to reconcile themselves to the perspective of staying on the plot and maximizing its potentials in a longer-term perspective. Thus hemmed in, many *colonos* living along the Transamazon highway in the Brazilian state of Pará have in recent years started to experiment with natural forest management and small-scale agroforestry. They have developed novel, hybrid agricultural knowledge systems, brokered by long-established *caboclo* backwoodsmen, which put them in a position to break with the maladaptive and unsustainable “fugitive” land-use practices embraced by earlier generations of settlers (see Campos, this volume).

The more critical among human ecologists have taken pains to demonstrate that it is not so much “frontier values” which make pioneer settlers indifferent to the long-term consequences of their behavior, but a particular set of economic and ecological conditions which normally prevail at the frontier. Given the fact that a) labour and capital are in short supply in pioneer settings, limiting soil conservation options on established plots; b) often, plots deeper in the frontier interior can be opened up which guarantee – at least for the immediate future – higher yields than the degraded plots; and c) market prices are highly unstable, prompting cash-crop-growing pioneers to maximize output at the cost of soil exhaustion (and areal expansion), settler land-use practices, however deleterious, are in fact rational economic adaptations (Margolis 1977:43-47, 50ff.).

A similar re-evaluation has occurred with regards to the role played by state policies and policy orientations in a broader sense, and several authors have demonstrated the great historical depth and geographical ubiquity of state-sponsored deforestation by supposedly independent pioneers. Thus, pre-modern agrarian states in Asia depended in a near absolute manner on the promotion of

67 Forest conversion by soy planters is so rapid that the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama estimates that by 2020, the forests in the Amazon may be diminished by 40% on account of it (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2003a). The indirect fall-out of the soy boom may be just as fearful, as the main producer, Brazil, seeks a road connection through so-far untouched areas that will link it with coastal ports on Peru’s Pacific coast, and thence to China, the main consumer of Brazilian soy (*The Economist* 2005:53). In recent years, the expansion of soy cultivation was also due to the crop’s versatility, serving both as food and biofuel. Energy demands in the US and Europe are currently driving a worldwide boom of liquid biofuels. Increasing amounts of the world’s wheat, corn, sugarcane, jatropha and palm oil production are used as carburants in the name of a low carbon solution to climate change. In tropical forest countries, a substantial part of current deforestation rates has to be blamed on plantation expansion for biofuel production (see my discussion of the issue in chapter 10).

intensive agriculture and the clearing of forests (Dove 1985, 1988, Ludden 2003). To establish and consolidate their realms, the rulers had to push back the jungle and arrondate more taxable subjects, i.e. wet rice cultivators. Forests were associated with metaphysical and political danger; clearing them to make farms became a “quintessential imperial project” (Ludden 2003:n.p.g.), and was exalted as the ultimate civilizing act (Dove 1985:12-21). These ancient agrarian ideologies resonate in contemporary civil servants’ perceptions of the rainforest as an ecological type and human habitat (*ibid.*; 1988:21f.). Similarly, Ledec and Goodland (1989:450) posit for Latin America that in many states, forest clearing and the conquest of the frontier are “great symbols of progress”, and thus have become “important policy objectives in their own right”. The authors illustrate their case with the developmentalist discourse of the Brazilian authorities from the 1970s to the 1980s, who propagated the Amazon’s transformation from a “Green Hell” into a “civilized” landscape, calling the disappearance of the great forests “our moon shot” (*ibid.*:450f., quoting Myers 1979:138).

The case of indigenous swidden cultivators excepted, it has been a very recent phenomenon that states punish their citizens for destroying the forest; more often, they have rewarded them. State-organized frontier colonization has often set out direct incentives to pioneers for removing primary forest cover, either in the form of monetary rewards or legal title to the land cleared. Latin American legislation is exemplary in this respect: Here, the majority of the land area in frontier zones is legally available for homesteading. In order to acquire formal or informal usufruct rights to a piece of land, claimants have to demonstrate their actual use of it. One of the clearest and strongest demonstrations of active land use that the law recognizes is the elimination of natural forest (Jones 1990, Pichón 1996:348).

As word of the havoc wrought by frontier expansion in the world’s tropical forests is spreading and culprits need to be identified, many national governments are publicly holding settlers responsible (Colchester 1993a:4). Most authoritative studies on deforestation, however, disagree, shifting the blame to more powerful actors. They contend that, while forests are primarily lost through clearance by impoverished migrants, the main cause of degradation has been uncontrolled logging, an extractive activity that happens at the behest or with the implicit approval of state authorities (*ibid.*:4; Myers 1991:2; Goodland et al. 1990:4, World Bank 1992b:20f.). Besides, many states’ direct sponsorship of frontier migration and others’ “laissez-faire” attitudes towards it have brought the settlers to the forests in the first place – a policy that is motivated foremost by the desire to leave the skewed distribution of land in core areas undisturbed (Colchester 1993a:5ff.). The role of the migrant in deforestation, therefore, is today more controversially debated than when postcolonial frontiers were still young, and negative and positive ascriptions – those of “villains” and “victims” (see again Campos 2008) – are currently battling for hegemony.

6.1.7 Tendency for economic relations between intruders and indigenous inhabitants to be predatory or, at the least, based on unequal exchange

At the frontier, an intruding society tries to bring itself into the possession of resources – be it land or the natural wealth below or above the soil – belonging to another society (see e.g. Lattimore

1962b:25, 37, Willems 1977:259, Hennessy 1981:12, Wolfskill and Palmer 1981:x). Frontiers are theatres of accumulation; to the extent that the things accumulated do already have owners who do not want to part with their property, they are arenas of dispossession. On the world's many settlement frontiers past and present, millions of hectares of land have passed from indigenous into colonist hands through force, threat, cunning and deceit. In the course of this "Great Terrain Robbery", indigenous communities were either physically obliterated, herded into reservations or pushed back to areas that were too distant or too uninteresting for colonists to penetrate. Today, as most nation-states have established at least tenuous military control over their indigenous fringes, the use of violence in the contest for land is usually left to the individual colonist⁶⁸. Thus, in the mid-1980s in the Brazilian state of Maranhão, settler attacks on Indian villages within the state's many reserves – and Indian retributions in their wake – were reported almost weekly, plunging the area into actual range wars that were driven by the colonists' thirst for land (Schröder 1993:109-135). At the same time, 2000 kms to the west of Maranhão at the frontlines of colonist expansion in the Brazilian Amazon, land speculators were known to hire professional Indian hunters to kill members of uncontacted tribes occupying territory that was about to be opened by a road (Cowell 1990:106ff.)⁶⁹.

But by and large, in most contemporary situations, settlers and other frontier interlopers can avail themselves of means of acquiring land that stop short of brute force. Taking Palawan island in the Philippines as an example, the modalities for land transactions across the ethnic boundary range from the occupation of fallow swidden plots with or without compensation to the confiscation of a piece of land as a collateral for a bad debt (pawning of land), the retention – usually against the will of the owner – of land originally rented or borrowed, and formal land sales (Lopez 1986:104-107). The native Palaw'an in most cases bitterly resent the usurpation of their land and deny the justness of most transactions, but they are afraid of the tensions that refusals are bound to create, and are intimidated by the settlers' *reputation* for violence (ibid.:106f.). The "skillful presentation of the settler self" as embodying "modernity" and knowing to deal with and manipulate "the government" and "law" ensures in day-to-day interaction that the Palaw'an accept and internalize the hierarchical ordering of entitlements to land and other resources (ibid.:108-117). The legal situation at the time of the Palawan research was such that it formally put migrants and indigenous people at par, requiring that they formalize their land claims through the acquisition of different sorts of patents (to parts of the "public domain") or title (to land classified as "alienable and disposable"). The field thus was leveled against the indigenous who lacked both the knowledge of the procedures and the financial means to acquire such documents. Therefore, far from being the effect of the use of threats and force on the part of the settler population only, the establishment of settler communities at the cost of the original indigenous inhabitants on southern frontiers often is the composite result of state legislation that eases outsiders' access to the critical factor of production (land), a political economy (export-oriented, commercial agriculture) that prioritizes settler production strategies over indigenous ones, and the creative use of superior links to local nodes of power by the settlers themselves. Maria Elena Lopez (1986:85-121; 1987) has offered the poignant term "*integrated*

68 While this is the general trend, counter-examples do exist, concerning indigenous peoples involved in protracted rebellions, such as a number of Burmese minorities and certain sections of the peoples of the Cordillera in the Philippines. In these cases, it can be argued, we are presently still witnessing state campaigns of military conquest motivated (at least partly) by the desire to secure access to so far uncontrolled land and natural resources. For such an argumentation, see Bryant 1996, 2001 on the Burmese Karen.

69 Cowell investigated in the Serra dos Pacaas Novos in Rondônia, and the people concerned were the Uru Eu Wau Wau.



Photo 12: “take what you could while the getting is good”: logging truck between Nabire and Monamani, West Papua, 1996 (photo: Danilo Geiger)

displacement” for all those situations where the outcome of land contests between intruders and indigenous communities is prejudiced by legal and political conditions that systematically or by malevolent indifference favor the former.

Still, when talking of the allure of the frontier, it would be misleading to put too exclusive a stress on land and natural resources. Manpower, as well, was and is a coveted resource, as it is in equally short supply in these thinly-populated areas. As studies on slavery and serfdom have shown, it is precisely the combination of scarce labor and relative land abundance – typical of the frontier – which is most likely to produce highly coercive forms of labour control (Domar 1970, quoted in Duncan Baretta and Markoff 1978:602). On many modern frontiers, the settler economy thrives on unpaid or underpaid indigenous labour (Dentan 1992:227, Anti-Slavery International and IWGIA, eds., 1997, Hvalkof 1998). Exploitative trade relations where patrons and trader middlemen use fraudulent measurements or threats to force unfavourable terms of trade on their indigenous trading “partners”, are commonplace. Asymmetrical trade and exploitative labour relations between settler patrons and indigenous clients are often couched in terms that invoke the intimacy of real or ritual kinship. Thus, in Mindoro, Philippines, lowland settlers commonly use the term ‘*sandugo*’ (Tagalog for “of one blood”, “bloodbrother”) to address their Buhid clients, in the calculated hope of forcing them to accede to their terms of trade, continue exclusive trade relations with them and pay back “debts” incurred in earlier exchanges or while working in their fields (Gibson 1990:130, Erni, this volume). Bondage engineered by settler patrons has been reported in recent years from Southeast Asia (see e.g. Legaspi, Haygood and Santos 1997 on the *tabong* system in Quezon province and the Mt. Pinatubo area in the Philippines), South Asia (Robertson 1997 on the *kamaiya* system in Nepal’s Terai) and the Amazon (Hvalkof 1998 on the continuing reality of debt bondage and slave



Photo 13: exploitative labour relations: Buhid man carrying load for cattle rancher, Occidental Mindoro, 1985 (photo: Danilo Geiger)

raids in the Ucayali area, Peru). It is no exaggeration to claim that in the institutional vacuum of the frontier, feudal bondage and predatory forms of capitalism are left free reign, challenging our idea of the sweeping reach of the “civilizing” forces of modernity.

Any discussion of predatory economic relations in frontier settings would remain incomplete if it omitted the violent contradictions at the heart of settler society. In fact, some of the most impressive works on land conflicts at state peripheries focus entirely on conflicts between smallholder settlers on one side, and the large landowners, bureaucrats and hired thugs arrayed against them (see e.g. Foweraker 1981, Schmink 1982 and 1988 on the Brazilian Amazon). Typically, the unequal access to land in the settlers’ areas of origin – the condition that they wanted to leave behind in the first place – follows them to the frontier, as they come into conflict with a wealthy class of ranchers or agribusiness operators wishing to transform the forests into grazing land for cattle or monocrop plantations. On most colonization fronts in the Amazon (see e.g. Scudder 1989:xiv-xv, Schmink 1982 and 1988, Schmink and Wood 1987) and partly also in Southeast Asia (see e.g. Pelzer 1945:134, DeKoninck and Déry 1997:3f.), pioneer smallholders are the ones who take the hazards of opening an area for cultivation, but rarely reap the longer-term benefits of doing so. In the Brazilian Amazon, the pattern is that of large landowners and cattle ranchers terrorizing pioneer settlers into leaving their plots, using gunmen and availing themselves of the silent or active support of the police and state authorities (Foweraker 1981, Branford and Glock 1985). If,

indeed, the slogan “Land for the Killer” (Monbiot 1993:152) – an ironic adaptation of a battle cry popular among peasant syndicates the world over – should capture the essence of the accumulation of landed property at the frontier, we must not forget that the victims are to be found on both sides of the ethnic divide.

6.1.8 Failure of the state to establish or credibly assert its claim to the monopoly of violence

To assert that violence is only legitimate if employed by the state and its organs is the hallmark of established states – indeed, it has in past decades and sometimes centuries been the main justification for putting an end to tribal feuding and warfare at the frontier (see e.g. Rodman 1983). In reality, however, many present-day states in the Southern hemisphere are either unable or unwilling to control violence in frontier areas⁷⁰, in spite of the fact that they administer them more or less regularly and have eliminated serious challenges to their rule. A second group of states have yet to get to the point of ruling unchallenged, as ethnic insurgents or revolutionaries in the heartland refuse to accept domination under current dispensations. At frontiers, an unusual number of individuals and groups have access to military skills and military tools (Duncan Baretta and Markoff 1978:593); predictably, they are rife with violence from varying sources, employed for the most diverse reasons⁷¹. The following vignette of the situation in Bukidnon province in North-Central Mindanao, Philippines, in the early 1980s, will serve to illustrate this:

“Philippine Army and Constabulary soldiers were everywhere, tearing around in ramshackle jeeps, Civilian Home Defence Forces (CHDF)⁷² encamp for training on random hillsides, New People’s Army (NPA)⁷³ ‘night visitors’ haunt barrios as well as the dreams of the rich (who hire armed guards and accumulate small but lethal arsenals with the help of soldiers willing to sell their armalites⁷⁴ for P. 1.500⁷⁵), armed sects terrorise *barrios* in the south, Manobos and Bukidnons (the two ‘tribal minorities’ in the province) conduct sporadic raids in retaliation for the loss of their lands to settlers and agribusiness, Army renegades or ‘Lost Commands’ maraud along the southern border, and bandits – posing as NPA, Army, or ‘Lost Commands’ – still further confuse this picture of growing violence and insecurity” (Edgerton 1983:151).

Thus, frontier violence may, *firstly*, be the corollary of an ongoing armed conquest of frontier peoples who refuse to submit to the rule of the centre. In Burma’s frontier regions, for instance, indigenous minorities have for the most part of the 60 years since the country’s independence been in open rebellion against a succession of military governments who failed to deliver on promises of ethnic autonomy. The fighting has taken a horrible toll of lives both among the insurgent groups

70 Tellingly, an often-quoted single-criterion definition of frontiers is Duncan Baretta’s and Markoff’s (1978:590) who describe them as “places where no one has an enduring monopoly of violence”.

71 For America’s Trans-Mississippi-West, Richard White (1991b:328-351) has provided an overview of prevalent types of violence which can serve as a guidepost for the systematic research of forms of violence at contemporary frontiers in the developing world; he distinguishes personal violence; vigilante violence; social banditry; race riots; economic conflict; class conflict; and ethnic genocide. In a clear break with conventional frontier historiography, he stresses the central place of institutionalized violence by the military against Native Americans at the cost of violence between pioneers (and between pioneers and criminal outlaws) in defence of rights, person and property. For critical studies of the subject, see also Slotkin 1973, 1992; Hine and Faragher 2000, Hoeffle 2004.

72 A civilian auxiliary force recruited and armed by the military, known for its gruelling human rights record.

74 The armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), fighting since the late 1960s against unequal land distribution and political oppression.

74 An automatic rifle, the standard army weapon in the Philippines in the 1980s.

75 Corresponding to US\$ 30 at today’s rate.

and the armed forces; a Wa rebel leader, for instance, estimated in 1986 that since the onset of the war on Wa territory 18 years earlier, one in four of the Wa population may have died from it (Smith 1991:423). The brutality of state-building against a defiant indigenous periphery is also evidenced by the recent campaign of joint Laotian and Vietnamese forces for the annihilation of an estimated 15,000-20,000 Hmong fugitives in the mountainous jungles of Saisombum in Laos. Reports document air bombardments and cruel mop-up operations by ground troops that have included massacres (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2006b:7). The Hmong are considered traitors by the Laotian state, because during the Vietnam war, many of them had taken part in American operations against the Ho-Chi-Minh trail and the communist Pathet Lao.

Not always, however, are the forces in frontier violence arrayed in neat juxtaposition of unsubdued or resurgent indigenous polities on one side, and the state – plus, possibly, groups representing its ethnic core – on the other. Where states lack other means, they may seek the help of “martial” indigenous communities to advance state-building, trade or geo-political objectives, tapping their fighting force either as sovereign allies or as a regular or irregular part of its military forces. Alliance-building and “ethnic soldiering” – Ferguson and Whitehead’s (2000b:21 ff.) term for tribal mercenary operations under the tutelage of a state – represent the *second* distinct pattern of frontier violence.

A famous colonial example of state alliances with independent indigenous peoples was the grooming of Native American communities in 17th and 18th century Northeastern America by the British and the French. Edged on by their European partners, the peoples of the Iroquois League and their adversaries such as the Neutral, Erie and Huron plunged headlong into murderous warfare, in the course of which the last-named of these groups was all but obliterated (Trigger 1976, Wolf 1982:163-170, Blick 1988:659f., Berger 1991:54-65, Abler 2000). A contemporary variation of the theme is the almost mechanical trans-boundary support which many governments in Southeast Asia and Africa lend to indigenous insurgencies in neighbouring countries with which they have an axe to grind. In the 1980s, for example, India has provided funding and arms to the Shanti Bahini rebels in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, while Bangladesh propped up the Naga rebellion in India’s north-east (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2000, Egreteau 2006:91-146).

“Ethnic soldiering”, too, is a time-honed practice of contemporary relevance for the world’s frontiers. A number of European colonial states and later many independent states in the former colonial domains depended – and partly still depend – on irregular forces recruited among politically marginal indigenous groups to help them subdue other indigenous groups, reign in non-indigenous minorities or lend their support for fighting insurgencies and insurrections among majority populations. Examples from the colonial era include the Mundurucú of Pará, Brazil, feared raiders and headhunters who enjoyed the well-deserved reputation of selling their military talents to whoever was willing to pay for it (Murphy 1957:1026). Since the beginning of the 19th century, their clients were primarily *bandeirantes* – private expeditionaries to Brazil’s interior, organized and equipped by wealthy entrepreneurs – who paid the Mundurucú to combat and “remove” hostile Indians from areas thought to be rich in gold and brazilwood or abundant in prospective Indian slaves. These *bandeiras*, albeit private undertakings, when not directly ordered by the government,

were encouraged and protected by the local authorities, and usually carried an official royal letter (Moog 1964:94). In the private Bornean colony of the “White rajahs”, James and Charles Brooke, the use of tribal fighting forces in wars of pacification was standard practice. In an act of duplicity bizzare enough to alarm the Foreign Office in London, the government of the colony of Sarawak usually punished headhunters by ordering other headhunters to cut off their heads. Until 1935, the Brooke *rajahs* routinely employed Iban troops for their military expeditions not only against rebellious Iban and Kayan groups in upriver areas, but also in the event of the occasional Chinese uprising. Iban irregulars were paid “in kind” with booty and the temporary lifting of the ban against the taking of heads (Uchibori 1984:225f., Maxwell 1996:111f., Pringle 1970, Wagner 1972).

“Ethnic soldiers” of tribal background that assist postcolonial states in the bloody business of state-building are an outstanding feature in Sudan’s frontier politics. Thus, when the regime of Sadik al-Mahdi – in power from 1986 to 1989 – revived its efforts to defeat the insurgency of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) in the country’s non-Arab south, it armed and fielded the Baqara, pastoral nomads from the border to northern Sudan, against the Dinka, the main ethnic support base of the SPLA⁷⁶ (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2004c). With the Baqara tribes of the Misseriya and Riziqat exploiting their newly-won military supremacy, the usual skirmishes between them and their Dinka neighbours soon took the form of “genocide-like persecution” of the latter in the province of Bahr al-Ghazal (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2001), and of massacres in Darfur (Schmidinger 2005:199). The name of the latter province, meanwhile, became a chiffre for a state’s ruthless employment of non-state violence in pursuit of geo-strategic objectives. Disgruntled by the government’s exclusive focus on South Sudan – it had set out to sign a peace agreement and divide the revenues from the South’s rich oil reserves with the southerners –, two local rebel groups surfaced in 2003, demanding a similar agreement for Darfur. The background to the rebellion in Darfur were claims that the government had pushed the area’s Black African population out of jobs in the administration, and the realization that without the threat of violence, the proceeds from Darfur’s oil would all go to Khartoum (*The Economist* 2004a:22). Worried that rebel successes in Darfur might inspire other marginalized groups in the north and east, the government unleashed the *Janjawid*⁷⁷, pastoral nomads from Baqara tribes such as the Bani Hussein and Bani Helba. Armed by the government and equipped with a brief to ride south and pillage SPLA territory, the *Janjawid* “clattered into village after [Black] African village, torching the straw roofs of conical huts, killing young men who might join the rebels, raping women who might feed them, and stealing everything they might carry off” (ibid.). Although the government denied it had a hand in the attacks, there could be no doubt that the ferocious horsemen were the instruments of a gruesome campaign of “ethnic cleansing”, aiming at cutting the rebels off of support from Darfur’s Black African sedentary population (the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa) and, as most political observers agreed, advancing its aim to “arabize” the non-Arab parts of the country (Schmidinger 2005:199). In mid-2004, independent sources estimated that of West Darfur’s 1.9 mio inhabitants, 600.000 were internally displaced, 200.000 had fled to Chad, while 500.000 remained unaccounted for. Disaster relief organisations put the casualty figure for those killed by violence, hunger and disease at 100.00-350.000 (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2004b), prompting the UN to make comparisons with the Rwandan genocide of 1994 (*The*

76 The Baqara already figure prominently in accounts of the Mahdi uprising in the 1880s, indicating the historical depth of many local and regional complexes of indigenous warfare in the service of a state. Fielded against Turco-Egyptian and later Egyptian and British troops, the Baqara were responsible for particularly devastating and gruesome raids (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2001).

77 According to one source, this arabic term combines the words for “demon” (*jinn*) with that for a racehorse (*jawad*), pointing to the victims’ perception of attacks by demons on horseback (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2004c).

Economist 2004a:22).

Ethnic soldiering is, however, not restricted to Africa, where most of the world's frailest states are located and regular armies can, to some extent, be expected to get beefed up with tribal militia. Thus, Indonesia for instance, long treated as an aspiring "Asian tiger" for what the world took to be its stunning development successes, marked the start of its steepest economic advance with two years of slaughter, part of which was the massacre of an estimated 300 to 700 (according to some sources – see e.g. Peterson 1968:21 – up to 2000) Chinese in West Kalimantan. The perpetrators of the outrage that took place in October and November 1967 and forced one third of the province's Chinese population to vacate the hinterland, were Dayak. Stirred up by army-instigated rumours of Chinese atrocities against Dayak, mobs systematically raided Chinese residents and hunted down supposed insurgents⁷⁸. Only after President Suharto's resignation in 1998 was it possible for scholars to openly investigate the puzzling⁷⁹ events. The facts that have come to light since point to a mercenary operation orchestrated by the military and brokered by a former Dayak governor who wanted to win favors with the new regime (Geiger 1999, Somers Heidhues 2001, Davidson 2002, Davidson and Kammen 2002, Geiger, forthcoming). Moreover, the historical records suggest a long tradition of ethnic soldiering by the Malayic Dayak and the Land Dayak of the area, implicating the Malay sultans, Chinese gold mining cooperatives (*kongsi*) and the Dutch colonial overlords as sponsors (see Geiger 2004b).

A *third* manifestation of violence typical for frontier regions – referred to in the quote on the conditions in Mindanao that started this sub-chapter – is connected with insurgencies of a non-ethnic character which usually center around the demand for redistributive justice and a new social order to buttress it. Their relative inaccessibility for the state apparatus makes frontier areas the ideal operation base for revolutionaries, demanding difficult decisions from the local indigenous and settler populations. In countries as wide apart as the Ivory Coast, the Philippines and Colombia, we can see the state locked in a battle for territorial control and the allegiance of sometimes large sections of its citizenry. Where it wages counter-insurgency warfare, the state itself becomes the source of routine violence that affects the entire frontier zone and all its inhabitants⁸⁰.

A *fourth* major pattern of conflict is apparent at the frontier in which the state is not a principal protagonist. Frequently, different ethnic groups – some native to the area, others newcomers – are

78 At the time, Sarawak-based communist rebels operated in the vicinity of West Kalimantan's border with Malaysia. These rebels, once supported against Malaysia by the country's left-leaning founding president, Sukarno, fell from grace as Sukarno himself was deposed by a military coup in the wake of a failed communist conspiracy. When it became evident that the army's efforts to track down the insurgents came to naught, the pressure on the rural Dayak communities to get involved in the routing of these "enemies of state" mounted considerably.

79 In the conflict area, the relations between the greater part of the resident indigenous populations and the Chinese were free of the tensions reported from many other Southeast Asian frontiers. One of the reasons for this anomaly can probably be seen in the fact that the majority of the Chinese in West Kalimantan were farmers rather than traders and moneylenders, and thus were not exposed to the periodic charges of usury and exploitation as is the fate of Chinese middlemen minorities elsewhere in the region.

80 The same, of course, holds true for the violence perpetrated by the insurgency movements. Indeed, in the view from the state's margins, anti-state violence and violence by soldiers and police are often merged and their respective operators lumped together in the same moral category. The perspective from the frontier, then, may stress that armed outsiders, irregardless of their mandate, are unpredictable, predatory interlopers who can only be placated or fled (see e.g. Tsing 1996:190-195).

pitted against each other in a contest for language rights, access to land and jobs, administrative privileges and stakes in the distribution of political power. While many of these conflicts feature indigenous people on one side and settlers on the other, others lack this “sons-of-the-soil” component, involving indigenous groups on both sides (see e.g. Asian Centre for Human Rights 2005 on the clashes between the Karbi and Dimas in Karbi Anglong District, Assam, and Banerjee and Athparia 2004 on the violence between Kuki and Naga in Northeast India). The fact that in the latter case, the antagonists are all of tribal extraction, does not temper the ferocity with which these conflicts are fought (*ibid.*). Some states have apparently reconciled themselves to a situation of “durable disorder” (Baruah 2005), where insurgent groups are mushrooming, nourished by contacts to mainstream political parties and finances siphoned off from governance contracts and development funds. Ethnic violence is allowed to erupt periodically in raids and counter-raids, political murders and massacres (*ibid.*:3). In India’s Northeast, states political scientist Sanjib Baruah (Baruah 2002:4178), “militant organisations play as important a role as the institutions of the state in the performance of certain key functions” that are usually reserved for the latter – “guaranteed public order” being foremost among them. The “pervasive culture of militancy” in the region is the result of the fact that the state is not seen as a reliable provider of security by most citizens, a gap which ethnic militia help to fill. As an ethnic group must feel threatened by a rival group’s organizing of an armed force for ‘national liberation’, it has to form its own armed militant group (*ibid.*:4179f.). This situation – political science calls it the “security dilemma” – is at the root of the proliferation of “liberation armies” in the region⁸¹ (*ibid.*:4180).

Where indigenous insurgencies are “nativist” in orientation, i.e. directed against settler populations, states usually side with the latter and stimulate the formation of settler militia or, where these are already existing, fight the rebels in joint operations with them – thus giving rise to a *fifth* distinct mode of frontier violence (see e.g. Fearon and Laitin 2001:18-25). Settler militia operating in cahoots with the military have been responsible for some of the worst excesses in armed “sons-of-the-soil” conflicts (*ibid.*:18; 39). *Overall, state authorities seem to agree that violence by members of settler society is to some degree necessary and justified if the latter are to prevail over the original inhabitants of the frontier* (Gordon 1992:209, Alfred and Wilmer 1997:41f.) – a plausible proposition if we remind ourselves that many governments of developing countries have gone to great pains to install settlers there⁸². Incidences of armed migrants taking part in hostilities against indigenous communities as they were reported from Mindanao (George 1980:143-152), the Chittagong Hill Tracts (Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission 1991:39-42) and Xinjiang (Tyler 2003:194ff.) lend credibility to DeKoninck’s (1996) assertion that the use of military colonists is a pervasive feature at late modern Asian frontiers.

A *sixth* contributor to frontier violence does not spring so much from anything inherent in the frontier – for instance territorial conflicts that so often accompany frontier expansion –, but

81 According to one count, the three states of Manipur, Assam and Tripura all report between 30 and 35 active militant organisations (Baruah 2002:4178).

82 The authorities’ reluctance to reign in overbearing, violent wildcat miners or illegal loggers is more difficult to explain, as the state has not made any investments in their presence at the frontier. In an especially appalling case of state negligence in the face of atrocities committed against indigenous frontier-dwellers, thousands of *garimpeiros* (freelance gold miners) were tolerated for months inside the reserve of the Yanomami in Roraima (Brazil) in spite of evidence that they were leaving a trail of disease and violence. *Garimpeiro* depredations peaked in July 1993 when the village of Hashimu was attacked by miners, leaving 16 people dead (Albert 1994; see also my foregoing discussion of the issue in chapter 5).



Photo 14: challenging the state's monopoly on violence: guerillas of the New People's Army (NPA), South-Central Mindoro, Philippines, 1989 (photo: Christian Erni)

from deeply contentious structures and processes at the heart of the society occupying it. In a number of countries of the developing South, violence is an intrinsic part of the routine conduct of electoral politics. "Entrepreneurs in votes and violence" (Fegan 1994), provincial politicians in the Philippines as a rule employ armed force to secure wealth and power (McCoy 1994:15). On the wings of their armed retainers, political hopefuls rise to uncontested warlord status, whereupon they can start to barter votes which will win them immunity from prosecution and benefits in the form of rents, cheap credits and business licenses (*ibid.*). The transition from predation to old wealth and respectable politics is imperceptible; while the aging warlord may continue to cultivate an image of ruthlessness, his children will in all likelihood enroll in elite schools in the national capital, become lawyers or professionals and marry into established families (*ibid.*). In frontier provinces, the use of political violence tends to be even more liberal than elsewhere: in Sulu, for instance, a part of the country's "Wild South", "competing political clans fight pitched battles with hundreds of heavily armed men on the streets of the provincial capital" (Rocamora 1995:xiii).



Photo 15: buying protection on the market of violence: armed cowhands, Occidental Mindoro, 1985 (photo: Christian Erni)

A number of scholars of the frontier are proposing that their study subject is saturated with violence not – as has frequently been argued – because of its *distance* from the moderating institutions of the state, but to the contrary because that state – or rather its in-born social inequities – has reconstituted itself far too faithfully in these new places (see e.g. Schmink 1982:341 on the Brazilian Amazon). Thus, the exploitative agrarian structures which frequently characterize the densely-settled core areas usually follow the pioneer to the frontier, turning it into an arena of class conflict with large and well-connected landowners in one corner and materially and politically marginal homesteaders in the other (ibid.:341f.). Land-related violence on a large scale becomes likely where land can be had cheaply, its ownership is uncertain and the state committed to the defence of the interests of landed elites. Clashes between antagonistic class actors within settler society represent the *sixth* type of frontier violence, manifesting itself in the forced removal of small farmers from land claimed by landlords, the murder of peasant union leaders, but also – often violent – land occupations by masses of rural have-nots (Foweraker 1981, Branford and Glock 1985, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2005a).

A few remarks on what I take to be the logic underlying frontier violence are now in order if we are to gain insights from this pageant of frontier actors and types of violent contest in which they are involved. Contrary to what Marianne Schmink (1982:341, see above) believes, there is no question in my opinion that the peculiar institutional conditions and moral conventions of the frontier are of great importance for understanding the ubiquity and frequency of violence in these places. Thus, the institutional vacuum in this zone permits members of settler society⁸³ to interact with indigenous

83 Although it almost seems too trivial to mention, violence at the frontier is, of course, gendered violence, as

people according to their private behavioral norms rather than the law (see chapter 6.1.1 above). These private norms again are drawing on an ideology of conquest typical for frontier interlopers which deny possessory rights to original frontier inhabitants on the grounds of the latter's lack of civilizational credentials (see chapter 6.1.4 above).

If the frontier is, as Little (2001:8) justly contends, “a highly unstructured field of power (...) where the rules of interaction are not clearly established (...)”, this is due to the fact that laws regulating frontier affairs are often inconsistent, law-enforcing agents of the state are few and the few are lax in enforcing the laws. The institutional vacuum of the frontier makes for *legal ambiguity and insecurity*, conditions which have widely been found to further conflicts and violence (see e.g. Tyler 1999:266). The situation is compounded by the fact that indigenous institutions of conflict-resolution have come under pressure in the process of frontier expansion, as state authorities in many cases attempt to discourage or forcefully dissolve them. Increasingly, disputes within local society – not to speak of those between its members and settler individuals – have become resilient to mediation by means of local-level traditional judicial procedures (ibid.:264), and state courts are either not available or lack legitimacy on the part of the locals (ibid.:268), giving rise to a situation of *legal anomy*.

Most importantly, at the frontier, the state relinquishes control to powerful private citizens (Duncan Baretta and Markoff 1978:590). As it proclaims itself unable to extend protection in a reliable and durable manner, the latter seek to safeguard and promote their interests autonomously, by employing private armies and gunslingers, or by buying the support of the police and military (see e.g. Monbiot 1993:152-157 on Brazil, Fried 1995:154-224 on East Kalimantan, Indonesia). Consequently, a high number of loose firearms are in circulation, and many of those with martial skills make a living from selling protection and firepower to ranchers and landlords. In support of stakes in the predatory frontier economy, goons and vigilantes are traded on open “markets of violence” (Elwert 1999), as if to dramatize that economic wealth and direct, physical force remain the most important bases of power at the frontier (Schmink and Wood 1992:14).

Anna Tsing (2005:41) has correctly observed. Commenting on the South Kalimantan (Indonesia) logging and mining bonanzas, she states that frontiers bring an inpour of men who seek quick profit, reveling in the enactment of “wildness”. The clandestine, predatory and violence-ridden economy of frontier extractivism begets a climate of exalted masculinity, “a masculinity that spreads and saturates itself with images and metaphors, amulets, stickers of naked women, stories based on the confusion between rape and wild sex” (ibid.:40). Logging camps, the compounds of mining companies and frontier towns in general are brimming with men “forever talking deals, opportunities, and prices in the sped-up time of the chase” (ibid.:39). To survive in an arena thus charged with wildness, masculine magic and charisma are required, and illicit sex with native women or nights with prostitutes are the prizes which sojourning on these frontiers holds out to those who dare brave them.

7. “NATIONALIZING SPACE”: THE STATE’S AGENDA AT CONTEMPORARY FRONTIERS

The foregoing chapter gave a description of what happens at contemporary frontiers in the developing world; the present one is about the state policies that produce frontiers in the first place.

It has become fashionable to point to globalizing forces as the main originator of change in remoter corners of the globe. Undeniably, global regimes of power and taste have been a deeply transformative factor at most world frontiers (see Lewellen 2002); side by side with them, however, the more parochial designs of the nation-state continue to make themselves felt with equally, if not more compelling force.

The agenda of the state in frontier regions differs significantly from the one it pursues in the national heartland. At the frontier, state sovereignty is contested, as local indigenous communities cling on to their – albeit precarious – autonomous existences, setting limits to the state centre’s ability to freely access and exploit the zone’s resource potential. Other than in areas over which it has established more or less stable hegemony, at the frontier, the state finds itself locked up in stubborn conflicts that center on the control of meaning, space, territory and power (Hvalkov 2008:277). In what comes, I will try to outline the state’s agenda for the frontier in broad strokes (see Figure 5).

With the end of colonial rule in the Southern hemisphere, the peripheral indigenous frontiers of the formerly colonial dominions came to constitute new and exciting horizons for the novel “national projects” with their promises of autochthonous “progress” and “civilization”, and an alluring opportunity to re-energize national economies which were often left in shambles by the departing colonizers. It became economically and symbolically imperative to “nationalize” frontier spaces which the postcolonial elites deemed “incompletely structured” and underexploited (Becker 1996:77). While there is some variation as to how individual states have combined policy aspects and accentuated their “handling” of the frontier and its inhabitants⁸⁴, a surprisingly homologous policy pattern emerges for the de-colonized South; borrowing a term from politologist Sanjib Baruah (2003a), I propose to call it the “politics of nationalizing space”⁸⁵.

84 See chapter 7.2 where I discuss a development path – exemplified by countries such as Malaysia, Thailand and, to some extent, Botswana – which does not rely solely on the exploitation of frontier resources, but includes manufacturing and the services sector. These shifts in economic priorities do, as the case study material shows, scale down land pressure and reduce the number of rural poor available for peopling outlying regions. However, they fail to discourage logging and mining activities, keeping the extractive frontier alive, and generally do not have a bearing on the imperatives of nation-building and geopolitics which, as the present chapter makes clear, also drive the politics of “nationalizing space”.

85 In his spirited analysis of Indian state policies in the remotest northeastern parts of its territory, the former North-Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA), Baruah describes how New Delhi, energized by Chinese territorial ambitions, undertook to tie the territory closer to the Indian body politic. The strategy it chose to “nationalize” that frontier space was essentially two-pronged: implanting national political institutions and infusing “development” and a “developmentalist” mentality among leaders and common people. I am twisting his concept somewhat by adding two more sets of policies which, as I would contend, can often be detected in nation- and state-building endeavours at the frontier: cultural assimilation and sponsored or facilitated settlement (colonization).



Photo 16: “nationalizing space”: Indonesian stamp showing the national flag over Aceh and West Papua (photo: Susan Meiselas)

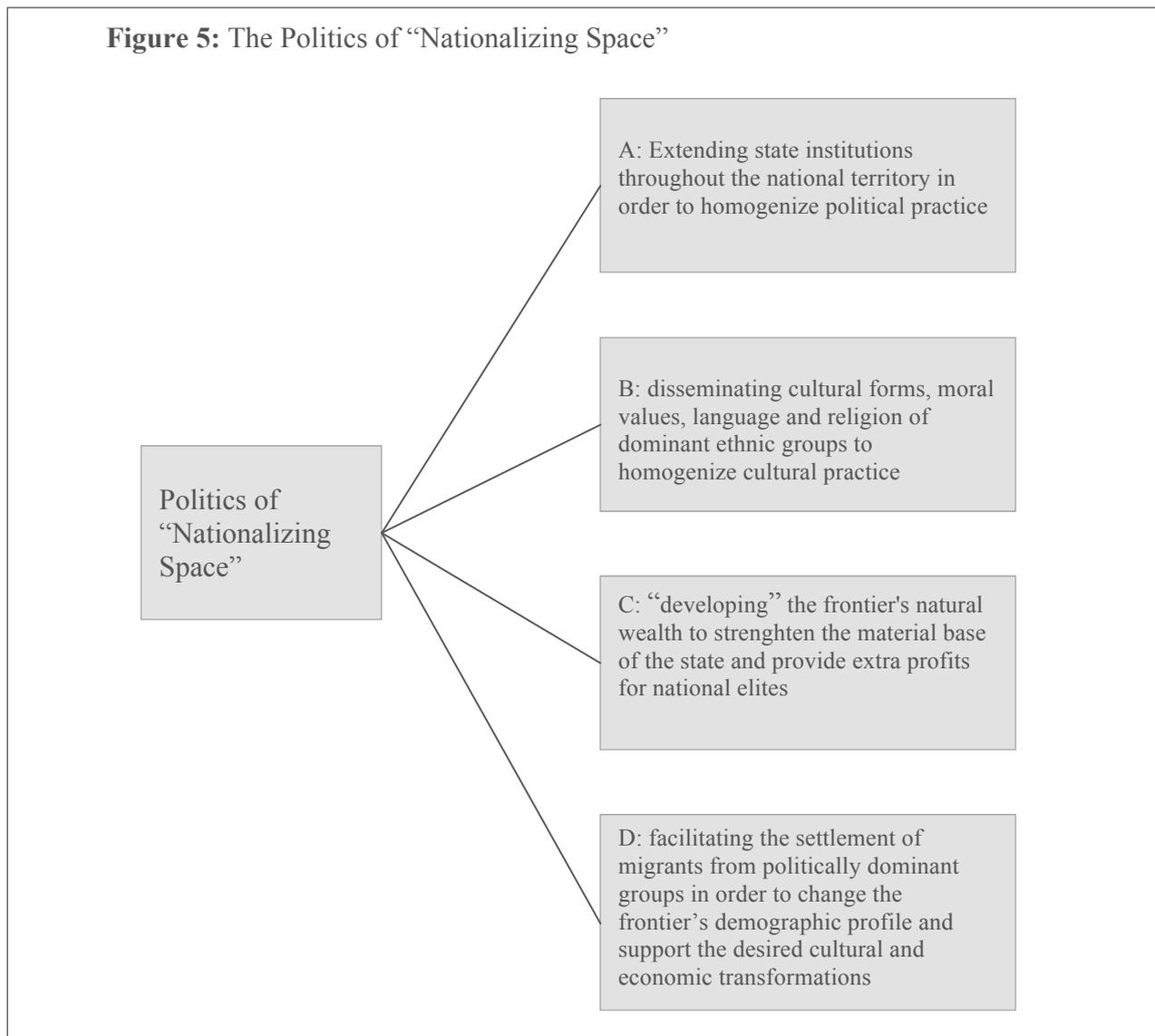
7.1 Characteristics of the politics of “nationalizing space”

In essence, the “politics of nationalizing space” include the elements listed in the sub-chapters that follow.

7.1.1 Extending state institutions throughout the national territory in order to homogenize political practice

The processes we study are essentially those of state- and nation-building, or more precisely, their geographical completion at the margins of the nation-state. “State-building” – the notion of concern in a discussion of the *political* aspects of state expansion into indigenous domains – refers to practices which elites employ to consolidate and centralise power within a defined territory (Rae 2002:4); the main challenge to state-builders is to cut back on and finally eliminate the power of rival power centres so that they can determine local political processes within the claimed territory (see e.g. Tilly 1975, Helms 1982:259, Mann 1986). “Nation-building”, on the other hand, refers to state-building elites’ practices of forging a unified political community through reference to an imagined community of bearers of a shared culture and language. For all practical purposes, given the reality of the pluri-ethnic composition of virtually all postcolonial nation-states in the South, nation-building means the modelling of the nation on the image of the numerically dominant or most powerful ethnic group (or collection of groups). By proclaiming the cultural forms and norms of that group as the “natural” standard for the nation, nation-building often entails the denial of the reality of ethnic pluralism and the imposition of hegemonial cultural and moral values on recalcitrant local and regional populations (see Migdal 1988, Gurr 1989). As it involves the production and manipulation of cultural rather than political materials, I will turn to the matter of nation-building later in chapter 7.1.2.

State-building is achieved through extending institutions of governance and conflict resolution – devised by the centre – throughout the national territory, thereby filling the “institutional vacuum” (Kopytoff 1987) as which the frontier is perceived. The introduction of the offices and functions of local government and the “routine practices that reproduce the consent of the governed” (Baruah 2003a:921) in the core areas of the body politic – notably voting and the adjudication of conflicts – is intended to create a channel for the transmission of orders of the centre and the means to



incorporate local leaders in national political circuits⁸⁶. Thus, diffusing national political institutions throughout the indigenous hinterland equips the state with powerful resources for surveillance on one hand and cooptation on the other. Out of necessity, traditional juridical systems, forms of leadership and norms for holding leaders publicly accountable have to give way; in many countries, they have either been forcefully dismantled or emasculated and re-instated as a farce (see e.g. Guinness 1994:272-276 on New Order Indonesia). In border regions, such state-building measures may target the local indigenous populace and the governments and military leaders of an adjacent country in equal proportion. In such cases, the replication of institutions of governance at the margins seems to be motivated in addition by the desire to dissuade potentially hostile neighbours from annexing “empty” tracts of the national territory (see e.g. Little 2001:88; 106).

⁸⁶ I would like to stress here that the extension of institutions of governance across the periphery is not necessarily predicated on the use of force; indigenous elites are often given stakes in this process. Through rents that buy their consent, symbolic incentives or genuine participation in local decision-making processes, indigenous leaders learn to picture themselves from the perspective of the national centre rather than that of their immediate kin or larger ethnic groups (Rutherford 1996:583).

In sum, by increasing “stateness” (Tilly 1975) in this way, developing states hope to achieve or at least project exclusive political/military control within their territories; the generation of political legitimacy within them; and their defence against possible claims from outside (Hettne 1996:19). Because the expansion of national political institutions is not possible without marginalizing, deforming or destroying local indigenous political institutions and systems of conflict-resolution, it is an inherently conflictive process which may be actively and violently resisted by indigenous communities (Bodley 1990:60-81).

7.1.2 Disseminating cultural forms, moral values and possibly language and religion of politically dominant ethnic groups in order to homogenize cultural practice

Faced by the challenge of attaching areas of only nominal sovereignty to routinely-controlled state domains, state- and nation-building projects usually rely not only on institution-building, but also on extending the reach of cultural forms, mores, values and lifestyles of the nation-bearing group(s). The way to the nation is paved with the debris of the linguistic practices, cultural heritage and ethnic allegiances of all those citizens who do not belong to them – among them, of course, frontier-dwelling indigenous people. In the manner in which it is carried out in most postcolonial nation-states in the developing south⁸⁷, nation-building is an exercise in cultural homogenization as the assertion of ethnic and cultural difference is discouraged or actively combatted⁸⁸.

Assimilationist programs of “national integration” in the cultural and linguistic domains are the standard means for fostering this homogenization of the realm (Dove 1988, McCaskill 1997, Harrell 1995, Duncan 2004). As applied to indigenous frontier-dwellers, the repertory for producing cultural subjects who have internalized the national narrative of a single, cohesive identity includes enforcing the exclusive use of the national language in schools and government institutions (Duncan 2004:3); conversion to the dominant religion (or, in some cases, at least one recognized world religion; Atkinson 1988, Clarke 2001:26); forced adoption of majoritarian dressing and housing styles (Meiselas 2003:124-142); sedentarizing mobile populations – notably pastoralists and hunters-and-gatherers, but also shifting cultivators –, often through forced resettlement (Scott n.d., 1998b:185-189, Duncan 2004:11ff.); and facilitating people’s entrance into the market economy, among others by stimulating the conversion to cash-crop production and the generation of consumer needs (Duncan 2004:3). In the centre’s gaze, frontier space and everything that is found there is “disorderly” and has to be brought in line with “proper” forms and practices. Therefore, besides its auspicious political and economic ambitions, the politics of “nationalizing space” also aim to bring about new forms of order in daily life, as Anna Tsing (1993:92) has noted with characteristic sensibility. The “disorderly” nature of indigenous living is often measured – as is the case in Indonesia – by supposed low levels of personal cleanliness and assumed poor dietary standards. Resettlement

87 Not all forms of nationalism recur on shared historical memory, tradition, mores, religion and language as the basis for membership in the nation (so-called “cultural nationalism”). An alternative model which liberal democracies in the North are claiming to have espoused, is “civic nationalism”. Under “civic nationalism”, the state refrains from making the adoption of certain cultural patterns the criterion for entry into the nation, demanding a commitment to shared political institutions, political practices and values instead (Ignatieff 1993:185; Fine 1999:149f.; Sabhlok 2002:33).

88 At a rhetorical level, however, many nation-states in the developing South acknowledge and even celebrate cultural diversity, as evidenced by national mottoes such as Indonesia’s “*bhinneka tunggal ika*” (‘unity in diversity’, see e.g. Rutherford 1996:583). Still, most of these official confirmations of pluriethnic and pluricultural realities concentrate on the picturesque and folkloristic aspects of indigenous culture, and do rarely imply the granting of political concessions on the basis of cultural difference.

programs for the Meratus of South Kalimantan were, among others, justified by claiming to bring their lives “in accord with the norms that operate for the Indonesian people” (Hamda 1979:2, cited in Tsing 1993:92). “Progress” of the program beneficiaries was evidenced by the higher percentage of villagers who had learned to bathe twice or even three times a day, and taken to eating rice, the lowland staple, on middays and evenings (Tsing, *ibid.*).

The re-organization of cultural practice at the frontier along national standards involves, of course, massive social engineering as native belief systems and cosmologies are eradicated and a broad range of other “undesirable”, “uncivilized” traits of indigenous culture⁸⁹ replaced. State elites will not deny that such interventions may entail high costs for those to whom change is administered, but they are to be stoically borne by the populations concerned until the transition to the national role model is completed (Schmink and Wood 1992:30, note 10). Many indigenous societies break apart from this assault on traditional culture, exposing their members to a life without the protection of networks of social solidarity and the consolations of a customary world view and ancestral religion (see e.g. Eder 1993 on the Batak of Palawan, Philippines). In the aggregate, the homogenizing effects of assimilationist state policies resemble the effects of the green revolution in the field of agriculture, where “the spread of new hybrid species increases uniformity of genetic stock, making crops at once more productive and more vulnerable to pests. Through the self-confident modernism of national governments, monocultures extend in the social domain with vigour and the same double edge” (Stange 1999:203)⁹⁰.

The resulting threats to the collective identities and cultural survival of indigenous communities are at least as potent causes of communal rebellions as are threats to their livelihoods and resource bases (Horowitz 1985, Gurr 1994). As indigenous people came to realize that the politics of claiming frontier space for the nation include a direct attack on their cultures and ways of life, aggressive state attempts to homogenize cultural practice throughout the national territory have greatly increased the complexity of frontier conflicts which otherwise may have been fought as mere resource contests (Suliman 1997).

7.1.3 “Developing” the frontier’s natural wealth to strenghten the material base of the state and provide extra profits for national elites

By and large, state development strategies for the frontier are geared towards strenghtening the material base of the nation-state, with the revenues from natural resource exploitation going to the political centre (Hettne 1996:20, 24; Clarke 2001:424, Duncan 2004:7). At the state periphery, entrepreneurs, civil servants and army officers are busy disengaging nature from local ecologies and livelihoods, commoditizing it and, thus processed, redirecting it to national priorities such as

89 High on the state index of reprehensible customs and other cultural forms are, for instance, polygyny, life in large communal houses instead of single-family dwellings, the communal, potlatch-type feasting of the type common in rank societies, and the ceremonial consumption of alcohol (see e.g. Dove 1988 on Indonesia).

90 To the extent that the homogenization engineered by the state produces human suffering on a vast scale (among indigenous communities), destroys valuable resources of humankind (cultural diversity), and damages the state’s body politic, it may justly be called “pathological”. Heather Rae’s (2002) notion of “pathological homogenization”, coined to describe violent politics of exclusion from Spain’s expulsion of the moors in the 15th century to the ethnic purges in the Balkans of the early 1990s, fits well the indigenous experience of forced assimilation and exclusion from membership in the nation. As I have tried to show in chapter 6.1.5 above, frontiers resonate universally with racist ascriptions of “primitivity” and “savagery” to those about to be displaced by the intruders, and it is these ascriptions which are at the bottom of the cultural and ethnic hierarchies put in place as the “politics of nationalizing space” unfold.



Photo 17: homogenizing cultural practice: Hinduist Shiva shrine in Itanagar, the capital of the largely tribal state of Arunachal Pradesh, 2004 (photo: Christian Erni)

patronage, profit and export production (Tsing 1999:166, 2005:28). The prevalent development model used to “nationalize” frontier space can be called “developmentalist” (Baruah 2003a:916, Becker 1996:75) or “mainstream development” (Hettne 1996:20). I propose to use the first term, because it has the advantage of connoting a powerful discourse which “captures imaginations, unleashes passions and comforts societies” (Sachs 1992:1, cited in Baruah 2003a:917). Development in the mould of “developmentalism” has as its dominant imperative progress, understood as infinite economic growth and prosperity, based on the ever-increasing exploitation of infinite natural resources (Becker 1996:74). As such, it is identical with modernization (Hettne 1996:20). The policies pursued to “modernize” local economies at the frontier include the promotion of industrial agriculture and tree plantations (Tyler 1999:66, Li 1999:29) and extractive industries which exploit the areas’ mineral wealth, timber and possibly oil resources (Howitt, Connell and Hirsch 1996:3-17; Ballard and Banks 2003). Intense pressure is brought to bear on indigenous communities to utilize their land more “efficiently” and give up their typically non-intensive production systems in favor of irrigated fixed-field cultivation of wet rice and other “majoritarian” staples (Dove 1988:19f., Duncan 2004:4). Particular opprobrium attaches to shifting cultivation which – contrary to the scientific evidence – is said to be the main factor in deforestation and the destruction of watersheds (Dove 1988:15ff., Clarke 2001:425, Duncan 2004:13ff.). Another priority of developmentalist state planning at the indigenous periphery is infrastructure building in order to link local economies to national and international markets and consolidate the control of the centre (Rutherford 1996:583, Baruah 2003a:928f.).

“Nationalizing space” along developmentalist precepts requires a frame of laws on land ownership and resource use which facilitates the state’s appropriation of indigenous ancestral domains. In most

cases, colonial legal systems were retained which classified indigenous lands as state domain (Lynch and Talbott 1995:65; Colchester 1995:66-69). Mostly on colonial foundations, governments have claimed indigenous lands and resources as fundamental elements of their own territorial integrity and economic and political sovereignty (Howitt, Connell and Hirsch 1996:15). Only a handful of them recognize indigenous communities' rights to the utilization and ownership of natural resources or their contributions to the sustainable management of local ecosystems, and most countries give local resource users no meaningful say in decisions on national land and resource-use policies (Lynch and Talbott 1995:135). As a consequence, indigenous communities have lost control over most of their land to government agencies. In Southeast Asia, for instance, forest departments control between 40 and 74% of their countries' total land areas and are invested with the power to lease them to logging concessionaires, plantation owners or agroforestry businesses (Colchester 1995:67). In a tendency that is reflective of developmentalism's policy bias against subsistence-oriented smallholders, "the more intrusive the interlopers, the more the state supports their activities" (Lynch and Talbott 1995:66). In prioritizing "national" over local interests, the great majority of developing countries refuse to recognize indigenous customary rights to land which, characteristically, had mostly been communal. Thus, even where indigenous communities were able to hold on to their lands, traditional concepts of custodianship and resource allocation were undermined by the fragmentation of territories into individually-owned plots, a trend that has facilitated mismanagement and the partial alienation of former community lands (Colchester 1995:65).

When a state considers it useful to increase control over or lay claim to a frontier by opening it for settlement, a *fourth element* can be added to the formula. That element will be explored in detail in the sub-chapter that follows.

7.1.4 Facilitating the settlement of migrants from politically dominant groups in order to change the frontier's ethnic profile and support the desired cultural and economic transformations

Many developing nations rely on settler-colonizers from politically dominant ethnic groups as a cheap and supposedly efficient means for advancing the "nationalization of space"⁹¹. By opening "frontiers of settlement" through guided population transfer schemes or aiding the influx of spontaneous migrants through a range of official and non-official policies ("state-sponsored" and "state-facilitated" settlement, see chapters 5 and 8.3.2), states hope to assist the processes described above in sub-chapters 7.1.1 to 7.1.3. The distinct disadvantage of the strategy of advancing "nation-building" and the extension of territorial control by settling migrants is that it often triggers nativist reactions on the part of local indigenous communities (see e.g. Weiner 1978 and 1995:88ff., Nietschmann 1986), and comparative evidence from the study of civil wars shows that migration-induced conflicts are especially likely to escalate violently, and, once escalated, to last long (Fearon and Laitin 2001:1, 3).

91 See chapter 6.1.3.



Photo 18: redirecting the forest’s wealth to national priorities (photomontage: *The Economist*)

7.2 Nuances, please!

Are frontiers withering away where resource dependency has lessened?

In the face of such bold generalizations, expressions of doubt as to how prevalent the politics of “nationalizing space” – and, by implication, frontiers – really are, are, of course, legitimate. Do not, for example, developing nations differ tremendously in the degree to which they depend on the exploitation of frontier resources, with the result that some of them may keep away from that zone, or at least only tread there very lightly? And would not the inclusion of political variables such as the presence (or absence) of democratic participation, the public accountability of governments and a free press – factors that can be expected to constrain human rights violations and ecological outrages at the frontier – suggest yet another important distinction among the states of the developing world, diminishing even further my claim of the universality of the politics of “nationalizing space”? In so far as it is often interlaced with the assertion that nowadays, autocratic or semi-autocratic regimes are on their way out, while “democracy” rules the day, I reserve discussion of the second point for a later chapter (chapter 10), and will concentrate on the first of these two challenges here.

True enough, by far not all developing countries are richly-endowed with agricultural, forest or mineral wealth at their frontier peripheries; the verve and energy, therefore, with which state-bearing populations push into the frontier zone, opening frontiers of settlement and extraction in the process, will not be the same everywhere. Even where frontier wealth is available, some countries have adjusted their economic policies in ways that – to a certain extent, at least – reduced the pressure on frontier resources. As the experience of the past twenty years or so has shown, frontier-based development may offer lavish resource rents for a thin layer of parasitic political leaders and

corporate entrepreneurs, but it “does not yield much in the way of sustained economic progress” for a developing economy (Barbier 2005a:158). Aware of the pernicious effects of what developmental economics have dubbed the “resource curse”, a handful of developing nations, mainly in Asia, but also in Africa, have set out to lessen their dependency of frontier resources. In a book devoted to the paradox that resource abundance rarely generates sustained and balanced growth, Barbier (2005a:354-372, based on Gylfason 2001) identified four⁹² countries that successfully diversified their economies and reinvested resource rents in non-frontier-based sectors of the economy. However, as I hope to show, the cases remain contradictory, because the gains from the policy changes do not extend equally across all relevant frontier types, and, in the aggregate, the new policy priorities even seem to have reinforced the pressure on frontier resources. For the handful of deviant cases, thus, the evidence that the respective countries truly renounced “classical” frontier politics, is less than conclusive, while for the rest, the overwhelming majority of developing countries continue to treat frontiers as an open-access source of national wealth.

Malaysia, to the economist of development, is a so-called “proton economy” that combines plantation crops for export with industrial development anchored on export-oriented, labor-intensive manufacturing (Barbier 2005a:357f.). Figures for 1990-1999 reflect a remarkable decline in dependency from natural resources in general, and frontier resources in particular: While in 1980, products from the primary sector (notably petroleum and foodstuffs) had still accounted for 80% of the country’s total exports, that share fell to 33% between 1990 and 1999 (ibid.: table 1.1, p. 29). Resource rents from minerals, timber and plantation crops were reinvested into public sanitation and the educational sector, and, most significantly for our discussion, went into the build-up of a manufacturing sector that offered at least a part of the rural population employment (ibid.:360). As a result, the rural work force fell in numbers, and, as labor flowed from rural into urban areas, land clearing by colonists at the country’s upland frontiers decreased substantially. Better employment opportunities for the rural poor, a rise in rural wages and government land rehabilitation programs that overcame the problem of the fragmentation of peasant land holdings all contributed to keeping the rural population in the lowlands (ibid.).

Still, to assume that a successful policy of industrialization and economic diversification would relax the situation on all – and every sort of – upland frontiers would be erroneous. While settler colonization was indeed largely curbed, plantation development for palmoil and rubber expanded exponentially (ibid.:358), causing new extractive frontiers to spring up and old ones to consolidate. While hailed by economists as an important contribution to economic diversification and growth (ibid.), ecologists and local indigenous communities bemoan the fact that accelerated plantation development pushed deforestation in Sabah and Sarawak to new heights, thereby irretrievably destroying tropical rainforests and traditional livelihood systems⁹³. Forest-based industries, too,

92 One of these (Indonesia) had to be crossed from the list because after Suharto’s demission in 1998, its macroeconomic data were found to have been foul all the while. For his analysis, therefore, Barbier had to put up with the remaining three (out of a sample of 65 countries; see Barbier 2005a:354).

93 Indigenous peoples’ organizations recently drew attention to the fact that the state government of Sarawak has expanded the total concession area for plantations to 14.000 km², an area 1/3 the size of Switzerland (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2009c). Incidentally, a large part of the concessions is situated within the 65.000 km² of forest which were lost to forest fires in the end of the 1990s. Thence, the fires had raged so fiercely that the cities of Kuala Lumpur and Singapore were plunged into week-long haze and air traffic in the region had to be suspended. In Sarawak and Sabah, but also in the Indonesian part of Borneo, plantation companies regularly resort to incinerating adjacent forest patches to enlarge their plantations. The practice survived the passing of stiff laws and strong pronouncements by the region’s environmental ministers against this form of corporate arson (ibid.).



Photo 19: stubbornly alive in Newly Industrialized Countries, too: the extractive frontier. Logging trucks, Tongod, Sabah, Malaysia, 2001 (photo: Christian Erni)

flourished, making the country one of the largest exporters of tropical timber products and the leading world exporter of wood-based panels (ibid.). Dismissing the warnings of ecological activists that the country was fast losing its remaining primary forests, Malaysia has, at the time of this writing, all but annihilated its rainforest reserves in Sarawak, and is fast nearing that point in Sabah (Hurst 1990:84, Coutts 2006:9f.).

As domestic supplies have started to dry up over the past 10 years or so, Malaysian logging companies have turned to neighbouring Indonesian Borneo where they have become major players in the battle for the logging frontier⁹⁴. Inside Malaysian territory, protected areas with substantial stands of precious woods have come under pressure from the logging industry; thus, in recent years, a state-owned foundation that operates several reserved forests in Sabah has turned two of them over to logging contractors and is presently endangering the viability of the Maliau Basin Conservation Area, the centerpiece of the state's protected area system, by opening its buffer zone to logging operations (Christian Erni, personal communication; see also environmentalist activists' blogs at <http://my.opera.com/katalina/blog/show.dml/354832>, and <http://arkitrek.com/page/4>). The overmining of Malaysia's forest wealth and the havoc wrought across the border in Borneo are, as even Barbier (2005a:361) contends, a worrisome problem. It is an indication of the fact that where an established industrial branch – the logging and wood-processing industry – has built up

94 Malaysia-based logging firms, in fact, are not only active in the near abroad, but represent a significant presence in the forestry sectors of countries ranging from Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu to Cambodia, Gabon, Guyana and Suriname (<http://new.forestmonitor.org/en/reports/550066/550073>).

large capacities (primarily sawmills), it will not go down without a fight, government efforts at macro-economic regulation notwithstanding. In the case of the Malaysian logging conglomerates and sawmill owners, the effort of staving off the “bust” phase of frontier development included reaching out to ever more remote reserves within and across the national border, and renegotiating the limits of felling legally-accessible timber.

In many ways, *Thailand's* case resembles that of Malaysia. The country represents the type of the so-called “tuk-tuk” economy, i.e. one that is based primarily on food exports, but also has substantial industrial development that rests on export-oriented, labor-intensive manufacturing (ibid.:361). While not starting from the same high levels of dependency from primary products, Thailand today records an even lower percentage of primary product exports to total national exports than Malaysia (30%, see ibid.). Like Malaysia, the country successfully diversified its economy and reinvested the rents from the exploitation of frontier resources, even without the benefit of comparably large mineral and timber reserves. Thailand managed to re-orient its economy through especially forceful and determined investments in agro-industrial industries and shrimp-producing aquaculture (ibid.:362f.). This structural adaptation led to an increase in employment opportunities outside the traditional agricultural sector and, in the process, to substantial migration from upland to lowland areas. As smallholder production started to decline and the total planted area receded, rural migration to the frontier abated, reducing, as a consequence, pressures on frontier agricultural soils, forests and watersheds (ibid.).

However, again like in Malaysia's case, the change in development strategy only reigned in the settlers, but it failed to restrain activities at the extractive frontier. While agricultural expansion in the uplands was reduced, intrusions into coastal mangrove forests and community fisheries multiplied, as the country built up its capacities as the world's leading shrimp producer (ibid.:363). But not only were new theatres of contention opened along remote stretches of the coastline, any assumption, too, that the days of upland frontiers were numbered, was misplaced. Until 1989, the year that the Thai government proclaimed a country-wide ban on felling timber, logging was a major export earner. In the years that followed, domestic logging companies simply shifted their operations to the rich forests across the Burmese and Cambodian borders, sharing the proceeds with these countries' cash-strapped governments. By laying waste to the forests of two neighbouring countries, Thailand thus shrewdly externalized the costs of salvaging what was left of its upland forest ecosystems (Bürgin 2005:31f.). Yet also within the country's borders, upland frontiers remained rife with conflicts between intrusive outside interests and local indigenous communities. As I will demonstrate in greater detail in a subsequent chapter (chapter 10), Thailand is one of those countries where the concepts of wildlife protection and indigenous rights clash most fiercely. Beginning in the 1960s, National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries began to be established, usually on top of already-existing indigenous territories. In the 1980s and 1990s, dozens of cases of forceful eviction of local communities out of newly-gazetted protected areas were recorded, as the authorities attempted to “keep those who would have been the the best protectors out of the parks or sanctuaries” (Ghimire 1991:10, quoted in Lohmann 1993:219).

Botswana, too, fared reasonably well with an economic diversification strategy: at the expense of the agricultural and husbandry sectors, labor-intensive manufactures and services grew in significance, and are now accounting for 25% and 32%, respectively, of all formal employment (Barbier 2005a:367). Above all, however, the country has acquired a reputation for clean and honest government, and has used the windfalls from resource booms in the still-dominant mining

sector⁹⁵ wisely, building up international reserves and government balances to cushion the effects of a future slack in mining revenues (*ibid.*:365). The proceeds from this policy were reinvested in physical and human capital: with public infrastructure and education high on the government’s economic agenda, the country managed to reduce rural poverty and increase the population’s overall welfare (*ibid.*). Arguably, this has halted agricultural expansion and may have helped to avoid scenarios like in neighbouring Namibia, where the government recently announced plans to expropriate about one third of the San reservation of Na Jaqna with the intention of redistributing the land to landless farmers (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2007).

However, Botswana’s sparkling image as a haven of good governance and human rights observance was tarnished when international advocacy groups made it known that from 1997 on, the government had sacrificed a large part of the country’s own remaining San hunters-and-gatherers for the sake of rigidly-understood wildlife protection in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (see chapter 10). Claiming that traditional hunting had given way to poaching for profit and livestock-rearing and that the San, therefore, were bad for the park, the government had resettled over 2000 people from the reserve. Things came to a head in late 2005 when the authorities sent armed police and park guards into the reserve to track down a few handful of San who had sneaked back into the reserve (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2005b, 2005e, *The Economist* 2006b). Newspaper reporters were able to document that park officials defended the sanctity of the boundaries of the reserve with great brutality, including beatings and torture administered to San individuals (*The Economist* 2006b). To make things worse for the Botswana government, it seemed that the issue of the park, reverberating with the cosmopolitan, late 20th century notion of biodiversity protection, hid more arcane policy priorities. Thus, the relocation of the San to permanent settlements is consistent with Gaborone’s longstanding concern with “civilizing” them (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2005e), revealing an obsession with the homogenization of cultural practices across the national domain which distinguishes most contemporary state polities in the developing world (see chapters 6.1.5 and 7.1.2). And, if the advocacy organization, Survival International, is correct, diamonds and thus the continuing dependency of Botswana’s economy on frontier resources may have had something to do with the San’s removal: The Central Kalahari Game Reserve has confirmed, rich diamond deposits, which the government can ill afford to leave idle (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2005e, *The Economist* 2006b). In conclusion, therefore, it must be said that economic adjustment has not prevented Botswana, either, from opening new frontiers – be they based on preservationist ideals or, more simply, on the quest for wealth –, even while it carried old ones – the settlement frontiers – to rest⁹⁶.

In sum, none of the three cases which the literature cites as examples of countries that tried to move away from an unhealthy reliance on the exploitation of frontier resources can truly be confirmed as having completed that transition. Although in the course of the past 20 years, Malaysia, Thailand and also Botswana have given their rural poor alternatives to frontier migration, closing, as a result, many a settlement frontier, logging (in Malaysia and Thailand) and mining (in Botswana) remain contentious issues and vital economic factors. Yet not only are extractive frontiers alive and well

95 Economic diversification notwithstanding, all of Botswana’s export earnings are still from diamonds and a few other minerals, rendering the country one of the most resource-dependent in the world (Barbier 2005a:25, figure 1.1).

96 This interpretation is supported by Coates (2004:220), who praises Botswana for the sincerity of its development efforts which generally “have improved the lives of the nation’s citizens”. “The San, however”, he continues, “have had their traditional territories reduced, controlled and regulated in such a way as to interfere with their lifestyle and pursuit of sustenance”.

in all these countries, but in the case of Thailand and Botswana, overzealous attempts to protect wildlife and other forms of biodiversity have opened “salvage frontiers” (Tsing 2005:32, see also chapter 10) that negate many of the gains to be had from the demise of the settlement frontier. Given the variability of frontier types, therefore, it is difficult to distinguish orientations in economic macro-policy which keep frontiers from arising. The overwhelming majority of low and middle-income countries in the developing world, anyway, have very straight economic patterns. Of 95 countries, 72 (more than 3/4) get 50% or more of their export earnings from (typically frontier-based) natural resources, and in 35 of them, that percentage is even 90% or more (Barbier 2005a:32). The most important source of resources is still agricultural land, and throughout the developing world, cultivated land area is expected to increase by over 47% by 2050. With a prognosticated 66% of this increase coming from forest or wetland conversion (Barbier 2005b:290), and timber, diamonds, copper and zinc frequent items on the list of dominant export commodities (Barbier 2005a:25-30, table 1.1), both settlement and extractive frontiers remain determining features of the economies of developing countries.

8. REPORT FROM THE SETTLEMENT⁹⁷ FRONTIER

8. 1 Introduction

To prevent the narrative from descending into caricature and stereotype – a danger that looms wherever analytical models are erected atop diverse geographical and historical contexts –, I would like to dip into fresh empirical data from one particular type of frontier – the settlement frontier – in a more limited region which my research team had the privilege to study in the context of a recent comparative project⁹⁸. The study aimed at isolating the factors that condition the relations between migrants and indigenous host societies, and aspired to develop a sound understanding of the logic and dynamics of the conflicts which often embroil the two groups. The case studies included Western Assam (see Goswami, forthcoming), Central Assam (Nagaon and Karbi Anglong Districts, see Barbora, forthcoming) and Arunachal Pradesh (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming) in Northeast India; the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh (Roy and Halim, forthcoming); Sinuda municipality, Bukidnon, Mindanao (Philippines, see Wenk, forthcoming), and parts of the districts of Sambas, Pontianak and Sanggau in West Kalimantan, Indonesia (Geiger 2008b, Geiger, forthcoming; for an overview of the study sites, see Figure 6). Fieldwork was conducted intermittently between 2002 and 2005, ranging in overall duration from 3 to 15 months, depending on the case. Where their salience for the broader picture of the dynamics of ethnic interaction at contemporary pioneer fringes warrants it, I will draw on additional examples from the literature. These examples again mostly centre on South and Southeast Asia, but also comprise illuminating material on Latin America (the Amazon), Russia (Siberia), China (Xinjiang, Tibet) and Oceania (Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia).

I will start my account with a set of *comparative observations* that, at first sight, may seem to go against the grain of the general frontier model that I have offered. Put starkly, that model posits a basic opposition between the postcolonial state and local indigenous society, and attributes to the former an apparently innate drive to constantly expand, absorb and transform. Conflict is the logical outcome as these two polar opposites come into contact with each other. It seems ill-prepared to deal with contexts – documented in our sample – in which *indigenous leaders shrewdly use or enter state institutions* and thus *start to erode the boundaries between these basic analytical entities* (see e. g. Tsing 1993:150, 250, Nugent 1994). Reliance on a purely oppositional model of state-society relations as it is implied in my representation of the frontier carries the danger of explaining too much by invasion and conquest (see Lattimore 1962b:23); the data from the settlement frontiers examined by my team, however, also bespeak the consensual element in the processes of state- and nation-building.

97 The term “settler” in the “settlement frontier” refers primarily, but not exclusively, to migrants with an agricultural background (see e. g. Friedmann 1996:1f.). The research group opted for a sufficiently broad definition that included descendants of early migrants or later arrivals at a colonization front who work in urban professions or as civil servants. Very basically, settlers are people who have come to *settle* in an area, regardless of how they make their living there. Paramount is his/her intention of taking if not permanent, then at least long-term residence in the new place. Different from itinerant traders, gold prospectors and the like, the settler’s activity is not transient. In contrast to the settler, such transient migrant types have sometimes been labeled “sojourners” in the literature (see Meinig 1969:214).

98 The project, entitled “Indigenous Communities and Settlers: Resource Conflicts in Frontier Regions of South and Southeast Asia”, ran from 2001 to 2005. It was part of a more encompassing research program, the so-called NCCR North-South (in full: National Centre of Competence in Research North-South: Research Partnerships for Mitigating Syndromes of Global Change), which received financial support from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) and the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), Switzerland’s official development agency. An edited volume containing six fine-grained case studies and a comparison will be published shortly (Geiger, ed., forthcoming).

But not only can the state and local indigenous communities co-exist peacefully and in mutual support of each other – under certain conditions, at least, settlers and indigenous peoples have a proven ability for co-operative relations, as well. The evidence from the settlement frontier points to a more encompassing set of relationships than appropriation, and deals with more diverse circumstances than violence. As other scholarly investigators of the subject have found as well, encounters at the pioneer fringe can have the “simultaneous features of exchange, perpetuation, transformation, reclamation and a greater sense of the limit of colonising influences than resistance, capture, seizure and violence entails” (Davis 2005:9). Contrary to what my model seems to imply, the respective interests of settlers and indigenous people are not necessarily irreconcilable, but can on occasion converge, giving rise to *pathways* that connect the purportedly antagonistic ethnic clusters.

To try and map frontier dynamics – as I do – by the help of categorical props such as “settler society” and “indigenous society” means imposing an undifferentiated unity on each of these analytical entities. In all the cases that we studied, the situation was one where *several indigenous ethnic groups* faced *a multitude of settler communities* with diverse ethnic backgrounds. As the latter often occupied different economic niches and embraced divergent strategies of asserting themselves at the frontier, relations with indigenous locals tended to vary from group to group. Moreover, also the component ethnic groups themselves are distinctly heterogenous; our research often showed them *fissured by marked social and economic divisions* that precluded them from acting in unison, and thus from functioning as “strategic groups” (Evers and Schiel, eds., 1988) as my characterization of the frontier seems to suggest.

Maybe Davis (2005:9) is correct in assuming that a major reason for the scholarly negligence of differences within aboriginal and settler society is, in fact, the post-Turnerian emphasis on the basic power asymmetries between the two. The context of conquest and colonization, justly highlighted by frontier scholars who wanted to dissociate themselves from Turner’s views, not only hid from view a rich crop of examples of cross-boundary exchanges and unexpected alliances of identity and power between intruders and frontier-dwelling indigenous communities. Just as basically, it occluded instances where local groups of aboriginals successfully defied the tyranny of numbers at least for the moment, offering courageous resistance as they defended their groups’ autonomy (ibid.). Thus, the general pattern of the sweeping expansion of the advancing settler nation – the Australian one in Davis’ case – is ruptured by the emergence of local enclaves where for astonishingly long periods of time, *indigenous groups are able to hold their own politically and militarily or even reverse the prevailing balance of power* (ibid.). More dramatically than Australia’s frontier history ever could, Inner Asia’s oscillating frontiers along China’s fortified Inner Asian periphery – brilliantly depicted in the writings of Owen Lattimore (1940, 1962a) – illustrate this circumstance of military stalemate or even an indigenous military preponderance. As I will explain below, our study sample boasts a series of examples where the powers of predation lie not so much, as my frontier formula suggests, with the external frontier actors – “wedded”, as it were, to the superior and expansive state –, but with the indigenous subalterns.

Some of our findings, thus, have failed to conform to the predictions that flow from my frontier narrative, and may make it appear too strongly drawn. The matter gets yet more complicated if we consider that – as already hinted at – the very categories with which I have proposed to analyze frontier processes seem to desert us. In a number of cases in our study sample, even the supposedly watertight distinction – so essential to any meaningful narrative of frontier colonization – between



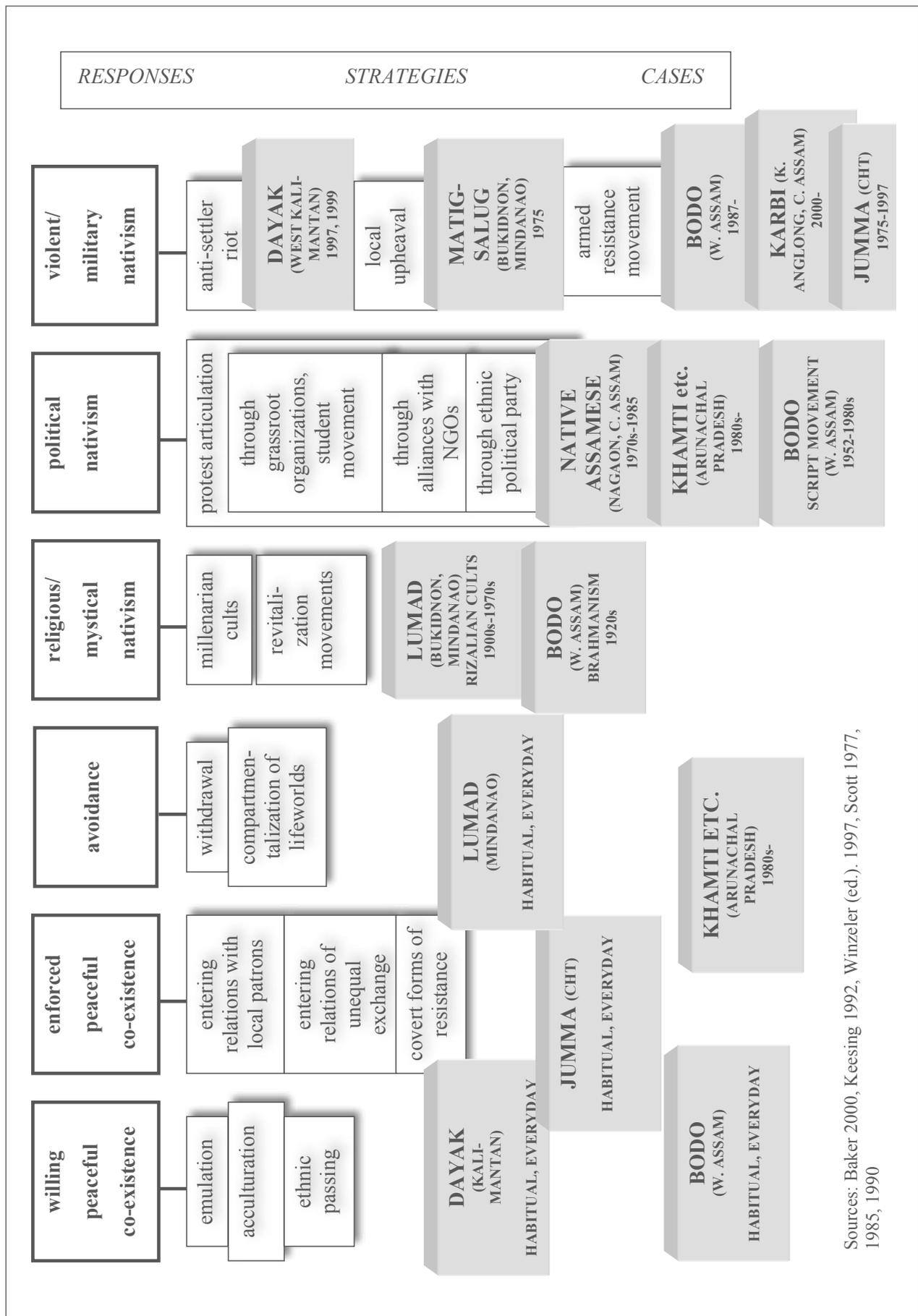
Figure 6: case studies of NCCR research project “Indigenous Peoples and Settlers: Resource Conflicts in Frontier Regions of South and Southeast Asia” (2001-2005)

non-native newcomers and indigenous locals slipped away. Brought to strange lands by the vagaries of the colonial labour market or the wishes of post-independence frontier administrators, some *tribal groups had taken up residence at the frontiers* in our study sample, only to be *declared unwelcome "settlers"* by the local tribal population. In the arising constellation of intra-"indigenous" conflicts over migration and displacement, the familiar parameters of alterity and identity at the frontier are radically changed, and the value of the frontier concept as a diagnostic and prognostic instrument appears diminished.

I do not think that anything that I have said so far truly undermines the frontier concept as I have developed it. Rather, our findings from our visit of South Asia's and Southeast Asia's settlement frontiers accentuate theoretical strands in the interpretation of the concept which I have described as integral to the refutation of the Turnerian tradition (see chapter 3), but not given additional emphasis as the text wore on. A crucial reference for scholars of comparative frontiers who insist on the complexity of indigenous-settler encounters and their long, entwined histories are Lamar and Thompson (eds., 1981). In their introduction to what is maybe the most disciplined and systematic comparative work on colonial settlement frontiers, they remind us of the fact that the vectors of social and cultural transformation point both ways when they define the frontier not simply as an arena of conflict and the setting for indigenous displacement, but a "territory or a zone of *interpenetration* between (...) societies" (Lamar and Thompson 1981a:7). Furthermore, leading revisionists in the historiography of the American West such as Richard White (1991a, b) or Patricia Limerick (2000) have distanced themselves from images of the frontier as uniquely disastrous and race relations there as solely ruinous for the indigenous subalterns. Instead, their accounts stress cultural mixing and the transformation of individual and collective identities *on both sides* of a porous ethnic border as a result of the frontier encounter. And before all others, Robin Wells (1973) had paid homage to the acculturative dynamism of American colonial frontiers by arguing that they – and, in extension, settlement frontiers throughout the world – gave rise to "frontier societies" that integrate both settlers and tribals in dynamic social networks which are based on mutual interdependence and growing cultural convergence.

That the notion of a neat division between "state" and "non-state spaces", each occupied by economically and politically independent polities (see Scott 1998a:52ff., 1998b:187ff.) is obsolete, has also been borne out by Owen Lattimore's (1940, 1962c) studies of the frontiers of imperial China. Lattimore revolutionized the field by granting a more active role to the indigenous inhabitants of frontier regions which articulated itself in vigorous trade, cultural exchange and political brokerage. By describing how tribal chiefs and headmen sold their allegiance to the Han conquerors in return for titles and land, thereby creating a system of "frontier feudalism", he was able to demonstrate the role of indigenous political elites in allying, if not actually fusing tribal and state antagonists.

Perhaps paradoxically, the results of our study of contemporary settlement frontiers in South and Southeast Asia vindicate both scholars who foreground boundary-crossing webs of interdependence and mutual opportunistic co-operation *and* those who prefer to diagnose, in the first place, conflict and the tension between indigenous cultural persistence on one hand and the efforts of the governments and peoples of the core areas to encourage social, cultural and economic change on the other (see, among others, Swift 1978, Bodley 1990:24-41, Whitten 1984, 1985:44-54, DeKoninck 2000, Little 2001:1-10, 229-239, Tsing 1993, 1996, 2005). The predominant impression from the comparison of the six sites that we studied and the half dozen others from the literature that I will draw on here is one of a *plurality of actual situations* that range from various forms of mutual accommodation



Sources: Baker 2000, Keesing 1992, Winzeler (ed.). 1997, Scott 1977, 1985, 1990

Figure 7 Typology of indigenous responses to the settler challenge, with case study peoples fitted in (sources for typology: Baker 2000; Keesing 1992; Winzeler, ed., 1997; Scott 1977, 1985, 1990)

to the openly hostile and confrontational. Not only does the in-migration of settlers elicit widely differing responses on the part of the indigenous locals (see Figure 7 above), but also the settlers' own readiness to relate or actively engage with parts of indigenous society varies strongly.

It is no coincidence, for example, that a much-cited distinction in comparative frontier history is that between "*frontiers of inclusion*" and such of "*exclusion*" (Mikesell 1960:65, Lattimore 1962d:477-481, Hennessy 1981:12), designating different degrees to which the expanding, dominant society in the encounter draws and enforces spatial, social and cultural boundaries between itself and indigenous society. At inclusive frontiers, the expanding society is at least theoretically permeable for members of indigenous communities, by allowing them to marry in, acculturate and, possibly, engage in ethnic passing (Mikesell 1960:65). Exclusive frontiers, on the other hand, are characterized by rigid barriers that separate colonizers and indigenous people, usually justified by an ideology of racial supremacy on the part of the former. Our sample, indeed, covered the entire scope, involving, in some cases, porous collective selves and encounters with a strong acculturative thrust, while the impression in others was of incommensurable differences of cultural attitudes and philosophies that rendered encounters antagonistic and bitter. Such variability, finally, characterized not only the different cases, but often also different phases of frontier expansion in one and the same case.

Rather than disproving the validity of applying a frontier analysis to the study of contemporary pioneer fringes, our research thus highlights the *complexity of encounters* that take place there – a complexity with which the frontier concept as a multivalent analytical tool is well able to deal. In what follows, I will endeavour to show the range of sometimes unexpected variations in frontier situations by remarking on a quartet of – sometimes more and sometimes less – counter-intuitive observations. They are: *indigenous people as settlers*; *indigenous people as stakeholders in state-building*; *inverted capabilities for violence*; and *internal differentiation of settler society and indigenous peoples*. Then, I will present a selection of findings from our examination of variables that may (or may not) allow us to explain the contingencies and variations in settler-indigenous relations. In our study, we looked at the *political and legal state structures* that form the frame of the encounters; the *degree of state support* for settlers; the latter's *temporal position* in the settlement process; *relative cultural distance* between indigenous people and settlers; and *relative numbers* (majority-minority relations). For the (mainly illustrative) purpose of the present thesis, a summary of the first three of those five topics will have to do.

8.2 four comparative observations

8.2.1. indigenous people as settlers

The standard narrative of conflict at settlement frontiers features social formations which radically differ in livelihood and sociocultural background (see e.g. Colombijn and Wadley 2001:8). The tension and violence which often characterize their interpenetration is usually the result, among other things, of the fact that they exploit the environment in different ways, possess social systems of different complexity and scale, and wield power asymmetrically. As a result of the differing social, political and economic endowment of settler society and tribal communities, many settlement frontiers have been described as "moving", and the basic process as being that of the displacement of the latter by the former (Alexander 1947, Jacobs 1971, West 1978, Nobles 1997). "Indigeneity", finally, connotes more than just local ancestry and origins; in influential interpretations of the concept,

it represents an oppositional category that derives its definitional features from the basic “otherness” of the various kinds of frontier interlopers (Tanner 1992). The neat categorical distinctions that inform our assumptions of basic conflict dynamics on settlement frontiers get blurred where we are faced with tribal settlers – a constellation which we encountered twice in our small sample of study cases. The opening of colonization fronts by indigenous migrants – sometimes forced, sometimes voluntary – represents a perplexing and altogether unexpected additional aspect of the phenomenon of postcolonial frontier colonization⁹⁹.

When in 1963, Pakistan’s then-military dictator, Ayub Khan, built a dam across the Karnaphuli river in the *Chittagong Hill Tracts* to propel his country’s industrial take-off, he submerged 40 % of the prime agricultural land of that largely tribal region. The construction of this hydroelectric project displaced 100,000 indigenous people who had farmed the area, most of them belonging to the *Chakma* ethnic group. An estimated 14,000 of them crossed into Tripura, a neighbouring princely state belonging to India. As just a year before, Chinese troops had overrun the northeasternmost bit of Indian territory (the North-East Frontier Agency, NEFA), and India felt a desperate need to augment the population on its side of the boundary in that exposed border region, the *Chakma* refugees were re-channelled to the North-East Frontier Agency. Together with 750 *Hajong* (Hinduized tribals from Mymensingh district in Bangladesh), they were allotted land in Lohit, Papumpare and Changlang Districts and issued certificates that legalized their entry into India and made them eligible for citizenship (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:15, 28f.)¹⁰⁰. Today, the Union Government’s decision to strengthen border defenses by populating vacant land with tribal settlers has become the source of acute political tensions in the otherwise tranquil state of *Arunachal Pradesh*. Citing the danger that the unchecked growth of the erstwhile refugees – who were estimated to number 65,000 in 1991 – irredeemably changed the population balance to the detriment of *Arunachal Pradesh*’s indigenous people¹⁰¹, students and politicians started to demand the *Chakma*’s removal from the state. The agitation against the presence of the tribal settlers culminated in massive threats and violence towards them in 1994 and 1995; it has since flared up again repeatedly, usually as a response to attempts of the central government to resolve the deadlocked issue, or in the run-up to local elections (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:64, 66).

Whereas the *Chakma*’s opening of a colonization front in *Arunachal Pradesh* is the combined result of “self-rescue migration” (van Schendel 1986; van Schendel 2005:210f.) occasioned by development aggression and a state’s geostrategical interest in creating “living borders” (Little 2001:106), *West Assam*’s resident population of *Santhal and other non-autochthonous tribals from Jharkhand and Orissa* illustrates a different pattern of indigenous migration to the frontier. From 1836 onward, the British converted a part of today’s Tezpur, Darrang, Goalpara and Kokrajhar

99 The salience of indigenous migration for population dynamics in the developing world has been highlighted, among others, by a recent issue of the IWGIA periodical *Indigenous Affairs* (3/07, “Migration”). The articles, however, deal not so much with migration to the frontier, but with population flows from indigenous territories to urban areas within or across the boundaries of the respective countries.

100 The Union government’s choice fell on the *Chakma* because of their reputation of loyalty to India. At the time of the partition in 1947, the Indian flag had been hoisted in the main towns of the Hill Tracts, indicating the people’s refusal to be incorporated into Pakistan. On account of what many Bengali understood to be *Chakma* treason, the latter to this day are charged with having served as a pro-India fifth column (Levene 1999:349; Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:26, note 37).

101 In the meantime, the *Chakma* have become the third-largest ethnic group in *Arunachal*; in areas of high concentration, as in some parts of Bordumsa, Diyun and Miao circles, they have come to outnumber the locals (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:63f., 74ff.).



Photo 20: indigenous settlers: young Chakma man waiting for the boat to bring him to his village on the other side of the Berang River, Chongkham Circle, Lohit District, Arunachal Pradesh (Photo: Christian Erni)

districts into tea plantations, bringing along labourers of diverse tribal backgrounds from Bihar, Orissa and other economically-depressed areas in Central India. Collectively tagged “tea-garden tribes” or “Santhal” in Assam, they settled in their thousands in the vicinity and later also further away from the plantations, displacing local indigenous Bodo communities in the process. The fact that the British colonial administration lured Santhal settlers with land grants which they could later convert into ownership deeds – a possibility that was not available for the original owners of the land – compounded the bitterness of the Bodo, directing it both against the state and its perceived Santhal favorites. In 1987, radicals have started their violent agitation for a Bodo homeland; besides Muslim and Hindu Bengali, Nepali and Marwari settlers, their campaigns have increasingly also targeted their fellow tribals whose grandparents or great-grandparents had once set out for the booming tea frontier of Northeast India (Baruah 1999:195f., Goswami, forthcoming:60)¹⁰².

¹⁰² A glance at the literature suggests that indigenous migrants at settlement frontiers are by no means an anomaly, although not all of them have elicited nativist responses in the local population. The cases listed below evince additional rationales for relocating to the frontier. The search for land for swiddening, cattle farming, intensive agriculture and often cash-crop cultivation is evident in Eastern Chiapas where the principal actors in the colonization of the Selva Lacandona and the main areas of the Zapatista uprising in 1991 were Tzeltal and Tzotzil Indians from the central highlands of Chiapas, complemented by Tojolobales and Choles (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello 1994:41); in the case of the *serranos* of Quechua descent who keep pouring into Peru’s *montaña* (Hvalkof 1998, 2003, 2007, 2008); with the Ifugao, Itneg, Tingguian, Bontok and Kalinga from the Cordillera who are a conspicuous settler element in large parts of the Sierra Madre of North Luzon, the Philippines (Bion Griffin 1985:91ff.); in the case of the Akha, Hmong and Karen who have migrated to Northern Thailand in the course of the first half of the 20th century (see e.g. Kammerer 1988); and with the Hmong, Tay Nung and other tribals from North Vietnam who settled in the Central Highlands in significant numbers in the past decades, specializing in slashing and burning fields for majoritarian Kinh migrants

8.2.2. indigenous people as stakeholders in state-building

Oppositional models of state-society relations – to which my frontier concept largely subscribes – cast local politics as premised on the defiance of state authority. Seen through their lens, indigenous communities are essentially conservative, wishing at all costs to fend off change and preserve their – territorial and symbolic – boundaries. Conversely, state-building is being represented as a process in which the state must impose its central institutions and cultural values on recalcitrant indigenous populations¹⁰³. Where states have managed to extend some amount of control over the frontier, indigenous communities are implicitly portrayed as “conquered, coopted, or duped” (Nugent 1994:336). While our study showed in numerous instances that states indeed expand in ways that *do* threaten community interests, and indigenous communities may in fact comprehend the state as basically inimical and a hazard to their survival (West Kalimantan before 1998, see Geiger 2008b; large parts of the *Jumma* peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts to this day, see Roy and Halim, forthcoming; Bodo nationalists¹⁰⁴ in West Assam to the immediate present, see Goswami, forthcoming), there is no logical necessity for things to develop this way. In almost as many instances, the opposition – far from being structural – faded as indigenous people were given stakes in the local state, and moved into positions of power.

Northeast India, where we find a heavy concentration of indigenous peoples, is governed in part by the so-called *Sixth Schedule* of India’s constitution. The Sixth Schedule contains special provisions for the administration of tribal majority areas; the scheme’s benefits are bestowed on all those groups whom the Indian government officially recognizes as indigenous to the area (termed “Scheduled Tribes” in the language of the country’s constitution). Most Sixth Schedule areas had already been set apart during colonial times as so-called “backward tracts” or – the term in use since the beginning of the 20th century – “excluded areas”. Sixth Schedule provisions feature the setting-up of autonomous districts and autonomous regions with elected councils in which are vested the powers to regulate customary law, the administration of justice as well as the occupation or use of land. While these regulations are frequently undermined by corrupt officials, they, in fact, do provide for some measure of self-government for indigenous peoples, and illustrate how in community spaces, the state can take shape in a non-antagonistic fashion

(deKoninck 1998:358). Not always is frontier colonization by indigenous people spontaneous, as is evidenced by the Hmong in French Guyana. Because they had cast their lot with the Americans in the Vietnam war and thus had to expect retribution from the victorious North Vietnamese, thousands of Hmong were airlifted to the United States after the fall of Saigon. A sizeable number of their ethnic kin in Laos faced the same predicament; several hundred of them were finally given asylum by the French authorities and resettled in their overseas territories. In 1977, Hmong refugees were moved to the interior of French Guyana where they were given patches of rainforest along the Comté river to clear. The descendants of the airlifted wartime allies of America today make up 1.2% of the territory’s total population (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2004a). Forced resettlement, finally, is the fate of scores of so-called “mobile” peoples (usually hunters-and-gatherers, but also swidden cultivators) who fail to conform to the state’s “civilizational” standards. Pressed into sedentarization programmes were for instance the Maniq (“Sakai”) of South Thailand (Hamilton 2002:81-89; 93f., note 16), and indigenous uplanders from various ethnic groups were resettled by the government of Vietnam on the pretext of protecting watersheds and combating shifting cultivation (McElwee 2004:198f.). In these cases, however, the vector of population transfer often points away from the frontier as the states in question prefer to shift “civilization”’s latest recruits nearer to population centers.

103 Note for instance Heinz’ (1988:17) formulation, according to which “we could identify indigenous peoples as populations (...) displaying unwillingness to be part of the state in which they live for the moment”.

104 As previously noted in chapter 6.1.8, the term “nativism” refers to a local population’s intense opposition to a minority because of its foreign origin (see e.g. Weiner 1978:268).

(see Barbora, forthcoming:49-52 on Karbi Anglong, Stulligross 1999 on Meghalaya and Karbi Anglong).

After independence, areas which had largely been unadministered during colonial times or where the colonial state was least present – such as today’s state of *Arunachal Pradesh*, formerly the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) – were considered not quite ready for self-government by the way of autonomous district councils. For decades, they were administered directly from Delhi with the Governor of Assam acting as the agent of the Indian president. Moreover, they were protected from the large-scale influx of migrants from the Indian heartland or that of neighbouring countries (such as East Pakistan, later Bangladesh) by a carry-over from British times, the so-called *Inner Line Regulation* which restricted the entry of outsiders and their owning land or operating businesses. In 1987, Arunachal Pradesh became a full-blown state, and provisions for affirmative action on behalf of Scheduled Tribes were preserved. In the state’s Legislative Assembly, all except one seat are reserved for indigenous people¹⁰⁵ so that only tribal candidates can contest elections. Moreover, a constitutional amendment is in place to prevent settler in-migration and its attendant demographic change from subverting the fixed balance between reserved and unreserved seats. Local politics in Arunachal Pradesh, thus, are entirely dominated by Khamti, Singpho, Mishmi and indigenous politicians of other tribal backgrounds, even though these seem to exhibit values and priorities that one would rather associate with national rather than with parochial tribal elites (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:37, Baruah 2003a:916). In withholding the right to political franchise from migrants, the political order in Arunachal Pradesh, in fact, violates current standards of universal social and political rights. Where a regime of protective discrimination in favour of the indigenous population regulates political life, such as in this Indian frontier state, not only is it difficult to maintain that indigenous society is excluded from political power, but the very proposition of a sharp dichotomy between “the state” and the latter becomes untenable.

In contrast to Northeast India, where the modestly inclusive political order of the present has evolved organically from colonial and early postcolonial precedents, the indigenous Dayak population of *West Kalimantan* has won stakes in the local state as a result of the collapse of the previous regime – a collapse to which they may actually have contributed in their own small way two years earlier when they unleashed the worst ethnic clashes that Suharto’s “New Order” had seen in more than three decades (Geiger 2004b:8). Since it rose to power in 1965, the “New Order” regime had ruled in the name of stability and economic growth, fueled by resources from the archipelago’s outer islands. It maintained a tight-fisted control over the latter through farcical electoral procedures which more or less amounted to the appointment of trusted military personnel (or other representatives of the regime) to important offices such as those of the provincial governor or – one level down – the head of a regency (*kabupaten*). Numerous laws were passed that placed the rights of the state and of “development” ahead of those of local communities, and their leaders which had traditionally overseen resource allocation and land management lost their authority to village heads who now implemented policies based on national directives (Duncan 2004b:106). At the time when the Dayak violently rose against the Madurese in early 1997, only one out of six rural districts in the province was led by a Dayak (Geiger 2008b:380), and the governorship was held by a Sumatran from Lampung province. The fact that the Dayak “sons of the soil” were systematically excluded from access to the higher political offices in the province was the cause of immense frustration among the indigenous population, and as such an important contributing factor in the latter’s recourse to violence against the unloved

105 Mizoram and Nagaland, two other states in Northeast India, prescribe the same number of reserved seats for Scheduled Tribes, while Meghalaya reserves 55 of 60 (Baruah 2003a:923).

migrant group. Fourteen months after the 1997 riots ended, Suharto had to step down, weakened by the Asian financial crisis, and his successors in office agreed to institutionalise sweeping political changes. Among these was a new framework for the transfer of responsibility and authority from Jakarta to regional (i.e. district) governments. With the new laws on regional autonomy, the central government now availed of an instrument to appease Dayak anger over bureaucratic marginalization by the national centre. Trying to prevent more “violence from below”, the government of B. J Habibie started to appoint more Dayak to district head (*bupati*) positions – the highest political prize beside the governorship. It did so mainly by dividing existing districts into two parts, giving leadership of the new units to Dayak (van Klinken 2007:7). By early 1999, three out of eight rural districts (37.5%) were in Dayak hands, as were the provincial chapters of some of the most important political parties (Davidson n.d.:8f.). At the time of this writing, West Kalimantan has a Dayak governor, indicating that the local state is rapidly assuming an indigenous face¹⁰⁶.

The encapsulation of many indigenous communities by the state is, of course, not dependent on access to positions of power. Even before they become eligible for office in local government, indigenous leaders may show a pronounced zeal to propagate the narratives of nation-building and popularize the nation’s symbols. The case of the *Manobo* (among them the *Matigsalug*) in *Bukidnon*, *Mindanao*, indicates the presence of such symbols even as the group mobilizes to lash out against those who represent the nation on their territory – settlers, loggers and armed constabulary. In the first decades of the 20th century, a millenarian cult revolving around the martyred hero of Filipino anti-colonial resistance against the Spaniards, José Rizal, found fertile ground among the Manobo and other tribal groups. In the face of growing outside encroachment of tribal domains, ritual activity aimed at precipitating the return of this iconic figure of Filipino nationalism galvanized unity among the dispersed and formerly hostile indigenous communities. Until the 1970s, incidences of violent retribution carried out by Manobo Rizalian cultists who believed themselves immune from physical harm by loggers, settlers, private security guards and the police occurred repeatedly in the region, and the leader of the great Manobo uprising of 1975 professed to have been under the influence of José Rizal’s spirit (Wenk, forthcoming:34f., 41).

8.2.3 inverted capabilities for violence

At some frontiers, indigenous peoples have historically been able to hold their own in regional political-military fields of force. Nils Magnus Fiskesjö (2000:14) coined the term “predatory periphery” for hill-dwelling tribal polities such as the Wa at the Burmese-Chinese border whose constant raiding – both of fellow Wa communities and adjacent tribal and lowland communities

106 The involvement of indigenous people in institutions of governance is not confined to the latter’s capture of political offices and participation in party politics. The literature offers rich evidence for an interface between the supposedly “traditional” political system of local tribal communities and the institutions of the engulfing state even where indigenous elites do not vie for positions in local government, and are ignorant of electoral politics. The Meratus, a society of egalitarian shifting cultivators in South Kalimantan, are a case in point. As Tsing (1993:150) explains, local politics are built on an unquestioned recognition of state authority and its invocation by indigenous leaders. Indeed, among the Meratus as much as among other contemporary acephalous societies, leadership is achieved and consolidated by tapping locally unavailable sources of power (ibid.:250). When trying to settle disputes, Meratus leaders routinely threaten to call the police and strategically deploy symbols of state authority by using administrative titles and stressing ties between *adat* (the customary law of local society) and national law. They urge iconic forms of state-endorsed order on their communities, such as clustered settlements or “proper” marriages. “Through a rhetoric of connection to regional authorities”, Tsing (ibid.) writes, “local leaders attract political constituencies that believe in their capacity to lead”.



Photo 21: helping to build the state: Khamti chief (*gaonbura*) in his office, Tezu town, Lohit District, Arunachal Pradesh (Photo: Shimreichon Luithui-Erni)

– struck fear in the hearts of their neighbours and forced the states who claimed suzerainty over their territories (including the British in colonial time) to refrain from militarily subduing them. Rather than being tribal satellite polities, such predatory societies constituted smaller power centers of their own (ibid.:13). Heirs of decidedly bellicose societies, they continue to inspire fear to this day, successfully cultivating their warrior image as a precious strategic resource. As that resource's value for the deterrence of intruders is diminished unless it is periodically demonstrated, some of the heirs of societies with warlike traditions can be seen meting out violence in bloody uprisings or pogroms.

Thus, like other Manobo groups to which they belong in ethno-linguistic terms, the *Matigsalug* of *Bukidnon, Mindanao*, enjoy a comparatively warlike reputation. Traditional warfare featured the taking of slaves, and raiding is documented until World War II (Wenk, forthcoming:6). In the first half of the 20th century, the influx of rising numbers of settlers led to repeated outbreaks of millenarian cults among the *Matigsalug*, and in 1975, a simmering land feud with migrants culminated in an armed uprising in the course of which the *Matigsalug* attacked logging camps, military posts and settlers in parts of *Bukidnon, Cotabato* and *Davao del Sur* provinces. The rebellion left an estimated 300 (according to some estimates even 800, see *ibid.*, note 48) people dead, among them 50 military men and an unknown number of *Manobo* (*ibid.*:38). At the behest of his advisor on minority affairs, Manuel Elizalde, then-president Marcos pardoned the leader of the uprising, awarded a reservation to his people and secured his allegiance by means of a lifelong monthly rent (*ibid.*:41f.). As part of the peace agreement, the indigenous leadership agreed to help persuade other *Lumad* rebels to lay down their arms, and to let their men be trained as an anti-communist vigilante force. The *Matigsalug* continue to honour this part of the peace compact till



Photo 22: political broker: billboard sign with harvest festival greetings by the newly-elected Dayak governor of the Indonesian province of West Kalimantan, Cornelis, January 2008 (photo: Danilo Geiger)

today. Their case bears out that under certain circumstances, local traditions of forceful territorial defense can resurge among former warrior societies and fuel outbursts of nativist violence.

In the shadow of a rather famous embodiment of Fiskesiö's "predatory periphery" in the region – the Iban –, groups of *Malayic Dayak* and *Land Dayak* in *Western Borneo* have recently given proof that they were able to perpetuate "traditional" institutions of violence in spite of vigorous colonial pacification campaigns at the turn of the 19th century (see Geiger 2008b). In early 1997, parts of the indigenous population of West Kalimantan's Pontianak, Sambas and Sanggau districts rose up to drive out the Madurese settler minority. To the tune of some 486 settler fatalities, 3000 torched migrant homes and 20.000 internally displaced, Dayak crowds purged the unloved settler group from the interior of the province. Besides the Dayak's large edge in numbers, the assault owed its terrible force to the terror unleashed by the Dayak's employment of seemingly arcane methods of killing (headtaking) and techniques of frenzy (possession by the spirits of mythical war leaders) mentioned in early ethnographic sources. The key to this amazing resurgence of "customary" violence in a contemporary conflict is the regional tradition of states employing Dayak as mercenaries. The long trail of state-authorized non-state violence includes Suharto's enlistment of Dayak warriors to flush out Chinese rebels in the border region to Sarawak in 1967. It also leads back to the 19th century's tangled struggles for the control of the alluvial gold fields in the so-called "Chinese Districts", involving Malay rulers, Chinese miners and the Dutch colonial power.

The third relevant case in our sample concerns the *Mishmi*, *Khamti*, *Singpho* and related groups that inhabit the two study areas in the district of *Lohit* in *Arunachal Pradesh*. Tireless raiders, their

forefathers regularly laid waste to Assamese settlements in the plains, carrying off large quantities of slaves¹⁰⁷ (see e.g. Barooah 1969, and von Fürer-Haimendorf 1982a on the Nishi and Miri). Heirs to slave-holding traditions, they have found novel ways to institutionalize a predatory economy as Arunachal Pradesh is opening up to the outside world. Knowing that, being migrants in a state still regulated by the restrictive Inner Line regulations, most vendors on the market are operating their businesses illegally, Mishmi, Khamti and Singpho are habitually taking advantage of these migrants' precarious legal situation. Many market tenders and tea stall owners on Lohit District's town markets report having experienced that both old and young indigenous locals eat and drink or take goods without payment, or pay only a fraction of the actual price. The lifting of goods from migrant shops is also occurring among the members of Arunachal Pradesh's fervently nativist student union, the AAPSU (All-Arunachal Pradesh Students Union); moreover, the AAPSU also extorts "contributions" in cash from migrant shop owners (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:59). Such petty exploitation of hapless settlers may be attributed to the temptation offered by a legal set-up which disenfranchises non-natives. However, it is also possible to discern a legacy of formerly predatory politics which, given the opportunity, are re-incarnating themselves in everyday-acts of theft¹⁰⁸.

Equally thriving among at least the economic elites of many of Arunachal Pradesh's indigenous groups is the practice of employing underpaid migrant labour on their fields – again, a curious inversion of the standard situation at the frontier where labor relations are usually tilted in favour of the migrant element (see chapter 6.1.7). Illegal immigration into Arunachal Pradesh happens at least partly at the behest of indigenous landowners who show no interest in working their fields themselves; most Khamti households in the case study area in Chowkham Circle (Lohit District) nowadays employ between one family and – in extreme cases – one hundred individual migrant labourers as tenants, sharecroppers or as farm hands on their land holdings (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:15f., 49). Apparently, the Khamti feel secure in the knowledge that when necessity arises, they can easily rid themselves of this work force, as the settlers do not have the necessary papers and thus can be expelled any time (ibid.:48).

While in cases such as Arunachal Pradesh, indigenous supremacy appears rather durable as it is upheld by a politico-legal regime of protective discrimination, in others – such as that of *West Kalimantan* –, the indigenous subalterns' position in the regional ethnic hierarchy must continually be reinforced by demonstrations of military prowess. Nevertheless, the case of the violent confrontation between the Dayak and the Madurese in 1997 (and 1999) suggests that structures of exclusion may sometimes weigh in in favour of indigenous people rather than migrants. Thus, the Madurese were not only up against their Dayak foes' war magic and supernatural allies, but also against powerful, pan-Indonesian stereotypes that deprived them of public and official sympathies despite the fact that they had so clearly been victimised (Geiger 2008b:351). Not admitted to the "moral community" of West Kalimantan's multi-ethnic settler society, and poorly represented in local government and the bureaucracy, the average Madurese migrants are a parody of Robert Dentan's (1992:220) frontier "invaders" – "relatively powerful people [who] force themselves into the milieu of relatively powerless people (...)".

107 Raiding and slave-taking by hill peoples was, of course, not confined to the foothills and the plains; its standard target were neighbouring communities of the same or closely-related ethno-linguistic groups (von Fürer-Haimendorf 1982a:98-116).

108 Tellingly, trading minorities in the state do not usually employ usurious trading practices – another form of negative reciprocity in transactions – in transactions with indigenous locals; their preferred clients are Nepali, Assamese and above all Chakma migrants (ibid.:19, note 30).



Photo 23: violent indigenous nativism: Madurese survivors of the Malay/Dayak purges of 1999, being taken to safety by a military convoy near Singkawang, West Kalimantan (photo: Philip Blenkinsop)

8.2.4 internal differentiation of settler society and indigenous peoples

Upon close inspection, the simple opposition between indigenous frontier-dwellers and settler invaders dissolves into a much more fine-grained pattern that shows these dichotomous entities to be internally differentiated and interconnected. While the boundary between indigenous and settler realms may involve a deeply-felt cultural division and the lived experience of incommensurable lifeworlds on the part of individual actors, sociological analysis reveals that neither of them are bounded isolates; furthermore, their internal heterogeneity – in ethnic, social and economic terms – defies attempts at reification. Thus, in the *Chittagong Hill Tracts*, for instance, the epithets ‘*Jumma*’ (‘swiddener’) or ‘*Pahari*’ (‘hill people’) comprise a total of eleven indigenous

ethno-linguistic groups belonging to different language families, inhabiting different ecological zones and belonging to different socio-political types. A wide gulf separates, for example, the egalitarian Mru from the Chakma and Marma with their hereditary *rajahs* (chiefs) who reflect – in the case of the former – the influence of Indian traditions of traditional statehood and that of Burmese and Rakhaing models of the petty state in the latter case (see Sopher 1964, Brauns and Löffler 1990, Roy and Halim, forthcoming). The partly state-sponsored, partly state-facilitated transfer of Bengali plains-dwellers that culminated between 1979 and 1985 affected these groups to a different extent, leading them to very different conclusions regarding the option of armed resistance. While the Chakma, Marma, Tripura and Taungchangya whose fertile territories in the valley floors were overrun by settlers rallied to the flag of the tribal Shanti Bahini guerillas, the Mru in their hill redoubts were not affected by displacement. As a result, they not only failed to commit their fighting men to fight the Bangladesh army, but in fact rose up in arms against the tribal guerillas. As the intertribal conflict dragged on, the Mru fighters (called the *Mru Bahini*) turned to the Bangladesh military for help, who gave them military training and salaries. The immediate reasons for the Mru's alignment with the state in the context of the *Jumma* insurgency were the guerillas' high-handed behavior towards the Mru villagers and resentment against the forced provisioning of the fighters. At a much more basic, almost structural level, however, the Mru's misgivings about the Chakma guerillas are reactions to the longstanding ambitions of power of the valley polities in the surrounding hills, and the condescension that their populations traditionally exhibit toward the hill-dwellers and their lifestyles (van Schendel 2002:370, note 16).

No less pronounced is usually the ethnic heterogeneity of settler society. Theorizing on Latin America, Emilio Willems (1977:259) has found that the diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds of migrants and the difficulties that they encounter in forging social cohesion and solidarity are a crucial definitional characteristic of the settlement frontiers which he described – at least in the pioneer stage. As each of the component ethnic groups has a distinct socio-economic profile and is represented in a distinctive manner in the civil service and local government, their respective relations with the indigenous population – with whom they compete for resources and access to power – are far from uniform. The example of *West Assam* with its five major groups of migrants bears this out well. Though resented by the indigenous Bodo, the Marwari, an ubiquitous trading minority in Northeast India, maintain smooth relations with them; the fact that they have not so far been the target of nativist assaults can probably be explained by the sheer indispensability of their services as sources of credit and the backbone of the local retail system. A complementary or symbiotic ethnic division of labour also prevails in the case of the Bengali Hindu who dominate the higher echelons of the local state administration and supplement the Marwari as petty traders and shopkeepers. As the Bodo emulate them socially and culturally, frictions between them are minimal. The same can be said for the Nepali, though this is not so much the result of the migrant group's dominant position in the area's ethnic hierarchy (to the contrary, the Nepali score low on social capital), but of the fact that their numbers are insignificant, and – being graziers – they occupy a different economic niche from the Bodo. Competition is most intense with Adivasi and Muslim Bengali agriculturalists, but in the case of the former, conflict has long been tempered by the broad socio-cultural commonalities which, as fellow tribals, they share with the Bodo. Numerically most significant and burdened by an Assam-wide anti-Muslim sentiment, the Muslim Bengali have become the standard target of Bodo attempts to thin out the settler population in the area which they claim as their homeland (Goswami, forthcoming:34-41).

Thus, the fact that migrants are split along ethnic lines may have important consequences on the configuration of migration-induced conflict. Because it is very rare that nativist violence targets a heterogeneous migrant population evenly, but tends to single out one or two groups at a particular moment, the different settler groups are left with a range of choices. These include passive by-standing, accommodation with or appeasement of indigenous nativists, or partisan participation on either side of the conflict. Thus, six decades of accelerating spontaneous settlement and state-sponsored transmigration have brought four major ethnic groups of migrants (the Bugis, Javanese, Balinese and Madurese) to *West Kalimantan*. The Chinese as the fifth major migrant element have a longer history of settlement in the area, dating back to the early 19th century (see Geiger, forthcoming). Anti-settler violence in 1997 and 1999 concentrated uniquely on migrants from Madura. In 1997, the Dayak rioters could count on the tacit complicity of most other ethnic groups; two years later, the major blows were dealt by the Malay, a non-indigenous native community that has traditionally dominated West Kalimantan's social and ethnic hierarchy, and some Chinese and Buginese were reported to have joined the fray on their side (Somers Heidhues 2003:275).

Commonly, however, settler society is not only made up of a variety of ethnic groups, but also of social classes. Depending on the case, violent antagonisms between pioneer homesteaders and large landowners or cattle barons may be more prominent and conspicuous than conflicts with indigenous peoples (see chapter 6.1.8). As the outcome of such conflicts is usually pre-determined, the role of the frontier as a safety valve and social equalizer – a chief proposition of Turner's – is thrown into question. Re-evaluations of the Turner thesis have shown for the American West that the frontier has not usually promoted social mobility, as, over time, a majority of yeomen farmers found their dreams of a secure livelihood denied by land speculators and corrupt public officials (Gates 1936, Fite 1966). The myth of delivery from poverty through frontier migration has also been exposed by research on contemporary settlement frontiers in Latin America and Southeast Asia. Until the mid-1990s, national land policies in Latin America emphasised cattle-ranching for export and the establishment of large-scale, export-oriented plantations. As a result of this policy bias, the old, landed elites' influence and wealth was further entrenched, increasing their comparative advantage over smallholder settlers. The majority of frontier migrants have been "unable to move beyond subsistence", and the tens of thousands who have given up end up as a low-cost labour force, clearing new land for the ultimate benefit of speculators and larger-scale interests (Scudder 1989:xiv). These practices have advanced the denudation of the forests and resulted in the simultaneous displacement of indigenous communities and pioneer settlers alike. Debating the merits of frontier migration for impoverished farmers in the context of Southeast Asia, DeKoninck and Déry (1997:3f.) have arrived at very similar conclusions.

Evidence of the deep socio-economic rifts that divide settler communities is not hard to come by in the results from our research. In *West Assam*, the Muslim Bengali, the most numerically significant of the settler groups, are heavily stratified internally. A few of the early Muslim Bengali settlers had "assumed control over vast lands" and "amassed immense wealth". Risen to political influence as leaders of this important immigrant group, they also made themselves a name as unscrupulous usurers among the Bodo. On the other hand, the vast majority of the Muslim Bengali "never enjoyed economic ascendancy". Thousands of them do not own land and have to eke a living as landless farmhands or menial labourers in the town of Kokrahjar (Goswami, forthcoming:39). Life is equally precarious for a majority of *West Kalimantan's* Madurese. Working as wetland rice farmers in the countryside or as day labourers, coolies or stevedores in urban areas, their thriftiness

is the only capital of the average member of this ethnic group. Nevertheless, in the communities hardest hit by the violence in 1997, “the Madurese were generally better off than the norm and included contractors, businessmen, quarry operators and many others wealthy enough to have made the pilgrimage to Mecca” (Human Rights Watch Asia 1997:5). Moreover, the fact that one of the districts ravaged by the riots (Sanggau) had a Madurese district head (*bupati*) disproves the notion – prevalent in academic writings on the case – of that minority’s pervasive powerlessness (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 1997).

The gap between rich and poor is, however, best illustrated by the following examples. In *Nagaon, Central Assam*, local political brokers – the so-called *mattabar* – dominate the Bengali-speaking Muslim migrant communities in a near total manner. They own a large chunk of the land, have privileged access to the bureaucracy and strong ties to the local Muslim clergy, and handle local disputes. The only chance for new settler arrivals to legalize their stay, acquire land and gain a more or less stable livelihood is through the *mattabar*, who becomes his patron. The *mattabar* obtains a permanent resident certificate (PRC) and a land title for him, acting as a mediator with the authorities, protecting the settler against harrassment by officials and the general hostility of the local Assamese populace. In return, he appropriates a large part of the produce of his settler dependents and tells them who they ought to cast their votes for. Their success as frontier entrepreneurs of sorts seems to stem basically from their ability to provide protection in a rough and hostile frontier milieu (Barbora, forthcoming:37ff.). On the other end of the social and economic scale, spectacular amplitudes of destitution are reached in the case of the *Chittagong Hill Tracts*. Among the strongest incentives for joining the transmigration programme was that it offered relief from debts to *zamindari* (landlords) in the migrants’ home provinces (Levene 1999:362), and that it held out the promise of weekly rations of basic foodstuffs (among other things 80 kg rice) in the settlement areas. Whereas provisioning with food rations features in many programmes of guided population transfer across the world, it is usually conceived of as a transitional measure and phased out after some time. Not so, however, in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. A study estimated in 2003 that nearly 28,000 families of government-sponsored settlers that live in cluster villages continue to depend on food rations – notably 15 or more years since the military had started handing them out (Dewan 2003, quoted in Roy and Halim, forthcoming:32).

Indigenous society often is bitterly divided over how best to deal with various kinds of intruders to their lands. Factionalist cleavages may follow traditional rivalries between leaders, undermining the unity of the group in the face of the challenge by invasive outsiders. Thus, the campaign for a collective land title (CADT) that would protect the entire domain of the Matigsalug in *Bukidnon, Mindanao*, was nearly derailed by a legal challenge from the clan of a longstanding political rival of the chief (*datu*) who pushed the title application (Datu Lito Gawilan). After intensive mediation, the renegade clan acceded, but is reported to remain reluctant with regard to the CADT, and wishes to retain the sole management control in its area (Wenk, forthcoming:71).

As the situation often presents itself, some members of indigenous society favor doing business with the intruders, while others would want nothing to do with them. Sometimes, yet by no means always, the dividing line follows the division between elite and common population. Elites may draw on traditional forms of legitimation as in the case of the Chakma *rajas* (see Roy and Halim, forthcoming), or may have risen to prominence as movement activists such as some members of the FEMMATRICs Council in Bukidnon (see Wenk, forthcoming), or combine these two modes of



Photo 24: precarious living: flooded settler enclave on exposed river bank, Juria, Nagaon
(photo: Sanjay Barbora)

elite formation (as in the case of the current supreme *datu* of the Matigsalug (ibid.)). Be it as it may, the range of strategies available to indigenous societies and their elites is certainly much wider than the mere choice between accommodation and resistance. Between the two, accommodation seems the logical choice, given the unequal power relations between encapsulating and incapsulated society. While indigenous frontier histories occasionally may tell tales of one leader's principled and unwavering opposition to engulfment, they are replete with episodes where indigenous elites make their private peace with settler society, often for the promise of material rewards and other benefits that accrue to brokers between locals and newcomers¹⁰⁹. Thus, Nishi, Mishmi, Khamti and Adi politicians and businessmen in *Arunachal Pradesh* have (through legal and illegal means) leased out logging contracts "and earned a fortune from the proceeds" (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:19). The current transition from a regime of separate administration to an ordinary legal codex offers even more opportunities for profiteering. As the provisions that so far used to vest land in the community rather than the individual start to be replaced, the indigenous elites are the first to serve themselves on the budding land market. Ever so often, village heads and indigenous businessmen register private titles to land which, according to still-valiant land acts, are the collective property of their communities. The same elites also flaunt the regulations that restrict the sale or transfer of community land to non-community members. And finally, at the behest of indigenous landowners who need labourers for their fields, and encouraged by politicians who build their careers on the migrant vote, government officials issue Inner Line permits – i.e. the prized documents that legitimize an outsider's presence in this restricted area – at an inflationary rate (ibid.).

109 On strongly exclusive frontiers, for instance, coopted members of the indigenous elite are allowed to penetrate the otherwise impenetrable lines of segregated housing and living, and be admitted an – albeit peripheral – place in the social networks of the dominant society (see, for instance, Tyler 2003:249 on Uighur cadres sharing apartment blocks with their Han colleagues in otherwise ethnically-segregated Xinjiang).

Being a transient activity that does not necessitate the permanent transfer of land rights to outsiders – nevertheless a contentious proposition that is bound to stir up dissent in the community –, logging in particular invites the collaboration of indigenous elites. Thus, when logging was rife in *Mindanao* (from the 1950s to the 1980s), operations in some concession areas were guaranteed by local leaders whom the concessionaires had appointed as “chief concession guards” (Wenk, forthcoming:31). Where the frontier has not been pacified yet, rents for indigenous leaders may also be granted for military restraint, or the promise of military support against challenges from other than indigenous contenders, as a second example from *Mindanao* illustrates: Manobo and Bukidnon *datus* who led rebellions against the encroachment of their domains in the mid-1970s, were pardoned by the Marcos government, donned fantasy honorific titles (“supreme *datus*”) and recruited as political and military allies to the government side. Their allegiance was bought with monthly stipends and their followers armed and trained as paramilitaries. Apart from consenting to the militarization of their communities, the *datus* persuaded the leaders of still-defiant groups to submit to government authority and become, like them, clients in the Marcos regime’s system of political patronage. PANAMIN patronage enabled these leaders to break out of the confines of traditional models of political leadership in Lumad societies, as it gave them access to material largesse that bought them allegiance and provided them with unprecedented, regional influence. As regional strongmen, they were in a position to forge alliances with Manila-based politicians, the rewards of which were posts in the local government which are normally out of reach for indigenous leaders. Thus, Datu Lorenzo Gawilan, the leader of the great Matigsalug rebellion of 1975, became a follower of the Congressman who represented one of Bukidnon’s districts, and subsequently became mayor of one of the nearby towns. The office has remained in the family: at present, a son of the former rebel leader is holding it (see Wenk, forthcoming:45f.). We can hardly disagree with the conclusion of the author of the study that this much-revered figure in the pantheon of Lumad leaders traded his group’s independence and “negotiated its acceptance and acculturation into the dominant [lowland] society” (ibid.:45).

Thus, not all locals are doing badly under the alien overlords, and by far not all members of settler society prosper as the frontier advances. The twin fact that the colonizers are internally stratified, and that many indigenous people realize that wealth and privilege does not come automatically to all members of the invading society, may lead the locals to meet some segments of settler society with less hostility than others. Thus, in some cases, poor migrants are credited as being “more humble” and less prone to overbearance than more affluent settlers, and are more easily admitted into (or near) indigenous communities. In current-day *Bukidnon*, in the context of the politics of titling and the defense of territorial boundaries, it is mostly the “rich Bisayas” supremely fertile land that the indigenous Matigsalug want to redeem. As they shun back from expelling settlers, their favoured strategy is to demand lease rent from those migrants who intend to stay on the titled domain. Poor settlers¹¹⁰ are not considered a problem, as the land they occupy is usually marginal and they tend to comply with the federation’s will; as the Matigsalug’s former lawyer said, “it is the rich that we are worried about because they always resist”. While poor settlers merely have to signal their agreement with the new legal dispensation and pay a symbolic sum to be allowed to remain in the title area, “rich Bisaya” have to pay hefty amounts of money to secure continued usufruct rights (Wenk, forthcoming:75f.)¹¹¹.

110 Poverty, as the author of the study insists, is rampant among the settlers in and around the Matigsalug’s title area. Not only many Matigsalug families, but also poor settlers depend on daily wage labour (*suhol*) during harvest or sowing time – as well as throughout the year (weeding) – on the fields of relatively affluent settlers (see Wenk, forthcoming:47).

111 Other examples of indigenous empathy towards the lower strata of settler society can be found in the literature.



Photo 25: patron at home, client of the mighty: Datu Lorenzo Gawilan, leader of the Matigsalug Manobo, being received in Malacañang Palace following his surrender after the uprising of 1975. Left: Pres. Ferdinand Marcos, looking on: Presidential Assistant on National Minorities, Manuel Elizalde (photo of original picture: Irina Wenk)

In the way of summing up this point, we may state that while the rhetorics of ethnic struggle – in the name of which indigenous communities organize the defense of their territories – suggest rigid and impermeable boundaries of identity, trust and even interaction between the two ethnic groups (Hughes McDermott 2000) reality shows that most indigenous individuals maintain multiple ties to representatives of settler society. Without these, they would find it difficult to survive, which renders the *political economy of the frontier complex and contradictory*. Indigenous society is dependent on, and partly constituted by, *pathways of dependency, unequal exchange and exploitation* that incorporate them in wider spheres of markets and national polity. In some cases, at least, it is therefore warranted to *conceptualize settler society and indigenous communities* not as unrelated and antithetical to each other, but *as one integrated social system* whose component parts are interlinked by exchanges of goods, political forms and ideas, religious practices and, significantly, social and material aspirations (see Wells 1973).

8.3 explaining the variability of interethnic relations at the settlement frontier

Relations between settlers and indigenous communities are known to have varied greatly from one world-historical era to the other, between different geographical areas within a single such

Thus, for instance, in Xinjiang's ethnically-segregated urban neighbourhoods, poor Han settlers have little difficulty being accepted in Uighur town quarters; in contrast, Uighur boundaries of trust and social intercourse towards Han functionaries or businesspeople are very rigid (Tyler 2003:248).

period, and from one concrete frontier setting to the other in the same broad geographical and temporal context (Lamar and Thompson 1981 a, b, Banner 2007). At contemporary settlement frontiers in the developing South, the scope of indigenous responses to the settler challenge is vast (see Figure 7 above); it ranges from (willing or enforced) *peaceful co-existence* to *avoidance*, *religious/mystical nativism* and finally various forms of *anti-settler violence*. While the latter have found considerable resonance among scholars of ethnic conflict (see e.g. Fearon and Laitin 2001), most other forms of behavioral reactions to the presence of settlers, being less conspicuous, have – the occasional anthropological study of millenarian movements with an anti-migrant tinge notwithstanding – usually escaped the attention of the scientific community. However, it serves us well to remember that violent anti-settler nativism is the exception rather than the rule. Many indigenous peoples are not in a position to boldly resist settler incursions, because the military odds are stacked against them or economic dependence is heavy. The frequency with which inter-ethnic contests at contemporary settlement frontiers of the South turn violent is generally overestimated; avoidance (see Fulcher 1983), ambivalence and some sort of accommodative relations are more frequent.

Factors that are available for explaining uneven relations with settlers include – *first*, and basically – the different politico-legal frameworks of state laws and regulations within which interactions between indigenous communities and settlers are being played out; *second*, the degree to which the state is involved in the transfer of migrants (i. e. whether the latter have come spontaneously or with state support); *third*, the migrants' temporal position in a settlement process (early vs. later settlers); *fourth*, the relative socio-cultural distance between migrants and indigenous local societies; and, *fifth* and finally, demographic conditions (i. e. the relative numbers of migrants vis-à-vis indigenous people).

In our study, we have examined the influence of all these variables on interethnic relations at the margins of the state in South and Southeast Asia; for the limited purposes of this thesis, it will suffice to restrict our discussion to variables one to three.

8.3.1 politico-legal frameworks

As we study fields of conflict between different user groups that compete for scarce resources, the state is clearly the most influential external force. It exercises its domination through the fixation of boundaries, the patterning of economic activity, the facilitation or containment of population movements, and, very generally, by setting the parameters for political contests (Young 1976:66f.). The institutional setting that governs a) the access to land and natural resources, and b) access to the political institutions of the state, is a vital structural dimension of the conflicts at the settlement frontier. Regarding land and natural resources, the most relevant domains of public policy are 1. the laws that regulate land ownership, and 2. the laws that regulate migration to frontier areas. Regarding political participation, the question of indigenous representation in local government and, possibly, national-level legislative and executive structures, is crucial. Only where indigenous people share in political decision-making powers can they – depending on the actual politico-legal context – either acquire, defend or consolidate secure land rights. Land-related legislation and the institutional opportunities for indigenous participation in the political system vary from place to place (Brown and Ganguly, eds., 1997, Wessendorf, ed., 2001), and the scope of that variation shall be demonstrated in what follows.

In the era of the late-modern nation-state, conflicts at the settlement frontier are in important ways pre-configured by the constitutional tenet that all citizens enjoy the same basic rights – among them the right to the freedom of movement¹¹². While in an overwhelming majority of states in today's world, colonists can invoke the right to freely move to and reside and hold property (notably also land) in any part of the national territory, indigenous communities in most cases cannot claim a right of closure, i.e. a right to deny colonists access to and settlement in the administrative regions that they inhabit. Nevertheless, there are a number of exceptions to the universalist proposition of the citizen's unrestricted access to frontier areas. Thus, in some parts of the former British dominion in South Asia, the state has retained modified versions of colonial regulations for the special administration of indigenous territories (see Burling 1967:215-219, Lynch and Talbot 1995:117ff., Sonntag 2006). Based on the reasoning that free movement and free access to land and resources would work to the disadvantage of indigenous communities, Indian law continues to designate large tracts of land as off-limits to outsiders and gives the locals privileged access to educational institutions, public employment and political offices. Where states desist from facilitating frontier migration by defining indigenous territories as no-go areas, the likelihood both of land conflicts and of large-scale displacement of frontier-dwelling indigenous peoples is significantly diminished.

In all, however, only a handful of the world's indigenous peoples benefit from the advantages of an Indian-style system of "protective discrimination" (Baruah 2003b:45). As I have already mentioned in one of the foregoing chapters (chapter 7.1.3), governments throughout the developing world have claimed indigenous lands and resources as fundamental elements of their own territorial integrity and economic and political sovereignty. It is not the rule, therefore, for states to recognize customary indigenous ownership rights to land which most of them have classified as belonging to the "state domain" – a zone where by definition subjects can only be granted limited use rights (ibid.). More uncommon still is legislation that vindicates *collective* rights to land. Where indigenous communities were able to hold on to their lands, traditional concepts of custodianship and resource allocation have frequently been undermined by the fragmentation of territories into individually-owned plots. It is a widely-recognized fact that the replacement of customary collective tenure by individual tenure by legal *fiat* has accelerated the process of land alienation on many settlement frontiers, as communal prohibitions on land sales were removed (Colchester 1995:65). Another, equally pernicious consequence are the pronounced socio-economic disparities which tend to appear within indigenous communities, as local elites translate their wealth and connections into private certificates of land ownership (Karlsson 2004:11). Therefore, a critical variable in national land policies is whether the latter force indigenous people to formalize their land claims as individuals in an undifferentiated system of agrarian law, or if they provide for titles for communal *territories* – a notion that resonates with ideas of restorative justice, autonomy and self-determination (Assies 2000:96ff., 104f.; Deere and León 2000:80ff.). While the mainstream pattern of individualized land titles diminishes indigenous people's tenurial security because it exposes them to the ravages of a rambunctious land market, collective land titles enhance indigenous control over land in that they impede the individualized land transactions on which the land market rests.

112 Bangladesh's constitution, for instance – to take an example from the region of study of the comparative research project – grants every citizen the right to "move freely throughout Bangladesh, to reside and settle in any place therein (...)" (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:44, quoting Article 36 of the constitution). Considered a basic right under a liberal concept of the state, freedom of movement for all members of a national community is endorsed by Article 13 of the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As I have briefly sketched the scope of policy options that impact on frontier processes, I should hasten to add an important qualifying remark. In contemplating the influence of regulatory regimes on frontier actors' actual behavior, we have to remind ourselves that the practical relevance of *statutory* law (concerning, for instance, the use of natural resources and the official perception of the legitimacy of local ownership and use rights over them) tends to vary strongly within national territories. In frontier zones as areas where state-building is currently still underway, a mere analysis of state policy frameworks will not produce an adequate understanding of the rules that guide the encounter between competing actor groups. Frontiers, as I have stressed, are characterized by a lack of routine governmental control and a correspondingly stronger presence of private entrepreneurs who are free to construct a desirable political order and social and ethnic hierarchy out of the institutional vacuum (see sub-chapters 6.1.2 and 6.1.3). Laws promulgated by the remote political center are either interpreted opportunistically or completely ignored by local power holders. Informal positions and relations of power are often more determinative of political processes at the frontier than formal ones (see sub-chapter 6.1.2). To make things more complicated, the relationship between a discrete state and outside actors dominating the frontier and exploiting its economic potential in the absence of the state is often a complementary one, if not one of overt complicity. Several authors posit that frontiers are characteristically "unpatrolled" not because states lack the resources to assert the rule of law, but because they find it more expedient to use non-state actors for the task of "pacifying" and later "developing" the national periphery (see e.g. Bodley 1990; this thesis, chapter 6). Only a critical, fine-grained analysis of the interface between national systems of governance and local power structures will bring to light the particular institutional conditions, the way the state is run and its laws and principles of governance enacted in these zones remote from the political center. Ethnographies of that sort have been attempted by the research team, and some of the more enlightening observations that are mentioned in them are gathered in the subsequent paragraphs.

To elucidate more fully the way in which regulatory systems differ from each other, I propose to distinguish *four different politico-legal constellations* that determine and constrain both the strategies that settlers may resort to in trying to establish themselves at the frontier, and the practical role of local state agents in the allocation of land and other strategic assets. At one end of the continuum, laws facilitate colonist intrusion or work in the colonists' favor by either creating a level legal ground or else establishing laws that directly favor encroaching outsiders, thereby bolstering and reinforcing the ethnic hierarchy of the frontier. The expansion and advance of the settlement frontier is supported by the absence of both individual and collective possessory land rights of any substance on the part of indigenous frontier-dwellers, and the drifting of colonists to the frontier is not impeded. In terms of decision-making powers, influence over and opportunities for participation in political institutions ("*political voice*") lack. At the other end, law establishes reverse dominance hierarchies with indigenous communities at the top, disempowering the migrant element. Indigenous control of land and political affairs rests on exclusionary immigration laws, the recognition and legal safeguarding of *territory* and regulations that withhold political rights from non-indigenous inhabitants of the respective areas. Between these polar opposites are two politico-legal orders of an intermediary sort that help us make sense of those cases where indigenous frontier-dwellers are neither fully disenfranchised nor comprehensively empowered by state legislation. The four types are: "*integrated displacement*"; "*protective pretense*"; "*partial empowerment*"; and the "*citizen-denizen constellation*". Figure 8 (below) depicts them, assigning each one or more concrete case study areas as they presented themselves at given points in time.

8.3.1.1 laws that facilitate colonist intrusion

In some politico-legal orders, state laws put few if any obstacles in the way of settlers who want to acquire land or start a business at the frontier. Outsiders in general are given more or less unimpeded access to the natural wealth of the frontier zone, and the state, unabashedly, assumes the role of a resource broker, often to the highest bidder. In our study sample, legal frameworks that facilitate colonist and outsiders' intrusion in general coincide with authoritarian forms of government, and were all abandoned for more inclusive legal orders by the end of the last millenium. Recent developments in Peru¹¹³, however, demonstrate that governments of all political shades, two decades into our "post-authoritarian" era, may succumb to the temptation of legally disenfranchising indigenous people. Legal frameworks that facilitate colonist and other third parties' intrusion into indigenous domains are best exemplified by the "integrated displacement" type.

8.3.1.1.1 "integrated displacement"

In situations of legal disenfranchisement of indigenous communities, or in situations that are ambiguous with regard to land rights, state policies and an ethnically-biased, corrupt bureaucratic apparatus assist incoming settlers in displacing resident indigenous communities from their territories, allowing us to speak of a process of "*integrated displacement*" (Lopez 1986:85-121, 1987a). In most cases involving ethnic clientelist connections between the migrants and the bureaucratic apparatus, this constellation gives the former a decisive competitive advantage over indigenous communities. Where indigenous territories are being classified as national patrimony to which neither communities nor individuals may hold title – a situation favoring the bold and well-connected who know how to overcome bureaucratic obstacles –, or where indigenous community-based customary land rights are recognized by national law only to the extent that they do not conflict with officially-authorized uses of the forest, indigenous lands are open to the competing claims of the wider society.

In the *Chittagong Hill Tracts*, laws enacted under the British had made it difficult for people from outside the area to acquire rights to land. The Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900 and later colonial legislation strictly forbade the transfer and sub-letting of land to people from outside the area. During the Pakistani and Bangladeshi periods that followed, a series of legislative

113 In mid-2008, the government of president Alan García used extraordinary legislative powers delegated by the country's Congress to issue a range of decrees facilitating oil exploration, commercial farming and logging in Peru's Amazonian provinces. Among others, the new legislation made it easier for Native Amazonian communal land to be sold, and allowed the development of so-called "unproductive land", a catch-all term for, among other things, indigenous territories under less intensive forms of land use. The decrees, ostensibly issued to speed up the implementation of a free-trade agreement with the United States, were vigorously protested by Indian organizations. For seven weeks between late April and early June, 2009, tens of thousands of Native Amazonians blocked roads and rivers across eastern Peru, seizing hydroelectric plants and pumping stations on oil and gas pipelines. On June 5, police attempts to clear a stretch of road and retake an oil station from protesters led to clashes that claimed – estimates vary – between 34 and 50 lives, among them many members of the security forces. In the wake of the events, the parliament revoked the most crucial decrees, and the prime minister had to step down amidst charges that the government had bungled the crisis. The dramatic showdown in the Peruvian jungle exemplified a tension that has become characteristic for many South American countries in recent years. It features, on opposite sides, self-conscious indigenous federations that – invoking the United Nations' Declaration on Indigenous Peoples – claim territorial rights and resource control, while national governments are digging in, arguing, as did the García government, that a few hundred thousand Indians have no right to prevent a whole nation from exploiting sources of riches that lie dormant beneath Indian territories (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2009a, 2009d; *The Economist* 2009).

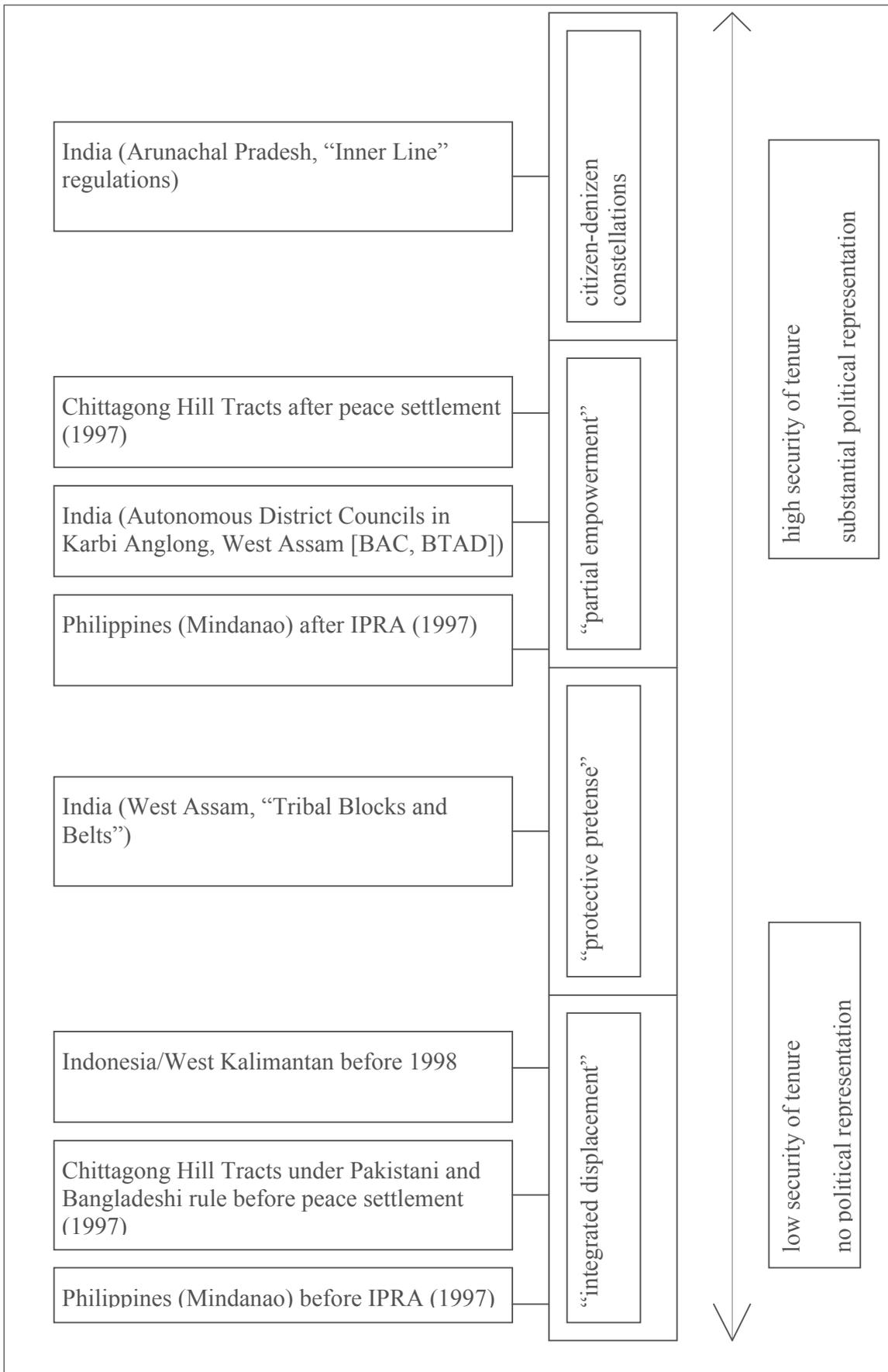


Figure 8: Politico-legal frameworks in the case-study regions at different points in time

amendments and executive orders eroded these restrictive measures, thereby modifying the “ground rules” governing the land rights and subsistence activities of the hill peoples. In stark contrast to the situation under the British *raj*, post-independence dispensations put Bengali migrants and indigenous locals at par concerning the rights of entry to, and residence and land ownership in the hills (Adnan 2004:42). Milestones on the way to the legalization of colonization by settlers from the plains and the removal of obstacles to outside commercial interests were the 1971 amendment to Rule 34 of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900 by the Pakistani government and the respective amendment issued by the government of Bangladesh in 1979.

For the first time in 70 years, the former allowed land to be settled by outsiders – the consent of the Board of Revenue provided –, and authorized the allocation of land to commercial plantations and industrial enterprises (ibid.:41). The latter, promulgated by the regime of Zia ul-Haq, made land policy in the Hill Tracts an instrument of redistribution and a substitute for agrarian reform by determining that land could be granted to any “deserving person” (i.e. landless Bengali settlers), and the necessity of obtaining the prior consent of the Board of Revenue fell away (ibid.). Of the indigenous population of the area, only cultivators in the valley bottoms were able to acquire ownership titles to their land (ibid.:39), while *Jumma* land in the hills was classified as “unclassified state forest” and its owners deemed illegal squatters. At the same time, Bengali businessmen and local officials were able to buy thousands of acres of swidden land for conversion into rubber plantations. These properties were no less officially registered than those of the growing army of state-sponsored Bengali settlers who received titles to five acres of land per family (Brauns and Löffler 1990:244). Although the successor government revoked the 1979 amendment, placing the power of deciding on land grants to non-*Jumma* in the hands of Hill District Councils with significant indigenous representation¹¹⁴, the main thrust of post-independence legislation on land was to support the forcible redistribution of *Jumma* land to Bengali colonists (Adnan 2004:41). Until the scheme was shelved in 1985, two successive military-dominated administrations saw to it that their plans for “demographic engineering” and counter-insurgency in the area had the blessing of the law, embedding, as it were, the displacement of the resident *Jumma* communities in an approach that pretended not to rest on sheer force.

“Integrated displacement” is the one type of politico-legal constellations which exemplifies most neatly the proposition that at the frontier, state authorities ultimately presume land to be freely available, and claim the right to allocate it according to their needs and priorities (see chapter 6.1.4). In the case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts prior to the Peace Accord of 1997, the veneer of legality was thin, and the interpretation of the law guided by the arbitrary rules of ethnic clientelism. Thus, whereas Bengali settlers were put in a position to acquire titles to land in zones (“unclassified state forest”) where no such titles should have been available in the first place, perfectly legal titles of indigenous title holders to highly-prized land in flat valley bottoms were ignored by the authorities. Particularly during the years of massive government-sponsored settlement, land alienation could take place in spite of the fact that indigenous residents had full legal title to the plots concerned (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:28). In theory, redress for dispossessed indigenous land owners was possible through lawsuits or through the quasi-judicial means of petitions to the authorities. However, many of those aggrieved were too poor to file or continue lawsuits, and petitioners were routinely told to accept the fact of the presence of the settlers and to “share” their land with them as they were “poor and deserving” (ibid., pp. 28f.).

114 For more details on these instruments of self-rule, see this chapter below.

Finally, pre-accord conditions in the Hill Tracts also bear out the observation that an important ingredient in the frontier's famed reputation as a lawless area are law-bending civil servants, soldiers and police officers (see chapter 6.1.2). While illegal logging and the theft of bamboo used to be (and partly still is) endemic in the area, it was an open secret that the organs of law enforcement condoned and participated in it. Large-scale smuggling of illegally-felled timber took place, involving forestry department staff, police and military. Controls and investigations to check and combat corruption and protection rackets were "isolated events only", occurring erratically "to please a high official or cover up larger instances of theft" (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:27).

Indonesia during the rule of president Suharto (1965-1998), too, is a prime example of a country whose land and forestry laws disenfranchised indigenous peoples. New Order forestry legislation was crafted in a way that deprived indigenous communities of access to timber, non-timber products and land available for shifting cultivation. While the rights of "custom-based communities" (*masyarakat adat*) were in principle acknowledged, their enjoyment of these rights was qualified; if they conflicted with commercial forest production (i.e. logging), the latter had precedence¹¹⁵. The implementation of this law by the timber industry meant that local people were, as Hawkins (2005:190) put it, "effectively locked out of their forests". For all practical purposes, forest management outside Java was in the hands of private concessionaires, some of whom had direct links to the First Family (Plant 1994:22).

As stipulated in the Basic Forestry Law of 1967 and the Basic Mining Regulations of that same, upon payment of compensation, land owned under any type of right could be acquired in the "public interest". While the intention immediately after the Second World War had been to carry out systematic surveying, mapping and registration on the Outer Islands, in practice, this has come to naught, and most indigenous communities were never informed about the need to register (*ibid.*).

Many such forced land transfers in the name of the public good were effected to make room for government-sponsored settlers. Under Suharto, the development of the Outer Islands was tied up closely with the concern for the military security of these thinly-populated areas, and transmigration and the facilitation of spontaneous migration were the centerpieces of the military's strategy of the "territorial management" (*pembinaan wilayah*) of the frontier (Davidson 2002:210f.). Beginning in the 1980s, indigenous landowners were often offered a slot in the transmigration programme instead of monetary compensation, as the authorities considered tutoring by the Javanese and Balinese colonists the highest reward for "primitive" indigenous frontier-dwellers (see e.g. Guinness 1994:278). As Suharto-time legislation on land and resources placed the rights of the state and "development" ahead of those of individual communities, people who protested the seizure of their land could be branded as "agitators" working against the interests of the nation's development. Dissent and signs of open resistance against the intrusion of logging companies, plantation firms or transmigration settlements were usually met with intimidation by the police and soldiers (Fried 1995, Duncan 2004b:106). The ability of local groups to control resource use and preserve local systems of land management was further curtailed by the New Order's assault on traditional village authority. Law No. 5/1979 replaced local systems of village governance with standardized forms of local administration. Traditional models of locally-accountable political

115 Thus, paragraph 1 of an 1970 elaboration of the Basic Forestry Law of 1967 states that "the rights of the *adat* community and its members to harvest forest products (...) shall be organised in such a manner that they do not disturb forest production" (cited in Barber 1998:10, quoted by Hawkins 2005:189).

leaders had to give way to village heads who would implement policies based on directives issued in Jakarta, their authority buttressed by development funds that they could disburse (Guinness 1994:272-276).

In sum, the New Order variety of the politics of “integrated displacement” rested on a mix of legal and extra-legal means. While crucial parts of Indonesian agrarian and forestry legislation had been crafted so as to concur with the strategic goals of the authorities and the interests of the outside actors under their tutelage, a highly militarised state had no compunctions to use force when the circumstances demanded it. Ultimately, in the context of pretorian developmentalism that was the hallmark of Suharto’s rule, the state’s power needed no justification (Tsing 1997:80).

Suharto’s downfall in the wake of the Asian monetary crisis of 1997 precipitated rapid political reforms that re-defined the relations between the state and local communities – among them indigenous peoples. Important changes concerned the institutions and processes governing the management of natural resources, and thus the legal regulation of the frontier. With the passage of Law 22/1999 on Regional Governance, and Law 25/1999 on the Fiscal Balance between the Central Government and the Regions, the state center’s capabilities of extracting at will land, forest and mineral resources at the national periphery were dramatically circumscribed, ending an era where the law had facilitated the seizure of indigenous territories in relatively straightforward ways. The transfer of responsibility and authority from Jakarta to a multitude of regional (district) governments has strengthened local communities who, through participating in local-level electoral politics, may be able to wrest back control over their territories and natural resources (Duncan 2004b:107). The state’s scheme for allocating forestry resources has shifted from a centralized system of logging concessions, mining licences and the like to one now informally controlled by over 300 district-level governments. Although the communities still do not have formal legal title to the land on which their livelihood depends, they do now – emboldened by an altered political culture that does no longer criminalize dissent and protest – exert *de facto* control over their customary territories (Engel and Palmer 2006:435). While matters are admittedly still in flux, the tendencies as they are apparent at this stage do not suggest that decentralization has “tamed” the Indonesian frontier¹¹⁶. However, a broader discussion of the post-Suharto situation shall not be attempted here, since the Indonesia case study in our comparative research is set in the final years of the New Order, at a time, that is, when the “partial empowerment”

116 Thus, decentralization seems to have intensified rather than decreased the pressure on indigenous land and resources. As district-level governments are now entitled to a certain percentage of the revenues from natural resources hailing from their domains, the new legislation encourages them to maximize income generation through resource exploitation. Post-Suharto local governments are thus tempted to disregard indigenous land rights in the same manner as the central state in the Suharto era, and there are well-founded worries that they may further ease the already lax environmental and social conditionalities imposed on foreign companies active in mining or logging (Duncan 2004b:107). The basis for *adat* rights within state law remains constrained. While the regional autonomy laws of 1999 ceded the authority over land affairs to the districts and municipalities, a presidential decree (Keppres 62/2001) later returned the respective powers to the national government and parliament. Thus, the opportunity for creating district and village regulations that are more responsive to *adat* rights passed unutilized (McCarthy 2004:1209f.). In the absence of an established and tested legal framework, indigenous communities have started to negotiate directly with logging and mining companies and secured partly considerable financial and social benefits in the process. However, as Engel and Palmer (2006:435) have found for the logging sector, the new power nodes – the local governments – either lack the resources or the political will to enforce agreements between the communities and the companies. As a result of this laxity, ever more companies fail to comply with existing logging agreements, or simply log without community consent. Indigenous communities, on the other hand, have to depend on self-enforcement to assert their property rights. Endemic corruption in Indonesian forestry and a general decline in the state’s capacity to police that sector are boding ill for the future of forest-dependent communities in the country (ibid.).

of indigenous peoples in Indonesia was yet only a distant and unlikely possibility.

In the *Philippines*, where the epithet “integrated displacement” was coined, public land laws were traditionally designed to further goals of nation-building (commonly referred to as “national integration” in Philippine governmental discourse) and economic development in the “developmentalist” mould. Until the late 1980s, when the first post-dictatorial government of Corazon Aquino made “social forestry” the dominant principle guiding land and forestry legislation for the frontier, land laws did not seek to provide indigenous people undisputed ownership of their land (Lopez 1987b:234, 236). Their rights to the land were, in fact, squarely ignored, the common assumption being that indigenous territories belonged to the “public domain”, i.e. the state. Irregardless of actual forest cover, the Revised Forestry Code of 1975 ruled that all land of 18% slope or more – a mark easily reached in most upland areas – was forest land to which no one could claim permanent title. At the same time, however, the state liberally granted agrobusiness companies and the extractive industry permits, concessions and lease agreements on forest land. In case of conflict with indigenous frontier-dwellers, an amendment to the Forestry Code stated that indigenous people can be ejected and relocated “whenever the best land use of the area so demands” (Wenk, forthcoming, p. 50, Lopez 1987b:236). Swiddening, the common mode of cultivation of indigenous Filipinos, was illegal and – in theory, at least – punishable with imprisonment of up to four years (ibid.:236, Wenk, forthcoming:50). In drastic ways, the criminalization of shifting cultivation reflected the state’s economic development policies for the forest fringes which favored commercial at the expense of culturally marginal agricultural users (Lopez 1987b:236).

Possibly with an eye to the government’s image abroad, Marcos-time legislation offered indigenous people token opportunities to secure so-called “patents of ownership” over land they occupied. However, the issuance of such patents entailed lengthy and complicated procedures. On account of their superior political connections, wealth and access to legal expertise, landed elites were more readily able to obtain the needed documents than simple settlers or indigenous people. Settlers, on their part, were better positioned than members of indigenous communities, as they were more familiar with national land laws, and knew how to manipulate them to outdo indigenous competitors (ibid.:235). Unsurprisingly, a decade after the Ancestral Lands Decree was promulgated by the Marcos government in 1974, not a single indigenous person had made use of the opportunity to acquire a paper title before the deadline expired (ibid.).

8.3.1.2 laws that acknowledge indigenous rights nominally or in actual substance

Not always do states have policies that legislate or ease the appropriation of indigenous land by settlers. Where states have themselves developed some sort of awareness of the predicament of indigenous communities, or where they continue to use policy instruments once devised by colonial predecessor regimes to protect vulnerable aboriginal peoples against the transgressions of majority populations, the legal situation is different. The scope of legislative interventions ranges from the merely token to the substantive and, finally, the institutionalization of indigenous hegemony in the legal domain.

8.3.1.2.1 “protective pretense”

Many states – past and present – have acknowledged the problem of the drain of land across the ethnic border at settlement frontiers, and have passed legislation that purports to regulate the land market. Frequently, however, the agencies tasked with enforcing the ban on land sales to settlers are



Photo 26: integrated displacement: land wrested from Manobo ownership by a Philippine government agency, Carmen, South Cotabato, the Philippines 1995 (photo: Danilo Geiger)

either blatantly uncommitted, close their eyes for a price, or else are not given the means (finances, personnel) to fulfill their purpose. The fact that government officials are obviously unconcerned with the gap between high-minded declarations on the policy level and the drab reality on the ground suggests that we are dealing with the *pretense* of minority protection rather than an honest concern with it¹¹⁷. In the context of our study, “*protective pretense*” is evidenced by the “Tribal Blocks and Belts” that are meant to restrict the erosion of the land base of the Bodo of *Western Assam*.

Indian land policies in Assam basically follow colonial patterns in that topography was made the criterion for the allocation of rights. The general argument being that indigenous cultures were threatened with disintegration unless barriers were erected that protected their territories from being overrun by the Hinduized majority populations of the valleys, the British sought to cordon off the hill country and mountain ranges by declaring them “backward tracts” or “agencies” which were excluded from the coverage of ordinary civil law – notably that regulating ownership of land and the free movement of people. In 1935, the terminology was changed accordingly to reflect that rationale more closely (“excluded” and “partially excluded areas”; see Goswami, forthcoming, p. 47). For the substantial indigenous populations like the Bodo that shared space in the Assamese

117 A highly instructive example of liberal legislation and poor enforcement in the field of indigenous rights are the laws that Brazil enacted as early as 1910 and 1911. At a time when in various parts of the world, indigenous people were being killed off without remorse by settlers who considered them less than human, the country created a federal department with the brief to protect indigenous peoples at the settlement frontier and attract them to “civilization” by way of assistance and example. Under the terms of the legislation that set up the Service for the Protection of the Indians (SPI), indigenous peoples were given guarantees to their lands and the sanctity of their cultures (Maybury-Lewis 1991:219f.). In trying to solve the riddle why Brazil bothered to afford itself pro-Indian legislation when no one else did, David Maybury-Lewis (*ibid.*:220) suggests that the laws were designed as a “beautiful gesture” which came at zero costs for the landholding elites in the frontier states. Much to the contrary, the laws shifted the burden of keeping the Indians out of the way of the settlers and plantation owners from the states to the federal government. Where they would clash with each other all the same, the SPI’s weakness and poor financial endowment made sure that there would be little inconvenience for the oligarchies.

plains with Assamese Hindus or Bengali colonists, there were no comparable measures available; to bring a semblance of order to the volatile settlement frontier at the entrance of the Assam Valley, a so-called “line system” was introduced in 1920, trying to fix indigenous and non-indigenous groups in their places. Thus, invisible “lines” came to divide village clusters that were exclusively reserved for “tribals” from those where only Bengali migrants were supposed to dwell, and from mixed villages on the other hand.

After independence, in 1947, the “line system” – widely criticized for being largely ineffective¹¹⁸ – was replaced by the so-called “Tribal Blocks and Belts”, with the purported ambition to protect what was left of the fast-shrinking land base of the Bodo and other remnants of the once much more numerous “Plains Tribal” population of Assam (ibid.:48f.). Special protection by more potent legislation like the one in force in Hill Districts like Karbi Anglong or the North Cachar Hills had not been deemed necessary as the Bodo were anyway getting “gradually assimilated to the population in the plains”, as a sub-committee of the Constituent Assembly of the newly-independent country found in 1948 (ibid.:48). Unsurprisingly, the creation of 45 “Blocks and Belts” between 1947 and 1977 – six of which lay in our case study area in Western Assam – roundly missed the avowed purpose of preventing further encroachment by non-tribals on tribal land. In 1994, it was estimated that 70% of the Bodo had lost their land due to the compounded effect of indebtedness, poverty and the porosity of the “Blocks and Belts”. The unauthorized entry of settlers has thus continued apace, deserving Bodo land owners carried on supplying the land market by selling off family and group territories, and the authorities have made no serious efforts to enforce the law (ibid.:49, George 1994:881). The flawed – because token – nature of this piece of legislation, compounded by the Assamese state administration’s lacklustre implementation of it, have no doubt been a driving force behind the Bodo’s decade-old, violent agitation for an Autonomous District Council of the sort that has long been in force in the “Hill Tribal” areas of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills (Barbora 2005:204f.).

8.3.1.2.2 “partial empowerment”

Land alienation by outsiders at settlement frontiers can – in theory, at least – be easier contained if controls on access are part of a more comprehensive policy of protective discrimination that includes either self-government or a weaker form of devolution of decision-making powers to indigenous communities. States provide for the latter’s *partial empowerment* when they guarantee secure tenure rights in the context of substantially large territories dominated by the beneficiary group, tolerate or even prioritize indigenous forms of land use over those of outside actors, and establish a substantial presence of indigenous people in local government – usually by replacing existing legislative and executive institutions with alternative forms, exclusively or predominantly controlled by indigenous people. In doing this, these governance structures eliminate the open or covert legal or procedural bias in favor of outside actors which characterizes “integrated displacement”, and overcome the barely-veiled duplicity of state agency typical of “protective pretense”. States, in

118 Goswami (forthcoming:48) characterizes it as “totally defunct” only a few years after it had been introduced. Given the staggering immigration rates to Assam throughout the late colonial period, the Line System was exposed to tremendous pressure from all sides. Indigenous landowners took opportunity of the rising prices of land in a market operated by Hindu Bengali businessmen, selling plots in spite of the injunction on inter-ethnic land transactions across the “Lines”, while Muslim politicians of Assam and Bengal railed against the “discriminatory” character of the institution, urging their settler clients to violate the “Lines”.

fact, may favor substantive pro-indigenous legislation for a variety of reasons¹¹⁹; still, no matter what the reasoning in a concrete case, the constellation that flows from it – “partial empowerment” – usually contributes to levelling the arenas of bureaucratic and legal struggle and rendering frontier contests for resource control – if only in theory – more open-ended.

With the overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship in the *Philippines*, international donors and development agencies such as the Asian Development Bank and USAID intensified their call for a re-orientation of the country’s development strategies. If the communist insurgents were to be stopped from seizing power, liberal reforms towards social equity and decentralization were needed. In the uplands, where the meagre resources of a destitute state contrasted sharply with its claim to exclusive ownership, control and management of the vast “public domain”, the millions of illegal “squatters” who populated it – among them the majority of indigenous Filipinos – represented an urgent problem. To solve it, the new government propagated the so-called “social forestry” approach (Wenk, forthcoming:50f.). Already in the final phase of the Marcos regime, first programmes had been launched which, instead of criminalizing them, promised to make forest-dwellers “partners” in forest management. In 1993, the Revised Forestry Code of 1975 which, like no other law, had epitomized the logic of “integrated displacement”, was replaced by a much more progressive law, the Administrative Order No. 2, Series of 1993, of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). Through DAO 2, as the new piece of legislation was called, indigenous communities were given the right to lodge ownership claims to communal territories, and have that claim documented. In turn, they committed themselves to the sustainable management of their territories’ resources. While the documents (called Certificates of Ancestral Domain Claim, or CADC) left the question of the validity of competing claims by settlers or extractive ventures open, DAO 2 represented a true break with previous practice. Significantly, it recognized the principle of native title, i. e. the pre-conquest rights of indigenous peoples to ownership of the land which they have held in continuity, whether or not these rights are backed up by legal documents (ibid.:61f., 64). Moreover, it introduced the notion of group territories embodying local identities and sacred traditions (“ancestral domains”) to Philippine jurisprudence¹²⁰.

119 Reflecting on India’s frame of special legislation for the North-East (known as the “Sixth Schedule”), Sonntag (1999) points out that it was not so much the wish to redress political and economic inequalities which moved Indian legislators to endorse affirmative action for indigenous peoples, but the need to establish the liberal essence of postcolonial India. By legislating the continued seclusion of the “innocent backwards”, she asserts, the Nehruvian liberals engaged in a sort of “liberal ‘othering’, so necessary for the construction of the ‘we’ of the new Indian nation” (ibid.:421). Based, as it was, on ill-informed “culture-bound reasoning” (Sonntag 2006:188), Sixth Schedule autonomy aimed at banning the spectre of the loss of culture and identity of the inhabitants of the North-East rather than their material dispossession which is, as she seems to infer, much more nefarious to indigenous survival.

Padilla (2008:452), on the other hand, interprets the Philippine government’s signing of the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997 – a law that represents a paradigm shift in the Asian context by providing for secure tenure in the form of communal land titles – as motivated by the thoroughly altruistic principle of “restorative justice” for the meekest and most abused of Philippine ethnic groups. The literature documents yet a third rationale for a state’s conversion to a “politics of recognition” – that of containing ethnic insurgencies and “managing” restive frontier-dwellers’ political demands (Stuligross 1999:498, 502; Barbora 2005:212). In half of the cases included in our comparative study, the indigenous beneficiaries of autonomy or self-government first had to engage in rebellion before the government granted them “partial empowerment”. Viewed over longer periods of time, autonomy through insurrection rather than unforced assent may well be the dominant logic by which states have shared power with ethnic minorities.

120 This concept, of course, had not been cooked up in the headquarters of multilateral banks and development agencies. Bequeathed on progressive Philippine lawyers at the University of the Philippines in Quezon City by an American legal scholar who spent years doing research and teaching in the country, the career of this notion demonstrates an emancipatory aspect of globalization. Not only do the operations of capital and the manifestations of a globalized consumer culture permeate every nook and corner of this planet, but also ideas and values that question local and global

While a host of local communities applied for and were granted a CADC, advocacy groups in the Philippines felt that even though it represented a significant improvement over earlier legislation, the law fell still short of providing indigenous peoples with the tenurial security they had been fighting for. Not only was it but an administrative order by an executive branch of the government and thus of a lower order than a proper law, but it was also too weak an instrument for deciding competing and overlapping claims in favor of indigenous stakeholders (*ibid.*:62). A new and more stringent law was formulated and, against ardent opposition from the mining industry and other business interests, passed in October, 1997¹²¹.

By Southeast Asian standards and, indeed, the standards of most countries in the developing world with substantial indigenous populations and accompanying land conflicts, the IPRA or “Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act (Republic Act 8371 of 1997)”, is a rather remarkable document. It commits the state to the recognition, protection and promotion of the rights of Philippine indigenous peoples and grants them the right to live their lives in accordance with their traditions, customs and religions. Pending the delineation and mapping of their respective territories, it provides for the awarding of full deeds of land ownership (called “Certificates of Ancestral Domain Title”, or CADT) to indigenous communities and mandates the protection of the titled areas from unauthorized and unlawful encroachment. To impede the unilateral sale of land by members of the beneficiary communities, the titles awarded are communal rather than individual (Eder and McKenna 2004:66f.; Wenk, forthcoming:63-66). Within the titled territories, title-holding groups can determine the use and management of the natural resources of the respective areas and defend their boundaries according to customary law. Significantly, the IPRA prohibits the alienation of any portion of land within a titled domain to non-indigenous persons or other third parties, and vests the authority over all lands in a “tribal council” to be established by the applicants. In marked contrast to DAO 2, its legal predecessor, the IPRA offers options for redeeming land that has been alienated. Finally, to protect the beneficiary groups from being cheated by sweet-talking outsiders, the law mandates a strict requirement of “free and informed prior consent” before any development projects or other forms of intervention can take place in a CADT area (Eder and McKenna 2004:67; Wenk, forthcoming, pp. 63-66). In compliance with the requirements for title application, indigenous groups have since embarked on the delineation and mapping of their domains, and devised management plans that vouch for their sustainable use of the natural resources in the titled areas (Wenk 2007:138). By early 2006, 42 CADTs had been issued by the government, covering 852,000 has of land (an area slightly more than 1/5 the size of Switzerland, see Padilla 2008:471).

With the IPRA, suggests Sabino Padilla in a recent article (Padilla 2008:452), the Philippine government declared an end to the complicity of the state in the displacement of indigenous peoples, and made the transition to a “politics of recognition”. In theory, at least, the landmark law seems to

forms of order travel unencumbered by national boundaries. The agitation and lobbying of a multi-faceted coalition of social movements that absorbed and “naturalized” this and similar inputs by allies from abroad constitutes the second condition that enabled the surprisingly swift transition from the “integrated displacement” of Philippine indigenous peoples to their “partial empowerment”.

121 The bill, however, had a rough sailing in the Congress and the Senate where it was stuck for years. One senator described it as “one of the most divisive and emotional bills” ever proposed in the House (Eder and McKenna 2004:67). After it was signed into law, conservative politicians tried to shoot it down by challenging its constitutionality. The reasons that were given were that the IPRA violated the principle that all natural resources belonged to the state, and its implementation constituted a denial of the basic right to private property. After a long review during which all CADT applications were stalled, the country’s Supreme Court dismissed the petition in a narrow vote (Wenk, forthcoming:69).



Photo 27: seeking (partial) empowerment: member of a Tagbanua community on Palawan island, the Philippines, assisting land surveyors of the National Council on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) with the perimeter survey as part of the CADT (Certificate of Ancestral Domain Territory) delineation procedure (photo: Sabino Padilla, Anthrowatch)

have the potential to lastingly transform the country's frontiers. If the law is properly implemented, indigenous ownership claims to land and natural resources are no longer denied (cf. chapter 6.1.4), nor are predatory relations between indigenous people and outsiders allowed to prevail any longer (chapter 6.1.7). Furthermore, if the indigenous beneficiaries of the law, entrusted with the task of deciding on the future management of their domains' natural resources, live up to their reputation, resource management will cease to be wasteful and destructive (chapter 6.1.6). As the law removes the characteristic legal ambiguity over proprietary rights that fuels so many frontier conflicts, and generally shifts the latter from the forest to the courts, violence levels will fall and the state be able to more fully assert its claim to the monopoly of violence (chapter 6.1.8). And finally and most generally, the application and titling procedures will enmesh the respective groups in bureaucratic processes, as a result of which the state will increase its control over the proverbially loosely-controlled frontier. (This, of course, begs the question if the law's finer details and the experiences in the course of its implementation indeed warrant a positive appraisal.)

Other than e.g. most of the Asian countries that emerged from the British *raj*, Philippine constitutional thought does not provide for separate forms of administration or even preferential treatment to communal groups¹²². In a US-American mould, successive governments established

122 The granting of regional autonomy for the Muslim Moro in Mindanao and Northern Luzon's Cordillera region in the constitution of 1987 is an alien element in a body politic otherwise marked by centralization and administrative uniformity. The two autonomous regions were ad-hoc creations designed to avert armed separatism and, in the Cordillera's case, thwart a communist guerilla (Eder and McKenna 2004:68).

reservations under the jurisdiction of a government minority office in the tradition of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), but never made the added offer of self-government to indigenous Filipinos. True to that tradition, the CADTs convey relatively secure rights to territory, but do not alter the distribution of political power by institutionalizing self-rule. Thus, CADT areas and the existing grid of villages (*barangay*) and municipalities overlap, and so do the jurisdictions of the newly-founded “tribal councils” and the settler-dominated village and municipal authorities (Wenk, forthcoming:68). While the average settler in Wenk’s study area of Sinuda reluctantly cooperates with the Matigsalug leadership, most *barangay* officials obstruct the latter’s policies, while high-ranking settler politicians like the North Cotabato governor outrightly deny even the existence of a CADT in their province (ibid.:62, 64, 74). Partly for material reasons¹²³, *barangay* captains and councillors in the titled area continue to register and approve land transactions, although the IPRA vests the sole authority for land-related matters in the Matigsalug’s tribal federation (ibid.:73). Unless the power of the settler officials is broken by removing the CADT areas from their jurisdiction, the claim that the new law places the authority over land ownership, distribution and transfer in indigenous hands remains spurious. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the Matigsalug leaders continue to press for a municipality of their own where local government would be under Matigsalug control (ibid.:37).

Apart from the fact that the existing structures of local government have been allowed to remain in place, other factors diminish the impact of the new law on the situation on the ground. Again, the Matigsalug case shall serve to illustrate more general truths. *First*, a timid and sometimes subservient attitude on the part of the indigenous people – a frequent adaptation to the physical and symbolic violence of the frontier (cf. sub-chapters 6.1.5 and 6.1.8) – may keep them from taking full benefit of the law. Thus, IPRA mandates that imperfect or otherwise invalid land ownership titles of settlers or other non-indigenous people found within a CADT area can be challenged and revoked (Wenk, forthcoming:65). Given that Marcos-time legislation precluded private ownership to land in the “public domain”, a large number¹²⁴ of the nearly 28,000 settlers inside the Matigsalug’s CADT area would be liable for eviction. However, the Matigsalug leaders shirk away from pressing claims against settlers who lack titles or acquired them fraudulently, at least in part because they want to avoid confrontations. Instead, the federation of Matigsalug “tribal councils” prefers to “legalize” the settlers’ presence by establishing lease agreements (ibid.:79)¹²⁵. On a similar count, the Matigsalug leaders have watched passively as the settlers started donning Lumad honorific titles (*datu*, *bae*) and, by the strength of these credentials, infiltrated the “tribal councils” in the CADT area. Though the motives of the colonists – to have a share in the councils’ decision-making powers in matters such as who will be allowed to live within the CADT, and on what terms – are plain to see for everybody, no settler has yet been asked to leave a council (ibid.:79). Quite clearly, the legacy of settler violence and cunning that characterized the earlier

123 Pursuant to the Local Government Code, the *barangay* council is entitled to a substantial registration and handling fee at the occasion of any land transaction. This source of income will dry up in the CADT area if the IPRA law is implemented properly.

124 In spite of the injunction against the issuance of ownership titles, some settlers on the Matigsalug domain apparently do hold valid legal documents (ibid.:75). This situation is typical for the settlement frontier where bureaucratic malpractice is an indispensable ingredient in a speculative land market that depends on the connivance of civil servants (see chapter 6.1.4).

125 Apart from the fear of antagonizing the settlers, Wenk gives two more reasons for that preference: The possibility of generating income through land leases, and the costliness of court cases to which any open challenging of colonists would sooner or later lead (ibid.:84).

stages of the advancement of the settlement frontier in the hinterland of Mindanao – a deeply-ingrained fear of predatory violence on the part of the indigenous – has militated against the Matigsalug’s defense of the territorial boundaries that the IPRA has allowed them to set up.

A *second* observation is that some of the indigenous beneficiaries themselves are apt to undermine the new law. However, indigenous cooperation with outsiders need not necessarily involve greedy leaders (see e.g. above, pp. 16ff.) – it may also and foremost be driven by needy commoners. In the case of the Matigsalug, this involves numerous households who ignored their leadership’s order to stop selling land to outsiders, or submitting to a sort of usurious pawning of land that is locally known as *prenda*. A number of households indicated that they recently sold or pawned land to colonists because they badly needed money to pay for medical care, wedding or funeral ceremonies, or their children’s education (Wenk, forthcoming:76). Thus, rather than suppressing the land alienation that the IPRA outlaws, the widespread poverty in Matigsalug country seems to have forced it underground. Without accompanying socio-economic support programmes, we may conclude, CADTs will be powerless instruments for stopping the erosion of the land base of Philippine indigenous peoples (ibid.:91f.).

Third, and finally, whereas the displacement of the conflicts with colonists “from arms to court” – intention and result of the IPRA – is strongly welcomed by the indigenous beneficiaries, they can’t afford litigation. Not only in the Philippines, lawyers are a parasitic breed, and unless they have social commitment and are attached to (and paid by) non-governmental organizations, legal assistance for poor people or communities is an insane proposition. Some years ago, the federation of “tribal councils” of the Matigsalug terminated its collaboration with a Visayan lawyer because the costs were out of keeping with the results. One reason why the leadership shirks from confrontational solutions in the matter of the presence of illegal settlers inside the CADT area are the enormous costs of litigation in court (see note 125 above; Wenk, forthcoming:84). Thus, unless the Matigsalug and other communal holders of CADT titles are given access to non-profit legal assistance, they will be easy prey not only for powerful and affluent encroachers, but also for cunning investors who are waiting to get a foothold in the CADT areas (ibid.:92). Now that the CADT process has helped identify the bodies in whom ownership is vested, and the territories have been delineated, mapped and documented, the Matigsalug and their fellow indigenous people with rights to a CADT domain are moving targets for the most dubious sorts of land speculators and shady business operators (ibid.:85), and could, unless steps are taken to avert the danger, easily become the victims of their own “empowerment”.

Though fundamental rights place individuals at the center of political action, electoral rules and reservations in post-independence *India* acknowledge and incorporate communal groups in their own ways¹²⁶. Unlike in the Philippines, Indian constitutional thought makes it a point that the state work towards ensuring equality among all social groups and take special care to promote the interests of “scheduled tribes” and “scheduled castes”. Among the instruments for communal empowerment that the constitution points out is territorial autonomy *cum* self-government (Stulligross 1999:505).

After independence, the country adopted two sets of special legislation for its indigenous peoples – one for the “tribal belt” of Central India and a second one for the still-undivided state of Assam

126 See my discussion of the “Tribal Blocks and Belts” in this chapter above, 8.3.1.2.2.



Photo 28: reversing established ethnic hierarchies: settlers opposing the CADT application of the Lison valley Subanen, Zamboanga del Sur, Mindanao, the Philippines (photo: Sabino Padilla, Anthrowatch)

in the country's north-east. Judging the tribal population of the Central Indian states culturally "adulterated", the laws to be implemented there were designed in a manner that would allow in time the respective groups' assimilation into the economic and cultural mainstream. Powerless "Tribal Advisory Councils" were to oversee that transition, and feeble regulations of the sort of the "Tribal Blocks and Belts" just discussed for the plains-dwelling Bodo were to ameliorate the worst outrages of land-grabbing by outsiders (Sonntag 1999:422). For the Assamese frontier which, as Nehru held, "breeds a different kind of people" – more belligerently jealous of their autonomy and more remote from the "Hindi core", as the reasoning went –, an institutional mechanism was developed which followed closely the British model of "backward tracts", "secluded" and "partially secluded areas". That mechanism was intended to enable indigenous peoples of the North-East to lastingly "preserve their ethnic identity and (...) face the forces of assimilation (...) from their more advanced neighbours in the plains" (Gassah 1997:6, quoted in Sonntag 2006:191). To these supposedly "culturally authentic" groups, the Nehruvian liberals were ready to grant a modicum of self-government in the form of comparatively potent "*Autonomous District Councils*".

Autonomous District Councils were to serve as the main institutional form "by which (...) northeastern tribal communities could be integrated into the modern, bureaucratic, institutional, secular Indian political system with a minimum sacrifice to community values and traditions" (Stuligross 1999:507). Typically larger than ordinary (revenue) districts, Autonomous District Councils have less power than states, but more than local governments. Formally parts of one of the seven states of Northeast India, they form legal enclaves that challenge the notion of the uniformity of law across the national territory. Through their elected members, the Autonomous

District Councils administer justice, revenues, education and economic development (ibid.:497). The council members are freely elected from the (largely) indigenous population of the council area, and the chief executive member has to have an indigenous background; non-tribal residents are assured of (minimal) representation. The Autonomous District Councils' legislative powers range from agrarian matters and economic development policy to social and political issues such as marriage, divorce, inheritance and the succession of political leaders (ibid.:503f.)¹²⁷.

Crucially for the concerns of a study on settlement frontiers, the Autonomous District Councils make laws regarding the allotment, occupation and use of land (except for Reserved Forests). It is also in their discretion to regulate the practice of swidden cultivation (*jhum*) (Barbora, forthcoming:50). Replicating the colonial role model, Autonomous District Council regulations initially formulated strict injunctions against the individual ownership of land, holding that in "tribal" society, all land is held by the group. Thus, the Mikir Hills District (Transfer of Land) Act, 1959, the respective law for Karbi Anglong, for instance, provided that land under the Council's jurisdiction cannot be sold, mortgaged, leased or otherwise be transferred either to tribal or to non-tribal persons (ibid.). As land tenure systems changed, this absolute preference for communal ownership gave way in 1979 to a more flexible legal regime which opened a part of the District territory to the land market. In this new system, the District Council and the village headmen of Karbi Anglong have become the source of land titles and land leases, and an increasing amount of land has been converted to individual ownership, with both indigenous and settler beneficiaries (ibid.:51).

To this day, the District Council restricts the right of residence on its territory by reserving it preferentially for Karbi, Dimasa and other members of indigenous groups listed ("scheduled" in Indian legal parlance) in the District or in the neighbouring – predominantly indigenous – District of the North Cachar Hills. Settlers – unless they entered before the year of India's independence – are officially banned from the territory (ibid.:50). However, the regulation is apparently dead letter as there has been a considerable influx of outsiders over the past years, which, as unofficial sources estimate, may have caused a decadal population growth of 60% (ibid., note 76). As a result, the majority status of the district's indigenous population is currently under threat (Baruah 2003b:54).

Autonomous District Councils are, moreover, supposed to administer justice, and to that end are expected to establish district and regional courts¹²⁸. Autonomous District Councils are, furthermore, tasked with establishing and managing primary schools; they can prescribe the language of instruction and insert local content into the curriculum (ibid.:505). Finally, to establish and enforce their own development priorities, they are allowed to raise certain taxes; for the rest of their financial needs, they are entitled to funds from the central and state governments. In the hands of a District Council determined to fend off unwanted settlers, this taxing power can become an effective means of deterrence. Local authorities in Karbi Anglong, for instance, candidly admitted that migrants were not only taxed systematically (which indigenous Karbi weren't), but also much heavier than the latter, as part of a conscious policy to make their lives miserable and dissuade potential new migrants (ibid.:523, note 37).

127 However, these powers are restricted in so far as all bills passed by the Autonomous District Council need the approval of the state governor before they become law, and the governor on his part has first to secure the consent of the respective state's council of ministers (ibid.:504).

128 Still, ambiguity in the law allows the high court to bypass the Autonomous District Council courts and hear all cases that would normally fall in their jurisdiction (ibid.:504).



Photo 29: devolution of power: entering the jurisdiction of the Khasi Autonomous District Council, Meghalaya, Northeast India (photo: Christian Erni)

In practice, however, Autonomous District Councils hardly ever live up to the expectations. The legal barriers to the settlement of outsiders seem to have lost all significance, and the land market is in full swing, with the District Council members and village headmen as its operators. Invested with the power to allocate land, the latter facilitate land transfers to outsiders and indigenous locals alike. Besides pecuniary incentives, electoral politics and party membership determine who is to benefit from their largess (Barbora, forthcoming:51). Moreover, as a result of informal transactions, much land that is formally registered in the name of indigenous owners is cultivated and controlled by colonists (Baruah 2003b:54).

Land and settler in-migration aside, Autonomous District Councils “have not been engines of economic growth”, writes Stulligross (1999:498), meaning that the people living under this sort of special administrative arrangement have remained as poor as before. The major reason for the Autonomous District Councils’ unimpressive economic performance is that they have only small development budgets, and state governments are always late in disbursing them, if they release the funds at all (ibid.:508). If their bargaining power vis-à-vis the state government is small, this, as some authors have suggested, reflects a deliberate policy of keeping the instruments of indigenous self-rule weak and dependent (Baruah 2003a:917). The creation of a dispensation of small and financially dependent “autonomous” states and districts in North-East India has been at the very core of a military-driven strategy by central government and army planners to assert control over this frontier region and make it a “normal” part of India’s national space (see chapter 7.1).

However, the examination of the reasons for the economic non-viability of the Autonomous District Councils suggests yet a second causality that points beyond the “politics of nationalizing space”: these units are weak, too, because indigenous members of the state legislative assemblies fail to intervene on their behalf. Theoretically, the councils should be able to influence state budget and decision-making processes through members of the state legislative assemblies (MLAs) elected from constituencies in the Autonomous District Council territory. However, complaints are widespread that even legislators who got their start as leaders of the ADC’s are quick to turn their backs on the councils and their problems. Once elected, indigenous MLAs from Meghalaya and Karbi Anglong have shown a marked tendency of working only to retain their seats, thus abandoning the cause of their ethnic constituency for the state government which is now their source of patronage (Stulligross 1999:508).

Overall, therefore, Barbora (2005:212) calls the Autonomous District Council an “ineffectual” tool, “laden with contradictions” and as such reducing the principle of devolving power and control over land matters to the local population to an opportunistic conflict-management method. Goswami (forthcoming:64f.), writing on the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD) in West Assam, strikes a similar note, stressing in particular that for all the anti-settler rhetoric that had marked the agitation for a separate homeland, the settler element has remained firmly entrenched since the establishment of the BTAD. Lacking business acumen, many Bodo families have started earning income through farming out business licences to outsiders who by law are forbidden to operate businesses in the area. With Bodo skilled workers and professionals in short supply, educated and well-trained migrants fill many jobs in the area’s towns. Outward signs of Bodo sovereignty in the new homeland – such as shiny new government buildings manned by droves of indigenous bureaucrats – were quick to appear, but the essence of change is thin¹²⁹. Goswami, therefore, concludes that “autonomy (...) seems to have served only a certain section of the Bodo, and it is doubtful whether it can ever rise to the challenge of empowering Bodo society as a whole”¹³⁰.

While there is agreement that the institution does not address the issues of the control of resources, finances, and the costs of running autonomous territories in a comprehensive manner (Barbora 2005:212), and that its rewards for the indigenous elite seem to exceed those for the general populace, some authors at least credit the Autonomous District Councils with fulfilling what they believe is their primary rationale: introducing the offices and functions of local government to the frontier and familiarizing frontier-dwelling populations with the “routine practices that reproduce the consent of the governed” elsewhere in the national territory (Baruah 2003a:921; see chapter 6.1.2). In Stulligross’ (1999:498) view, Autonomous District Councils have clearly had a positive effect on the local populations’ social and political development. By providing a career avenue for indigenous political entrepreneurs and an outlet for the expression and resolution of local

129 Goswami illustrates this, among other things, with the observation that the substitution of non-Bodo bureaucrats by Bodo after the establishment of the BTAD is not saving Bodo supplicants from being humbled and turned away by them – much as it had been the custom in the pre-BTAD era (Goswami, forthcoming:65).

130 Goswami’s sobering judgment echoes other, equally pessimistic views of the benefits of India’s system of preferential treatment for indigenous peoples (“scheduled tribes”) in general. Thus, as Pradip Prabhu (Prabhu 2001:54f.), writing on Central India, put it, the policy of reservations “has created a ‘creamy layer’ in the tribal communities which garner most of the advantages that the Scheduled Tribe status has to offer. (...) The new tribal elite is distanced and alienated from the core of the tribal ethos, yet members of this new elite remain the tribal spokespersons. The real tribals remain silent and speak a language that the elite often do not hear”.

grievances, Autonomous District Councils have, says Stulligross, significantly contributed to making the region more stable politically (ibid.:507)¹³¹. Of the two cases in our study sample, only one supports this conclusion.

After more than one and a half decade of violent nativist agitation, the so-called Second Bodo Accord of 2003 succeeded in putting the conflict to rest. By redrawing existing district boundaries, the *Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD)* – as already mentioned in the previous paragraph – was established and the requisite Autonomous District formed through an amendment of the Sixth Schedule. Ten years earlier, in 1993, an unrefined and maybe intentionally botched-up version of an Autonomous District had been foisted upon the leadership of the main Bodo rebel formations of the day, the All-Bodo Student Union (ABSU) and the Bodo People’s Action Committee (BPAC). The many flaws of that First Bodo Accord – among them confused definitions of the area to be incorporated in the Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC) territory, as well as a lack of financial and legislative power that were granted to the new entity – had left the Accord unimplemented and caused a deep split in the movement for a Bodo homeland. The 2003 Accord, on the other hand, laid down unambiguous boundaries, gave considerable legislative, financial and executive powers to the Bodo leadership, and provided for minimum interference by the state government in the functioning of what was henceforth called the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). Unlike its predecessor, it had constitutional status and no longer merely the force of a piece of state legislation, and the fears of non-Bodo ethnic groups living in the BTC territory were allayed by credible promises to safeguard their rights (Goswami, forthcoming:62). In due time, elections to the BTC were conducted, following which there have not been any major incidents of interethnic violence in Bodoland (ibid.:63). If the absence of large-scale ethnic strife is the measure of success for the political settlement of a conflict, the Second Bodo Accord of 2003 has so far performed rather well (ibid.).

The same cannot be said, though, of the *Karbi Anglong Autonomous District territory* of Central Assam, the second example of such an institution in our sample. In the 1980s, the Karbi and other indigenous communities in the territory began agitating for greater autonomy. The struggle, initially led by a faction of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), soon took a violent turn, and in the 1980s fragmented as the rebel formations underwent multiple splits along ethnic and ideological lines. These splits have since resulted in frequent clashes between militant Karbi and those perceived to be encroachers on their territory – natives and settlers alike (Barbora 2005:198). In the first decade of the new millennium, the war of ethnic militias reached a new level of intensity. In mid-2000, members of the United People’s Democratic Front (an ethnic militia of militant Karbi youth) attacked Hindi-speaking settlers in Hamren subdivision of Karbi Anglong. In retaliation, the latter, armed and aided by the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), a paramilitary unit often deployed in trouble-ridden regions, attacked Karbi villagers, looting and killing many of them. Such violence continued through 2001 and 2002. In 2003, a fresh round of ethnic conflicts was recorded, this time pitting the Kuki and Karbi communities around the Singhason Hills against each other (ibid.:206). With slight changes in the cast, the conflicts continued in 2005 as Karbi and Dimas militia fought each other, displacing nearly 50,000 civilians in the process (Goswami, forthcoming:63).

131 Baruah (2003b:51) echoes this view when he reasons that the District Councils and other institutional devices created by the Sixth Schedule managed to ensure not only the penetration of the state in hitherto loosely-administered spaces, but also the “creation of local stakeholders in the pan-Indian dispensation”.



Photo 30: powerful lobby group: student protesters of the All-Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) calling for the abolishment of the ill-functioning Bodo Autonomous District Council (BAC, 1993-2003) (photo: Shib Shankar Chatterjee)

Even to seasoned observers, it is not entirely clear what accounts for the success of the Autonomous District Council model in one case (West Assam) and its apparent failure in the other (Karbi Anglong). Our case study researcher on West Assam cautions that the solution to the conflict in her case study area is far from stable and, only six years after the settlement, the institution has not yet stood the test of time (Goswami, forthcoming, p. 64). Calling it a mere “appeasement of ethnic aspirations” through elite cooptation, she reminds us that protests by non-Bodo groups such as the Adivasi or the Koch-Rajbongshi against their legal marginalization in the BTDC area are on the rise, while many Bodo are assailing the slow or non-existent economic progress under the new dispensation (ibid.:65, 67). Even if peace should return permanently to the Bodo country, there seems to be little reason for recommending the granting of Autonomous District Councils as a standard formula for the mitigation of ethnic conflicts both in India’s North-East and beyond it. As one group’s claims to an ethnic homeland are granted recognition, two more will decide that they are aggrieved by that recognition and raise the same demands from within the newly-established entity – a situation that exhausts the conflict-resolving capacities of the state, if only for the fact that there is not enough land to go around (ibid.:67f., Barбора 2005:212).

The *Chittagong Hill Tracts* of Bangladesh, though not significantly larger in size than the District of Karbi Anglong¹³², make up no less than 10% of Bangladesh’s national territory. Since December, 1997, they have acquired the distinction of being the only *de facto* autonomous region in a country otherwise characterized by a highly-centralized political system that allows local government bodies

132 While the Hill Tracts measure 13,221 km², Karbi Anglong is 10,432 km².

little or no effective powers (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:6). The “Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord” of that year represents territorial autonomy of an order different from the Autonomous District Councils just discussed; whereas the latter purport to empower a single or at the maximum two or three indigenous minority groups in a precinct named after them, the former grants special territorial and political rights to a whole number of groups – eleven in the case of the Hill Tracts – on a truly regional scope. The accord of 1997 recognizes the region’s special ethnic and cultural profile as a “tribal-inhabited area”¹³³, and, on the basis of that categorization, re-organizes and improves the political representation of the area’s indigenous population. Even staunch supporters of the struggle of the *Jumma* concede that the accord goes a long way towards fulfilling the indigenous movement’s demand for the constitutional recognition of the multi-ethnic character of the Bangladeshi state¹³⁴, and our researchers called the passage of the act a “remarkable achievement considering the gradual decline of indigenous land rights from British times up to 1989¹³⁵” (ibid.:58). However, since we compare the present situation with the miseries of yesterday’s frontier regime of “integrated displacement”, these “achievements” constitute progress on a rather low level.

The accord’s salient provisions strengthen the existing bodies of local self-government (the three district councils established in 1989, see above, note 135), and introduce a supreme new one (the regional council), invest them with decision-making powers on matters related to land, culture, education and health, and decree that two thirds of all seats in these bodies, as well as the chairmanship, be reserved for indigenous people (Roy 2008:491f., Roy and Halim, forthcoming:44). The accord addresses the matter of the guerilla fighters’ return to normal life, mandates affirmative action through quotas for reserved jobs for local residents (with priority to indigenous candidates), puts in place a task force for the re-settlement and rehabilitation of *Jumma* refugees and internally-displaced persons, and establishes a separate ministry to deal with all major aspects of administrative and developmental matters related to the hill region. The document foresees the formation of a multi-ethnic police force for the region, promises to dismantle all non-permanent military camps and encampments of para-military units, and, most crucially, vows to resolve land-related disputes, including those related to the grand population transfer programme of 1979-1985 (ibid.:6, 44; Roy 2008:491f.). It vests control over all land transfers in the Hill District Councils¹³⁶ and, in particular,

133 In contrast, Bangladesh’s constitution of 1971 vaguely referred to the *Jumma* and other indigenous peoples of the country as a “backward section of citizens” (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:72).

134 Again, praise for the wording of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord has to be viewed in the context of comparison with the national constitution of 1971 (article 6, part I). It decrees that “all citizens of Bangladesh should be known as Bengalis” and thereby in effect turns all non-Bengali groups into ethnic and religious minorities (Bleie 2005:163).

135 In 1989, in a first attempt to deal with the insurgency of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (“PCJSS” or “JSS”), the government had introduced a piece of legislation that provided for the establishment of three *Jumma*-controlled local government districts in the Hill Tracts. The Hill District Council Acts of 1989 included, for instance, a significant provision according to which the new bodies had to be consulted before any land transactions could take place (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:47). In spite of this, the “accord” of 1989 failed to pacify the guerilla. Not only did the proposed solution bypass the JSS, but the councils had, after all, limited decision-making powers as the government reserved the right to dissolve them if necessary. Also in doubt was the councils’ capacity for settling land questions related to the past appropriation of *Jumma* territories by government-sponsored migrants (Brauns and Löffler 1990:244). But whatever their shortcomings at the time, in a longer-term perspective, the Hill District Council Acts of 1989 were important precursors of the more comprehensive peace accord of 1997, and indicate the processual nature of the change in frontier regimes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts as elsewhere.

136 The centerpiece of land-related legislation, section 64 of the Hill District Council Acts of 1989, stipulates that henceforth, “no lands (...) may be settled, leased out, mortgaged, compulsorily acquired, or otherwise transferred, without the consent of the Hill District Council” (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:47).

provides for the formation of a Commission on Land to expedite justice in land-related disputes (especially between *Jumma* and settlers) and cancel at least a part of the land leases from which settlers and other outsiders had benefitted in the past. In adjudicating land contests, the commission is to take account of customary land rights (ibid.:492; Roy and Halim, forthcoming:44). The accord is silent, though, on the *refoulement* of the estimated 200,000-450,000 government-sponsored settlers who arrived at the behest of the military junta between 1979 and 1985, rendering land conflicts much more numerous and acrimonious than before. Their relocation outside the Chittagong Hill Tracts had been a core demand of the indigenous guerilla, but the government only agreed to include such a provision in the form of an unwritten and secret additional clause, on which it has since reneged (Roy 2008:496)¹³⁷. Incidentally, the “voluntary withdrawal” of the state-sponsored colonists is at the heart of Shapan Adnan’s (2004:171-174) catalogue of mitigation measures without which there can be no realistic chance for a lasting solution to the conflict in the Hill Tracts.

For various reasons, the implementation of the accord by the government and the military has been very tardy. For one, as stipulated by the compact, the guerilla handed over their arms and decommissioned at an early stage of the process. Forgetting to insist on a *quid pro quo*, the JSS could not consider a return to violence when it became apparent that the government dragged its feet on crucial parts of the agreement (Roy 2008:503). Second, while the very government that had concluded the accord – formed by Sheik Hasina Wajed’s secularist and left-of-center Awami league – was already taking a lot of time to implement its provisions, matters turned worse after 2001 when the major opposition party came to power. From the outset, the right-leaning Bangladesh National Party (BNP) under the leadership of Sheik Hasina’s arch-rival, Khaleda Zia, had denounced the agreement as being inimical to the rights of Bengali residents in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. When it came to form the government four years after the peace deal, the BNP cabinet did everything in its might to sabotage the agreement (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:45). With the political will to take forward vital aspects of the accord now lacking, crucial items such as demilitarization, a genuine devolution of powers to the Hill District Councils and Regional Council, joint policing, refugee rehabilitation and the resolution of land conflicts through the Land Commission remained unimplemented (ibid.:45, Adnan 2004:170). Thus, in direct contravention of the accord, Bengali Deputy Commissioners continued to allocate and transfer lands to non-*Jumma* (IWGIA 2002:317), and when the Land Commission was finally convened in 2005, it became mired in conflicts over the control of the office of the chairperson (Roy 2008:496, 498).

Not surprisingly, the challenges to the fledgling order of self-rule peaked during the tenure of the BNP government (2001-2007); in 2001, the Dhaka High Court annulled as incompatible with the Bangladesh Constitution those paragraphs of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900 which prohibited the entry of non-*Jumma* into the Hill Tracts (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:44), and in 2006, the same court had to concern itself with an appeal to revoke the entire regulation of 1900 (Raja Devasish Roy, personal communication, June 2006). For a while, in 2001, the government even loudly considered reviewing the Hill Tracts Peace Accord of 1997 itself, again on the grounds that it might violate the country’s sovereignty and constitution (IWGIA 2002:315). As Roy and

137 That the government negotiators were able to deflect a matter of prime concern to the *Jumma* to an “unwritten” and therefore unenforceable part of the agreement, is indicative of the JSS’s weak bargaining position in the negotiations with the government. The JSS’ failure to commit the state to take back the brunt of the government-sponsored colonists prompted a part of the guerilla cadres to refuse the settlement. A violent conflict between the breakaway group, called the United People’s Democratic Front (UPDF), and the JSS has since claimed an unknown number of lives and has gravely hurt the *Jumma* in their effort to pressurize the government to honor and fully implement the accord.



Photo 31: The beginning of peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts: Arms deposit ceremony before the signing of the Peace Accord, Khagrachari district, 10 February 2007 (photo: Devasish Roy).

Halim (forthcoming:71f.) rightly point out, the fact that the accord could be held to ransom by party politics indicates a basic flaw of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord of 1997 – its being a mere law instead of a set of provisions anchored in the constitution. As such, the accord’s validity is constantly on the line, as it can be repealed anytime by a simple majority in parliament (ibid.:72)¹³⁸.

With the Land Commission in limbo, tenurial security for the *Jumma* does not seem to have improved much. Against the spirit of the agreement, the BNP-led government that ruled throughout much of the post-accord period appeared determined to re-strengthen the settler element in the Hill Tracts, and more or less openly transferred new migrants to the area (Adnan 2004:51, Roy and Halim, forthcoming:18, 70). Many migrants whom Adnan (2004:51) saw arrive after the proclamation of the accord actually acquired land titles through “legal or illegal means”, and Bengali civil servants continue to be reported to be “favourably disposed towards their fellow plainsmen, facilitating them in acquiring rights to *Pahari*¹³⁹ lands” (ibid.:51f.). Roy and Halim (forthcoming:22) note not only numerous post-accord cases of displacement of *Jumma* by settlers, but also the “widely-held belief” among those displaced that such landgrabbing was happening “with the connivance of government officials” and the armed forces. Only in a few isolated cases have Bengali settlers

138 Therefore, where autonomy laws are not protected by the constitution – as is the case in the Chittagong Hill Tracts –, adequate political representation at the national level is of utmost importance if indigenous peoples are to withstand attempts at unravelling autonomy agreements. *Jumma* leaders have become aware of the implications of the mismatch between representative local institutions and the lack of access to the national parliament or the cabinet. In a public discussion with the editor of a national daily paper in 2005, one of them offered the settler population stronger representation in the Hill District and Regional Councils in exchange for *Jumma* seats in the national parliament and the executive branch of the government (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:68).

139 *Pahari* (“hill people”) is another collective term to designate the *Jumma*, in frequent use among Bengalis.

been removed from illegally-occupied *Jumma* lands in the Hill Tracts (Adnan 2004:171). To date, not only is there no larger-scale withdrawal of Bengali colonists in evidence, but the few instances where settlers were relocated were of virtually no consequence for the area and its staggering population density. To the alarm of indigenous rights advocates far and near, the policy directives issued by the government targeted “state-owned land” – evidently a formulation with a wide range of possible meanings – *within* the Hill Tracts as possible resettlement areas for colonists whose legal standing had become untenable (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:46). Instead of advancing the return of alienated land to *Jumma* ownership, the BNP government compulsorily acquired large swathes of indigenous lands for state forestry and military installations (ibid.:6).

However, my understanding of the relevant facts is that even without concerted attempts by an unsympathetic government to thwart the restitution of *Jumma* land to its rightful owners, the characteristic legacy of the turbulent land frontier – legal ambiguity (see chapter 6.1.4) – would make it very difficult to establish the legality of settler claims to occupied land. In the course of the massive transfer of government-sponsored migrants to the Hill Tracts between 1979 and 1985, a large number of colonists were given title deeds to the allotted lands. In spite of the fact that some of these were technically flawed or invalid, they could not be easily disowned even by the Aswami League government which was not duty-bound to preserve Bengali possessions (Adnan 2004:53). Particularly with respect to the highly-priced flat plough lands, the purposive demographic engineering undertaken by the military governments of Ziaur Rahman and (partly) General Hussain Muhammad Ershad has left permanent traces in the form of highly resilient disputes and land conflicts (ibid.).

In yet other ways, arcane frontier traits refuse to yield to the late modern imperatives of minority rights, democratization and decentralization (see chapter 10). Reminiscent of other frontiers where in spite of contrary claims, political authority rests with the military (see chapter 6.1.2), the new Hill Councils as well as the chiefs and headmen who answer to them are unable to assert themselves against the armed forces. Not only have the latter successfully ignored their obligation – as stipulated in the 1997 accord – to reduce their presence in the Hill Tracts (IWGIA 2002:318) –, but they have in several cases refused to act on the new authorities’ orders to stop settler encroachment on indigenous village territories and thug violence against villagers. In an especially alarming case from Rangamati district, military commanders, faced with appeals to reign in the colonists, exhorted the villagers to be lenient and share their land with the latter. The rationale given – familiar from the late 1970s and the 1980s – was that the colonists were “poor and helpless” (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:29).

Furthermore, in spite of the political settlement of the conflict, the Chittagong Hill Tracts remain saturated with violence and the state’s monopoly to it plainly fictive (see chapter 6.1.8). While the factional cleavage among the radical indigenous movement accounts for sporadic fighting and assassinations, the larger part of the blood still being spilt is that of indigenous villagers attacked by rampaging settlers; more often than not, soldiers are reported to be involved in such raids. The most spectacular incident was a joint attack by settlers and army units on 14 villages in the sub-district of Mahalchari (Khagrachari district) in August 2003 in the course of which some 50 villagers were injured and 400 houses were burned down. There was no official inquiry (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:53). Human rights organizations therefore bemoan a “blatant disregard for the rule of law in the area” and a complete lack of accountability in the ranks of the military (IWGIA 2007:387, 389). In the few cases where human rights violations by army personnel are publicly



Photo 32: violent disagreements within the Jumma movement: UPDF (United People's Democratic Front) activists denouncing the Peace Accord as a sell-out at a demobilization rally, Khagrachari (photo: Society for Environment and Human Development, SEHD)

exposed, these have been legitimated by accusing the victims of “terrorism” (ibid.:389) – a self-serving label in violent domestic politics that enjoys wide currency in the post-9/11 world (see e.g. Lutz 2005:15). Irrespective of the Peace Accord of 1997, it is thus hard to escape the conclusion that with regard to the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the armed forces of Bangladesh (and probably also a large part of the political elite) have not really abandoned the dream of territorial consolidation through the mass relocation of plainspeople to the hills.

8.3.1.2.3 “citizen-denizen” constellations

In what I call “*citizen-denizen*” constellations, the legal situation favors indigenous frontier-dwellers in so comprehensive a manner that the proposition of the universal denial of indigenous land ownership claims at the frontier (see chapter 6.1.4) is, in fact, invalidated. Usually on colonial precepts, territory is recognized and the land market kept at bay by legal provisions mandating the inalienability and indivisibility of communal landholdings. While pressure on land is minimized by land laws that vest all rights in local descent groups or communities, migration flows to the frontier are constrained by strict rules that deny outsiders access to it (Lynch and Talbott 1995:117ff.; Baruah 2002:14). In the original colonial formula, political representation was indirect, channelled through Caucasian regents or commissioners who were supposed to base their decisions on consultation with “traditional” institutions of governance like elders’ councils and chiefs. In a postcolonial context, such structures of separate administration were gradually brought in line with the wider national political system, and paternalist indirect forms of representation were replaced by more

or less standard forms of franchise. In contemporary varieties of “citizen-denizen” constellations, political participation (“voice”) is maximized by ensuring that the most inclusive administrative units below the ultimate level of the national polity are controlled by indigenous politicians¹⁴⁰. The political supremacy of the locals is not left to the whims of the electorate, but is buttressed by regulations that reserve most elected political offices and the majority of jobs in the civil service to indigenous people. Exploitation is curtailed by a ban on any kind of commercial activities by outsiders and, very generally, the fact that the latter cannot rely on a supportive administration implementing permissive laws (von Fürer-Haimendorf 1966:x). In sum, in a remarkable reversal of the archetypical frontier constellation (see chapters 6.1.4 and 6.1.5), local indigenous communities can be said to form an “ethnocracy” at the expense of the migrant element (Lawson 1996). While “tribal” status confers privileges, outsiders are turned into “denizens” – citizens with restricted rights that do not grant them legal parity with local “sons of the soil”¹⁴¹. Naturally, the frontier being what it is, administrative laxity and corruption on the part of the authorities will ensure that scores of settler “denizens” enter and inhabit these no-go areas inspite of their being off-limits. However, in a manner yet more pronounced than where locals are “partly empowered”, settler “denizens” find the legal odds seriously stacked against them, and their success at bypassing the law appears to be much more conditional and reversible as it depends on indigenous complicity.

Technically, “citizen-denizen” constellations require systems of protective discrimination (Baruah 2003b:45), and occur together with forms of separate administration. Protective discrimination/separate administration regimes accord the beneficiary groups preferential legal treatment because they are considered too weak to prevail in interethnic struggles over the distribution of power and resources (Bodley 1990:166f.)¹⁴². In actual historical practice, areas of special administration for indigenous communities have usually been established by imperial fiat and did not evolve from democratic consensus. Cases in point for policies of separate administration/protective discrimination in colonial times were the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation for then-British Bengal’s Chittagong Hill Tracts (van Schendel 1995); the British Inner Line Policy in the Northeastern Frontier areas of India; the Closed Districts Policy in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan; the Uncontrolled Areas Policy in Australian New Guinea; the Inini Statute applied to Amerindian groups of interior French Guyana until 1968; and Rennel and Bellona islands in the British Solomons (Bodley 1975:172). Concepts for separate administration/protective discrimination were without exception colonial inventions, and few of them survived the transition to postcolonial rule; India with its complex set of rules for

140 Thus, while under “partial empowerment”, the units of self-government (the Autonomous District Councils) were contained within and subordinated to their mother entity – in our case the State of Assam –, the respective unit under the “citizen-denizen” mode is itself a state.

141 Political scientist Sanjib Baruah has introduced the term “denizen” to the debate on the merits of differential rights for indigenous peoples and colonists (and their descendants). In Northeast India’s Sixth Schedule areas, Baruah maintains, the latter lack the full citizenship rights that the former enjoy, which reduces them to the status of mere “denizens”. The term evokes the power of “denization” of British monarchs to grant some aliens parts of the privileges of natural-born subjects. In 16th century England, denizens, while free to buy land, were not allowed to inherit it, and – with the passing of time – were also forbidden to sit in the Privy Council or the houses of parliament (Baruah 2003b:65f., note 3).

142 I should note here that this rationale is not undisputed. Several scholars have registered their opinion that colonial policies for the exclusion of undesirable outsiders from tribal areas were in fact motivated not so much by compassion for the well-being of tribal frontier-dwellers than by concern for revenues. Talking of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, for instance, van Schendel (1995:134) judges the proclamation of the area’s excluded area status by the British a pretext for furthering highly capitalized, plantation-type agricultural development on indigenous land, at the expense of migrant smallholders who would have contributed considerably less to the colonial exchequer.

special administration of “tribals” that were moulded on colonial schemes, is a notable exception here (see von Fürer-Haimendorf 1982b:286-298). In contemporary policy debates, therefore, the notion of special territorial statutes for indigenous areas, anchored on provisions for limited outside access, is tainted by its association with colonial attitudes of patronizing benevolence towards “savage races” (Bodley 1975:167). Nationalist circles in countries with protective discrimination schemes vigorously reject them as a colonial ploy to keep the tribal hills isolated from the plains (Burling 1967:219f.). Indigenous rights advocates, on the other hand, assert that no other legal regime outperforms tightly-enforced provisions for protective discrimination/separate administration when it comes to guaranteeing indigenous communities’ control over land and natural resources¹⁴³.

Extending from Assam to Tibet, *Arunachal Pradesh*, our example for the “citizen-denizen” category, always enjoyed a political status different from that of most other parts of India. The British were content to rule the area as a borderland that was only nominally attached to the body politic of British India; typical for a “frontier of control” (see chapter 5), only a fraction of the territory was under regular administration, the greater part being a political no man’s land where feuding tribes lived their lives free from state domination (von Fürer-Haimendorf 1982b:286; Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:4)¹⁴⁴. On the grounds that it wanted to separate the “incommensurable” cultures of the plains and mountain people, and to prevent the exploitation of the latter by the former¹⁴⁵, the government of British India made efforts to keep outsiders out of the “wilder” mountain regions of Assam.

It established the so-called “Inner Line”, a boundary running along the foothills which no plainspeople were allowed to cross without a written permit. Between “Inner Line” and “Outer Line” (the latter being the formal limit of colonial jurisdiction at the outer rim of the Frontier Tracts), the indigenous polities were left to govern themselves (and dispense justice) undisturbed by government interference. Classified as “partially excluded” or entirely “excluded” areas, the region comprised the Sadiya, Balipara and Lakhimpur Frontier Tracts (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:7). After independence, in 1951, the plains areas all along these Frontier Tracts were placed under the jurisdiction of the governor of Assam, and somewhat later, in 1954, the different frontier tracts were merged and made to form the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA, see Verghese 1996:220).

The territory was for a time jointly administered by the External Affairs Ministry in Delhi and the Governor of Assam, who acted as the agent of the President of India. Unlike other indigenous areas in the Northeast, Arunachal’s population was not considered ready for elected local and state government until 1987, when NEFA was transformed into a full-fledged state, complete with its own government and legislative assembly. To the credit of the leaders of post-independence India,

143 This view is, by the way, shared by anthropologist Robert Goodland (1988:396). In his World Bank study on possible policy approaches to enhance indigenous people’s role in development, he recommends protective discrimination/separate administration as the “most feasible means of protecting a tribal group whose culture is endangered by national intrusion”.

144 A measure of the shadowy suzerainty that the British exercised over the territory – a domain more than half the size of England – is the fact that its administration was in the hands of only three political officers. Their only means of making their presence felt were extended patrols through the territory, undertaken on a yearly basis, accompanied by a few hundred coolies and native policemen carrying salt, tea and tobacco for the chiefs (Guha 1999:238f.).

145 Again, the official justification of the resort to separate administration may tell only half the story. As critical scholars contend, the “Inner Line” served also to prevent the spread of anti-colonial dissidence (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:7), and was supposed to insulate the Assam tea estates – the region’s main economic assets – from habitual raiding by tribal uplanders (Guha 1999:238f.).

however, the special legislation of colonial making which had kept the area insulated from settler colonization was kept in force after the departure of the British. The most important of them – mentioned before – were the Bengal Frontier Regulation, 1873, better known as the Inner Line Regulation, which mandated outsiders to seek clearance of the authorities for entering the territory, and forbade them to permanently settle there, own land, or obtain trading licences (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:34f., 63, 66). The Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation, 1945, entrusted the village councils with the adjudication of civil and criminal offences and disputes, directing them to employ local customary law. While the non-indigenous were denied proprietary and settlement rights, detailed laws regulated access to and ownership rights to land for indigenous people themselves. Thus, the Chin Hills Regulation, 1896, acknowledged indigenous ownership rights to land on a communal basis and established traditional clan and village communities as tax-paying and landholding juridical entities. Three different Jhum Regulations acknowledged the viability and legality of shifting cultivation (*jhum*) and recognized local communities' permanent heritable ownership rights to land utilized under that production regime (ibid.:32, Lynch and Talbott 1995:118f.).

In British times, these regulations had had a proven, far-reaching effect in protecting the rights of Arunachal Pradesh's indigenous communities, giving them control over their land and natural resources, and allowing them to continue self-governance in accordance with traditional practices (von Fürer-Haimendorf 1982b:297f., Lynch and Talbott 1995:117f.). It is a measure of political far-sightedness that the founding fathers of post-independence India chose to retain them with only minor modifications¹⁴⁶. Until the early 1960s, the legacy of the colonial "frontier of control" afforded the area's indigenous peoples breathing space that most other tribal groups not only in India, but the world over sorely lacked. It took a border war with China (1962) to make India's leaders rethink their approach to governing Arunachal Pradesh (see above, this chapter, 8.2.1), as a result of which the policy formulations which kept "denizen" outsiders few and legally disadvantaged have come under great pressure. It is only with reservations, thus, that we can classify the state as a case of a "citizen-denizen constellation", since the legal prerogatives of the native population have begun to be dismantled.

The shattering defeat which the Indian troops suffered at the hands of the invading Red Army prompted New Delhi to "nationalize" the Arunachalese frontier. Following the standard prescription (see chapter 7), this was to be achieved through the build-up of state institutions; the dissemination of cultural forms, languages and religious beliefs dominant at the national center; tapping the frontier's wealth; and facilitating frontier migration. In pursuance of these aims, *first*, roads were built to enable rapid troop deployment, and administrative capacities were shored up by moving the government center from far-away Shillong into the heart of NEFA. The outreach of the state

146 In fact, an important part of the credit for sparing Arunachal Pradesh's indigenous peoples the experience of the ravages of the settlement and extractive frontier belongs to Verrier Elwin, a British-born anthropologist. A close confidant of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, he drafted an administrative "philosophy" for NEFA which endorsed the retention of the Inner Line Regulation. According to Elwin, the paramount aim of Indian policy in the North-East Frontier had to be to foster the development of "tribal life and culture" with due respect for the latter's integrity and intrinsic sophistication. "National integration" was to be achieved without causing the indigenous cultures' absorption into the fabric of Hindu culture. Elwin's benevolent paternalistic approach to frontier management manifested itself, among other things, in the creation of the Indian Frontier Administrative Service that was tasked with the administrative legwork in NEFA. The administrators were handpicked and given special sensitizing training in order to avoid alienating the local communities through displays of cultural chauvinism, as had happened in the Mizo- and Naga-inhabited areas of erstwhile Assam (see Elwin 1959a, Guha 1999).

bureaucracy, furthermore, was expanded by adding twelve more to the six existing administrative sub-divisions (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:12). *Second*, separate administration was abandoned by promoting the territory first from “frontier agency” to Union Territory and finally to a full-fledged state that holds regular elections and sends its representatives to the national parliament in New Delhi¹⁴⁷. In addition, in 1967, in a dramatic reversal of the previous policy of self-government through autochthonous political institutions, the pan-Indian institutions of local government – the so-called *panchayat raj* – were introduced, rivalling and increasingly replacing traditional institutions of representative governance such as the *kebang* of the Adi and other, similar forms (Baruah 2003a:930, Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:13, 38).

Third, the drive to homogenize administrative practice and bring Arunachal’s autochthonous politics in line with national standards was flanked by a policy of cultural assimilation. Following the argument of P.N. Luthra, an advisor to the Governor of Assam in the 1960s, the Union government in Delhi set about to generate a “sense of belonging to the country as a whole” by imparting the values and practices of Hindu culture to the state’s indigenous population (Luthra 1993:30). Under the state and central governments’ patronage, Hindu missions such as Rama Krishna and Vivekananda Kendra established themselves and opened residential schools in Arunachal Pradesh. Meanwhile, a law that forbids the conversion from one religious faith to another keeps the classical “dissident religion” among India’s tribals, Christianity, from operating in the state. Hindi was made the administrative language and the official medium of instruction in school, along with *Devanagari* (Hindi) as the official script¹⁴⁸. As a result of this linguistic assimilation policy, the rich diversity of languages in the state is on the wane; above all in the western part of the state, most of the young can no longer speak their mother tongues (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming, p. 43). Civil servants from mainland India use their monopoly of bureaucratic posts in the state to propagate the linguistic, religious and cultural standards of the national body politic. In their intercourse with the general populace and its elected leaders in local government, they enact daily what they consider to be their vast cultural superiority (Baruah 2003a:930). Offering the villagers escape from the “stigma” of their autochthonous religion, they advise them to return “hinduism” where census forms enquire about religion. In so doing, Arunachal Pradesh’s bureaucrats act as “*bazaristas*” in the cultural domain, i.e. brokers of the Hindu caste ideology and claim to cultural supremacy (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:44).

Fourth, the central government in coalition with the Arunachal state government has aggressively promoted the “development” of the state’s natural resources on developmentalist precepts (see

147 Like in other northeastern states that evolved from British “frontier tracts” (Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya), a fixed number of reserved seats ensure the political dominance of Arunachal Pradesh’s indigenous population over the migrant element. In the state legislative assembly, all seats but one are reserved for “scheduled tribes”, and only indigenous candidates can contest elections (Baruah 2003a:923). While the system of reservations in the local parliament indeed checks political challenges from colonists, it is not tantamount to effective autonomy, as political scientist Sanjib Baruah points out. The crafting of the state edifice in Northeast India obeyed the imperatives of national security, with the result that vast executive powers were retained by unelected state governors who usually have a military background (ibid.:926). Even if they wanted to, Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh, being fiscally independent on the political centre, cannot stray far from the track outlined for them by India’s security establishment (ibid.:924f.). That, however, is unlikely anyway, suggests Baruah, since Arunachal Pradesh’s indigenous elites were raised as ardent proponents of “development” in the “developmentalist” mould, and have become reliable stakeholders in India’s political party system (ibid.:928f.).

148 The effect of this linguistic assimilation policy has been the slow loss of indigenous languages. Above all in the western part of the state, most of the young can no longer speak their mother tongue (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:43).



Photo 33: isolated tribal abodes, protected by restrictive colonial laws: Mishmi longhouse, Anjaw District, Arunachal Pradesh (photo: Christian Erni)

chapter 7.1.3). Deforestation – with government connivance – is rampant, as timber traders make use of illegally-issued felling permits (Singh 1995:xix; Baruah 2003a:936). A 1996 logging ban notwithstanding, the state's economic lifeline are sawmills and plywood factories whose numbers are to be significantly increased, as stated in the latest official economic program, the New Industrial Policy 2001 (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:37). Capital investments from outside are to be attracted at all costs. The acting chief minister, his predecessor and other leading local politicians see the building of dams and hydroelectric power plants as the best course for Arunachal's development, a development which is anchored on extractive industries. Their intent to position Arunachal as one of the leading exporters of electricity has manifested itself in a flurry of projects for power-generating facilities. At various stages of design and realization, plans exist for over a hundred small and medium-sized and more than 20 large dams and hydropower plants (Sahgal, ed., 2003:3). Currently, road-building projects include three Assam-Arunachal inter-state roads and the construction of a National Highway along the state's middle belt, purportedly in the name of providing the planned industries access to national markets (Baruah 2003a:917, Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:18f.). As national policy makers have dropped the restraints urged on the first generation of Indian leaders by colonial precedent, Arunachal Pradesh is rapidly turning into a "frontier of extraction" (see chapter 5), with the attendant toll on the state's pristine forests and outstanding biological diversity.

Fifth, and finally, post-1962 governments in New Delhi have found it convenient to use settlers in their drive to "nationalize space". By bringing about demographic change, facilitating resource extraction and helping to extend the reach of commodity cycles to indigenous pre-capitalist economies, colonists serve the aim of tying frontier areas to national heartlands in direct and indirect ways (see Geiger 2008a:10-27). In the immediate aftermath of the Chinese invasion, the

Indian state planned and realized the sponsored settlement of migrants to selected rural locales. In order to strengthen border defense, the government did its best to raise NEFA's spectacularly low population densities. Targetting non-Indians with both a record of loyalty to the country and the necessary resilience to a montane climate, smaller Tibetan and Nepali colonies were opened and retired soldiers received land grants in areas adjacent to the Chinese and Burmese borders. The same period – the 1960s – also saw the resettlement of a large group of 14,000 Chakma, victims of the flooding of their land along the Karnaphuli River in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, to NEFA (see above, this chapter, 8.2.1; Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:15). The larger share of the substantial immigrant population that flocks to the territory, however, has been made up by state-facilitated migrants attracted by the economic opportunities generated by the opening of the extractive frontier (see above, this chapter; Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:15, Baruah 2003a:930f.). At least until 1996 when a logging ban curbed legal logging operations in the state, migrant manpower was needed for the felling of trees in the logging industry, and it is still in demand on the building sites of hydropower dams and the fields of indigenous landowners. The latter now prefer living on rents from farmed-out business licences and leased-out land to an existence as hill or paddy farmers (see above, this chapter; Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:15).

The net result of the border war of 1962 and the changes in frontier management triggered by this event was that Arunachal Pradesh “changed from a place that the state wanted to see preserved to one it wanted to see transformed” (ibid.:10). That momentous transformation, however, required fundamental legislative adjustments. Given that the burgeoning indigenous elite of Arunachal Pradesh is self-consciously aware of the relevance of the old colonial safeguards for their land base and ethnic position (von Furer-Haimendorf 1982b:298, Baruah 2003a:933), the national government and the security apparatus – the latter being the most powerful player after the military debacle of the border war – had to proceed slowly with dismantling the old legal set-up, which explains why the process is currently still in process (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:36f.)¹⁴⁹. While the colonial laws have remained in force, new ones have been passed which substantially contradict prior legislation, rendering the situation rather opaque. The murkiness of the current legal conditions concerning land ownership and immigration notwithstanding, the general picture is one of pervasive economic and political de-regulation. Step by step, the constitutional and legislative cushions put in place to protect indigenous peoples' interests are being removed; affected are the provisions that vest land rights in the community and those that restrict the right to own land and operate businesses to indigenous locals (ibid.:16).

In the year 2000, the state assembly approved the Arunachal Pradesh (Land Settlement and Records) Act. For the first time in the area's constitutional development, the new law invoked the concept of state lands and forests, reduced indigenous ownership rights to mere “use rights” and made even these contingent on formal proof of occupancy (ibid.:34). With more than 82% of the state territory now classified as either Reserved Forest or “Unclassed State Forest”, the jurisdiction of the villages and clans is severely curtailed. While the law does not explicitly revoke community ownership rights to land and the regulatory role of the village councils and other customary institutions, it does not

149 For several years, development planners of the influential Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi have come out openly in favor of rescinding the Inner Line Regulation, arguing that it hinders the free circulation of labour and the allocation of resources according to development priorities (Baruah 2003a:932). Aware of the sensitive nature of the issue, Indian policy makers keep such proposals on hold for the moment, but legal adjustments to the demographic changes of the past decade and the shifts in the state's policy imperatives seem inevitable in the longer run (ibid.:933).

confirm them either (ibid.:34). While so far the authorities have not interfered with the customary land rights of the communities, the day will come when the shift to absolute and enforceable state rights over forest will generate the first, manifest conflicts (ibid.:37).

In 2001, the government of Arunachal Pradesh proclaimed a new Industrial Policy (see above, chapter 8.3.1.2.3). It significantly eases the terms for the leasing of land to moneyed outside entrepreneurs and provides for a hundred per cent equity ownership of the industrial units to be set up by them. The new policy also drops the requirement for securing business licences – documents which so far were granted very restrictively. Finally, it promotes the conversion of *jhum* land to permanent cultivation. Subsidies, grants and loans are offered for agricultural intensification (e.g. through terracing) and the production of cash-crops such as coffee, tea, ginger or mustard. In an attempt to further weaken community control over land, applicants for loans have to provide individual land possession certificates as collateral (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:37).

While at the time of the study it was yet too early to assess the appeal of the new policy frame on outside investors, one group that clearly benefited from juridical de-regulation was the indigenous elite. As community and clan land is no longer resolutely protected, local headmen (*gaonbura*), legislative assembly members and indigenous businessmen use their political connections to have choice bits of communal territories registered in their own names. As a consequence, economic disparities within the local communities are increasing fast (ibid.:16, 35, 53). The developments in Arunachal Pradesh thus confirm an observation made elsewhere in North-East India's former Frontier Tracts: while the laws that prohibit the sale of land to non-tribals are still relatively well-entrenched, there are "no safeguards against land alienation or unequal accumulation of land within the tribal communities" (Karlsson 2004:35, quoted in Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:53).

However, whereas the legal barriers against private land ownership are tumbling with the connivance of influential Arunachalese, the laws that limit land ownership and, indeed, formal settlement rights for ordinary settlers are staunchly defended by the leaders and the general populace (Baruah 2003a:933). By general consensus, the Inner Line Regulation has to stay as it is considered the *conditio sine qua non* for the survival of the state's indigenous polities and cultures (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:35). The fear of the Mishmi, Khamti, Singpho and other resident indigenous peoples of being swamped by immigrants is palpable (Baruah 2003a:927); in order not to nourish it further, the authorities in Delhi have so far desisted from attacking the rules of exclusion openly. If the observations of our case-study researcher are correct, the prevalent strategy is instead to undermine the Inner Line Regulation by ignoring it. Government officials issue Inner Line Permits almost at will (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming, p. 16) and the police conducts few checks to see if non-locals are in possession of the document. At the time of field research, many migrant respondents said they had not had an Inner Line Permit when they entered the state, and though a majority acquired one at a later point, hardly anyone had his permit renewed after it expired (ibid.:35).

As the political will to maintain the area's relative isolation has grown weak, the legal restrictions against immigration have become a major source of income for corrupt officials selling permanent or temporary permits to scores of unqualified applicants (ibid.:16, 35). Many of the migrants whose presence is legalized in this way are Marwari, Bihari, Bengali and Punjabi engaged in trade, commerce and local transport, with some running tea plantations and extractive ventures such as sawmills (ibid.:47). An even bigger group, though, are unskilled, low-paid labourers on urban construction sites and rural farms. Bihari, Assamese, *adivasi* and people from Uttar Pradesh in their

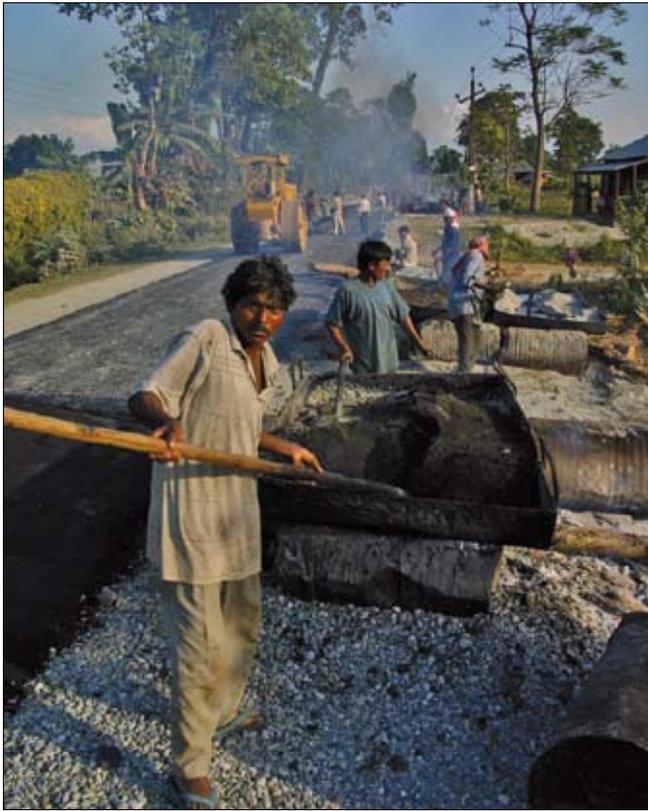


Photo 34: Inner Line Permit? What Inner Line Permit? Migrant laborers on a road construction site, Lohit District, Arunachal Pradesh (photo: Christian Erni)

thousands have been hired as farmhands, cow herders or labourers on tea plantations and in saw mills, while others subsist as sharecroppers (ibid.:49). Khamti, Singpho and Mishmi families have come to depend on them for all sorts of work. Indeed, local indigenous demand for cheap labour and the opportunism of native politicians eager for the migrant vote seem to be a driving force behind the farcical application of the Inner Line Regulation (ibid.:16). Consistent with this pattern, the local economy is largely controlled by migrants, in spite of the fact that they cannot legally hold land or hold trading licences. As the state embraces “development”, migrants, attracted by the opportunities of the extractive frontier, have entered into countless informal arrangements with the authorities and the locals, doing contract work for the government, running tea plantations or setting up enterprises of different sorts (ibid.:45). Characteristically, of six sawmills presently operating in the researcher’s study area, Chongkham Circle, four are owned and managed by Marwari migrants using farmed-out business licences, while ownership of the fifth is divided between a local Khamti and a migrant (ibid.:45).

Even while they are complicit in subverting the laws that restrict outside settlement and business activities in their state, Arunachal Pradesh’s indigenous peoples do not fail to assert the legal boundary. In one of the more dramatic instances of such boundary enforcement, shop owners in the town studied by our researcher were forced to sell back the plots that they had been allotted in NEFA times and leave the place (ibid.:19, 31). On an everyday basis, meanwhile, migrant food stall owners or shopkeepers in that same town have had to endure the lifting of food or merchandise by indigenous youth who felt safe in the knowledge that in case the victims protested with the authorities, their business licences and even their staying permits could be revoked anytime at the prodding of indigenous leaders (ibid.:19, 59). A much more effective way of dramatizing the persistence of the laws of exclusion, however, is their invocation – noisy and partly violent – in political campaigns

against foreign nationals. For a growing number of indigenous Arunachalese, the descendants of the 14,000 Chakma refugees from East Pakistan's (now Bangladesh's) Chittagong Hill Tracts, invited in the 1960s by the Indian government, personify the menace to their continued political, legal and numerical dominance of the state. Though primarily launched to thwart the Chakma's campaign for citizenship rights (and the attendant right to vote, see *ibid.*:75), the movement for the Chakma's "detection" and eviction also sent a powerful message to all non-Chakma settlers in the state. The violent rapping of the Chakma was a bold reminder to other migrants that their stay in this frontier state was conditional and temporary, and that the Inner Line, though neglected by convenience, could bounce back vengefully at any time.

8.3.1.3 evaluation and summary

It will be useful to synthesize briefly what my examination of the different types of regulatory regimes has brought to light. Clearly, variables in land policies and policies towards colonization do influence migration flows to the frontier in critical ways, hemming them in, enabling them or forcing them "underground".

	land	territory	voice
Integrated displacement			
Philippines (pre-IPRA)	–	–	–
CHT between 1945 and 1997	(–)	–	–
Indonesia	–	–	–
Protective pretense			
West Assam (Tribal Blocks&Belts)	(+)	–	–
Partial Empowerment			
Philippines (post-IPRA)	–	+	–
West Assam, Karbi Anglong (Autonomous District Councils)	–	(+)	+
CHT after 1997	+	–	+
Citizen-Denizen Constellations			
Arunachal Pradesh	+	(+)	+

Figure 9: Politico-legal frameworks and degree to which they manage to safeguard individual ("land") and communal land rights ("territory") as well as political participation ("voice") of indigenous peoples

Politico-legal regimes classified as practicing "integrated displacement" employ laws as tools of conquest, designed to ease (or, at the very least, not obstruct) the mass establishment of colonists and facilitate other forms of outside access to the frontier and its resources. Indigenous modes of production are sometimes outlawed (as in the Philippines during the reign of Ferdinand Marcos) and in all cases ranked lower than those of colonists or other state-supported intruders at the frontier. Entitlements to land and resources are decided according to "national interest" and the parties' significance for "development", introducing a pervasive element of arbitrariness and nihilistic contempt for the very laws that pronounce different criteria (like in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, where until 1985 indigenous people were evicted in spite of valid titles, while settlers received titles even though the law did not foresee them). Colonists are served with or can easily avail themselves of land deeds that are unavailable for indigenous people, either because the law excludes them

right away (like in the Chittagong Hill Tracts after the legal amendments of 1971), or because the bureaucratic procedures are too tangled and cumbersome for them to go through them successfully (as in the case of Philippine President Marcos' Ancestral Land Decree of 1974). Sometimes the law excludes both sides from securing land titles (as again in the Philippines under Marcos), where the sloped upland terrain was judged to be of national significance and thus made part of the "public domain", unavailable for private ownership. In such a situation, settlers benefit from ethnic clientelist bonds with bureaucrats and a general ignorance of the law on the part of most indigenous people, and are able to negotiate their de-facto control of the land. "Integrated displacement", of course, not only bars indigenous frontier-dwellers from access to private land titles ("land"), but also denies them the stronger form of legal safeguards, communal ownership rights ("territory"), and has no place for indigenous participation in political decision-making ("voice", see Figure 9 above).

This type of legal framework exemplifies a straightforward and rather brutish approach to achieving the frontier's transformation from indigenous to national patrimony. In our sample, at least, the regimes that embraced the politics of "integrated displacement" were in all cases strongly authoritarian in type and thus not subjected to contestation by civil society for their treatment of indigenous peoples. The fact that in the course of the last ten years all of these regimes were supplanted by (at least formally) democratic governments could suggest that the historical momentus of the bluntest of all embodiments of frontier politics (see chapter 10) has passed. In many instances (evidenced by the landmark IPRA law in the Philippines and the inauguration of regional autonomy in the Chittagong Hill Tracts), more politically inclusive forms of frontier management reflect a shift to more democratic forms of governance and the rise of human and minority rights, sustainable development and biodiversity protection as major paradigms in world politics. Not all forms of more responsible politico-legal frameworks, however, obey the temporal logic of political globalization: Autonomous District Councils in Northeastern India, in place in Karbi Anglong and West Assam (Bodoland), are standard means for empowering tribal minorities under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, promulgated as early as 1950. Local, too, and solidly rooted in British administrative practices for "backward tracts" are the origins of the politico-legal supremacy of indigenous peoples in Arunachal Pradesh.

Land and resource laws still retain their utilitarian character under the next type of politico-legal regime, "protective pretense", even if there is token recognition of the need for special measures to protect indigenous domains. As exemplified by West Assam's "Tribal Blocks and Belts", law here has a palliative function. While the Indian state (and the government of British India before it) has, in fact, never seriously endeavored to halt the erosion of the land base of the Bodo "plains tribals", declaring them unworthy of special measures for safeguarding what they considered to be their vanishing culture, it nevertheless felt compelled to create the illusion that it took serious and addressed the problem. The solution offered to the Bodo contained merely the fiction of "tribals only" zones with exclusive rights for private land titles, with no accompanying political privileges nor the backing-up of communal sanctions against individuals who wanted (and overwhelmingly did) undermine the injunction against transferring land to non-tribals in the reserved zones (see again Figure 9). The Assamese authorities apparently never bothered to monitor the land market and check its excesses in the "Blocks and Belts", with the result that colonists, exhausting the familiar range of tactics known from most settlement frontiers, displaced the Bodo from the bigger part of their land. (The accounts from Bodoland, to be fair to the settlers, also stress "voluntary" transactions, meaning Bodo land sales motivated mainly by the economically destitute owners' desperate need for cash). All politico-legal orders save "integrated displacement" acknowledge that indigenous people are

disadvantaged in frontier struggles for land and resources when the political arena is characterized by uneven access to bureaucratic favors; from this, they derive the need for special legislative measures on their behalf. While that acknowledgement is purely rhetorical in the case of “protective pretense”, it offers genuine possibilities for indigenous empowerment in the remaining two categories – both with regard to the security of group territories and these groups’ participation in political decision-making. “Autochthonous” institutional forms of “partial empowerment” and “citizens-denizen” constellations preserve communal territories (“territory”) and grant self-government (“voice”) to indigenous peoples in three conflict arenas in Northeast India, while global discourses and emerging international minority rights standards have shaped progressive, though less comprehensive¹⁵⁰ policy regimes in the Philippines and the Chittagong Hill Tracts (see Figure 9). Even though it is apparent that in Arunachal Pradesh, the “citizen-denizen constellation” is a legislative order in retreat, that case-study area epitomizes the pinnacle of minority rights protection, combining, as it does, customary community control over land with vast (though still not all-embracing) legislative powers for indigenous people.

Given the advantages that they promise to confer on the groups that come under their coverage, regimes of “partial empowerment” and “citizen-denizen constellations” exercise an unrelenting appeal on those who are excluded from them. Thus, Bodo insurgents fought long and hard for an Autonomous District Council (granted to them in 1993 and 2003, respectively), while Karbi rebels in Karbi Anglong who are already in possession of such an institutional privilege, demand – among other things – a separate state for the area and, once that demand is granted, the introduction of the Inner Line permit for the new entity.

While indigenous activists are prepared to die for them, others work hard to dismantle existing structures of protective discrimination of indigenous peoples. In Northeast India and Bangladesh, policy planners, certain military circles and conservative political parties have taken aim at the Inner Line Regulation and other remnants of colonial separate administration for the frontier. In Arunachal Pradesh, new pieces of legislation provide openings for the “development” of the state and the introduction of private ownership of land, after influential government think tanks pointed to the Inner Line Regulation as the main obstacle for the free movement of labour and capital to the state. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, meanwhile, an (unsuccessful) appeal was made to the High Court of Bangladesh to revoke the CHT Regulation of 1900, which is presently again providing the foundation for the autonomy regulations for the area.

The actions of both indigenous communities and of settler society, therefore, betray a fundamental belief in the efficacy of these schemes; their actual record, however – as far as we were able to assess it in the context of our limited study –, does not justify this creed. We cannot escape the overall conclusion that the *practical* effects of exclusionary land and immigration laws and provisions for indigenous self-rule are severely limited and, in the end, minimal. Settlers keep trickling in in the Chittagong Hill Tracts years after the Peace Agreement ordered a stop to migration into the region, while the Bodo-inhabited areas of West Assam, Karbi Anglong and Arunachal Pradesh report undiminished growth rates, due to continuing settlement. As a consequence, nativist mobilization has been a persistent problem (among the Bodo, in Karbi Anglong), or has recently reached alarming heights (in Arunachal Pradesh, as far as Chakma settlers are concerned).

In spite of incisive changes in substantive law, we have to infer, the pragmatics of power and

150 In the case of the Philippines, the revolutionary IPRA law of 1997 introduces communal land titles (“territory”) but no concomitant devolution of political power (“voice”), while the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Agreement of the same year increases political participation without providing for communal titles.



Photo 35: say it with violence: goods train derailed by Bodo rebels in the Chicken's Neck (Siliguri) corridor (photo: Shib Shankar Chatterjee)

rule at the frontier help secure outcomes that are not much different from those that characterize “integrated displacement”. The Indian and Bangladeshi varieties of “protective discrimination” and the Philippine brand of “restorative justice” examined by our researchers do only establish restrictions on what settlers and other frontier interlopers *can legally do*; in the shadow of the respective regulations, *informal arrangements* subvert the idea of indigenous control over land and decision-making. In Karbi Anglong, settlers have managed to circumvent and overcome their legal handicap, establishing themselves in great numbers in the autonomous district, while in Arunachal Pradesh, they have infiltrated the “Inner Line” to an extent which makes a parody of the law. “Denizen” settlers have inserted themselves into the local economies everywhere in Northeast India in substantial ways. Where pro-*bhumiputra* legislation bans them from operating businesses (as in Arunachal Pradesh), they acquire the necessary licences with the help of indigenous strawmen, while rural workers or labourers on urban construction sites (again in Arunachal Pradesh) are issued staying permits (against the law) at the behest of wealthy indigenous farmers and politicians. In the Philippines’ largest CADT area, the Matigsalug domain studied by our researcher, land sales and the pawning of land to settlers continue although outlawed by IPRA regulations, and such illicit transactions are still being approved by settler-controlled units of local government which should no longer have a hand in them. To make matters worse, the title-managing “indigenous councils” have partly been undermined by colonists who are allowed to sit on them unopposed by either indigenous leaders or the government authorities. Communal or clan land, considered the most resilient modality of indigenous land ownership, is confirmed and celebrated by the law in Assam’s autonomous district council areas, in Arunachal Pradesh and the Mindanao CADT domains; in the first two of these three cases, however, reality mocks the legal texts: Community and clan-owned

land is being broken up into individual landholdings, many of which are being transacted across the ethnic boundary to benefit colonists or outside business interests.

Why, then, do the laws of exclusion and the institutions of protective discrimination in favor of indigenous communities work so poorly? What are the reasons why settlers and other outsiders at the frontier are allowed to outwit the state, ignore existing legislation and establish themselves at the frontier just as firmly as if they had had the full or covert backing of the law that is the hallmark of the more simply-knit “integrated displacement” regime? I can provide two rather obvious answers which, however, point to other, more basic factors. *First*, there is *poor enforcement* on the part of the state authorities. Virtually all accounts stress the *venality of government officials* who, for smaller or larger amounts of money, close their eyes when colonists and other outsiders lack documentary evidence for the legality of the jobs they work or the land they occupy. In Bukidnon, the Philippines, *barangay* councillors and captains operate as land brokers without placing the deals before the tribal council, lining their pockets with the fees due to be paid by the involved parties, while in Arunachal Pradesh, government officers at various echelons of power liberally sell Inner Line Permits for migrants to the highest bidder – usually indigenous farm owners, government contractors or politicians interested in immigrant labour or votes. According to many observers, therefore, the institutions of the Sixth Schedule in Northeast India’s former “frontier tracts” – not to speak of the “tribal blocks and belts” in the more accessible plains areas – are today little more than sources of graft and corruption, cash machines for greedy bureaucrats.

The culture of corruption and nepotism, though, is not peculiar to the frontier. Like their peers at the periphery, office holders in core areas of state control, too, use their posts to increase their basic income. The frontier context, however, adds two distinctive, additional motives for bureaucrats to ignore rules of exclusion – with or without payment. The first of them is *ethnic clientelism*, a bond of solidarity and material exchange that connects colonists and their ethnic compatriots in government offices on many settlement frontiers. Unconditional support for Bengali settlers by Bengali civil servants has long been reported from the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and it seems to have played a role again in renewed post-agreement settlement activity in the area. Sharing the same ethnic (and religious!) background also appears to be a factor in Arunachal Pradesh where bureaucrats display such obvious tolerance towards the hundreds and thousands of illegal immigrants from mainland India, although these are of more variegated ethnic backgrounds than the migrants in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The second one is more overtly political, and has to do with the *drive to “nationalize” frontier space* and the role that colonists can play in such a scheme (see chapter 7.1.4). Migrants in the aggregate mean demographic change, and demographic change boosts the state’s efforts to firmly incorporate the indigenous periphery into the realm; with only a little exaggeration it can therefore be claimed that being complicit in bending laws against frontier immigration is a patriotic act for a bureaucrat. The Chittagong Hill Tracts and Arunachal Pradesh illustrate this strategic dimension to civil servants’ laxity in enforcing legal restrictions against outside settlement; in both cases, there are clear indications that the government (and, in the first case, the military) is unhappy with the existing rules of exclusion, and conspires in bypassing them. Arunachal Pradesh and the autonomous district councils of Central and West Assam, of course, demonstrate yet other aspects of the “politics of nationalizing space” that prevent the institutions of positive discrimination and self-governance from fulfilling their avowed role. Thus, the autonomy of all elected bodies (including Arunachal Pradesh’s state government) is heavily compromised by their lack of independent sources of tax revenues and the existence of a parallel political structure (including the powerful governors) that is directly controlled from New Delhi. “Cosmetic

federalism” – intentionally emasculated structures of self-rule – ensures that the political decision-making powers that the Sixth Schedule conferred on Northeast India’s indigenous peoples remain closely circumscribed and cannot be used against the “benevolent” guidance of the central state or the migrants who enjoy its tutelage.

However, state agents’ intentional neglect of laws that empower indigenous peoples is not the sole factor that prevents “partial empowerment” regimes and “citizen-denizen” constellations from unfolding their emancipatory potential. The *second* reason why the formal legal supremacy of indigenous peoples fails to translate itself into material reality is that *indigenous people themselves* are actively *undermining the regulations that were formulated in their favor*. Apart from government bureaucrats, the main beneficiaries of the non-enforcement of protective discrimination legislation are *indigenous elites* (village heads, members of local government or autonomous district councils, local legislative assemblies and, in the case of Arunachal Pradesh, the state parliament). As national institutions of local government are taking root at the frontier, indigenous elites become stakeholders in settler society and often exchange their loyalties with their communities of origin for patronage in larger circuits of power. Invested with the power to allocate land (as in Karbi Anglong) or with the capacities to provide employment and protection (as in Arunachal Pradesh), many of them ignore the regulations against land transfers to outsiders which they facilitate against payment or the promise of voting for the political party or the election candidate of their choice. In circumvention of the prohibition of outsiders’ permanent settlement in the area, they hire illegal migrants for work in their fields or homes (in Arunachal Pradesh), or farm-out – again for a fee – business licences (in the Bodoland Territorial Council, BTAD, Arunachal Pradesh) or government contracts (again in Arunachal Pradesh) to migrants, without consideration for the longer-term consequences of breaching what are basically sane regulations. People of position and power within indigenous society, finally, are also propelling the dismantling of the commons, registering clan or community land in their own names (in Arunachal Pradesh). It is not the least the existence of ethnic brokers that renders the political economy of the frontier so characteristically complex and contradictory (see chapter 6.1.3). Of the *pathways* – some balanced, other asymmetrical – that criss-cross the boundary between conquerors and conquered, none is diminishing the efficacy of pro-indigenous legislation as much the one that connects the elites of both camps.

Spite for the laws of exclusion that protect indigenous domains in the contexts of “partial empowerment” and “citizen-denizen constellations”, however, is not a privilege of the elite. For sometimes rather different motives, *ordinary indigenous households*, too, engage in collaborations that bring in settlers and usher in the illicit sale of land. Thus, in Arunachal Pradesh, it is fairly common for ordinary Mishmi, Khamti and Singpho families to ignore the Inner Line Regulation by hiring migrants for field labour and household work. Further down the social rung, poverty and lack of income-generating opportunities force poor indigenous farmers to sell or mortgage land that by force of law belongs to the community (Matigsalug CADT area, Mindanao). The background of such forced land transfers are often debts incurred with settler patrons, a phenomenon at many settlement frontiers (see chapter 6.1.3). The effectivity of exclusionary land laws and other features of more enlightened politico-legal orders, thus, is also undermined by the undiminished vitality of *asymmetrical pathway relations* which tie indigenous landowners to wealthy members of settler society. Without addressing the economic distortions which the frontier leaves in its wake (see chapter 6.1.7), the most well-meaning attempts at strengthening the legal boundaries that protect indigenous citizens at state peripheries must run aground.

8.3.2 extent of state support for settlers

It is common for students of migration studies to distinguish between *state-sponsored* and *spontaneous* settlement¹⁵¹ – a distinction previously referred to, but so far not explored further in this thesis (see chapters 5 and 6.1.3). The former term denotes forms of migration that involve the systematical planning, organization and funding of population transfers by a state government. On the other hand, we speak of *spontaneous settlement* when migrants migrate in the absence or independent of *direct* state efforts to bring about such a population transfer. As I have pointed out earlier (see chapter 6.1.3), a third, intermediary category is *state-facilitated settlement*, encompassing all those cases where states – while desisting from directly organizing and funding it – create incentives, an enabling social and political environment and a supportive infrastructure for migration. Scholars have often been blind to the fact that even if they may not have a comprehensive and publicly-heralded settlement policy, states often support frontier colonization in a variety of ways such as road-building, creating attractive economic niches for migrants, crafting legislation that provides outsiders with land or use rights on easy terms, or the non-enforcement of legislation that excludes outsiders from the right to trade, settle, or have access to land (ibid.). In the context of postcolonial frontier colonization, state-facilitated settlers generally form the largest of the three categories, outnumbering those who arrive on the wings of a state programme and those who do not rely on any form of state incentive or support (Geiger 2008a:9, note 10). Incidences of genuinely spontaneous settlement are usually confined to the early pioneer phases of a settlement process when state resources are particularly scarce and inconsequential for developments at the frontier; in many cases, the heydays of this form of migration date back to the colonial period (see e.g. Monbeig 1981:55 on Brasil).

However, as state-facilitated settlers are not usually identified as a distinctive category, observations in the literature on correlations between migration-induced conflicts and migration types are usually based on the simple and analytically inadequate dichotomy between state-sponsored and “spontaneous” settlement. That methodological difficulty apart, the literature offers considerable, though not necessarily conclusive, support for the contention that of all modes of frontier migration, state-sponsored settlement is most conducive to nativist protest and violence. Fearon and Laitin (2001) report that in a majority of the conflict cases in their data base, violence was preceded by state-supported migrants upsetting the ethnic balance of the respective region. Li (1999:17) identifies the strategic use of settlers by the state – contrary to the independent movement of migrants to the periphery – as particularly prone to creating tensions when she notes that “order along the frontier is not guaranteed, as the processes of settlement and expanding state territorial control themselves routinely reproduce conditions for conflict”¹⁵². Nowhere is this so obvious as where states engage in the large-scale, systematic and organized transfer of peasants to the frontier. State-sponsored migration schemes not only have a record of leaving many transferees frustrated, recreating, as they do, the inequalities and impoverishment they were designed to redress (Scudder 1975:309, Monbiot 1989:37-40, Moran 1989:34f., Cowell 1990:122ff.), but they also seem to have a remarkable potential for producing disaffection and resistance among indigenous host

151 Terminological equivalents in the literature are “induced” and “voluntary” migration (MacAndrews and Yamamoto 1976), “official” and “spontaneous” colonization (Smith 1969:93), and “planned” and “free” migration (McElwee 2004:202).

152 A positive correlation between state-sponsored and -facilitated settlement on one hand and ecological disruption and political instability on the other hand is also posited by DeKoninck and McTaggart (1987:350f.) and Parnwell and Bryant (1996:336).

populations (Davis 1977, Anti-Slavery Society 1984, Chase Smith 1985, Colchester 1986, Monbiot 1989:180ff.). The reason for this is, it has been argued (Geiger 2004a:37), that they implant large numbers of settlers in short spans of time, leading to high and highly visible migrant concentrations, and painful levels of land alienation for local communities in the target areas. Truly spontaneous, but also state-facilitated settlers, in contrast, tend to settle in a more dispersed manner, “trickling in” rather than “flooding” an area, and thus are much less conspicuous a presence for local populations than state-sponsored migrants.

Five of our six cases feature state-sponsored and state-facilitated/spontaneous migrants either side by side at a given moment or separately at different times in the settlement process, allowing us to compare how these different colonist categories were received by the indigenous populations concerned. The exception is our study site in Mindanao. While the island had, in fact, seen quite substantial government-sponsored migration both under the American colonial government and in the immediate postwar years, the *Sinuda Valley (Bukidnon, Mindanao)* never received any state-sponsored settlers. State programmes for frontier settlement had targeted the island’s northern coast, the fertile “primary” agricultural frontiers such as the Allah and Koronadal valleys in Cotabato and areas further west in the heart of Moro (Muslim) territory, leaving the less readily accessible upland areas to “spontaneous” colonists. Upper Bukidnon of which Sinuda forms a part was settled in the course of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s by land-strapped farmers from the nearby Visayan islands (Wenk, forthcoming:23-26)¹⁵³. A part of them also hailed from official colonization schemes elsewhere in Mindanao which they had left in search of less crowded conditions (ibid.:25). While the latter group thus were descended from government-sponsored migrants, these origins are not addressed by the Matigsalug as being in any way relevant for their intercourse with them. Emic distinctions instead focus on the settlers’ relative temporal position in the settlement process (“first Christians”/“old Bisaya” vs. “recent settlers”) and the migrants’ behavioral dispositions as they perceive them (“good-mannered” vs. “bad-mannered” settlers). While some of those whose comportment gave no reason for complaint were rewarded by the symbolic inclusion into the local Matigsalug community (see below), miscreants were – in the case of the 1975 uprising – violently attacked.

Equally indifferent towards the distinction between state-sponsored and autonomous migrants were the Dayak nativists who, in the spate of two and a half months of violence in 1997, slaughtered an estimated 200 colonists, all belonging to one, relatively small migrant group. Dayak spokespersons justified the violence against the Madurese minority with their “irascible” character, pointing to that group’s reputation for fierce assertiveness in domestic and frontier settings (Geiger 2008b:365). They share this view with Indonesia’s transmigration authorities who seem to avoid recruiting Madurese. Coupled with their own reluctance to depend on state officials, this explains why Madurese are typically spontaneous colonists (ibid.:363f.). Since the state’s programme of guided population transfer (*transmigrasi*) took up steam in the 1970s, West Kalimantan has been Borneo’s leading receiving area for transmigrants, absorbing them in their hundreds of thousands.

153 The poverty and maldistribution of agrarian resources that drove most of these settlers away from their home provinces notwithstanding, Wenk makes it clear that reference to the “spontaneity” of this population movement is misplaced in the context of post-independence migration to the hinterland of Mindanao. While land-hungry settlers set out for the frontier by themselves, they were attracted by the well-publicized existence of government settlements and favourable land policies that made public land available for homesteading. Finally, it was government-provided infrastructure (roads), built in the 1960s and 1970s, that gave them easy access to the frontier. Spontaneous migration thus clearly operated in the context of supportive state policies and the role model of official settlement programmes (Wenk, forthcoming:24).



Photo 36: state-sponsored settlement: 1980s poster advertising the Indonesian state's program of guided populations transfer (Transmigrasi). The text reads: "Raising the people's living standards and prosperity with the transmigrasi program" (Photo: Gloria Davis)

Nationwide, the province is the fourth most significant transmigration target (see e.g. Tirtosudarmo 2001:212). Nevertheless, during the nativist riots of 1997 and 1999, no transmigration settlement was harmed safe for the few who housed Madurese. Dayak voices credibly assert harbouring no adverse feelings towards the largely Javanese and Balinese state-sponsored migrants, pointing to what they refer to as their more malleable habits (Geiger 2008b:378). The Dayak in the conflict area do not seem to care much if settlers arrive with the blessing, funding and logistical support of the state or independent of it; instead, their emic explanations of what led to the catastrophe foreground cultural manners. If we accept their emic viewpoint for a moment¹⁵⁴, the proposition that state-sponsored frontier migration must evoke more hostile reactions from host populations than spontaneous colonization loses plausibility. The more pliant types of settlers who mix better with indigenous host societies of the likes of the Dayak will choose state programmes of colonization, while the more troublesome who are likely to clash with the native population are bound to arrive as spontaneous migrants.

Different from Upper Bukidnon, the first of the cases cited in this sub-chapter, all South Asian study sites have had their shares of state-sponsored migrants. However, only in two cases did they elicit the particularly hostile response that the proposition on correlations between mode of settlement and likelihood of manifest conflicts predicts. Both *Western* and *Central Assam* have had state-sponsored settlement in the form of the recruitment of indigenous labour for the tea

154 We need not do that for much longer. Analytically, we have to read different motives into the Dayak's actions. These should prominently include the wish to make a dramatic, violent statement against actors more powerful, but less tangible and assailable than the Madurese – notably the province's rapacious palmoil plantations and the national government who, for decades, kept high political offices out of reach of the Dayak. According to my own explanation, therefore, the qualities that recommended the Madurese as targets of the upheaval in 1997 and 1999 were their power- and defenselessness rather than their supposed uncouth manners (Geiger 2008b:379f., 393).

plantations in the area (Goswami, forthcoming:18ff., Barbora, forthcoming:18). Rather than operating with locally-recruited Kachari or Chinese labour that had to be brought in from China, the tea growers found it cheaper to avail themselves of manpower from Central India with its huge reservoir of uprooted, landless tribal people. As of 1867/68, two thirds of the plantation labour force of Assam were imported, mostly from among groups such as the Santhal, Oraon, Munda and Gond of Chota Nagpur (Goswami, forthcoming:19). The colonial administration and the Assam Company, the largest plantation operator, jointly ran a camp in Dhubri in the Western Assamese district of Goalpara, where the recruits disembarked and were sorted. While many were dispatched to the tea districts further east, those thought unfit for work in the gardens were “left to their own devices”. In due course, they put down roots in the sparsely-settled, forested areas along Assam’s western boundary. These “Santhal¹⁵⁵ colonies” grew in numbers as word spread of abundant land in the western *duars*, attracting more *adivasi* from Chota Nagpur as well as time-expired labourers from the tea gardens who chose to remain in Assam. From 1899 onwards, Santhal were provided free passage and interest-free loans if they volunteered for settlement in the wastelands of Goalpara (Goswami, forthcoming:ibid.). In spite of the fact that in some places, the Chota Nagpur tribals came to equal or outrank the indigenous Bodo in numbers (ibid.:20), relations between the two groups were “by and large non-confrontational” until the 1990s when Bodo radicals started to raid *adivasi* homes and villages in an attempt to tip the demographic balance in their favour and fulfil the Assamese state’s conditions for a Bodo homeland. This long tradition of amicable interethnic relations is even more astounding when we take into account that the two groups are in their majority agriculturalists and thus direct rivals for the same economic niche (ibid.:36). Quite clearly, the Bodo have for generations not held it against the Chota Nagpur tribals that they had migrated with government help, but preferred them to other immigrant groups such as the East Bengali Muslim (ibid.:40f.). As mentioned above, in several districts of the Bodo area, intermarriage between Bodo and *adivasi* migrants has been frequent since the first decades of the 20th century, a fact that the researcher relates to a certain socio-cultural proximity between the two groups (ibid.:37). Even more decisive, to our mind, is the fact that once they had been dropped in Western Assam, most Santhal immigrants could no longer count on any kind of government aid and thus quickly lost their state-sponsored nature. The process of their settlement of the western *duars* and their adaptive behaviour, in consequence, came to resemble the patterns usually associated with spontaneous/state-facilitated migration. On the North Bank of the Brahmaputra, it was marked by a relatively slow and impromptu advance of settlement and a long phase where pioneers and indigenous locals lived side by side in a hybrid and highly fluid cultural and social world (Goswami, forthcoming:37).

While intermixing and the sharing of social space with the local indigenous communities characterized the settlement process of the former tribal tea plantation labourers in Western Assam, spatial and to a large extent also social segregation are dominant features in the case of the resettlement of the Chakma refugees in *Arunachal Pradesh*. State-sponsored settlers *par excellence*, some 14,000 victims of the Kaptai Dam project in the Chittagong Hill Tracts were, as has already been mentioned various times, offered asylum by the Indian government. Arunachal Pradesh – then still called the North-Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA) – was a logical choice. Not only was land abundant and were people few, but after China’s invasion of 1962, India felt compelled to show the flag by “filling” the border with citizens or, in the case of the Chakma, foreign nationals with a reputation for loyalty with India. The settlers were allocated land at some distance from

155 Owing to the fact that most of the earliest recruits for the tea plantations were Santhal and because they form the biggest single group among the so-called “tea tribes” of Assam, “Santhal” enjoys wide currency as a generic name for the latter in Assam (Goswami, forthcoming:19).

existing settlements, and told to form separate villages which up to this day – at least in Chowkham Circle of Lohit District) are referred to as “Chakma *basti*” (“Chakma villages”, Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:29). Except at market days, social intercourse between the descendants of the erstwhile refugees and the indigenous is minimal, communication difficult¹⁵⁶ and intermarriage exceedingly rare. If Arunachal Pradesh has one of the highest population growth rates in the Northeast (27% in 2001 compared to the date of the census 10 years prior to that, *ibid.*:25), that is, however, not the fault of the Chakma migrants, but the result of the contempt of both the central government in Delhi and the state of Arunachal Pradesh for the laws that restrict entry, permanent settlement and business opportunities for outsiders. As a result, tens of thousands of Assamese, Bengali and Hindi-speakers from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttaranchal and Punjab have come in at the behest of either the state administration or local entrepreneurs and outside contractors to man the civil service or work on the construction sites of the district or state capitals, in logging and on the fields of idle indigenous landowners (*ibid.*:30f., 35, 46). The creeping demographic transformation in pursuit of the “development” of this “frontier state” and the more general strategy of “nationalizing space”, is not, however, of much concern to the average Arunachalese; public discourse associates immigration and its possible negative repercussions uniquely with the estimated 65,000 Chakma state-sponsored settlers (*ibid.*:59). Among the reasons which the anti-Chakma campaigners cite to explain their fixation on the descendants of the erstwhile refugees, is that the latter benefited from undue favoritism by the central government (alluding to the free gifts of land), and that the process of guided population transfer had resulted in large local concentrations of settlers that turned indigenous communities into numerical minorities (*ibid.*:62ff.)¹⁵⁷. From an analytical point of view, however, the fact that of all settler groups in Arunachal Pradesh, only the Chakma are challenging their status as “denizens”¹⁵⁸, is of at least equal explanatory weight. Political sensibilities in a state that, like no other, has enshrined the supremacy of indigenous locals over outsiders, are the main fuel that nourishes violent nativism in Arunachal Pradesh (*ibid.*:65, 75).

The most unequivocal endorsement of the proposition that state-sponsored settlement is more likely to antagonize indigenous host communities than other modes of migration comes from the *Chittagong Hill Tracts*. There, nativist sentiments focus first and foremost on the estimated 200,000-450,000 state-sponsored colonists and their descendants who were transferred to the region between 1979 and 1985. Initiated by the government of Ziaur Rahman and continued by his successor, Hussain Muhammad Ershad, this ambitious resettlement programme was part of a multi-pronged strategy to extend effective military and political control over the Hill Tracts. Bangladeshi hegemony was challenged by a largely Chakma-based tribal insurgency, the JSS (Jana Samhati Samity), active since 1973, and an indigenous population that stayed aloof of the Muslim lowlander core of the fledgling nation. The organized settlement of a sizeable Bengali population, loyal to the Bangladeshi state, was to help push the indigenous population from its land and provide a counterweight to the guerilla’s support base among the *Jumma* population (Adnan 2004:29). With funding from the Asian Development Bank, USAID, the World Health Organization and

156 In Lohit district, only 58% of the Chakma have a command of Hindi, the *lingua franca* in the state (as against more than 90% among all other settler groups, see Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:58).

157 While Chakma numbers are relatively moderate in Lohit district (where the study was conducted), they are significant in the district of Changlang. In the three district circles of Changlang where colonies were founded, the estimated 60,000 Chakma vastly outnumber the indigenous population. In the aggregate in Changlang, the indigenous groups have been reduced to a mere 36% of the total population, mainly due to the Chakma factor (*ibid.*:63f.).

158 They do this by demanding citizenship rights, and thus the right to vote in state elections (*ibid.*:75); for an explanation of the notion of the “denizen”, see chapter 8.3.1.2.3 above.



Photo 37: In the eye of the storm: anti-Chakma graffiti in Chongkham town, Lohit District (photo: Christian Erni)

Unicef, the programme succeeded in transferring 100,000 settlers in 1980 and another 100,000 in the following year. The plans for 1982 (250,000) even surpassed the previous marks, but because of the escalation of the armed hostilities in the area, it is unclear if and to what extent the target was reached (Levene 1999:356)¹⁵⁹.

Bengali traders had visited and partly settled in the area since the late 18th century, in many cases acquiring land and becoming farmers. Popularly referred to as “Old Bengalis”, they are a rather heterogeneous group. While a wealthy fraction is involved in trade and retailing in the area’s small towns, many are “middle-income farmers”, while others are “almost as socially disadvantaged” as the average indigenous *jhum* cultivator (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:34). Just as diverse in socio-economic terms, but much larger in numbers, are the later spontaneous Bengali arrivals who arrived from the late 19th century onward first as traders, and later as sharecroppers, service sector employees and urban menial workers (ibid.:12). The farmers were largely Muslim, while the traders were (at least initially) predominantly Hindu. The latter (both Hindu and Muslim) belong to the wealthiest stratum in the Chittagong Hill Tracts; they largely control the wholesale and retail trade of essentials and forest products, while those who came as farmers live less affluently (ibid.:34). A third group are Muslim refugees from Assam and other parts of India, resettled after the partition in the Hill Tracts where they now live dispersed over different areas (ibid.:12). Fourth and finally, there are the government-sponsored settlers, recruited between 1979 and 1985

¹⁵⁹ A considerable part of the funding for the project went into financing the incentives for and sustenance of the colonists. Each of them received 5 acres of free land, government food rations at least for a transitional period, and release from the often considerable debt burden that many recruits had laboured under at their places of origin (ibid.:362).

in a range of lowland districts as instruments of the military regimes' strategy of "demographic engineering". While the majority are marginal peasants (sharecroppers, tenants) or homesteaders, a surprisingly large percentage make a living in urban, low-paying employment as peddlers or porters (ibid.:31).

Emically, these four different settler categories are collapsed into the distinction between "natural migrants" – comprising the "Old Bengalis" and the spontaneous settlers who followed on their heels – and the population transferees of the early 1980s (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:12f.); for the latter, interestingly, people employ the English term "settlers". This denomination is also in use among earlier Bengali arrivals, while the government transferees themselves reject it as it possesses a pejorative connotation locally (ibid.:12)¹⁶⁰. Semantically, therefore, the indigenous distinguish between wanted and unwanted colonists: the presence of those who came not on army trucks, but on their own initiative, is being "naturalized" and set in sharp contrast with the political and therefore extraneous motives behind the settlement of the government transmigrants. Indigenous policy initiatives for a lasting solution to the multiple crisis in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, consequently, single out the state-sponsored colonists for relocation to the plains, whereas the rest of the resident Bengali is granted the right to remain in the area (ibid.:62f.).

There is no great mystery in explaining why a large part of the *Jumma* seem to evaluate these two migrant categories in so starkly differing terms. *First*, unlike all previous colonists in the area, the state-sponsored settlers were instrumental in the displacement of relatively large numbers of indigenous people from prime agricultural land in the valleys and on gently-sloping foothills; as they were brought in in large numbers at a time, the impact on land distribution, notably in the Chakma areas, was instant and of considerable proportions (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:16). *Second*, in the aggregate, it was the state-sponsored settlers who turned the demographic profile of the area upside down and marked the territory with the symbols of Bengali culture. Thus, in the early 1970s, the Bengali population in the Hill Tracts stood at only 11%; the mass influx of government-sponsored settlers raised that percentage to roughly 33% (Levene 1999:355f.). The government transferees are credited with supreme intolerance towards indigenous culture and lifeways (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:33, 68f.), and a connection is made between the growing spatial circumscription of indigenous communities in the vicinity of transmigrant villages and increased restrictions on the free expression of indigenous cultural practices (ibid.). Thus, in the areas most affected by state-sponsored colonization, native dress styles and the everyday demeanor of indigenous women had to become more "chaste" to correspond to Muslim norms, and Muslim food taboos against the drinking of alcohol and the consumption of pork have begun to be extended to neighbouring indigenous communities (ibid.). Similarly, the waves of state-sponsored settlement of the early 1980s have resulted in the replacement – much-resented by many *Jumma* – of indigenous place names by their Bengali equivalents (ibid.:22). *Third*, in a situation where many indigenous inhabitants of the Hill Tracts have to struggle to feed themselves and their families, the government transferees are envied and resented because the government provides them with free food rations¹⁶¹. Many argue that these rations should be withdrawn both

160 It can be speculated that the use of English in this case reflects the influence of international human rights campaigns against the settlement programme – a cause that found a certain measure of support in Europe and the United States in the 1980s and 1990s. Campaign discourses equated "settlers" with the mass transferees in government programmes and highlighted the illegitimacy of their presence in the Hill Tracts (see e.g. Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission 1991).

161 As reported in 2004, the government spends 360 mio. Taka (then corresponding to 7,7 mio Swiss francs)

to discontinue artificial incentives for staying on in the Hill Tracts, and to curtail the flourishing trade in ration cards between the migrants (ibid.:32, 70; Adnan 2004:171ff.). And *fourth*, in the eyes of many *Jumma*, government-sponsored settlers – in contrast to “natural migrants” – bear the stigma of participation in the military’s counter-insurgency onslaught in the early 1980s. Indeed, government transferees were often issued arms and received army training as so-called “village defense parties” (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:54). In that capacity, but also as rogue armed gangs, they were involved in a series of raids and massacres on indigenous villages alongside the Bangladesh Army (Levene 1999:359).

In contrast to the various groups of spontaneous settlers (and most notably the “Old Bengalis”), the relations with the settlers that arrived with military help are chronically strained. Indigenous informants in our study pointed to the government settlers’ penchant to use violence in the struggle for land, and their debasing views of indigenous people as uncouth and primitive (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:22, 68f.). It is also alleged that they see themselves as the vanguard of the Bangladeshi state in the region, justifying all sorts of behavior towards the indigenous inhabitants of this undomesticated frontier (ibid.:54). To be sure, conflicts with “natural migrants” do occur, too, but are “limited” in extent and occurrence (ibid.:66), a fact that is explained locally with reference to their longer presence in the area and the tolerant and respectful attitude towards indigenous culture and lifeways which they developed in its course (ibid.:37). Political alignments between “Old Bengalis” and *Jumma* testify to the strength of the bonds between the two groups. Thus, the organization that spearheads the cause of the victims of the Kaptai Dam construction has a mixed ethnic base that includes “Old Bengalis”, while others have formed a political lobby group that has entered a formal alliance with the indigenous JSS and comes out openly against radical settler organizations (ibid.:55). Considered “‘disloyal’ to the government and the greater Bengali cause”, “Old Bengalis” were repeatedly subjected to reprisals by the army and the militant colonists (ibid.:34, 38; see also chapter 8.3.3).

If we are to *summarize* this point, the proposition that state-sponsored and spontaneous migrants elicit different responses from the local population was not, in general, corroborated by our case study data. Only in two out of five cases were state-sponsored migrants more strongly disliked by their hosts than spontaneous ones, in all others, different criteria than the question of government support determined the local population’s response. In the case that most clearly contradicted the proposition (West Kalimantan), nativist violence singled out the spontaneous colonists, whom the local population described as far more troublesome than the state-sponsored transmigrants. The respective migrant group’s (the Madurese’s) fierce individualism and unpliant nature which had brought them into conflict with the locals had also made them unsuited for inclusion in state programmes. The case at hand, in fact, would allow the opposite conclusion, that the properties of spontaneous migration are more conducive to strife than those of state-sponsored colonization.

8.3.3 settlers’ relative temporal position in a migration process

A number of authors who have studied relations between settlers and indigenous communities have found that these relations tend to differ relative to the time depth of the presence of a settler group in an area (see e.g. Kay 1979, Trosper 1981, Lopez 1986, Tyler 2003). According to their reasoning, *first-generation or pioneer settlers* are more likely to establish balanced and durable

annually on food grain rations for the transferees. As of 2003, slightly less than 28,000 settler families depended on them for their survival (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:32).

social and economic bonds with indigenous host societies than are *later settler arrivals* – regardless of whether they came with the support of the state or on their own¹⁶². Pioneer settlers are often in a precarious position vis-à-vis the indigenous host community, as their relative numbers are small and their household economies still fragile and often dependent on barter with and material support from indigenous neighbours. Resident indigenous peoples are also an important resource for early settlers because they are familiar with the local ecosystem, may possess superior technologies and skills for extracting agricultural or forest produce, and are likely to provide goods at a lower price than fellow colonists (Trospen 1981:257). As a result, pioneers have been found to interact more freely with them, often to the extent of intermarrying with indigenous host societies¹⁶³, learning their language, and undergoing sometimes far-reaching processes of acculturation (Lopez 1986, Malikov 2006). The resulting inter-ethnic relations tend to be amicable, as they are based on common interests and, as a result, mutual respect and learning.

As settlers stay on and live next to indigenous communities, ethnically-plural “frontier societies” of the type described by Wells (1973) may emerge, marked by extensive cultural borrowing on both sides and thus different in character both from “traditional” indigenous society and the settler’s ethnic communities of origin¹⁶⁴. At these prototypical “frontiers of inclusion” (see chapter 8.1), ethnically-hybrid frontier societies have sometimes developed their own conflict-resolution mechanisms to deal with frictions and delinquency that involve actors from both groups. These juridical institutions, often distinctly *métis* in character, have at times worked quite well in containing local-level conflict that threatened to turn relations from accommodative to antagonistic and confrontational. The adaptive talents of pioneer settlers in the social and cultural field also tend to be mirrored in the economic and ecological realms; early settlers on many colonization fronts have emulated indigenous production methods and in the process accumulated knowledge of local ecosystems that may equal that of indigenous host societies (see e.g. Begossi 1998, Pace 2004:234

162 However, the two category distinctions (state-sponsored/spontaneous and pioneer/late settlers usually coincide. The typical pioneer settler is a spontaneous (or at best a state-facilitated) settler, while later arrivals often benefit from state sponsorship.

163 It should be noted, however, that intermarriage (or “miscegenation” as older texts have it) is an ambiguous proposition when it comes to predicting the quality of ethnic relations at frontiers of settlement. Not necessarily and not always is the taking of local wives by pioneer settlers an unequivocal sign of the latter’s respect for indigenous culture. Almost as a rule, pioneer settlers arrive as single or married men who, in the latter case, left their spouses with the promise of swift return in the comparative safety of the home region (Moog 1964:157f.), and will enter into liaisons with indigenous women as a matter of sexual necessity. Whether the resulting bonds of intermarriage prove permanent or temporary in the concrete case, they establish networks of (affinal) kinship between settlers and indigenous society which may bolster rather than diminish the basically paternalist and exploitative relationship between the two antagonistic groups (Galvao 1979:33). A second caveat flows from the observation – frequently made by anthropologists – that on many frontiers, the establishment by settlers of marriage and kinship bonds with local indigenous society clearly is a strategic device that allows them access to land through inheritance rather than through the more risky means of open fraud or coercion. Even in the absence of flesh-and-blood matrimonial relations, accounts on inter-ethnic relations at Southeast Asian frontiers, for instance, contain many references to the settlers’ construction of fictive kinship bonds with indigenous individuals (i.e. *sanduguan* or blood-brotherhood in the Philippines) that help camouflage asymmetric relations of power and exchange favoring the settler part (see e.g. Erni 2008:318f.) on upland-lowland interaction on Mindoro, the Philippines).

164 The comparative literature on pioneer frontiers includes many examples of cultural and linguistic hybridization across the ethnic divide separating indigenous peoples and intruders, including the *coureurs de bois* on Canada’s trapper frontier (Hennessy 1981:12), the *bandeirantes* in Brazil (Moog 1964, Morse 1965) and the so-called Pakeha Maori (“white Maori”) in New Zealand in the earlier part of the 19th century (Bentley 1999). Turner himself elaborated on the pervasive cultural transformation that European frontiersmen in the woodlands of the American Great Lakes area underwent as they came into sustained contact with Native American societies (Turner 1963:29).

and Campos 2008 on the *caboclos* of the Brazilian Amazon, long-established backwoodsmen, who often – but not always – are involved in rubber tapping).

The situation changes, the argument goes, as the settlers become more numerous and can avail themselves of social networks that they have imported from their places of origin, or find established in the expanding migrant universe at the frontier. As the settler population grows over time, the dependency on inter-ethnic support lessens, and new arrivals are no longer compelled to entertain equitable and warm relations with the host community. In time, frictions and – possibly – occasional bursts of violence may strain the relationship, with the likely result that ethnic boundaries harden and the protagonists come to define their identities in an idiom of roundabout antagonistic separation from the “ethnic other” (George 1980:119, Trosper 1981:257ff., Hughes McDermott 2000). The resulting discourse of collective social disengagement – espoused by indigenous and settlers elites and often shared by a sizeable part of their social base – is characteristic of many “saturated” latter-day settlement frontiers. On both sides of the ethnic divide, voices that bespeak traditions of accommodation are silenced or stigmatized as treacherous. Typically, the elements of moderation on the settler side are the descendants of early colonists.

The literature offers strong support for the proposition that even where settler-in-migration is massive, indigenous people do discern between different classes of settlers, often taking the time depth of their presence in the area as the cardinal criterion. Not infrequently, expressions of nativism on the part of a disgruntled indigenous population are reserved for the more recent settlers, while first-generation migrants are held in high esteem. Where tensions peak in violence against migrant lives and property, the latter often emerge unharmed¹⁶⁵. Descendants of early arrivals may in fact be considered so close socially that they are no longer classed as “outsiders”, but accorded “sons-of-the-soil” status (see Majumdar and Singh 1997:169, 177 on India’s Jharkhand and Chappel 1993:317 on New Caledonia)¹⁶⁶. In turn, they may voice their sympathies for the indigenous population as the latter (and they themselves with them) comes under increasing pressure from later settlers

165 In such situations, indigenous people have been known to have protected first-generation settlers at high personal risk. In Papua New Guinea, for instance, local frustrations over the slow pace of development occasionally lead to rioting against Chinese immigrants and their shops. The latter are deeply unpopular because, looking for work permits and entry visa, they shrewdly exploit the corruption in the country’s bureaucracy and manage to secure jobs in the mining sector at the expense of indigenous people. People’s dislike of opportunistic Chinese migrants, however, does not extend to earlier groups of Chinese arrivals who, partly for several generations, have dominated trade and retail in most of the country’s larger and smaller towns and appear to be well-integrated socially. Their contribution to the local economy and the overall advancement of the country is widely recognized by the general population. A recent incident bears this out. When, not too long ago, bandits tried to ransack two Chinese shops in Finschhafen on the north coast, they met with fierce resistance by no fewer than 500 locals. The villagers held the attackers off until the police arrived and overwhelmed the robberers (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2009b).

166 In their account of the Jharkhand movement, an indigenous movement that successfully agitated for the formation of a separate “tribal state” in Central India, the authors document how the leadership admitted the descendants of the early settlers to the moral constituency of the hoped-for state. By releasing them from the general category of *diku* (“outsiders”) and allowing them an active role in the movement, the leaders were able to forge a pragmatic coalition of *adivasi* (tribal autochthones) and *sadan* (“settled migrants”). As a consequence, the movement changed in orientation from one that was clearly nativist in orientation to one that acquired regionalist contours (Majumdar and Singh 1997:169, 177). The New Caledonian example involves the Union Calédonienne (UC), an indigenous organization that advocated interracial cooperation between early French settlers (so-called *petits colons*) and the indigenous Kanak population of New Caledonia. Founded by church-educated Kanak leaders after World War II, the UC bannered the slogan “two colors, one people”, and thus also subverted established distinctions between the indigenous “we-group” and non-indigenous outsiders (Chappel 1993:317).

(see Tyler 2003:216 on Xinjiang¹⁶⁷), or (though, admittedly, in rare cases) may join armed nativist uprisings against colonization or the excesses of the extractive frontier (George 1980:118f. on Mindanao and St. George 1969:29 on Siberia¹⁶⁸).

But does the evidence from present-day settlement frontiers – to the extent that they were included in our study sample – bear out the proposition that tensions and open conflict tend to involve late settler arrivals rather than early ones?

The case of *West Kalimantan* suggests that alignments in nativist conflicts may indeed be related to the time depth of the respective groups' presence in the area. In the course of the various episodes of anti-Madurese riots that took place in West Kalimantan between 1996/97 and 2000, observers noted how a common interest in containing a group of particularly expansive and uncanny competitors for ever-scarcer agricultural resources gave rise to an "alliance of 'indigenous and long-term population' against 'newcomers'" (Somers Heidhues 2003:275). While the conflict principals during the first outbreak of violence (1996/97) were Madurese and Dayak, the latter could count on the (mainly) covert support of a part of the Malay population, whose ancestors had started to settle along the province's coast and rivers in the 15th century, giving it a credible entitlement to "sons-of-the-soil" status. This support turned active and overt two years later, when the Malay were the first to shed Madurese blood, and elements from other groups such as the Bugis and Chinese reportedly joined in the attacks on the Madurese (ibid.; Geiger 1999; Geiger, forthcoming:349). Nevertheless, the fact that e.g. Javanese and Balinese immigration in its majority did not antedate that of the Madurese (which came in substantial number only in the 1960s and 1970s), yet has not elicited any sort of nativist response on the part of West Bornean "sons-of-the-soil" so far, points to yet other causal factors behind migration-related violence.

Where immigrants belong to one single rather than many diverse ethnic groups (such as in the Chittagong Hill Tracts), or where the diversity of settler backgrounds is of no ethno-political significance (as in Bukidnon, Mindanao), the correlation emerges more clearly. We already noted how conflict in the *Chittagong Hill Tracts* involved in the main state-sponsored settlers, but not "spontaneous" ones. The opposition is mainly between the so-called "Old Bengalis" – merchant or farming descendants of early traders who had visited the Hill Tracts regularly since the end of the 18th century – and the settler population – numbering anything from 200,000 to 450,000 individuals – which two successive military regimes moved into the area from 1979 onwards. The

167 In Xinjiang, disaffection from Beijing's settlement policy is not confined to the indigenous Uighur. Early Han settlers, who had migrated voluntarily in the 1950s and 60s to heed Chairman Mao's call to help build a socialist Xinjiang, complain that the systematic transfer of Han settlers to Xinjiang has ruined their own good relations with the Uighurs and "made life harder for everybody". Significantly, they consider themselves to be "old Xinjiang people" who feel that they have little in common with the recent state-sponsored migrants. Retired Han farmers and veterans of the state-owned Xinjiang "Production and Construction Corporation" which had been Mao's chief instrument for advancing the industrialization of the area, resent the privileges of the newcomers. (e.g. free individual land grants), while their own sacrifices as pioneers won them no recognition from the state (Tyler 2003:ibid.).

168 George, speaking of the confused boundaries of ethno-religious conflict in the migration-stricken homelands of Filipino Muslims in the 1950s and 1960s, only hints at the possibility of inter-ethnic alliances against second-generation colonists (ibid.:118f.), but details how occasionally "old Christian settlers fought new Christian settlers" (ibid.:121). Better documented are armed revolts involving Russian settlers in the early phase of the conquest of Siberia. At regular intervals in the 16th century, Russian colonists and indigenous people revolted jointly against excessive taxation by corrupt and greedy officials (the so-called *voyevodas*) or against tribal elites who worked hand-in-glove with the Tsar's administrators. Such local uprisings occurred in Western Siberia, Yakutia, and among the Even and Evenk (St. George 1969:29).

two groups form separate social networks (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:33) and relate differently to the indigenous *Jumma* population. “Old Bengali” traders are reported to maintain by and large “symmetrical” pathway relations (i.e. relations that cut across rather than stop at ethnic boundaries) with their *Jumma* hosts, while the state-sponsored settlers enjoy a reputation of using violence in attempting to grab land from the indigenous (ibid.:22). Having come as part of a military-guided operation, the state-sponsored settlers transferred to the area between 1979 and 1985 felt that they enjoyed state protection and impunity when they helped themselves to indigenous land (ibid.). Many of them also readily complied when the army urged them to form militia to help fight the indigenous *Shanti Bahini* guerilla (Levene 1999:359). In contrast, indigenous relations with “Old Bengalis” are said to be much less conflict-prone; on account of their long presence in the area, the latter – say Roy and Halim – have developed “tolerance and respect” towards indigenous culture and lifeways (Roy and Halim, forthcoming:37). On some local markets, “Old Bengali” traders have called on their ethnic brethren with more recent migration backgrounds to stop stealing from *Jumma* vendors, even threatening them with sanctions (ibid.:31), and “Old Bengali” have by and large kept their distance from the thuggish anti-accord groups that formed among the settlers (ibid.:39). The fact of shared ethnicity did not endear the “Old Bengalis” to the military; between 1979 and 1985, they were left out of the army-controlled distribution of state benefits and favors because they were “suspected to be sympathetic to the indigenous peoples and thus ‘disloyal’ to the government and the greater Bengali cause” (ibid.:34). In a municipal election after the Peace Accord of 1997, furthermore, the “Old Bengali” electorate helped vote in an indigenous candidate rather than his Bengali opponent, while indigenous voters helped an “Old Bengali” candidate defeat his rival, a recently-arrived Bengali (ibid.:38). At least in one case, the military branded an “Old Bengali” who ran against a government-sponsored settler candidate a “Black Chakma” – i.e. a Bengali only by skin complexion¹⁶⁹, but not by his ethno-political concerns (ibid.).

Even if it stops short of pitting settlers and indigenous people against each other in absolute, antagonistic terms, the overall situation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts reveals deep and pervasive rifts between the two ethnic blocs; that is not the case in *Bukidnon, Mindanao*. Here, ethnic polarisation is less pronounced than on other settlement frontiers in the study sample; intermarriage does occur, and local communities are often ethnically heterogenous (Wenk 2007:169ff.). Provided they do not disqualify themselves by being rude and manipulative, settlers are pragmatically viewed by the Matigsalug as neighbours who can be emulated, and therefore are seen to be useful. The emic distinction between “good-mannered” and “bad-mannered” settlers which, to the Matigsalug, determines the boundaries of trust in social intercourse, roughly corresponds to the two categories of “First Christians”/“Old Bisaya” (*karaan nga Bisaya*) – who arrived between the late 1950s and the mid-1970s – and the more recent settlers. While in Matigsalug eyes, the latter do vary in their behavior towards the Matigsalug, it is them, among all settlers, who have committed (and still commit) instances of fraud, land grabbing and violence. In contrast, the descendants of the “First Christians” are praised for their sincerity and willingness to integrate themselves in the local Lumad communities (Wenk, forthcoming:35f).

Being few, the “First Christian” pioneers were not considered a threat when they arrived in the Sinod Valley; to the contrary, the leaders welcomed them as “catalysers of development”. Land was still plenty and settler claims did not collide with native ones. Being on their own in an unknown

169 The average Bengali agriculturalist is relatively dark-skinned, while Chakma, Marma and other *Jumma* groups tend to have fairer complexions.

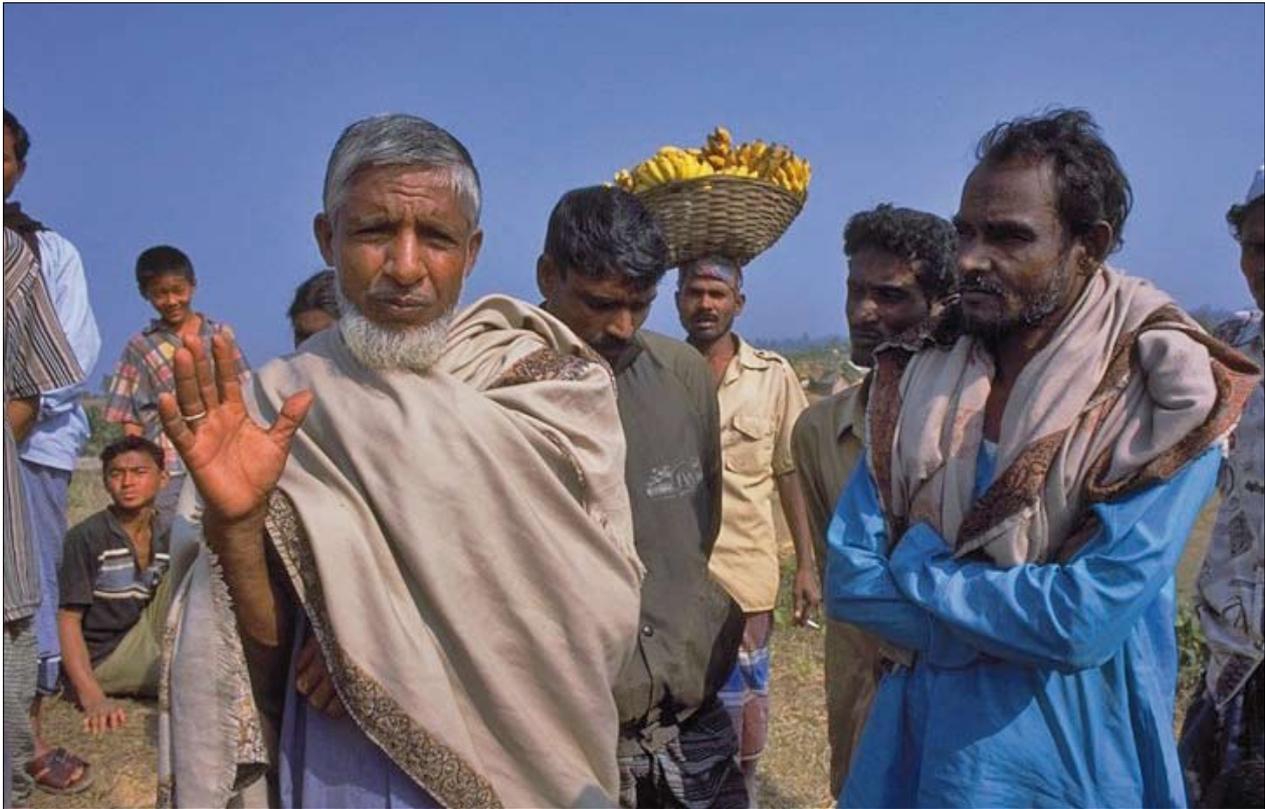


Photo 38: welcome settlers: early migrants to the Chittagong Hill Tracts and their descendants are evaluated positively by the indigenous population (photo: Christian Erni)

environment, the “First Christians” “were dependent on the Matigsalugs’ generosity and could not afford to antagonize them”. Intermarriage occurred, and in the aftermath of the rebellion of 1975, the leading *datu*s chose to tie some of the settlers to the community by making them fictive consanguineal relatives (ibid.:36). While the terms of the peace agreement included the removal of all migrants from the Sinod Valley, more than forty settler families were exempted from the clause on order of the leader of the rebellion, Datu Gawilan. With their help, the *datu* felt, the Matigsalug would learn “modern ways”, irrigation techniques for wet rice cultivation, a more diversified diet (through vegetable cultivation), mobility (attendance of markets in town) and the use of the regional vernacular language, Cebuano. These model “First Christians” settlers were officially “adopted”, i.e. placed under Gawilan’s protection, and hence considered a part both of Gawilan’s immediate family and the larger Matigsalug community (ibid.:40)¹⁷⁰.

To the Matigsalug at least, “First Christians” and their descendants – whether “adopted” or not –, are following “higher” standards of social conduct to this day, and, indeed, are elements of moderation in an era of escalating resource use conflicts. Thus, they are advising fellow settlers not to use racial invectives against Lumad and have mediated in disputes involving Lumad and later settler arrivals (ibid.:99). The Lumad acknowledge the strength of mutual ties with the “First Christians” by accepting their presence in the “Tribal Councils” which were put in place by the IPRA law and the CADC mechanisms (for details on this law, see sub-chapter 8.3.1.2.2) and by endorsing “First

170 The “traditional” content of this act is uncertain; the fact that it was officially documented through “adoption papers” that were filed in the local PANAMIN office points to the possibility that the role-model could be modern bureaucratic practice rather than a local tradition (ibid.:40).

Christian” self-representations as being in fact “Lumad” (=“grown from the place”), with all the rights that flow from that label under the present circumstances (Wenk, forthcoming:99, 110).

Of all studies of our comparative research project, the example of the “First Christians” in the hinterland of Bukidnon most clearly evinces a more general truth about the relations between pioneer colonists and indigenous communities at the settlement frontier: the latter tend not to obstruct the former’s presence, and in some cases, they even support it actively. Replicating the example of the “adoption” of early settlers as trailblazers for “progress” by the supreme leader of the Matigsalug, wealthy Khamti and Singpho families in recently-opened *Arunachal Pradesh* are presently employing migrant farm workers from Bangladesh, West Bengal and Central India on their fields (Luithui-Erni, forthcoming:15, 49), whereas wealthy Chakma landowners in the *Chittagong Hill Tracts* of the early 20th century brought Bengali sharecroppers into the area who were familiar with plough cultivation (Adnan 2004:39). The basis of such arrangements were (and partly still are), of course, the advantages that the presence of a moderate number of settlers brings to relatively isolated local communities and their leadership. Apart from representing a cheap labour force for semi-feudal indigenous landowners (where these exist), colonists often possess useful and locally-non-available knowledge and skills and herald the arrival of longed-for infrastructure development, as governments may come under pressure to build roads to provide the settlers access to towns and markets (Ondawame 2000:279, Duncan 2004b:105f.).

In sum, the empirical support for the proposition that unwanted settlers will tend to be later arrivals rather than first-generation migrants was impressive. In three cases, early settlers were not only allowed to live unobstructed by the local population, but were welcomed and their presence actively supported, the most spectacular case being the Matigsalug Manobo’s “adoption” of over forty pioneer families as trailblazers for economic progress.

9. ABOLISHING THE FRONTIER

Whichever form the interaction between local indigenous communities and advancing settlers takes, and however active and substantial the state's backing for the latter, settlement frontiers are zones of rapid and radical transformation where, irretrievably, land and resources pass from indigenous ownership to national patrimony. The sample that I evaluated contains not a single country which has not, at one point or another, actively sought to establish settler colonies at its indigenous fringes. In fact, conquest colonization is so frequent in the history of the postcolonial state in the developing South that it can be said to represent a standard device in the politics of "nationalizing space" (see chapter 7 and, particularly, 7.1.4).

Implanting the political institutions that secure domination in the heartland, diffusing majoritarian ethnic symbols and cultural forms, and incorporating the territories and resources into the wider national economy, it will be remembered, are conflict-prone strategemes. These state designs bring frontiers into being, modelling them as less than serene places where governance is particularly arbitrary, legal codes are biased or, in the absence of bias, unenforced, strategies of accumulation are predatory, and violence is the preferred means of conflict management. State agency at the periphery is, I have contended (see chapter 5), of an inherently antagonizing quality; other than in the heartland, it is not aimed at winning the allegiance of the local citizenry and securing its loyalty, but wants to secure control over the territory and resources of ethnic groups who are defined as standing outside the "moral community" of the nation, if not outside the moral universe altogether. As concerns for state- and nation-building outweigh considerations for local communities' rights, biodiversity conservation and even political stability, the "politics of nationalizing space" are calculated to bring about high levels of violence (see *ibid.*).

It is in the interest not only of frontier-dwelling indigenous communities, but also of the more vulnerable social groups in settler society, that frontiers yield to zones of *regularized* state control. As states shed their loosely-controlled edges, transforming them into more firmly-administered domains, the emphasis should be on legitimacy rather than the unilateral increase of control. Legitimacy at the indigenous fringe comes through respect for difference, and difference is best protected by strengthening autonomy. While frontiers are defined by an expansive move that meets indigenous autonomies, these autonomies exist by default rather than by design. If and where indigenous communities have succeeded in maintaining control over the bigger part of their territories, it is because the states and private interests involved lack the capacity to invade and overtake them, or find that the areas' resources do not warrant the effort. The balance of forces is delicate, however, and any change in the accessibility of the territories or the financial potency of the governments involved can alter it and lead to the disintegration of the indigenous communities in question (and thus to the disappearance of the frontier in that area). Rather than through a catastrophic process through which the world loses its cultural diversity, the elimination of the world's frontiers should come about through legislating the efficient protection of indigenous communities, and the concomitant control of the rapacious and violent economy of settler society. In other words, the *de-facto autonomy* of not-yet encapsulated groups would need to be replaced by the *negotiated autonomy* of groups which are recognized as a valuable part of the nation's patrimony.

To do away with frontiers, conflict transformation in frontier spaces should strive to eliminate the set of mainly destructive frontier traits outlined above (chapter 7.1). A policy priority is the

expansion of *individual* civil rights, and the *collective* empowerment of disenfranchised groups, among which indigenous communities stand out (Santos-Granero and Barclay 2000:5; 299ff.). The introduction of special measures for the protection of indigenous collective rights to land and resources (e.g. through autonomy provisions or community-wise delineation and titling of territories) or the re-invigoration/consolidation of earlier regimes of separate administration for indigenous communities should be considered. The strengthening of civil rights in general and the introduction of community-based titles or more far-reaching autonomy statutes can be helped through a general process of democratization, which, through raising the public accountability of officials, will curtail the tendency of local government to put itself at the service of the locally powerful. Finally, a re-evaluation of the usually mono-ethnic and culturally hegemonic character of the nation-state to include the frontier-dwelling “minor parts of the nation” (Trankell 1998) can help subvert prevalent frontier stereotypes of indigenous peoples as primitive and sub-human ¹⁷¹

171 A more comprehensive proposal of how frontiers can be reduced to zones of regularized state control can be found in Geiger (2008a:32-40).

10. THE ADVENTURES OF THE FRONTIER IN THE LATE 20TH AND EARLY 21ST CENTURIES

Yet is this not exactly what we have witnessed in the course of the past two and a half decades – a groundswell of democratic transformations all over the globe, massive inroads on the subject of human and, more importantly, indigenous rights, the mono-ethnic, culturally hegemonic nation-state model going out of fashion, and extractivist practices “softened” beyond recognition? Has not, therefore, the frontier expired without us noticing it? Indeed, there is no dearth of voices who have pronounced the frontier as we know it “closed” (or “tamed”) for good (Welch 1996:45f., Santos-Granero and Barclay 2000:5; 299-308) or declared it to lie in its death throes (Schmink and Wood 1992:353f., Nepstad et al. 2002:631) while others who do not use the frontier notion have advanced propositions that amount to a suggestion of frontier closure (Maybury-Lewis 2002a, 2002b, Clarke 2001:413ff.; 427-434). The composite argument of these proponents of the recent disappearance of the frontier is rendered in Figure 10; it is compelling enough to reward a brief recapitulation of some of the more momentous recent changes in global politics and ideas in as far as they may have had a bearing on frontier affairs.

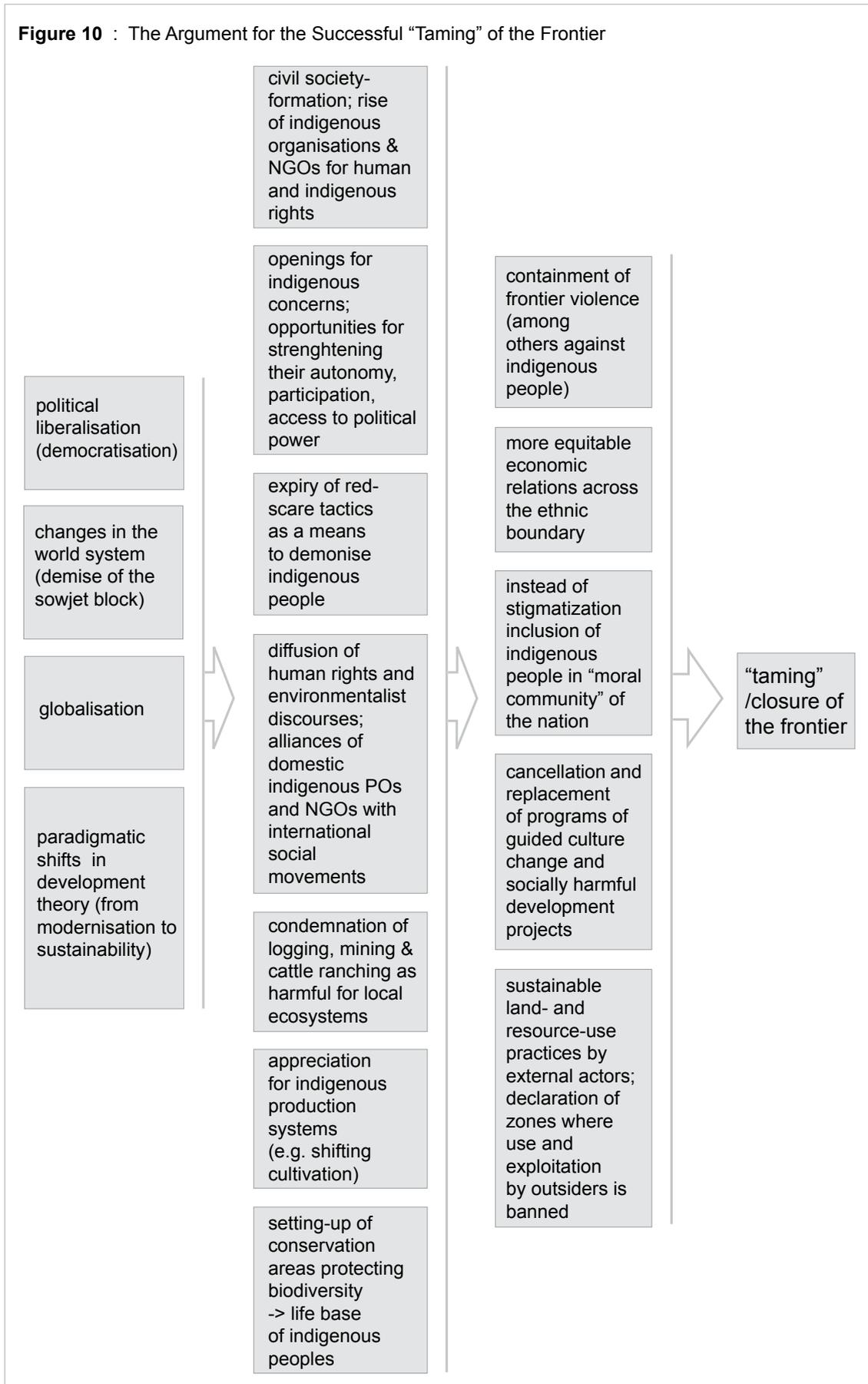
Starting in 1989, in the spate of a few years a world order that had held for more than four decades gave way, forcing leaders around the world to warm up to new principles of governance and concede a bigger role to a citizenry that henceforth came to be known as “civil society”. Even earlier, at the beginnings of the 1980s, the growing evidence of catastrophic global climate change had started to convert ordinary people, development thinkers and the occasional politician to new ideas about resource consumption and economic development that would no longer be premised on the rapid depletion of the planet’s biological and, as a consequence, cultural diversity. And, finally, as part of a longer trend, a fast-growing body of international standards on the rights of human beings to physical integrity and well-being, and the entitlement of cultural and ethnic minorities to difference in dignity, has started to circumscribe the possibilities for state rulers and local power-wielders to mistreat the populace at will. Democratization and the ascendancy of the discourses of nature conservation and human and minority rights have led to a noticeable shift in power relations between indigenous people and outsiders on many state peripheries, with the result that frontier processes concurrently do not continue in an untrammelled manner.

Probably the most conspicuous force for change in frontier politics has been the trend towards political liberalisation and more democratic and politically-inclusive systems of government which swept away a series of autocratic regimes in Latin America in the 1980s¹⁷² and transformed insular and parts of mainland Southeast Asia in the 1980s and 1990s¹⁷³. Some authors at least posit that the wave of democratic transitions has made governments in these two regions more sensitive to

172 Thus, the monopoly of power which Mexico’s Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) held since 1929, was broken in 2000, Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet was denied another presidential term in 1988 (but stayed on as Army Chief of Staff until 1998), and the region’s longest-serving dictator, Alfredo Stroessner of Paraguay, was deposed in a coup in 1989. Throughout Latin America (with the possible exception of Guatemala), the influence of the armed forces in politics was substantially reduced during the late 1980s and 1990s.

173 In chronological order, the Marcos dictatorship fell in the Philippines in 1986, Vietnam and Laos adopted the economic and partially political *Doi Moi* reforms and the New Economic Mechanism after 1986, Thailand received its first fully-elected democratic government in 1988, Malaysia started to evolve into a multi-party democracy with the appointment of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in 2003. Indonesia saw the collapse of the autocratic Suharto regime in 1998, and East Timor won its independence from Indonesian occupation in 2002.

Figure 10 : The Argument for the Successful “Taming” of the Frontier



the plight of indigenous peoples and led to efforts to involve them more fully in local and national politics (Clarke 2001:428, 433, Maybury-Lewis 2002a:xv). Heeding donor countries' calls to make government more effective and accountable, many states of the developing South introduced decentralization – a policy principle which has been hailed as resulting in the empowerment of indigenous constituencies (Duncan n.d.).

Political liberalisation was made possible in the first place by the end of the cold war. The demise of the socialist block and the military defeat of a great many – though by no means all – communist insurgencies in the developing world after 1989 has made it more difficult for authoritarian states to persist in their habitual branding of indigenous peoples' organizations and their domestic allies as communist subversives (Duncan 2004:7f.), thus depriving them – as well as their “democratized” peers – of a convenient justification for the politics of “nationalizing space”.

A corollary of political liberalisation has been the proliferation of NGOs, many of them concerned with the plight of indigenous peoples (Clarke 2001:428), and of people's organizations (POs) which directly articulate the latter's grievances and political agendas. As a result, international collaborations have come into their own, at least in part phrased in the language of the right to self-determination, making a powerful appeal to community sovereignty with rights that even transcend nation-states (Adelman and Aron 1999:841).

During the late 1980s and the 1990s, many states have taken a less confrontational view of the dangers and merits of cultural diversity at their margins (Jonsson 2001:10), a trend that expressed itself in the passing of a number of autonomy statutes for ethnic minorities in parts of Asia (examples being Muslim Mindanao in the Philippines and Aceh in Indonesia) and the strengthening of existing arrangements in Latin America (in the case e.g. of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast, but also that of the Shuarã of Ecuador, the Kayapó of Brasil and the Kuna of Panama). What is more, in some world regions, at least, the idea of cultural and ethnic pluralism seems to have taken hold among policy makers and the general public alike, signalling a departure from the time-honed practice of excluding indigenous frontier-dwellers from the “moral community” of the nation. Thus, David Maybury-Lewis (2002a), a leading South Americanist with an admirable record in indigenous rights advocacy, sees evidence of a profound and fundamental rethinking of the centuries-old relations between states and indigenous peoples in most Latin American countries. States like Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia are no longer insisting that the indigenous peoples within their borders relinquish their separate identities and assimilate, and have proclaimed themselves pluri-ethnic (Maybury-Lewis 2002a:xv; Levi 2002, Ramírez 2002, Macdonald 2002, Gustafson 2002). In Mexico and Ecuador, furthermore, spectacular indigenous protests¹⁷⁴ have elicited much sympathy among a considerable part of the non-Indian population in whose eyes their indigenous compatriots had taken the lead in redefining democracy and the state (Levi 2002, MacDonald 2002). In 2001 and 2005, finally, Peru and Bolivia have for the first time in their national histories elected presidents of indigenous descent, in Bolivia's case even a leader of an indigenous grassroots movement.

Both in Asia and Latin America, racist representations of indigenous people as lesser kinds of humans – notorious at the frontier – are increasingly contested. While these are admittedly tenacious and refuse to go away completely, two or more notions of the indigenous are today competing for

174 I am referring to the Zapatista uprising in early 1994, and the blockades by Ecuadorian Indians of streets and the national parliament in Quito which led to the ouster of President Mahuad six years later, in early 2000.

hegemony over the collective imaginary of most majoritarian societies in the developing world. Characteristic for the mindset of the average citizen, today, is a basic “ambivalence (...) towards indigenous peoples”, and there is a “pendular movement between distance and proximity”, as environmentalists and indigenous rights advocates have come to celebrate native communities as “keepers of the forest” and stewards of the planet’s biological diversity (Ramos 2003:367, speaking of Brazil).

Most significantly, unrestrained natural resource exploitation as a major feature of the “politics of nationalizing space” has given way to a “more complex discursive agenda” which revolves around the notion of biodiversity conservation (Bryant 2001:11). In pursuing these agendas, appeal is made not only to the national, but even the global “common good” (ibid.). In the mid-1980s, parts of the elites in developing countries discovered the ecological and esthetic value of untouched forests, whereas earlier elite generations had primarily viewed them as a commodity or an obstacle to development (Lohmann 1993:216 on Thailand). Environmentalists in developed countries and the South began to share a new discourse that lent visibility and legitimacy to both traditional livelihood systems and the alternative views of needs fulfilment and human development which they represented (Schmink and Wood 1992:8). By the end of the 1980s, indigenous communities in many parts of the tropical forest had successfully established links with international lobbyists, alliances which were buttressed by domestic coalitions with NGOs and sympathetic political parties. Whereas acquiescence or armed resistance had been the main options in the past, indigenous movements now discovered the possibilities inherent in the “politics of embarrassment” (Paine 1985), a strategy of subaltern collective action that turns the massive power imbalance between grassroot communities and the state into symbolic capital for the former, and tries to exploit the moral high ground which small-scale producers – and, in particular, indigenous communities – have conquered with the paradigmatic shift to conservation and sustainable development. The net result of these changes was a rather tangible empowerment of indigenous communities, as material resources and credibility became available to them to an extent never known before (Schmink and Wood 1992:8). Quite clearly, the increasing salience of notions of sustainability and development that are more respectful of indigenous communities’ needs altered the character of frontier confrontations, and introduced fresh ideas into the debate over appropriate development strategies for frontier areas.

If the battles fought over land between indigenous communities, settlers and private investors still had a clear tendency of being one-sided in favor of the latter in the 1970s and the bigger part of the 1980s, the balance of power began to shift by the end of the decade. Indigenous movements formed, showing villagers how to organize themselves and protect their interests more effectively against the threats posed by settlers, land speculators, mining companies, and bureaucrats. As Schmink and Wood (1992:9) point out quite rightly for the Brazilian Amazon, the odds remained staked against the indigenous communities, but the likelihood that they could win major contests against their adversaries rose. Broadly speaking, by 1990, the terms of the debate over frontier development had changed significantly. With the exception of the most notorious dictatorships (Burma, Indonesia), the environmental and human rights consequences of conventional development policies for tropical rainforest areas had become the target of headline stories in the domestic press of the developing countries concerned, and were a constant news feature in the developed world. Mining, logging, and cattle ranching – in many countries the mainstay of the modernization program – were increasingly condemned in favor of modes of forest use which would leave the latter intact (ibid.:9). Subsidies to the ranching sector were cut back, and the wisdom of dividing large tracts

of forest into small farming plots for colonists was challenged by the press as well as the more respectable part of the academe (ibid.:352). The equity and sustainability of the developmentalist model were questioned, prompting a new appreciation of traditional modes of production and the lifeways associated with them. Indigenous cultures came to be viewed as repositories of practical knowledge, and indigenous resource management systems were now treated as credible alternatives in the search for new policy directions (ibid.:9f.).

As a result of this paradigm change, forestry policies have in many parts of the world progressed from earlier priorities that supported forest conversion both for commercial and subsistence purposes (in the latter with settlers as beneficiaries), to an explicit concern for the protection of remaining primary forests and a recognition of the supreme value of preserving the world's heritage of biological diversity. Thus, legislation from the past two decades has started to reflect changing public images that attribute a positive and necessary role to indigenous people, casting them and their resource-use practices in a more favourable light (Dove et al. 2003:23).

Last but not least, the re-orientation of development and land-use priorities at the frontier expressed itself in the creation of nature reserves for the protection of endangered animal species or entire local ecosystems identified as "biodiversity hotspots". In many cases, these protected areas were established on the initiative of foreign conservationists whose international organizations funded and co-managed the reserves together with local civil society counterparts or government agencies. As ecology became a new parameter in global geopolitics, state frontiers became also frontiers of a global order which fragmented nation-state territories, thus imposing spatial limits on the pursuit of the environmentally harmful politics of "nationalizing space" (Becker 1996:83-86). In some instances at least, wildlife conservation areas and national parks have largely successfully kept settlers out of the bounds of ecologically-sensitive areas, with the side effect that the erosion of the land base of resident indigenous communities was also halted (see e.g. Dressler and Hughes McDermott n.d.:5 on the island of Palawan, Philippines).

Still, as we try to take account of the *changes* in frontier politics over the past two and a half decades and demonstrate how momentous they were, we must not forget that these trends neither went unchallenged, nor gloss over the *continuities* in the management of the frontier – some disturbing enough to make us doubt that there were inroads made at all. For the remainder of this concluding chapter, the floor belongs to those authors who have argued that policy changes towards indigenous peoples and the environment – though noisily advertised – were limited in effect, thus leaving the frontier alive and well (Bryant 2001, Little 2001, Tsing 2005:27-54, see also Duncan 2004 for a similar position, yet without the frontier terminology). Their arguments are summarized in Figure 11 below. As behooves someone who has devoted a thesis of 250 pages to a sketch of something said to be of burning relevance for the present, I myself tend towards this second, more pessimistic proposition, but would ultimately like to leave it for the reader to judge the plausibility of the two arguments.

Even though democratisation has changed some of the formal rules of the political game and brought a new generation of politicians to power (many of them educated abroad, and conversant in environmentalist and human rights discourses), the latter are not impervious to the imperatives of Realpolitik and the promise of high economic growth rates. In the new millenium as much as in the old, the environment and the rights of indigenous minorities tend to take the back seat in decisions on controversial development projects (see Duncan 2004:4 on Southeast Asia). An example from Brazil under former President Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva (2003-2010), the country's first president

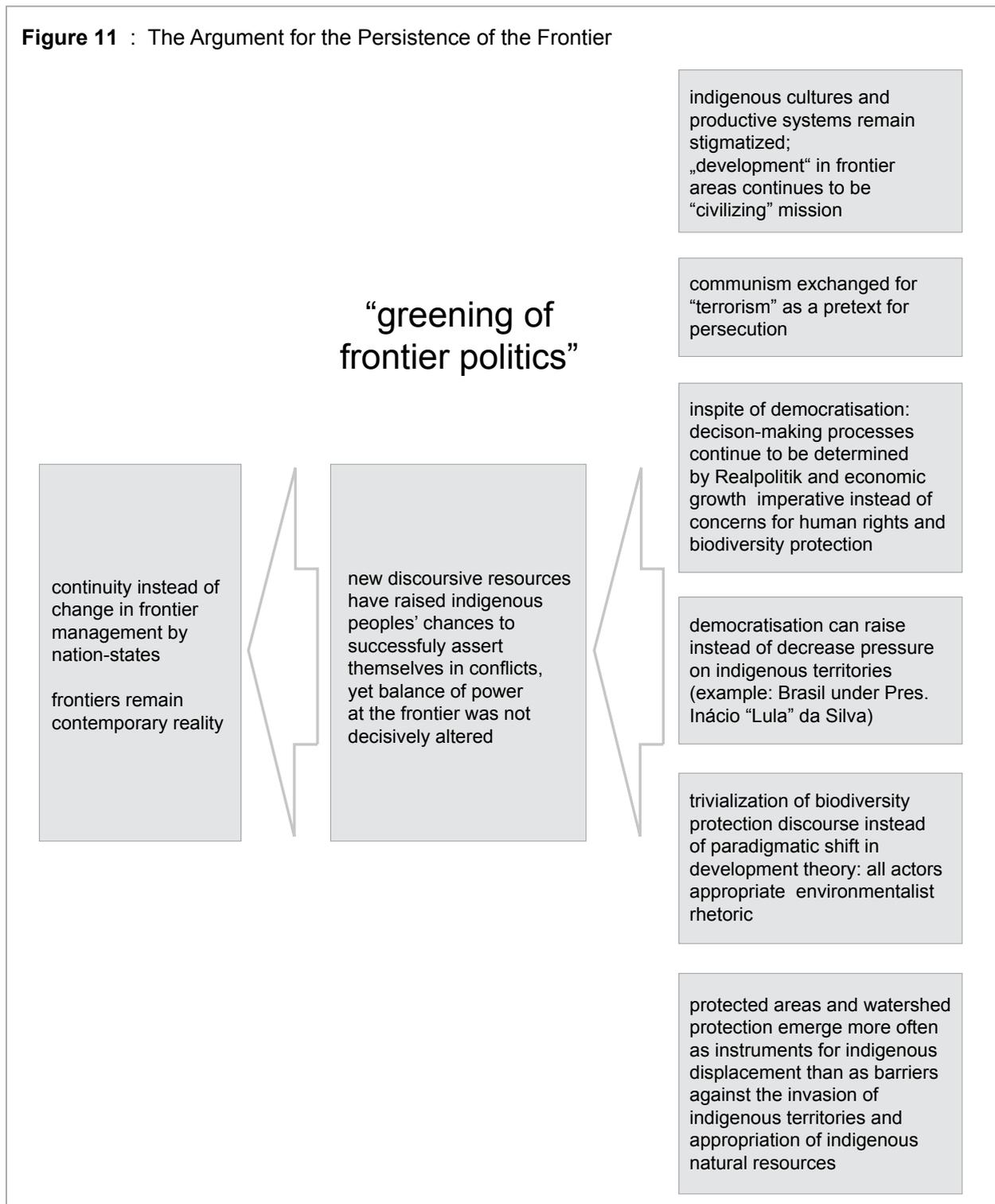
Figure 11 : The Argument for the Persistence of the Frontier



Photo 39: resilient enemy images: anti-communist banner admonishing citizens to be vigilant, Ambon, Indonesia, 1995 (photo: Danilo Geiger)

of non-elite background and a champion of human rights, will bear this out. In spite of criticism by local activists and foreign observers (who warn of a repetition of earlier social and environmental disasters), Lula's government signed a road-building (or, respectively, -upgrading) agreement with Peru designed to connect its far-western state of Mato Grosso – the centre of the country's booming soy industry – to Peru's Pacific ports and from there to the lucrative Chinese market. So far, these goods had to be carried to Atlantic ports or trucked across Argentina to Chile. By June 2006, the difficult dirt track that ran from the border town of Inapari to Lima and the coast was supposed to be replaced by an all-weather tarmac road that could accommodate the 400 40- tonne trucks which, as officials expected, will ply the route daily. The road will cross one of Peru's most biologically-diverse areas, the Madre de Dios, with three national parks, a nature reserve and a reserve for indigenous peoples such as the Amarakaeri. Locals fear that the trucks will be followed by settlers seeking to clear forest for soy and cattle like in numerous previous cases, spelling doom to flora, fauna and Native Amazonian tribes (The Economist 2005:53).

Brazil also exemplifies that a political shift from a centre-right to a leftist government, an exciting new scenario in the post-Cold War era, need not be for the better when it comes to indigenous rights policies. Since the ascension to power in 2003 of President "Lula" da Silva of the Workers' Party, the land rights situation in Brazil has become more tense and the pace of delineation and titling of indigenous reserves has slowed down. Observers interpret this as a reflection of the fact that the settler population is an essential part of the political base of a government controlled by the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), which can ill-afford to alienate the colonists if it wants to get re-elected (Pierrette Birraux, personal communication, March 2005). Two and a half years into the first term of

„Lula“’s successor as president, Dilma Rousseff (equally from the PT), Brazil’s indigenous peoples continue to be a low priority for the government in Brasilia. As titling efforts have stalled in various parts of the country and the government tries to reduce the powers of FUNAI, the government’s agency for the protection of the Indians, land occupations by desperate indigenous groups and violent clashes with colonists are becoming ever more frequent (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2013).

Another supposed trade-off of the end of the Cold War, the elimination of redscare tactics from the repertory of state authorities, in some cases has materialized very tardily. Thus, in 2000, more than a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall and over thirty years after the extinction by massacre of any organized form of communism in the country, Indonesian government officials still invoked the looming presence of communist insurgents as a rationale for resettling indigenous people (Duncan 2004:8). Other governments have dropped the label, only to replace it with the “terrorist” tag which has become the currency of the day in the game of criminalizing dissidents of any shade. Today, the threat of being associated with “terrorism” as a justification for state violence is limiting many indigenous communities’ ability to resist frontier depredations with dreadful efficiency (see e.g. Indigenous Peoples Rights Watch-Philippines 2006 on the Philippine Cordillera).

To continue with, some of the hallmarks of democratic reform and “better practice” in the field of governance are often not delivering the expected results, and may accentuate rather than eliminate contradictions at the frontier. Taking decentralization as an example, many studies bear out that unless indigenous peoples and other traditionally marginalized groups manage to make themselves heard both regionally and nationally, change will fail them as decentralization has the tendency to strengthen rather than weaken existing asymmetrical power relations at the frontier (see e.g. Duncan n.d.:17 on Indonesia). Talking of Peru and the present situation in the Ashéninka territories of the *montaña*, Søren Hvalkof (2008:277) makes a powerful case for the advantages of a centralized political structure, as decentralization may deprive indigenous communities of important political and financial resources that can be had from the central bureaucracy, delivering them instead entirely to local cultural biases and frontier entrepreneurs from the region. In the Gran Pajonal, impressive initial gains from the demarcation and titling of Ashéninka territories were reversed towards the middle of the first decade of our millenium when the centre, following the precepts of neo-liberal adjustment policies, stopped many of its services in the region, “outsourcing decision-making on frontier issues” to settler-controlled local administrations with a vested interest in indigenous territories (*ibid.*).

Collective soul-searching with the result that the nation explicitly owns up to the indigenous parts of its heritage, as it has occurred in Latin America over the past decade, seems to be a particularity of that world region. If insular and mainland Southeast Asia, for instance, are any measure, the existence of self-conscious tribal peoples in the midst of national populations storming towards modernity is still seen as a reason for shame, not for pride (Duncan 2004:5), and no re-formulations of the cultural and ethnic bases of nations in the region have taken place. Upon close inspection, even the evidence for Latin America is checkered: Maybury-Lewis and his co-authors have to concede that the regional revolution in ethnic relations has so far only seized those countries with significant indigenous minorities (or, as in Bolivia’s case, majorities). The re-definition of citizenship is being resisted where indigenous people are comparatively few in numbers, as evidenced by Brazil, the region’s most populous country, which continues to drag its feet over issues of indigenous rights. Mention is also made of the seemingly intractable conflicts related to the drug trade which are retarding the implementation of policy changes in Colombia, Panama, Peru and Bolivia (Maybury-

Lewis 2002a:xv, xxii).

While changing perceptions of the indigenous “Other” among the political class and urban professionals are certainly important, only if they filter through to settlers and other non-native actors at the frontier itself will they alter the exploitative and oppressive relations which have characterized the zone for so long. I do not mean to deny that “grassroots” representations of indigenous peoples may have changed for the good in recent times, but would like to point out that such shifts in attitude seem to reflect the global rise of new ecological or human rights paradigms more in an *indirect* than a direct sense: Rather than appreciating the merits of cultural diversity for their own sake, local settler populations in the developing South have often come to exploit it pragmatically. As adventure tourism has turned tribal lifeways into a valuable commodity, neighbouring settler communities may develop an economic interest in the preservation of the cultural integrity of frontier-dwelling indigenous populations. As Gerard Persoon (2003:446), a scholar working on Indonesian affairs, argues for the Mentawaians of Siberut and their Minangkabau settler neighbours, it is economic opportunity which gradually gives rise to an increased appreciation of a culture once widely despised as “primitive” and thus inferior. The implication, of course, is that backlashes in racial attitudes are inevitable if respect for the “Other” depends on fickle economic incentives.

No claim to the “taming” of the frontier can be made without demonstrating that the notorious violence of that zone shows signs of subsiding. The pacification of the frontier is usually attributed to the reduction of sharp conflicts over land and other assets, and the rising acceptance and efficiency of the law-enforcement agencies and the judicial system of the state (see e.g. Santos-Granero and Barclay 2000:5). However, I would contend that in many world regions, the facts belie the hypothesis that frontiers are slowly turning peaceful; again, I am offering the Brazilian Amazon as an example. Not only is the incidence of violent clashes and deaths between landless migrants and large landowners rising (de Almeida and Campari 1995:4), but also that between native Amazonians and settlers or gold panners: In 2005, more Indians were murdered in land-related incidences than any time before in the last ten years (*The Economist* 2006a:47). If the paid murder in February 2005 of Dorothy Stang, an American missionary and courageous supporter of small farmer opponents of large landowners in the state of Pará, highlighted the fact that the frontier was as life-threatening as ever, at least its speedy resolution by the courts seemed to underscore that state institutions were reformed and working in ways that signalled the impending disappearance of the frontier as a “land of impunity”. Barely 10 months later, a Belém court sentenced the two gunmen who had committed the murder to 27 and 17 years imprisonment, while the *latifundista* who had ordered the assassination awaited his own trial and a still stiffer verdict. Many observers were surprised by the unusual zeal with which the authorities investigated the murder and brought the assassins and their influential backers to justice, and wondered whether the case might indicate a break with the dismal record of Brazil’s law enforcers and judicial institutions¹⁷⁵. Others, however, cautioned that the speedy resolution of Dorothy Stang’s murder was exceptional and not likely to be repeated in future cases where the victim was not an American national and thus would not arouse international media interest (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2005f; see also Campos 2008:436f.). The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, while admitting that the Stang case seemed to show that Brazil availed now of a growing number of competent and honest policemen, judges and politicians, noted that the latter still represented

175 According to Church investigations, only a handful of cases from among the hundreds of murders of agricultural labourers, small farmers, peasant organizers and NGO activists who had come to their aid in Pará between 1971 and 2004 were properly investigated. In only nine cases were the murderers brought to court, and just three of them were found guilty and sentenced (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2005f).

“islands of correct administrative practice” in Brazil, and argued that it would be “naive” to give the matter wider significance as a landmark in the struggle against legal impunity, the destruction of the rain forest and the inequities and inefficiency of the Brazilian judicial system (ibid.). It remains a fact, says the newspaper, that “the state – its courts, police forces and environmental protection agencies included – assumes its tasks especially in the rainforest region but in a deficient manner” (ibid.).

The much-heralded paradigmatic shift in development theory from modernization to conservation and sustainable development has often been difficult to detect in practice. In a large number of countries, “developmentalism” has remained popular with economists and policy makers (Nicholas 2000:46). Policies for Amazon and Southeast Asian frontier regions for instance continued to invoke the precepts of development-as-modernization, have often remained coloured by national security doctrines and only occasionally moved away from the preference for capital-intensive projects (Schmink and Wood 1992:352, Duncan 2004:3ff.). A string of major regional development schemes in these two regions have remained explicitly hostile to indigenous rights (Schmink and Wood 1992:353, McCaskill and Kampe, eds., 1997). New extractivist cycles have replaced old ones, inaugurating new rounds of partially ferocious territorial struggles on indigenous domains. Under such circumstances, frontiers are constantly reproducing themselves and become “perennial” phenomena (Little 2001:233-239). At the time of this writing, the rapidly-expanding cultivation of soja in the rainforests of Amazonia and changing parameters in the global politics of oil (at present with a bearing on Africa) appear especially worrisome.

Because of the boom in large-scale soy production, the pressure on Brazilian rainforests has, if anything, grown over the past half decade: In the state of Mato Grosso in 2004, no less than half of that year’s forest loss was due to the expansion of soy cultivation. The large profits to be reaped by dedicating cleared forest patches to the cultivation of this latest cash-crop have resulted in rampant land speculation; probably a larger percentage of newly-cleared land was cleared by pioneers with the aim of a later re-sale to soy growers than for subsistence purposes (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2005c; see also *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2003a). In addition, in recent years, the pace of the expansion of soy cultivation – in Brazil as elsewhere – has accelerated as industrial countries have tried to lessen their dependence on oil as a combustible. US and EU government consumption targets for so-called “bio-” or “agrofuels” have created an immense demand not only for soy, but also for other crops (wheat, corn, sugarcane, jatropha and palm oil) which can be made into liquid biofuels. As a result, plantations are currently experiencing a new, worldwide boom, with disastrous effects on land access for poorer and politically marginal rural people – including, prominently, indigenous people in frontier areas (Cotula et al. 2008). To benefit from the bonanza, Indonesia, already the world’s largest producer of crude palm oil, is planning to expand oil palm plantations by an acreage (20 mio has) equivalent to the size of England, the Netherlands and Switzerland combined (Marti 2008:7). A similar increase, albeit on a much lower level of total acreage, has been reported from Colombia. The country’s expansion of cultivated land under oil palms from 188,000 has in 2003 to currently 300,000 has have made it the fourth largest palm oil producer worldwide. As documented for the Pacific Coast, plantation expansion was achieved with the help of armed groups driving black and indigenous communities off their land. Indigenous displacement was not halted by the fact that the land rights situation had improved markedly in recent decades (Cotula et al. 2008:43).

With respect to oil – still the most priced of fuels –, it has been noted that the rise of China as a major world power with a resource-hungry economy has not improved the prospects of frontier

environments and frontier-dwelling indigenous peoples. As consumer protests “at home” forced large American- and European-owned oil consortiums to mend their ways and use “softer” and more sophisticated strategies of securing their access to oil, China has moved into many of the world’s insurgency-ridden exploration and production areas – most notably in Africa –, exploiting to the full its competitive advantage of not having to conform to the ecological and human rights standards of a critical domestic citizenry (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2006a, *The Economist* 2008).

To the degree that the notions of sustainability and biodiversity protection have become ubiquitous, nauseating slogans in the conduct of development and international relations, they have lost a substantial part of their original, subversive power. Over the past two decades, ecological and conservationist themes have ceased to be the exclusive preserve of groups with the respective credentials (among them indigenous peoples and their supporters) and were appropriated in one form or another by nearly all of the actors present at the frontier – even by rather unlikely candidates for environmentalist sainthood such as ranchers, sawmill owners and military strategists (Schmink and Wood 1992:352)¹⁷⁶. Especially conspicuous in their reckless adoption of “green” imagery is the metropolitan oil industry (Haller et al., eds., 2000:574-577). Thus, far from seeing the discourse of concern for frontier environments becoming more binding for governance and development practice, we are witnessing its irresistible trivialization.

Indeed, many scholarly observers remain deeply sceptical in the face of the sudden “greening” of frontier politics, and indigenous movements the world over insist that the quest for self-determination is different from and sometimes even antithetical to the cause of biodiversity protection. Raymond Bryant (2001:11), for instance, a specialist in the political ecology of frontier areas in Southeast Asia, casts doubts on the conservationist track record of many governments in the region, calling their newly-found conservationist creed “born-again environmentalism”. In spite of the new rhetorics, he explains, decision-making and administrative processes in Southeast Asian countries remain elitist, disabling governments to record, for instance, signs of increasing, painful contradictions between conservationist priorities and the human rights of indigenous frontier-dwellers (*ibid.*). Furthermore, states Bryant, environmental mimicry abounds when opportunistic policy measures are packaged in ways that make them look as if they were part of a principled policy based on new-found values. A case in point is the government of Thailand which, after a series of devastating landslides in the uplands, decreed a much-publicized nation-wide logging ban; the losses in revenues for the national logging industry, however, were compensated by allowing the operations to shift to Burma, showing the measure to be, at its core, a calculating externalization of environmental costs (*ibid.*; Bürgin 2005:31f.).

That the rise of the new ecological paradigm has merely added an “environmental twist” to traditional frontier politics (Bryant 2001:11) is also Anna Tsing’s (2005) contention, who explores

176 Thus, for instance, indigenous discursive positions stressing the singularity of indigenous modes of relating to the environment have not gone unchallenged. In metropolitan settler societies, their claim to be natural-born conservationists practicing healthier forms of environmental management than other groups, has increasingly come under fire. Similarly, the claim to a spiritual connectedness with the land, another standard of contemporary indigenous self-representations, has been openly contested in the past two decades. White Australians, for instance, who objected to the transfer of Ayers Rock to aboriginal ownership – effected in 1985 – denied that the site was any more sacred to aboriginals than it was to the average non-aboriginal Australian, alluding to the “mystical and sacred communion” which many of the latter felt connecting them with the rock (Whittaker 1994:317ff.). In postcolonial states of the developing South, environmentalism and the indigenous rights discourse have never climbed to a similar, near-hegemonic position as in the developed North.

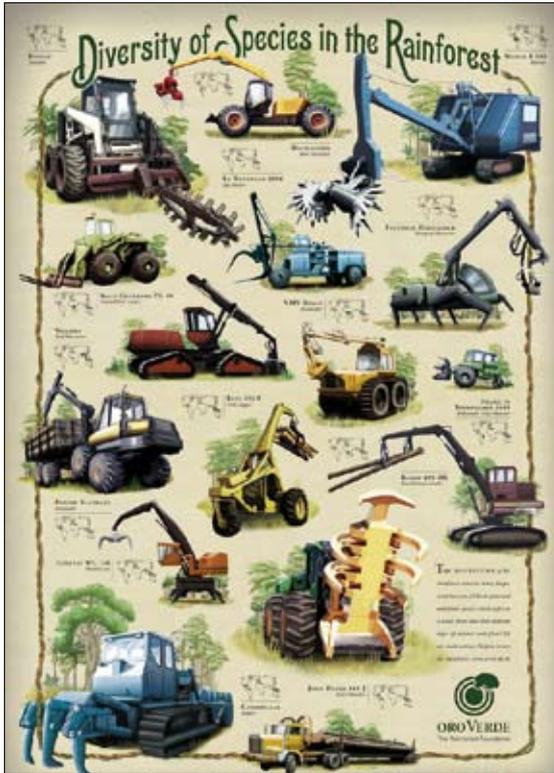


Photo 40: not on the list of endangered species despite the supposed “greening” of the frontier: heavy logging machineries. poster of the Germany-based environmentalist NGO, Oro Verde (photo: Oro Verde)

the discourse’s potential for cynical manipulation by governing elites. In her furious indictment of the ravages of the “frontiers of capitalism” in South Kalimantan, Indonesia, she points out that, far from hindering development aggression against forests and forest-dwelling communities, the arrival of notions of biodiversity protection in the late 1980s and the 1990s actually *strengthened* the existing regime of predatory resource extraction. “The frontier”, writes Tsing, “arrived in Kalimantan *after* environmentalism had already become established not just among activists, but also in government and corporate public relations” (ibid.:32). Fully aware of the environmental disaster in, among other places, the Amazon, Suharto’s New Order regime and its cronies proceeded with plundering Indonesia’s natural resources under the pretext of conserving them. Giant mining conglomerates were granted licences in the name of saving the land from the depredations of wildcat miners, yet everybody knew that legal and illegal prospectors were inseparable (ibid.:32; see also Collison 2002). Logging companies diversified to include profit-oriented reforestation in their operations; replanting clear-cut primary forest with fast-growing tree species that could later be ground to pulp, they were officially hailed as virtuous allies in the struggle to halt the disappearance of the forests. Plantation timber was certified as “ecology-friendly”, earning the companies new concessions in primary forest areas. To make matters still more grotesque (and profits for the loggers yet more extravagant), the production costs for plantation timber were shouldered by the state who financed pulp plantations through the national reforestation program. Indonesia’s most notorious lumber baron, Suharto family friend Bob Hasan, was made minister of the environment and – in the late 1990s – offered three environmental awards in the United States (ibid.:32; 36, note 6). Thus, rather than being an instantiation of Turner’s legendary and archetypical “savage” frontier where “civilization” meets its “barbarian” antithesis, Kalimantan in the late 1980s and 1990s represents the “salvage frontier” – the frontier in the age of environmentalism, where the destruction and salvation of resources, in Tsing’s words, are systematically mixed up and zones of limitless extraction overlap with zones of care and conservation (ibid.:32).

Short of reaching the standards of nihilistic opportunism set by the now-departed Suharto regime in Indonesia, many Southeast Asian governments nevertheless make rather shrewd use of novel environmentalist arguments for the pursuit of old policy obsessions. Prime among these are the tying-down of mobile populations (shifting cultivators and hunters-and-gatherers) and the replacement of “primitive” by “modern” and “rational” forms of resource use. In Thailand, Vietnam and Laos, the international concern for the protection of watershed areas serves quite clearly as a pretext for the forced resettlement of indigenous communities to locations where control by and dependence on the government is ensured (Rossi 1998, Laungaramsri 2000, Mi Dze 2005). Speaking on Vietnam’s policy towards the indigenous uplanders, the *montagnards*, Georges Rossi (1998:400) laments the fateful complicity of Western donors and a rather ruthless state government in a concerted assault on shifting cultivation, which is – against scientific evidence – still portrayed as the main culprit for deforestation:

“The recurrent [stereotyping] discourses about the *montagnards* (...) are a smokescreen that deflects attention from the true problems, which lie elsewhere. The pioneer fronts and commercial exploitation, conducted or tolerated by the authorities for political and financial reasons, are by far the leading causes of deforestation. The official declarations of the need to consider the environment are rather an expression of the wish to satisfy the fund-givers than a sign of a genuine conviction”. (...)

“The true reasons for the strange unanimity with which swidden cultivators have everywhere and through all times been denigrated, are not to be found in scientific reality. They, too, belong to the states’ interior politics. The currently-purported concern for the protection of the environment provides them with favorable circumstances for trying to achieve – in consent with international opinion and under the gaze of the funders – what the state has failed to achieve for a century: To fix in space, control and assimilate those who are eternally suspected of ‘irrational’ land use”.

Of all aspects of the new politics of the environment, the creation of nature reserves for the protection of local ecosystems or endangered animal species shows clearest the basic ambiguity of the present situation. Being a regulatory instrument for frontier spaces which characteristically suffer from a lack of sensible restrictions on opportunistic forms of resource-use, protected areas can make significant contributions to the goal of “taming” the frontier. However, as their defining interest is biodiversity rather than cultural diversity and minority rights, protected areas can turn into a weapon of exclusion, victimizing vulnerable indigenous frontier-dwellers who have come to be seen as hazards to more highly-priced natural capital. In that second scenario, rather than being domesticated, the frontier as a site of contention and often violent contradictions is infused with new life.

Indeed, orthodox protected area concepts – unchallenged until the 1980s – assume an irreducible antagonism between nature protection and human extractive and productive activity. According to the precepts of modernization, “traditional” societies jeopardize biodiversity and natural resources through their demographic growth and – so it is assumed – notorious “poverty”. Conventional notions of nature protection through nature reserves therefore include the resettlement of indigenous societies found within and around the proposed boundaries of a reserve. This strategy has performed very badly; disappointment with its results¹⁷⁷, together with the resistance of a growing number of indigenous groups affected by such policies, have since the 1980s led to the rise of a new, more utilitarian approach. This newer approach advocates protection through utilization, and tries

177 The experience of recent years has shown that without creating stakes for the local population, protected areas cannot be defended against encroachment and defilement (Gawora 1999:43f., quoted in Bürgin 2006:n.p.).



Photo 41: victims of wildlife protection: elderly San Bushmen complaining about their forced removal to New Xade, a resettlement camp across the western border of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, Botswana, 2005 (photo: Craig Timberg, Washington Post)

to accommodate what it describes as the legitimate interests and rights of resident populations. However, as Bürgin (2006:n.p.) observes, “the practice of establishing and managing protected areas is frequently oblivious of the standards of the revised protected areas concept, and is notably in Third World countries in most cases still following the ‘classical’ model”.

Developing nations’ refusal to adopt protected area concepts in their more enlightened version, and international environmentalist organizations’ failure to unequivocally cast their weight with the latter, is costing indigenous peoples dearly. In numerous cases, national parks which were recently established on indigenous lands have denied local rights to resources, “turning local people practically overnight from being hunters and cultivators into ‘poachers’ and ‘squatters’” (Colchester 1993b:78, citing examples from Indonesia and Sri Lanka). Thailand and Botswana offer especially glaring illustrations of how state-espoused environmentalism can degenerate into a strategy of displacement in the familiar frontier mould. Thailand and Botswana offer especially glaring illustrations of how state-espoused environmentalism can degenerate into a strategy of displacement in the familiar frontier mould.

Thailand’s national park system was largely put in place since the mid-1980s; these protected areas cover at present no less than 1/4 of the country’s land area. The doctrine followed by the administration is to free the parks of human habitation; most – if not all – of them coincide with or cut across indigenous territories. Resident indigenous groups either face outright relocation, or see their use of the forest and its resources severely curtailed by park authorities and the military

(Bürgin 2005:28f.). The expansion of protected areas in frontier areas of the country's northern part has led to the enclosure of hundreds of tribal communities. Although the enforcement of the laws that ban, among others, shifting cultivation within the protected areas, is uneven, depending on how remote the concerned villages are (Laungaramsri 2005:9), foresters in many areas crack down mercilessly on villagers who have chosen to ignore the new realities. Thus, for instance, in the case of the Doi Suthep-Pui National Park of Chiang Mai Province, patrols by forest guards and arrests of recalcitrant locals have become common since the park's establishment in 1981. In 1987, eight Karen women were arrested while planting their swidden fields. As one victim recalls:

“The head of the regional office (who came from Bangkok) wouldn't listen to our explanation that it was the Karen traditional practice of communal labour exchange in rice planting. He insisted that all of us worked for a businessman to clear the land. Until the head of the reforestation project¹⁷⁸ came to the forest station and saw that we were all women with small children. It was such a pathetic scene when he ordered each of us pay 250 baht¹⁷⁹ before releasing us” (Laungaramsri 2005:9).

Botswana, on its turn, has made headlines for its expulsion between 1997 and 2002 of over 2000 people – in their majority San Bushmen¹⁸⁰ – from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, a protected area of some 53,000 kilometers² in the middle of the country (*The Economist* 2006b). Claiming that the San's traditional hunting has given way to poaching for profit and livestock-rearing, the government has transformed the reserve – created by the British in the early 1960s for the explicit purpose of protecting both bushmen and wildlife (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2005b) – into a pure wildlife protection area. The relocated population was resettled in two desolate places outside the reserve where they received a few heads of livestock, a small plot of land and some money. The San say they were moved from their ancestral lands against their will, and raise charges of physical abuse and and torture against the park rangers who enforce what amounts to a *de facto* hunting ban for San in the reserve (*The Economist* 2006b). While one of their organizations filed a court case against the government, many ordinary San voted with their feet against their relocation: In spite of the threat of armed force from police and rangers (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2005e), an estimated 200 sneaked back into the reserve. Observers cited two reasons for the government's zeal to remove the San from the area: diamond prospecting, and the “civilizing” of a people whose lifeways are felt to tarnish the sparkling reputation of a swiftly-modernizing country (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2005b).

In late 2006, though, following an international media campaign at the behest of a local indigenous organisation, Botswana's High Court surprised the world by declaring the government's eviction of the San illegal (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 2006d). While the San who had fought the case celebrated the decision as a historical victory, the government chose to subvert the ruling by refusing to re-open capped boreholes in the Reserve, thus depriving the San of a realistic chance of returning to their former territories (Odysseos 2012:47). Somewhat confusingly, the High Court in 2010 dismissed a legal challenge against the government's obstruction of its verdict, finding that the latter had not, in fact, obliged the government to restore services in the Kalahari Game Reserve. Foreign critics of Botswana's political and legal system who had questioned the independence of the country's courts all along, found themselves vindicated. Yet, barely a year later, they were put in the wrong when, in what has so far been the latest twist in a protracted and complex legal battle, the Court

178 Reforestation projects are a regular component of park management practices in Thailand.

179 Corresponding to 7,5 US \$ at today's rate.

180 Since the 1990s, San organizations and their supporters have actually come to refer to their people as *Basarwa*, putting older labels that long enjoyed wide currency in anthropological circles out of use.

of Appeal overturned the 2010 High Court decision. The judges opined that the government's denial of water to the San amounted to „degrading treatment“ unworthy of a civilized country, as a consequence enabling the San to reuse a central borehole and allowing them to drill more wells in the Reserve when needed. They also stated that the San have the right to hunt and gather in the Reserve, and should not have to apply for permits to enter it (*ibid.*).

Despite their legal victory, however, the future of those San who have clung to their ancestral rights within the nature reserve, opting to return to the area, hangs in the balance. In ways typical of frontier governance, the Botswana government, turning a blind eye to the letter of the law, is continuing to make life for the returnees difficult. In flagrant violation of the 2010 ruling, the authorities would not issue permits for re-entry into the Reserve, while continuing to require hunting documents from San already within its confines (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, ed., 2013:426, *Think Africa Press* 2013). Human rights organisations tell of numerous cases of arrests and intimidation throughout 2012 (*ibid.*). As water is currently only available at one of the five re-established communities within the Reserve, returnees need to fetch it there or off the Reserve, in which case there is little or no guarantee that they will be allowed to return to their home communities (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, ed., 2013:426). The government, meanwhile, has made clear its priorities for the vast contested area. Although they had always denied that the San have to make way for mining, the authorities in 2007 have leased exploration rights to a diamond mine. Tourism being a second hoped-for revenue earner, one operator was granted a land lease in 2008. Visitors at its newly-built tourist lodge can now enjoy the luxury of a swimming pool, while the San struggle to access food and water (*Think Africa Press* 2013).

Benedict Kingsbury (1999:369) best summarizes the views of those in the scientific community who feel that the new politics of the environment are, in fact, old wine in new bottles – traditional frontier politics in disguise. Today, he states, indigenous communities may have as much cause to feel themselves “victims of ‘conservation’” as they had to perceive themselves “victims of development” before the onset of the “greening” of the frontier. If he and his fellow sceptics are correct, the subject of this book is still going to stay with us for some time.

11. SUMMARY

Through an analysis of the special spatial setting in which conflicts between indigenous communities and settlers take place, the frontier concept helps us understand their dynamics and underlying logic. Frontiers are spaces whose richness in natural resources is only matched by the paucity of administrative control to which they are subjected. Being areas of limited state presence, the capacities and, indeed, the willingness of the state to defuse tensions, enforce laws or restrain predatory forms of resource accumulation, are reduced. As a consequence, frontier-dwellers have maintained (in the case of indigenous peoples) or developed (in the case of settler society) unique cultures of dispute and collective action, informed by the primacy of direct forms of power (notably the threat or use of violence) at the fuzzy edges of state authority. States, however, are not just passive bystanders in frontier conflicts, but do actively contribute to them. Resorting to the “politics of nationalizing space” – the diffusion of national political institutions to minority areas, their subjection to schemes of cultural assimilation, and the re-direction of the areas’ natural resources to national priorities –, national governments jeopardize indigenous communities’ resource sovereignty and livelihoods and catalyze the often violent politicization of ethnicity among them. To further these ambitions, states have in many instances organized or tacitly supported frontier settlement by colonists, and often throw their weight behind the settler part when nativist uprisings challenge the colonists’ presence.

To render the frontier concept fertile for the study of contested state peripheries in the contemporary South, however, I first had to reclaim it for comparative analysis and uncouple it from exclusive association with the person of Frederick Jackson Turner, who had provided an account of the rise of American democracy and national character by pointing to the nation’s frontier heritage. I showed Turner’s narrative to be narrow in explanatory concern, strongly parochial, and hampered by his times’ ethnocentrist and social Darwinist views which let him cast the injustices visited upon Native Americans in terms of Manifest Destiny. Furthermore, Turner made only statements on a fraction of all frontier phenomena – those usually typologized as “frontiers of settlement” –, at the expense of two equally important other types – “frontiers of extraction” and “frontiers of control” which tend to follow different trajectories and entail different demographic scenarios. I concluded that on balance, Turner’s particular notion of the frontier may now be discredited, but the broader subject that he dealt with is not: If recast in less loaded terms, the frontier concept can serve us well for the study of *conquests* not only in colonial but also in present-day, postcolonial contexts.

Frontiers are, I contended, durable and resurgent phenomena and do not owe their existence to a particular world-historical constellation. They develop in cyclical rather than lineal fashion, “closing” and “(re-)opening” in response to a twin logic. First, they are made and unmade in keeping with the expansion and contraction of states and the force they can muster to control the fringes of their influence. Second, they flourish and disintegrate in tune with the cycles of exploitation of valuable resources, undertaken by actors who operate on their own or in loose association with the state. In their double capacity as, on one hand, loosely-controlled space suspended in tension between hegemonial state designs and indigenous autonomies, and, on the other hand, areas of high resource potential coveted by non-residents, frontiers are a continuing reality in the postcolonial world. I then set out to describe that reality in comparative terms, and delimit frontiers from more common modalities of state territoriality.

The diagnosis for the presence of a frontier, I argued, is better not tied to a single criterion, but depends on multiple variables. In the contemporary South, frontierness is indicated by the presence of a majority of the following eight characteristics: relatively low populations densities; absence of full-blown civil administration and routine state control; the pronounced presence of non-native private actors; the tendency to deny indigenous inhabitants' ownership claims to land and natural resources; the tendency to define indigenous inhabitants as standing outside the moral universe by symbolically associating them with "untamed nature"; wasteful and destructive forms of resource management by outsiders; exploitative/predatory economic relations across the ethnic boundary; and the state's failure to establish or credibly assert its claim to the monopoly of violence.

Apart from specifying the political, economic, social and cultural characteristics which distinguish present-day frontiers from core areas of state control, I tried to convey my understanding of how power works and influences the outcomes of conflicts at the fringes of state authority. Direct forms of power – economic wealth and direct, physical force – are complemented by "softer" modes of power, such as access to and control over the state apparatus, as well as the use of legitimizing discourses. While the first three favor the most powerful groups within settler society, recent developments in the ideological field have tended to improve the position of poor colonists and, even more pronounced, indigenous peoples. With regards to the latter, the ascension in the 1980s and 1990s of the notions of minority rights and environmental protection balanced out – to some extent – their economic weakness and exposure to violence by all sorts of outside actors. Insights into rival indigenous notions of power were added, reminding us that things at the margins must be seen through the prism of both the expanding, modernizing *and* the traditional local societies. These notions center, for instance, on the ability to harness cosmic forces through shamanic knowledge, and may, the general dominance of settler society notwithstanding, influence the outcome of inter-ethnic struggles.

Another concern in my exploration of comparative frontiers was the question of how to assess the role of the state and, correspondingly, that of the enterprising individual at the frontier. It remains a major challenge for critical frontier studies that we account for the parallelism of interests which so often unites the state and para-state actors (e.g. settlers), without completely collapsing the distinction between the two. Conversely, conventional frontier narratives posit that governments lack the means to reign in settlers, miners, loggers and other private intruders to the frontier, and cannot therefore be held accountable for ecological depredations and human rights violations that occur in the zone. Arguing that we should guard ourselves against blanket judgements, I present evidence that both implicates and absolves the state from responsibility in frontier developments.

Nevertheless, there is no way around stating that the state is by far the most powerful actor even where its control, as in the frontier zone, is incomplete. It patterns resident populations' economic activity, facilitates or contains population movements into the zone, and, very generally, sets the parameters for the political contests that take place there. More than anything else, it is state policies that *produce* frontiers. In my examination of the politics of "nationalizing space", the state politics that make frontiers, I suggested that these are geared towards taking full possession of a periphery inhabited by, at least in part, still-defiant populations and replete with natural resources waiting to be tapped. Depending on the concrete case, I argued, states try to magnify their presence by a three- or four-pronged strategy. First, local indigenous societies are made to connect with the national heartland through standardized institutions of governance and conflict-resolution through which patronage can be channelled and local leaders can be incorporated into national political circuits.

Second, local cultural forms, mores, values and lifestyles are being brought in line with or replaced by the respective forms, mores, values and lifestyles of the dominant, nation-bearing group(s). Underlying the (oftentimes forced) integration of ethnic “others” through cultural assimilation is the proposition – characteristic for the “cultural” variety of nationalism – that the basis for membership in the nation are a shared and uniform historical memory, common traditions, mores, religion (or, as in Suharto-time Indonesia, several world religions) and language. Third, the frontier’s natural wealth is being accessed and extracted to finance the nation’s development and provide extra profits to the national elite. Often with the blessing of national legislation, land and natural resources are wrought from the control of local indigenous societies and inserted into national and international commodity cycles. Fourth, settlers may be sent to the periphery to support the above-mentioned policy goals of state-building, nation-building and resource extraction. While land shortages and population pressure are in many cases objective facts that drive state programmes for frontier colonization, frontier settlement as a “solution” for agrarian problems can easily be combined with the purposes underlying the politics of “nationalizing space”. However, full-blown programmes of guided population transfer being very costly, all states do not sponsor colonization all the time, rendering this fourth policy element an optative rather than a standard choice of contemporary states of the developing South.

Making a detour to developmental economics, I next probed into what I had just characterized as – leg three of the politics of “nationalizing space” – the ubiquity of reckless resource exploitation at the frontier. Not all economies of developing countries of the South depend to the same extent on the zone’s supplies of natural resources and “free” land, and in recent years, a handful of countries have tried to base their growth on the development of manufactures and the service sector rather than on primary resources, notably agricultural commodities. My examination of the cases of Malaysia, Thailand and Botswana showed that while, indeed, the new employment opportunities in urban and peri-urban areas helped drain the pool of impoverished farmers who would otherwise have flocked to the frontier, mining for precious stones and logging for timber continued apace, because the established mining ventures and wood-processing industries had no intention to leave their massive capacities unutilized, and were, anyway, economically too important to be neglected. Thus, I had to conclude, while economic diversification may calm things at the settlement frontier, extractive frontiers tend to remain virulent. On top of this, Thailand and Botswana have opened what has been dubbed “salvage frontiers” in the name of biodiversity protection. Indigenous peoples in both these countries – notorious for their uncompromising stand vis-à-vis communities that happen to live in gazetted protected areas – have been forcibly resettled by park authorities and police, citing a basic incompatibility of human occupancy and species protection in park areas. Macro-economic decisions that reduce a country’s resource dependency have no bearing on this novel, global regime of territorial management and the conflicts it engenders on many national peripheries – one reason more, I contend, why the consequences of altered development priorities for indigenous frontier-dwelling populations should not be overestimated.

In order to provide as dense as possible a description of what I had so far said about contemporary frontiers in the developing world, I presented selected data from field material gathered between 2002 and 2005 at six different settlement frontiers in Western and Central Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bukidnon (Mindanao) and the Lower Kapuas Basin of West Kalimantan. In the case-study areas, indigenous locals and settler populations were embroiled in conflicts of highly varying intensity, had established ethnic boundaries of starkly differing porosity (or rigidity), and availed of, depending on the case, highly uneven power resources and legal standings. Examples (such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts) where the fault lines of a history of conquest and cultural and

religious division ran deep, rendering exchange between the indigenous and the settlers difficult, ranged alongside cases (such as Bukidnon) where relations did not appear to be predetermined by irrevocable antagonisms, allowing for the mutual transfer of goods, political forms and ideas, religious practices and social and material aspirations across the ethnic divide. Frontier theory refers to the former as “frontiers of exclusion” and the latter as “frontiers of inclusion”, but “frontiers of exclusion” have traditionally been the favorite object of scholarly treatment. Faced with a large scope of actual situations, I chose to highlight aspects of the anthropology of the settlement frontier that failed to correspond to the standard narrative.

Thus, firstly, indigenous people will not only be encountered as host populations, but may – often as victims of earlier displacements – also enter the scene as settler invaders. The sample contained two cases (Arunachal Pradesh and West Assam) where indigenous victims of frontier processes sought to rebuild their shattered lives elsewhere on tribal territories, leading to an interesting variation of the opposition between colonizers and colonized for which frontier orthodoxy does not prepare the student of migratory processes.

Next, rather than fending off change and resisting the advance of the state, as my strictly oppositional frontier model posits, indigenous people – usually leaders – may actively promote the integration of their communities in the expanding state. Where elections establish indigenous politicians in responsible positions in local government (as in West Kalimantan after 1998), or where the rules of the political order spell indigenous peoples’ permanent dominance in state assemblies and executive offices (as in Karbi Anglong [Central Assam] and Arunachal Pradesh), any idea that indigenous communities and the state exist independently from each other, as each other’s structural opposites, becomes untenable.

Thirdly, indigenous people’s capacities for violence may exceed those of settlers, indicating that a “lo, behold the poor tribal” rhetoric – frequently encountered in indigenous advocacy circles – may not adequately capture reality at the average settlement frontier. While there are, of course, many instances where the roles of victims and perpetrators are distributed in more familiar ways, the tribal periphery in Bukidnon in the mid-1970s, in West Kalimantan around the turn of the millenium and in Arunachal Pradesh in the early 2000s impressively demonstrated unbroken military potentials, manifesting themselves in everyday threats, thuggish behavior or – more dramatically – spasmodic violent uprisings against unwanted migrants. In the latter case (set in West Kalimantan), it was less the fact that a local indigenous society would stage a bloody upheaval – not in itself an indicator of politico-military power – which was puzzling, but the curious circumstance that the killings were neither properly investigated, nor were the killers (mostly indigenous) ever brought to justice.

Forth, and finally, both settlers and indigenous peoples are often kept from acting in unison by their internal divisions and the differences in interest that go with them. Settler societies and indigenous peoples are in themselves divided by class and (often) ethnic as well as (sometimes) religious differences, inhibiting their acting as “strategic groups”. While settler society reproduces the stratification – familiar from the agricultural core areas – between large landowners and homesteaders or tenants, indigenous societies show rifts between commoners and a political elite that may or may not base its preeminence on traditional forms of legitimation. A common thread that ran through all accounts was, in fact, the pivotal role of native leaders brokering land, legitimacy and political submission, engaged in the business of erecting the state in the midst of stateless societies. Thus, for example, Matigsalug *datus*, after having been pardoned by the

Philippine president following their 1975 slaying of settlers, guaranteed their followers' loyalty to the authoritarian government and their enmity towards its communist challengers, while Nishi, Mishmi, Khamti and Adi politicians in Arunachal Pradesh are securing their peoples' allegiance to the Indian state in exchange for the rents accruing to the members of the local parliament, plus the advantages from being the first to register community land as private property on the emerging land market in the state. Members from the lower strata of settler society, on the other hand, as well as migrants from certain ethnic groups in its midst, may be more easily admitted into (or near) indigenous communities, and on their part, are often amenable to strategic alliances with indigenous peoples. Upon close inspection, thus, the two antagonistic clusters are connected by pathways of dependency, exchange and conditional support that the rhetorics of ethnic struggle, highlighting boundaries and mutually-exclusive interests, tend to conceal.

My analysis of the settlement frontier then turned to the examination of three variables that influence the quality of interethnic relations in migration-affected environments, and may explain why the cohabitation of settlers and indigenous peoples is more conflictive and violence-prone in some cases than in others. The first of these, the political and legal frameworks regulating the interaction between the contending groups, were scrutinized based on the manner in which they allowed or disallowed frontier migration by settlers, and allocated access to a) land and natural resources, and b) the political institutions of the state. The virulence of conflicts at postcolonial settlement frontiers in the developing South is crucially determined by the tension between the freedom of movement which modern constitutional thought bestows on a nation's citizens, and the desire of many indigenous communities to delimit the flow of land-hungry colonists to their domains. On colonial precedents, however, states may also define indigenous territories as no-go areas. Where this is the case, the likelihood of land conflicts and indigenous displacement is, at least in theory, significantly reduced. With regard to land policies, a matter of similar importance is whether the law forces indigenous people to formalize their land claims as individuals – facilitating land transfers across the ethnic boundary –, or if it allows for communal titles that best protect the group's land base.

I identified four different types of regulatory regimes that, each in its own way, influence migration flows to the frontier and have a bearing on the strategies that settlers resort to in colonization. Under type one, "integrated displacement", laws facilitate colonist intrusion or work in the colonists' favor by either creating a level legal ground or else establishing laws that directly favor encroaching outsiders, thereby bolstering and reinforcing the ethnic hierarchy of the frontier. The expansion and advance of the settlement frontier is supported by the absence of individual *and* collective possessory land rights of any substance on the part of indigenous frontier-dwellers, and the drifting of colonists to the frontier is not impeded. In terms of decision-making powers, opportunities for participation in political institutions lack.

Under the second type of regime, "protective pretense", there is token recognition of the need for special protection on behalf of indigenous communities and their domains. On an individual basis, indigenous land may be protected by spatial plans that prohibit the non-indigenous from settling in indigenous "blocks" and prohibit the alienation of land in such blocks, but the regulations are not embedded in a broader policy context, remain unimplemented, and the implementing authorities are unconcerned about this fact.

Under type three, "partial empowerment", legal controls on land alienation are part of a more

comprehensive policy of protective discrimination that includes self-government or a weaker form of devolution of decision-making powers to indigenous communities. In the form of substantially large territories dominated by the beneficiary groups, secure tenure rights are granted to indigenous communities, indigenous forms of land use tolerated or even prioritized over those of outside actors, and a substantial presence of indigenous people established in local government – usually by replacing existing legislative and executive institutions with alternative forms, exclusively or predominantly controlled by indigenous people. At least in theory, “partial empowerment” contributes to levelling the arenas of bureaucratic and legal struggle and rendering frontier contests for resource control more open-ended.

Under type four, the “citizen-denizen” constellation, law establishes a reverse dominance hierarchy with indigenous communities at the top, disempowering the migrant element. Indigenous control of land and political affairs rests on exclusionary immigration laws, the recognition and the legal safeguarding of communal territories and regulations that withhold political rights from non-indigenous inhabitants of the respective areas. A regime of protective discrimination in favor of indigenous locals is in place that confers privileges on those having “tribal” status, while outsiders are turned into “denizens”, i.e. citizens with restricted rights that do not grant them legal parity with local “sons of the soil”.

The empirical data that I presented, fitted to these four classes of politico-legal frameworks, showed that policies, laws and institutions *do* matter. They constitute factors that either reinforce or weaken the respective position of indigenous peoples and settlers in frontier contests. Very broadly, they have the capacity to either slow down or hasten the longer-term advance of the settlement frontier, but the way they work in actual practice, none of them will bring it to a halt. Thus, in the recorded instances of “integrated displacement” where ethnic clientelism is given free reign and the bureaucratic apparatus can throw its weight behind those that it sees as assisting it in “nationalizing space”, it is decidedly easier for colonists to occupy and control indigenous land than it is under the more developed legal orders. Conversely, the legal obstacles that the “citizen-denizen” constellation in our sample has put in the way of settler intrusion over several decennia were instrumental in keeping land conflicts minimal so far, and the present effort at dismantling protective legislation in the respective frontier setting will certainly reflect itself in raised levels of resource-based contention a few years from now. “Partial empowerment”, too, holds promises of tenurial security and political participation real enough to be violently claimed by those who are excluded from its benefits. Where, for instance, Autonomous District Councils – a Northeast Indian specialty – or collective CADC titles – a Philippine variety – are in place, settlers find the legal odds stacked against them in ways that make them much more dependent on protection from high places, indigenous collaboration, or both.

However, frontier theory correctly predicts that statutory law is of limited relevance at the far ends of effective state control. Where the Leviathan is unable (or unwilling) to ensure implementation of its programmes and policies, a mere analysis of state policy frameworks will not produce an adequate understanding of the rules that guide the encounter between competing actor groups. Despite the fact that the balance of power between migrants and indigenous locals is reversed in “citizen-denizen” constellations, and evened out under “partial empowerment”, the pragmatics of power and rule at the frontier help secure outcomes that are not much different from those that characterize “integrated displacement”. Denizen settlers have managed to establish themselves in great numbers in West and Central Assamese Autonomous Districts (not to mention the “Tribal

Blocks and Belts”), and they have infiltrated the “Inner Line” – beyond which no non-native settlement is allowed – to an extent which makes a parody of the law. Everywhere, colonists have become integrated into the economy of the region in substantial, but informal ways (subsistence and export production on land that they control *de facto* or *de jure*, business and retailing by virtue of farmed-out business licenses, etc.). Land transfer across the ethnic boundary is substantial, silently tolerated by state agents, and aided not only by the impoverishment of many indigenous smallholders (who have to mortgage their land), but also by the emergence of an indigenous class of large landowners who sell clan land or act as strawmen for denizen cultivators. Corruption only goes halfway in explaining civil servants’ laxity in enforcing legal restrictions against outside settlement. The frontier being the site of an ongoing process of state- and nation-building, and migrants being structural allies of the expanding state (“territorial compromise”), bureaucrats’ ignoring of immigration restrictions also conforms to the “high politics” of “nationalizing space”.

The second variable examined was closely related with the first. State policies for frontier colonization give us the state-sponsored migrant, who, according to the theoretical literature, tends to be more closely associated with nativist protest and violence than his “spontaneous” cousin. In contrast to unassisted colonization, state-sponsored frontier migration implants large numbers of settlers in short spans of time, leading to high and highly visible migrant concentrations, and painful levels of land alienation for local communities in the target areas; as a result, rejection of state-sponsored migrants by local indigenous communities will be more likely than of spontaneous colonists. The proposition that these different migrant categories elicit different responses from the local population was not, in general, corroborated by our case study data. Only in two out of five cases were state-sponsored migrants less wanted by their hosts than spontaneous ones, in all others, different criteria than the question of government support determined the local population’s response. In the case that most clearly contradicted the proposition, nativist violence singled out the spontaneous colonists, whom the local population described as far more troublesome than the state-sponsored transmigrants. The respective migrant group’s fierce individualism and unpliant nature which had brought them into conflict with the locals had also made them unsuited for inclusion in state programmes. The case at hand, in fact, would allow the opposite conclusion, that the properties of spontaneous migration are more conducive to strife than those of state-sponsored colonization.

While in their majority, the indigenous host societies in our study sample did not stress the distinction between government-sponsored and spontaneous migrants, they did discern between settlers that had arrived early in the colonization process and those that came later. In so doing, they confirmed the conviction – in evidence in the literature on interethnic relations at settlement frontiers past and present – that the latter tend to differ relative to the time depth of the presence of a settler group in the area. Being few and far between, pioneer settlers depend for their very survival on amicable relations with their indigenous hosts, and cannot afford to show them the cultural and racial depreciation often exhibited by later settler arrivals. To the extent that colonists gain the upper hand numerically, no longer needing support from the locals, the “frontier of inclusion”, characteristic for the early stages of colonization, mutates into one of “exclusion”, and interethnic relations tend to take on an antagonistic and confrontational hue. In contrast to the first two variables we tested, the empirical support for proposition three was impressive. In three cases, early settlers were not only allowed to live unobstructed by the local population, but were welcomed and their presence actively supported, the most spectacular case being the Matigsalug

Manobo's "adoption" of over forty pioneer families as trailblazers for economic progress.

Back from visiting the settlement frontier, I expressed my wish for a world without frontiers. Being places of suffering, exploitation and violence, they will, or so I hope, yield one day to zones of *regularized* state control. However, rather than through a catastrophic process in which indigenous peoples are extinguished or culturally obliterated, the elimination of the world's frontiers will have to be brought about through legislating the efficient protection of indigenous communities. Provisions for territorial autonomy, for instance, are a privileged means to that end. Frontiers will only wither away, I concluded, if the *de-facto autonomy* of not-yet encapsulated groups which is integral to the frontier's definition is replaced by the *negotiated autonomy* of groups which have, by force of an unprecedented break with the policies of the past, been recognized as a true part of the nation's patrimony.

In the concluding chapter, I examined the possibility that just such a major political change has actually occurred recently, leading to the silent, serial expiry of frontiers all over the globe. Since the beginning of the 1980s, and in accelerated form after 1989, a wave of democratic transitions and the ascendancy of the discourses of nature conservation and human and minority rights have resulted in a noticeable shift in power relations between indigenous people and outsiders on many state peripheries, guaranteeing that frontier processes do no longer continue in an untrammelled manner. Many states have adopted a more relaxed view of cultural diversity at their margins, and autonomy statutes for ethnic minorities have become more. At the same time, racist representations of indigenous people as lesser kinds of humans have been reported to be on the wane. And finally, the paradigmatic shift in development theory from modernization to conservation and sustainable development led to a re-appreciation of indigenous modes of production and the lifeways associated with them, and prompted the creation of protected areas from which indigenous communities – or so it is said – stand to benefit, as well.

Having layed out the arguments of the proponents of the recent "taming" of the frontier, I turned to those scholarly voices who have stressed continuities rather than changes in frontier management. Among the evidence that they cite is the continued importance of the calls of *Realpolitik* and the promise of high economic growth rates among many post-authoritarian politicians, indigenous peoples' sobering experiences with some of the hallmarks of democratic reform (such as decentralization), the rise to prominence of China and other ecologically-irreverent eastern powers, and widespread environmentalist mimikry among most governments. Furthermore, a plausible claim has been made that the new ecological paradigm may have *strengthened* rather than weakened existing regimes of predatory resource extraction. By continuing to outlaw traditional indigenous livelihood systems and displacing people to make room for national parks, many countries across the globe give the lie to the notion of a new dawn for the erstwhile victims of frontier expansion. Maybe, therefore, the fact that we are living in an age of democracy, human rights and environmental protection does not make all that much of a difference for people and things at the margins of the state. It may not be the silliest idea, after all, to assume that the frontier's past is at the same time also its present and its future.

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