



# Reconfiguring Frontier Spaces: Territorialization and Resource Control

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**Summary.** — The expansion of capitalism produces contests over the definition and control of resources. On a global scale, new patterns of resource exploration, extraction, and commodification create new territories. This takes place within a dynamic of frontiers and territorialization. Frontier dynamics dissolve existing social orders—property systems, political jurisdictions, rights, and social contracts—whereas territorialization is shorthand for all the dynamics that establish them and re-order space anew. Frontier moments offer new opportunities, and old social contracts give way to struggles over new ones. As new types of resource commodification emerge, institutional orders are sometimes undermined or erased, and sometimes reinterpreted, reinvented, and recycled. New property regimes, new forms of authority, and the attendant struggles for legitimacy over the ability to define proper uses and users follow frontier moments. The drawing of borders and the creation of orders around new resources profoundly rework patterns of authority and institutional architectures. We argue that the territorialization of resource control is a set of processes that precedes legitimacy and authority, fundamentally challenging and replacing existing patterns of spatial control, authority, and institutional orders. It is dynamics of this sort that the articles in this collection explore: the outcomes produced in the frontier space, the kinds of authority that emerge through control over space and the people in it, and the battles for legitimacy that this entails. This collection explores the emergence of frontier spaces, arguing that these are transitional, liminal spaces in which existing regimes of resource control are suspended, making way for new ones. © 2017 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The frontier did not vanish when the North American settlers arrived at the Pacific coast or penetrated the Rockies, or when Argentinian and Chilean settlers reached the Tierra del Fuego. Entailed in these classic frontiers of seemingly linear movements in space and time now relegated to a distant past are core issues that are today more relevant than ever: the commodification of nature, the scramble for land and resources, the imaginaries of self and others, the erasure of existing orders, and the establishment of new patterns of governance and regimes of regulation. While the Western frontier ended in the late 1890s, frontier spaces continue to mushroom across the globe. Following a key insight from the emerging scholarship on resource frontiers, we note that frontiers represent, most basically, the discovery or invention of new resources (Barney, 2009; Eilenberg, 2014; Kelly & Peluso, 2015; Tsing, 2003). They are novel configurations of the relationship between natural resources and institutional orders that happen at particular moments in particular places. This collection explores the emergence of frontier spaces, arguing that these are transitional, liminal spaces in which existing regimes of resource control are suspended. A frontier is not space itself. It is something that happens *in* and *to* space. Frontiers *take* place. Literally.

Frontier dynamics are intimately linked to their seeming opposite: territorialization. Frontier dynamics dissolve existing social orders—property systems, political jurisdictions, rights, and social contracts—whereas territorialization is shorthand for all the dynamics that establish them and re-order space anew. Frontiers and territorialization seem to us to be co-constitutive. We understand territorialization as a strategy of using bounded spaces for particular outcomes, a resource control strategy (Vandergeest & Peluso, 1995) that involves the classification of particular areas in order to regulate people and resources (Sack, 1986). In what follows we discuss the concrete maneuvers to secure resource control by governing access, policing boundaries, and defining space.

Understanding space in this perspective, we focus on the discursive, political, and physical production of frontiers as “vacant”, “ungoverned”, “natural”, or “uninhabited” spaces that makes way for acts of territorialization. Territorialization, in turn, is the creation of systems of resource control,—rights, authorities, jurisdictions, and their spatial representations. However, when new resources are discovered or come within reach, new acts of frontier making are brought to bear to undo established territorial orders. This sequence is, in principle, cyclical: frontier–territorialization–frontier–territorialization. . .

The question of spatial control in relation to the commodification of resources has generated two largely separate scholarly debates. Recent debates on the frontier center around Turner’s (1921) description of the American West as a wilderness to be colonized. In a thoughtful discussion of the Amazonian frontier, Cleary (1993) notes that the frontier is the absorption of peripheral regions by an expanding capitalism. This is a political economy perspective that depicts capitalist advancement in space, but has little to say about

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the territorial dynamics that shape these spaces. Moreover, such modernist understandings of progress imply directionality from undeveloped to developed spaces. More recently, Geiger's work on the Amazon (Geiger, 2008) argues that rather than a distinction between civilized and mastered, on the one hand, and wild and unowned, on the other, we are dealing with a zone of destruction of property systems, political structures, social relations, and life-worlds to make way for new ways of resource extraction. Some contributions have explored the spatial contours of the frontier, arguing against the notion of a borderline and for more subtle ideas of frontiers as contact zones and spheres of friction (Anzaldúa, 1987; Tsing, 2005, 2015) or relational spaces (Barney, 2009). Others still focus on the unmaking by frontiersmen of different stripes: companies, militias, NGOs, and governments (Korf & Raeymaekers, 2013).

In contrast, the debate on territorialization focuses on a range of actions deployed to control and consolidate space and thereby its resources and people (Sack, 1986). A number of perspectives have animated the literature on territorialization. Some have focused on external territorialization and how the spatial extent of sovereignty has developed (Elden, 2013; Sassen, 2006). Others have focused more on how modern states turn to territorial strategies of control inside national boundaries (Elden, 2009; Vandergeest & Peluso, 1995). Both external and internal perspectives seem to privilege states as territorializing agents, and the very distinction between inside and outside bespeaks "state territory" as one of the most successful territorializations of space and our conception of it (Walker, 1993). More recently, there is growing attention to the territorializing capabilities of non-state actors and organizations (Corson, 2011; Eilenberg, 2012; Gayer, 2014; Lund & Rachman, 2016; Ng'weno, 2007; Peluso, 2005, 2009; Raeymaekers, 2014; Suykens, 2013). Here there is a productive convergence with the attempts at reformulating ideas about the frontier that we have detailed above. Although not always acknowledged explicitly, such attempts at complicating configurations of space harken back to the debates on the relationality of space (see Jessop, Brenner, & Jones, 2008). We believe that while both perspectives are very useful, each of them either over-emphasizes or underplays the destructive and constructive elements of territorial resource control. We therefore want to engage the literatures and adopt a bi-focal perspective, giving both dynamics equal attention. As Moore succinctly suggests: "The making of rules and social and symbolic order is a human industry matched only by the manipulation, circumvention, remaking, replacing, and unmaking of rules and symbols in which people seem almost equally engaged" (1978, p. 1). We want to analyze this constant process of formation and erosion of a social order of property rights, socio-legal identity, and political institutions in a *spatial* perspective. It is a dynamic where governing institutions build, maintain, or lose their authority, and people become, or disappear as, enfranchised rights subjects, and where nature is transformed into resources and commodities in the process.

Collectively, this issue pursues a double argument related to the frontier spaces: first, we argue that territorialization establishes authority (rather than "those with authority can territorialize"); hence, we are interested in how the ability to produce borders can create state or state-like entities, and how other institutions are destroyed in the process. In other words, we investigate how those who can draw the line on the map assume jurisdiction (Lefebvre, 2015); how those who can define citizenship and rights assume authority; how those who can define and enforce rights to resources effectively rule (Lund, 2016).

The ambition, therefore, is not to take political and territorial authorities as given, but rather to examine how they come about. Rather than settled facts, they are facts to settle. And our focus on frontier moments—when existing regimes of resource control are suspended—allows us to identify just how this happens. As competing claims to territories follow the emergence of new resources, we see how social, political, and legal orders are rearranged in these transitional spaces.

Second, we propose to look at resource frontiers as dynamics of spatial control that fundamentally challenge existing institutional arrangements in a non-linear fashion. As new types of resource commodification emerge, institutional orders are sometimes undermined or erased outright, and sometimes "taken apart" and then reinterpreted, reinvented, and recycled. In resource frontiers the *ideas* of what constitutes the nature of resources, as well as the *rules* that govern their use and control, are reworked. The institutional debris of obsolete and recovered fragments of rules, institutions, forms of organization, and artifacts combine to shape and territorialize space. Like Stoler (2013, p. 3), we are concerned with how earlier formations "have left their bold-faced or subtle traces [...] in which contemporary inequities work their way through". Unlike Stoler, on the other hand, we are not concerned with "imperial tangibilities", but direct our attention to the vernacular political forms that constitute emergent institutions and struggles over legitimate rule. Debris is not useless rubble, but rather elements gleaned from past orders refitted in the improvised recombinant continuity of affairs. The "rediscovery" of earthpriests in northern Ghana as territorial stewards (Lund, 2008), and the reconfiguration of water governance in highland Peru (Rasmussen, 2015) are both examples of an imaginative scavenging and reanimation of rules and authorities. It is therefore worth looking at some of the concrete imaginative ways in which different actors attempt to assert spatial control.

This double argument relates to the ways in which the mushrooming of frontier spaces transforms the nature of resources in fundamental ways. Frontier spaces are intimately connected to commodification through processes of dispossession involving enclosures, land grabbing, and other forms of primitive accumulation. Primitive accumulation analyzed by Marx through the enclosures in eighteenth-century England is the archetypal version of the broader accumulation by dispossession at different scales around the globe through history (Harvey, 2005; Marx, 1978; Neeson, 1993; Thompson, 1963, 1975, 1993). Accumulation by dispossession has since taken many forms with variation from place to place. New technologies such as GMO related to soy production (Hecht, 2005) or chemical procedures for extracting minerals (Bury, 2015) ensure that particular geographical spaces can host recurrent frontier moments of capitalist extraction. Yet, despite mutating forms of dispossession, the replacement of systems of knowledge, the undoing of the commons, the valorization of nature, and its formalization into the uniform, legible commodification of resources seem to be ubiquitous features (Alden Wily, 2012; Kelly, 2011; Kelly & Peluso, 2015; Scott, 1998).

Frontiers are described as emerging in such different locations as oil-palm plantations or cattle ranches in Amazonia (Browder *et al.*, 2008; Walker *et al.*, 2009) and Indonesia (Peluso & Lund, 2011), in the oil-rich Niger Delta (Watts, 2004a, 2008), and even in zones of oil fracking in the US (Willow & Wylie, 2014). Hence, rather than being simply related to the spatial expansion of civilization, the frontier and territorialization dynamics are part and parcel of resource commodification and emerging property regimes. The commodification of resources articulates these spaces with

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