

**Untaming the Frontier
in Anthropology, Archaeology,
and History**

Edited by Bradley J. Parker and Lars Rodseth

The University of Arizona Press
Tucson

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⊗ This book is printed on acid-free, archival-quality paper.
Manufactured in the United States of America
10 09 08 07 06 05 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Untaming the frontier in anthropology, archaeology, and history / edited by
Bradley J. Parker and Lars Rodseth.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8165-2452-5 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-8165-2452-1 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Ethnology—Philosophy. 2. Archaeology—Philosophy. 3. World history.

4. Economic history. 5. Human beings—Migrations.

I. Parker, Bradley J., 1962– II. Rodseth, Lars, 1959–

GN345.U68 2005

305.8'001—dc22

2005004938

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Introduction

Theoretical Considerations in the Study of Frontiers

Lars Rodseth and Bradley J. Parker

The aim of this book is to open an interdisciplinary debate about the processes of frontier history in a variety of cultural contexts. We are not the first to call for such a debate. Since the 1950s, there have been several concerted attempts by historians and social scientists to compare frontiers around the world (Wyman and Kroeber 1957; Hartz 1964; Miller and Steffen 1977; Lamar and Thompson 1981). Despite these efforts, however, the study of frontiers is still closely associated with one specific historical context—the American West in the nineteenth century—and with one specific school of historiography—the American tradition that flows from the work of Frederick Jackson Turner (1861–1932). As a result, the very concept of the frontier is widely considered to be hackneyed and ethnocentric, bound up with Victorian notions of manifest destiny and rugged individualism (e.g., Limerick 1987, 1991; Worster 1987, 1991). The frontier, it would seem, has been “tamed”—turned to the purposes of a familiar ideology and thus relieved of its power to excite the scholarly imagination.

Yet this situation is changing. The frontier is being extricated from the Turnerian tradition, so that frontier phenomena are increasingly studied across space, time, and academic disciplines (Kolodny 1992; Schlegel 1992; Eaton 1993; Aron 1994; Donnan and Wilson 1994, 1999; Klein 1996, 1997; Guy and Sheridan 1998; Adelman and Aron 1999; Parker 2002). Here we attempt to advance this process, “untaming” the frontier as an analytic concept and releasing it in a range of unfamiliar settings. Throughout history, we argue, societies have been formed and transformed in relation to their frontiers, and no one historical case, such

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as that of the American West, represents the normal or typical frontier pattern. Only an adventurous, comparative approach, no longer tethered to a specific context or tradition, is likely to reveal the full range of variation, as well as the recurring patterns, in frontier history. Only this kind of approach, furthermore, can begin to integrate frontier studies with the burgeoning research on borders, diasporas, and contact zones—those “transnational fields” in which peoples, commodities, and cultural ideas tend to mingle and recombine (e.g., Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1996; Clifford 1997; Donnan and Wilson 1999). Such transnational phenomena are not unique to the present age but must be understood as extensions of frontier processes that have developed over hundreds or even thousands of years (Abu-Lughod 1989; Frank and Gills 1993).

In *Europe and the People Without History*, Eric Wolf argued that what is usually called “a culture” is “better seen as a series of processes that construct, reconstruct, and dismantle cultural materials, in response to identifiable determinants” (1982:387). We see the frontier in this way—as an extreme case, in fact, of the very processes that Wolf describes. Especially on the frontier, we expect “the rough-and-tumble of social interaction” in which “groups are known to exploit the ambiguities of inherited forms, to impart new evaluations or valences to them, to borrow forms more expressive of their interests, or to create wholly new forms to answer to changed circumstances” (Wolf 1982:387). In the chapters that follow, we encounter many examples of the frontier as a shifting zone of innovation and recombination, through which cultural materials from many sources have been unpredictably channeled and transformed.

At the same time, we encounter certain recurring processes of frontier history, processes general enough to provide a basis for world-historical comparison. These include (1) the emergence of the frontier in relation to a “center” or “core area,” usually a densely populated region of concentrated wealth and political power, (2) the mutually structuring interactions between frontier and core area, and (3) the development of social exchange, merger, or conflict between previously separate populations brought together on the frontier. Historical processes of this kind cannot be understood a priori. They must await the analysis of empirical evidence from many intensively studied cases. Before turning, however, to the cases at hand, let us examine in more detail the modern history of ideas about frontiers.

In the United States, the cultural and historical significance of frontiers has been debated for more than a century. Beginning with Turner’s address to the American Historical Association in 1893, variations on his “frontier thesis” have had a profound effect on the way we think about peoples, places, and cultural transformations (Turner 1920, 1938b). In arguing that American society and national character were not just extensions of European civilization but products of the frontier experience, Turner shifted the focus of inquiry from the “center” to the “periphery,” from Western Europe to the American West.

The usual interpretation of Turner’s thesis is based on one, oft-quoted passage: “The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development” (Turner 1938b:185–86). Taken by itself, this sentence would seem to imply that the frontier was an uninhabited wilderness waiting to be entered for the first time. Yet this oversimplifies Turner’s view of the West, which included “Indian country” (Cronon 2002; Klein 1996, 1997). In fact, in his master’s thesis (1889) and doctoral dissertation (1938a [1891]), Turner had focused on European exploitation of the natives of Wisconsin through the fur trade and the institution of the trading post. Even in the 1893 address, his use of the term “frontier” was ambiguous, suggesting a boundary between civilization and *savagery*, as well as that between civilization and wilderness. What is clear is that many of Turner’s followers came to emphasize the freedom and self-reliance of white frontiersmen in a rugged, “natural” landscape as definitive traits of the American character (Klein 1996:185–187).

Reactions to the frontier thesis have varied widely over the past century (for recent reviews, see Limerick 1994, 1995; Klein 1996, 1997). Through the 1940s, many historians followed Turner’s approach in their interpretations of U.S. history (e.g., Paxson 1924; Branch 1930; Billington 1949). Webb (1952) extended Turner’s argument and applied it to the global history of European expansion (see also Lattimore 1962; McNeill 1964, 1992). Others set out to conduct systematic comparisons of frontiers in various regions of the world (Wyman and Kroeber 1957; Hartz 1964; Miller and Steffen 1977; Lamar and Thompson 1981).

By mid-century, the frontier thesis confronted mounting skepticism among American historians, but many still defended some version of

Turner's approach (e.g., Hofstadter and Lipset 1968; Putnam 1976; Billington 1977). Since 1980, however, his thesis has been inundated with criticisms flowing from the so-called New Western History (e.g., Limerick 1987; Worster 1987; Malone 1989; Limerick, Milner, and Rankin 1991). In some circles, Turner's legacy was so stigmatized that "frontier" had become simply the "F" word (Klein 1996). Yet even the New Western History owes a debt to Turner, insofar as it represents a reaction, in part, to the frontier thesis. Whatever its shortcomings, Turner's argument continues to serve as a heuristic for fruitful research in several disciplines (e.g., Faragher 1994; Jacobs 1994; Anderson 1996; Elton 1996; Cayton and Teute 1998; Wilson and Donnan 1998; Adelman and Aron 1999; Rösler and Wendl 1999).

Independently of the Turnerian tradition, European historians and geographers also took up the study of frontiers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Ratzel 1897; Curzon 1907; Fawcett 1918; Febvre 1928). For these scholars, a frontier was usually an imperial boundary. It was not so much an open wilderness fostering rugged individualism, as Turner and his followers might imagine, but a zone of contested political control that would have to be surveyed, mapped, and perhaps invaded and occupied before proper borders could be drawn. As Curzon (1907:5) observed, "Wars of religion, of alliances, of rebellion, of aggrandisement, of dynastic intrigue or ambition" were now being "replaced by frontier wars." The spread of modern imperialism and nationalism, which tended to redraw the political map with each new war of conquest or consolidation, helped to focus scholarly attention on the boundaries that had been traditionally claimed by various powers and peoples.

The study of such boundaries could be easily extended into the distant past. Fortifications such as Hadrian's Wall and other remains of imperial frontiers have been of great interest to classical historians and archaeologists. Some of the major works in Roman history and archaeology do in fact focus on frontiers (Luttwak 1976; Dyson 1985; Isaac 1990; Whitaker 1994; Elton 1996). At the same time, such studies have received surprisingly little attention beyond the specialized field of classical history. Disciplinary and departmental boundaries have hindered a systematic integration of insights gleaned from the Roman case with more general research in archaeology and world history.

Anthropologists have been drawn to the study of frontiers through

their interest in diffusion, on the one hand, and ethnicity, on the other. Diffusion, the "borrowing" or "flow" of cultural materials from one population to another, was a central concern of anthropologists in the early twentieth century (Lowie 1937:128–195; Stocking 1995:179–232). By the 1920s, attention was beginning to focus on the power relations that framed the process of diffusion—what Pitt-Rivers called *The Clash of Culture and the Contact of Races* (1927). In the case of North America, anthropologists such as MacLeod (1928) and Lesser (1933) interpreted White-Indian relations not as a civilizing process but as a history of conquest and colonial domination.

Such cultural critique soon gave way to the study of "acculturation," defined by Redfield et al. (1936:149) as "phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact." In this sense, acculturation may take place in a wide range of settings, including densely populated core areas, but it is often a frontier process. The most prominent works on the subject tended to portray acculturation as a rather innocuous process of cultural exchange (e.g., Herskovits 1938; Linton 1940). Like Turner's thesis, however, early models of acculturation would come under intense criticism for their lack of emphasis on power inequalities between colonizing and indigenous groups. By the 1970s, anthropologists such as Talal Asad (1973) and Eric Wolf (1982) had begun to recast the study of acculturation in terms of colonial and capitalist domination over the last five hundred years.

Meanwhile, another avenue toward frontier history was being explored by Fredrik Barth and other ethnographers working in zones of contact between ethnic groups. In his introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969), Barth argued that interaction between ethnically distinct populations does not lead to the dilution or erasure of ethnic boundaries. In fact, such interaction tends to solidify or reinforce ethnic differences as the groups involved strive to maintain identities in a context of cultural exchange and economic interdependence. Instead of merely documenting the traits of various ethnic groups, Barth's approach focused attention on the boundaries between groups and raised the question of how such boundaries are maintained despite the flow of cultural materials across them (see also Cole and Wolf 1974). In the wake of Barth's research, a number of anthropologists and archaeologists began to explore how ethnic identities are reflected in the patterning of material culture (e.g., Wobst 1977; Hodder 1978, 1982; Wiessner 1983; Conkey and Hastorf 1990).

Most anthropologists and other social scientists have come to agree with Barth (1969) that culture is not some inert “stuff” contained within a static boundary, but a dynamic repertoire for social action. Much of this action, furthermore, is to be found on frontiers and other “contact zones” between social groups (Clifford 1997). From this perspective, some old arguments about the American West may well take on a new significance: “Set ‘frontier’ beside ‘culture’ and ‘ethnicity,’ as scholars have done across the last century, and we may reclaim the ‘F’ word and perhaps return western history to the continental and global stages” (Klein 1996:183).

At the same time, we would argue, local communities must be studied in their specific social and historical contexts as a step toward the understanding of regional and world-historical phenomena. This is the approach taken by the contributors to this volume, who all seek to illuminate large-scale dynamics through the study of local processes.

Disciplinary Frontiers

Scholarly discussions of frontiers have tended to create their own, intellectual frontiers, as each discipline has held fast to its traditional discourse on the topic. Only rarely has frontier research in one field been informed by the same kind of research in another. This book attempts to bridge such disciplinary divides by bringing together scholars from history, archaeology, and anthropology to investigate specific frontier situations and, in doing so, highlight some general patterns in frontier history.

Such interdisciplinary conversations are often difficult to sustain because they tend to engender considerable conceptual and methodological problems. Diverse sources, techniques, aims, and theoretical frameworks can make for an uneasy mix rather than a true synthesis of perspectives. To develop an analytical approach that can be used in a variety of disciplines and schools of thought, the contributors to this volume have been encouraged to step back from their own case studies and to consider how their findings might be communicated to a broad scholarly audience.

Assuming the methodological problems can be resolved, what would an interdisciplinary comparison of frontiers hope to achieve? Our ultimate goal is a deeper understanding of the *mechanisms* of frontier history—causal processes that generate recurring patterns in a variety of historical contexts. To identify such mechanisms, we will find that a

cultural history of the North American “borderlands” (Aron, this volume) is relevant to an analysis of the Bengal frontier (Eaton 1993); that frontier identities in Iron Age Syria (Dodd, this volume) have much in common with border identities in modern nation-states (Wilson and Donnan 1998); that Inka frontier policies (Alconini, this volume) may provide insights into the function of Roman *limes* (Isaac 1990), and so on. By comparing and contrasting specific frontier situations, framed in interdisciplinary discourse, we can begin to define both common and unique themes in frontier history and in doing so isolate what we believe to be a finite set of causal processes contributing to frontier dynamics.

In an effort to reach this goal, this book encompasses a wide range of places and times, stretching geographically from the Americas to the Middle East, South Asia, and China, and temporally from the twentieth century BC to the twentieth century AD. In fact, the diversity of places, times, and academic traditions explored in this volume says something interesting about the character of the frontier. Lying on the margins or in the interstices of cultural networks, frontiers are the quintessential matrices of change. Here it is possible both to escape from the cultural conventions of one’s own society and to make contact with people carrying other conventions, other ways of living, thinking, and organizing social groups. In this light it is easy to see how the study of frontiers could appeal to scholars of many disciplines. Our initial challenge is to draw such scholars to their own “borderlands,” where they might begin to forge a common vocabulary and analytical approach.

Definitions

In organizing the conference on which this volume is based, we soon discovered that each contributor had his or her own ideas about what constitutes a frontier. There was consensus at the most general level that frontiers are usually characterized by contact between previously distinct populations. Beyond this, however, there was much diversity of opinion and theoretical point of view.

To help move toward a common terminology, we would like to propose some definitions, even if these do not always match the views of the contributors. As a first approximation, the frontier concept must be distinguished from the closely related concepts of “border” and “boundary.” While the *Oxford English Dictionary* treats these as more or less

synonymous, we would propose a semantic division of labor. The most general of the three terms is “boundary.” According to the *OED*, a boundary can be defined as “that which serves to indicate the bounds or limits of anything.” In this sense, “boundary” encompasses the more specific terms “border” and “frontier” (cf. Anderson 1996:9).

A “border” is often defined as a legally recognized line, fixed in a particular space, meant to mark off one political or administrative unit from another. In our terms, then, a border is simply a “crystallized” boundary—a boundary between sovereign polities such as states and empires. The modern nation-state lays claim to all the territory within its borders, not just on land but in the air and at sea, creating a sharp contrast between its own territory and that of its neighbors. In many situations, however, national borders obviously do not line up with other types of boundaries, such as those between ethnic, linguistic, or religious groups. These cultural boundaries, instead of simply corresponding to political borders, are *conditioned* by them in complex ways (Elton 1996; Parker 2002).

In comparison with a border, a frontier is a vaguely defined boundary—a *region* rather than a line. Most frontiers are zones of transition between two core areas, each of which contains a population center and usually a center of political power. Some frontiers, however, divide a core area from a wilderness in which there are few or no human inhabitants (Prescott 1987:36 ff; Rösler and Wendl 1999:2; Parker 2002:375). In the history of frontier studies, European scholars such as Ratzel and Curzon tended to focus on situations of the first kind, in which a frontier divided one national or imperial power from another. Following Turner, however, American historians tended to think of the second situation, in which a frontier was seen as the leading edge of settlement and civilization, beyond which lay an open wilderness—“an area of wild nature *and* wild people,” as Klein (1996:185–186) puts it. When contact with Native Americans was considered at all, such contact was usually seen as a unidirectional flow of civilized culture from white settlers to “Indians.” Even anthropologists working within the framework of acculturation theory only occasionally recognized what Hallowell (1957) called “the backwash of the frontier”—the often powerful influence of Native American culture on Euro-American ways of life (see also Bailyn 1986:128–129).

In some cases, then, a frontier is neither a boundary between imperial

powers nor a gateway into open wilderness. In fact, a frontier has tended to develop “whenever one society abutted upon another that was somewhat less or more skilled” (McNeill 1992:12). The skills in question are often a matter of technology and weaponry, to be sure, but also of social, economic, and ideological organization (Wolf 1982; Mann 1986). The North American frontier, in this light, “was merely an extreme case of contact and collision between societies at different levels of skill—a pattern that runs throughout recorded history, and constitutes one of the main themes of the human past” (McNeill 1992:11).

The Many Dimensions of the Frontier

Because the contributors to this volume come from three disciplines (history, anthropology, and archaeology), we asked them to frame their studies in terms that would facilitate interdisciplinary discussion. As a result, each chapter lays out the author’s conception of what a frontier is, the patterns characteristic of frontier history in general, and the processes that are salient in his or her case study. Any frontier situation has many dimensions, and each of the chapters tends to highlight just one or a few of these. Smith, for example, focuses on the physical and ideological aspects of Egypt’s Nubian frontier, Alconini on the military and cultural components of Inka outposts in Bolivia, and Eaton on the shifting agrarian, religious, and political boundaries in Bengal.

These and other studies collected here lend support to the framework developed by Elton in *Frontiers of the Roman Empire* (1996). Although most historiography of ancient Rome treats the frontier as a division between political entities, Elton takes a more cultural approach. Frontiers differ from borders, according to Elton, not only because they are regions rather than lines, but because they include *many kinds* of boundaries, in addition to political or administrative ones. *Cultural* boundaries, whether ethnic, linguistic, religious, or aesthetic, did not correspond to political boundaries in the Roman Empire. Thus Elton defines the frontier as a zone of variously overlapping (but not congruent) political, economic, and cultural boundaries (Elton 1996:3–9; see also Parker 2002).

In this light, the approach taken by Adelman and Aron (1999) and Aron (this volume) may be seen as a way of highlighting political boundaries on the frontier and the negotiation of such boundaries by distant imperial powers. These authors rightly emphasize the “borderless”

nature of the frontier, described as a “meeting place of peoples in which geographic and cultural borders were not clearly defined” (Adelman and Aron 1999:815). They go on to distinguish between a frontier and a “borderlands,” which they define as “the contested boundaries between colonial domains” (816). According to our framework, however, such borderlands simply represent the political dimension of a frontier situation—the dimension likely to be of special interest to national or imperial powers seeking to *establish* borders within an otherwise fluid zone of interaction.

The Frontier as Contact Zone

A number of other scholars have begun to see the frontier less as a “no-man’s land” and more as a zone of interaction between peoples. From this perspective, frontiers throughout history have much in common with the borders of modern nation-states (e.g., Sahlins 1989; Anderson 1996; Wilson and Donnan 1998; Donnan and Wilson 1999). In particular, White’s (1991) concept of the “middle ground” suggests that a frontier gives rise to hybrid forms of culture and ambiguous identities composed of selected elements from each previously distinct cultural repertoire (see also van Dommelen 2002). Recent studies of transnationalism and globalization have also sharpened our sense of how culture contact is interpreted and negotiated by both local and expansionist groups (e.g., Appadurai 1996; Clifford 1997).

The chapters collected here explore various cases in which the centripetal forces at work in frontier zones have resulted in cultural “hybridization” or “creolization” (e.g., Bhabha 1994; Hannerz 1996). Aron’s chapter, for example, analyzes a region of “confluence” in colonial America in terms of accommodations between various groups. Perdue, in his chapter comparing two Chinese frontiers, argues that in spite of efforts to “civilize” the people of the northwestern frontier, contact between Chinese farmers and the nomads of the central Asian steppe created a “middle ground” that allowed these distinct groups to mix, ultimately producing new cultural formations. Smith similarly finds archaeological evidence to support the hypothesis that Egyptian colonists intermarried with the local Nubian population, eventually creating a new colonial identity whose material expression is a mix of Egyptian and Nubian forms.

In some cases, satellite settlements on the frontiers of core polities themselves develop into new core polities (Kopytoff 1987; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1991, 1997). Here Rodseth develops a similar argument, suggesting that frontiers are important sites of ethnic group formation or ethnogenesis. Rodseth distinguishes two ways in which ethnogenesis can occur—merger and fragmentation. Merger, an extreme form of hybridization, is a familiar pattern in many frontier situations. However, Rodseth’s case focuses on the alternative process of fragmentation. His study of the Nepal Himalayas shows that frontiers can *limit* rather than promote contact between populations, resulting in the separation and redefinition of previously united groups.

Several other contributors trace the contours of ethnic identities by analyzing variation in material culture (Alconini, this volume; Smith, this volume). A case in point is the study by Rice and Rice of Guatemala’s Petén region during the contact period (ca. 1450–1700). The Petén, deep in the Guatemalan jungle, appears to have served as a last refuge for Maya fleeing the Spanish colonial authorities. As the Maya arrived in successive waves, according to Rice and Rice, internal frontiers were constructed between groups of the same ethnic stock. This led to differentiation between established and newly arrived groups, thus setting the scene for identity creation and ethnogenesis. Competition over limited resources and, undoubtedly, continuing pressure from forces outside this “tidal frontier” caused established groups to emphasize their separate identities. Thus the frontier population *fragmented* (to use Rodseth’s term), giving rise to a series of new ethnic groups. In this case, however, fragmentation was not a result of isolation but of contact.

Geography, Demography, Economics, and Ideology

One concern shared by all the contributors to this book is physical geography. Each of the chapters suggests that frontiers are shaped in critical ways by topography, climate, vegetation, and the availability of water and other strategic resources. We have found that in one way or another such geographic factors play a role, sometimes larger, sometimes smaller, in conditioning the various social or cultural boundaries that overlap and intersect in frontier zones. For example, Eaton shows that the Bengal frontier was virtually created by the shifting course of the Ganges. As the river moved eastward, it created new ecological zones suitable for rice

farming and left other parts of the delta stagnant, dry, and economically isolated. Millward argues that by virtue of its location, Xinjiang, in what is today China's far northwest, became a frontier between the Chinese and Islamic worlds. Rodseth's frontier in the Himalayas is especially conditioned by topography. He argues that a key factor in cultural fragmentation was social isolation as a result of the settlement of remote Himalayan valleys. Rice and Rice show the isolation of the lakes region of the Petén in modern Guatemala allowed autonomous Maya states to persist for more than 250 years longer than those in neighboring regions such as southern Guatemala and northern Yucatán. Alconini argues that Inka expansion into the Bolivian lowlands not only was shaped by the boundaries between ecologic zones but also demonstrates that the placement of frontier defenses was conditioned by topography. Smith's study of the Nubian frontier, like most of Egyptian history, focuses on the Nile. This case is in fact the only one contained here in which, at least for part of the history of this region, it could be considered a border. Because of the linearity of the Nile valley, the location of the Nile cataracts, and the inhospitable nature of the surrounding desert, the pharaohs were able to construct a kind of "national border," long before the advent of modern nations.

Demography is another theme common to most of the papers in this volume. Aron, Eaton, Millward, Perdue, Rodseth, and Rice and Rice all consider cases of population shifts on various scales within or through a frontier zone. Indeed, some scholars have defined the frontier in terms of the migration of pioneers to a sparsely populated hinterland (e.g., Wyman and Kroeber 1957). While demographic shifts often do play a key role in frontier dynamics, such shifts take a variety of forms. Aron's study shows that migration into the Mississippi River valley was a slow process, whereas Eaton's study of the Bengal frontier suggests a much faster demographic shift, partly due to population increase and partly due to the shifting river course. Perdue's study shows that the Chinese authorities encouraged the migration of large numbers of landless peasants from the Chinese interior to the northwestern frontier through land grants and other incentives. Yet this was not the only group drawn to the region. Nomads seeking opportunities to trade with the new inhabitants also moved to the frontier. As Perdue points out, both the "settled" Han communities and the "nomadic" peoples of the steppe practiced mixed subsistence strategies of agriculture, pastoralism, and trade. The com-

plex relationships between settled and nomadic populations are also explored in the chapters by Eaton and Millward.

Turner (1920) and Lattimore (1962) both argued that frontiers are areas where pioneers have opportunities to exploit vast reserves of natural resources. Scholars have since emphasized that frontier zones are inextricably linked to the economics of the core. The southern African frontier, for example, was shaped by the European demand for gold and diamonds (Lamar and Thompson 1981), while the frontier in North America was closely tied to the fur trade (Wolf 1982:158–194). Similarly, the confluence region described by Aron was created in part by European exploitation of natural resources in the interior. Yet Aron also shows that key economic processes were sometimes in the hands of Native American communities. One such community, for example, might control the flow of trade goods to other indigenous groups.

Several chapters touch on the disparity between the ways in which a frontier is perceived or portrayed by the "center" and the observed realities of frontier life. Chinese imperial rulers, for example, saw their expansion into frontier zones as a means of extending civilization into the barbarian wilderness, in spite of the sophistication of the various states and empires they encountered there (Perdue, this volume). Smith argues that even the idealized or mythical representations produced by states and empires must be considered if one is to reach a subtle understanding of frontier dynamics. Thus the domain of Egypt was portrayed in imperial ideology as limitless. Although it presented a distorted image of the physical boundaries of the state, this ideology helped legitimize royal authority to an internal audience and thus shaped the realities of Egyptian life.

Much has been written over the last twenty years about the "invention of tradition" in modern nations (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), which have themselves been described as "imagined communities" (Anderson 1991). Yet we might well ask whether such inventing and imagining are exclusively modern phenomena (Anderson 1991; Smith 1998, 1999). In Iron Age Syria, as Dodd argues, Luwian elites co-opted and revised the past, in some cases transforming history to buttress new political formations in the face of an expanding empire. These ancient rulers seem to have invented traditions in much the way that modern nationalists do, and with the same strategic intention of consolidating and legitimizing power (Trouillot 1995; Wolf 1999).

Conclusion

The frontier presents a series of paradoxes. One of them has been pointed out by McNeill (1992:22): “The free, egalitarian, and neo-barbarian style of frontier life, so dear to Turner and his followers, did of course exist in North America.” But so did slave plantations and masses of indentured servants. Such extreme forms of social inequality, according to McNeill, “were quite as characteristic of the frontier as were the free and independent farmers and jacks-of-all-trades whom we habitually associate with frontier life.” Other paradoxes are evident from the foregoing discussion. The frontier separates peoples and brings them into contact; it preserves traditions and generates innovations; it seems both a backwater and a land of opportunity. “In the depths of the word itself,” as Klein (1996:207) puts it, “we find the doubled pattern of inclusion and exclusion, assimilation and differentiation.”

Given this pattern, the difficulties in simply *defining* the frontier might seem at times to be insurmountable. Here we have tried to develop a common vocabulary without defining away the ambiguities that are, after all, inherent in frontier situations. Like the word “culture,” “frontier” names a “thing” that is really a set of processes, a busy field of intersecting forces. To define the word narrowly (or to avoid it altogether) will not tame these forces or unite them in a single pattern. Instead, we argue, the frontier must be investigated as we find it “in the wild”—wherever it passes, in many specific times and places, and from our own divergent points of view.

The chapters in this book are substantially revised versions of papers that were originally presented at a conference entitled “Frontiers through Space and Time: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Frontier Studies.” The conference, which was held in the Tanner Humanities Center at the University of Utah during the spring of 2001, was organized by Bradley Parker with the assistance of Kathryn Smith. From its inception to its completion, this project has benefited from the input and assistance of a variety of people and institutions. We thank the authors who enthusiastically supported the project through what turned out to be an arduous revision and editing process. Funding for the conference and the resulting volume was pieced together from a number of institutions both on and off the University of Utah campus. We owe a sincere debt of gratitude to the following people and institutions for their support, without which this book would not have been possible: the Wenner-Gren Foundation for

Anthropological Research, the Utah Humanities Council, the Tanner Humanities Center, and, at the University of Utah, Peter Goss and the Office of the Vice President for Research, the College of Humanities, the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, the Department of History, and Anand Yang and the Asian Studies Program. Finally, we would like to thank Allyson Carter and Anne Keyl at the University of Arizona Press, Heather Hopkins of Arizona Editors, and the anonymous reviewers. Without their expertise this book would surely not have come to fruition.

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