

**A WORLD-SYSTEMS FRONTIER PERSPECTIVE TO LAND: UNRAVELLING
THE UNEVEN TRAJECTORY OF LAND RIGHTS STANDARDIZATION.**

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Abstract

This paper proposes a world-systems frontier perspective that both departs from and supplements World-Systems Analysis. It approaches frontiers and frontier zones as conceptual tools in indicating and understanding the uneven local-global interactions underlying incorporation processes. The notion of frontier highlights the role of ‘peripheral agency’ in local-global interactions, revealing incorporation as a deviating process of negotiation. The paper applies the proposed conceptual framework to the analysis of historical transitions in land rights regimes, in particular the implementation and contestation of a privatizing land reform in Andean peasant communities. The analysis of Bolivia’s nineteenth century land reform demonstrates how the interplay of the modernizing aspirations of a liberal government and strong communal land claims forced local communities, rural elites and government actors into a complex negotiation. The repercussions of the conflicts and alliances developing on the Bolivian highlands undercut the universality and uniformity of the global trajectory of land dispossession and concentration. The frontier perspective elaborated in this paper is instructive to the analysis of peripheral agency in the context of incorporative processes in other temporal and spatial settings, in order to give more texture to our understanding of an ever more globalizing world.

A WORLD-SYSTEMS FRONTIER PERSPECTIVE TO LAND: UNRAVELLING THE UNEVEN TRAJECTORY OF LAND RIGHTS STANDARDIZATION

This paper proposes a world-systems frontier perspective that both departs from and supplements World-Systems Analysis. It contributes to the frontier-border debate by approaching frontiers and frontier zones as conceptual tools in indicating and understanding the uneven local-global interactions underlying incorporation processes. The paradigm of an expanding world-systemic force, most famously elaborated by Immanuel Wallerstein, is key to a comprehensive analysis of how new peoples and places have been and are being incorporated into a capitalist order in the course of the last five hundred years. Yet, the theoretical insights derived from this paradigm often suffer from a blind spot towards the role of subaltern groups in/at/on the margins of expansive (world-)systems. Hence the development of historical capitalism tends to be reduced to a linear process resulting from dichotomist centre-periphery interpretations. Without downplaying asymmetric power relations, the notion of frontier seeks to capture this blind spot by highlighting the role of ‘peripheral agency’ in local-global interactions, revealing incorporation as a deviating process of negotiation.

Based on a new research on the implementation and contestation of a privatizing land reform in Andean peasant communities, this paper applies the proposed conceptual framework to the analysis of historical transitions in land rights regimes. Over the last centuries, and particularly after the breakthrough of liberal ideas on property in the nineteenth century, the communal character of customary land tenure systems has become subject to strong pressures to conform to national and international frameworks for land control. However, the local dynamics generated by land titling projects seldom lead to a homogeneous outcome and rather creates and recreates margins for (land rights) autonomy for peripheral

groups and regions. The analysis of Bolivia's nineteenth century land reform demonstrates how the interplay of the modernizing aspirations of a liberal government and strong communal land claims forced local communities, rural elites and government actors into a complex negotiation. The repercussions of the conflicts and alliances developing on the Bolivian highlands undercut the universality and uniformity of the global trajectory of land dispossession and concentration.

This paper is organized as follows. First we first present what we define as a world-systems frontier perspective. Subsequently we apply our understanding of frontier zones to the global creation and movement of 'frontiers of land control'. Finally, we discuss the (failed) implementation of Bolivia's first land reform in indigenous highland communities in relation to the notion of world-systemic frontiers.

A WORLD-SYSTEM FRONTIER PERSPECTIVE: INCORPORATION AS NEGOTIATION.

While capitalism may be "*a phenomenon that knew no frontiers*" in terms of digestible spaces or societies (Wallerstein 1974: 67), this statement in fact implies that capitalism recurrently creates frontiers, both at the external boundaries and the internal subdivisions of the modern world-system. Systemic expansion is fuelled by external incorporation and internal differentiation, that is, the spatial integration of respectively old and new frontier zones of the world-system. These 'fuelling' frontiers are key to the constant drive "*to divert or attach itself to other kinds of energy or logic*" (Gidwani 2008: xix).

The insight that world-systemic expansion needs and generates frontiers and that the role of agency in/at/on the margins of expansive systems is essential in the (re)creation of these frontiers is at the centre of what define as a world-systems frontier perspective (see also Hall

2013: 50-1). The construction of that perspective departs from the work of anthropologist Thomas Hall who explicitly unveils the margins as the pulsating heart of expansive systems (Hall 1989 and 2000). Most simply, Hall states that frontiers are “where the action is”. Rather than a line, this ‘action’ is represented by a historical and dynamic process of both incorporation and differentiation. A ‘frontier zone’ is the spatial dimension of these processes, where different actors -be they individuals, companies, projects, institutions, etc.- embedded in different forms of organization based on an-other logic (‘systems’) come into sustained contact -get to know, question, attack... each other- in the context of incorporation processes without having defined common rules of encounter (Hall 2012: 51; see also Sassen 2012: 1).

The origins of the proposed frontier perspective are located in World-Systems Analysis (WSA), but contrary to the classic (mis)interpretation of a closed theory, this perspective was precisely developed to counter the idea of all-powerful organisms and their prescribed histories of progress and modernization. While WSA does not necessarily provide in the ‘only’ or ‘best’ analytical instrument that explicitly addresses multi-scaled interconnectedness, it offers a valid and ‘malleable’ systemic approach that prevents these connections of floating somewhere in the air (Hall and Fenelon 2009: 11, Vanhaute 2013: 157-159). Still, a prevailing frustration with Wallerstein’s systemic framework regards its limits in transmitting “*the history of the concentration of power in particular places without divesting the world's peripheries of agentic capacities*” (Adelman 2004: 407). However, if subaltern actors are less present in world-system analysis production, it is not because they cannot or should not, but because only a limited number of scholars took the plunge to fine-tune the theory (Hall and Fenelon 2009: 12). The insights distilled from such plunges foreshadow the idea of ‘frontier’ as WSA’s blind spot, that is the question of (peripheral) agency in local-global interconnections. Several notions of frontier and frontier zone have been put forward, emerged within or in critical dialogue with WSA, resulting in a diverse and

fertile landscape situated on the interdisciplinary crossroads of history, anthropology and geography. The frontiers evoked by this landscape underscore the intrinsic entanglement of social change, ecological change, and epistemological change produced by systemic expansion (Galaty 2011; Moore 2003 and 2010; Barbier 2011; Hornborg, McNeill and Martínez-Alier 2007; Mignolo 2000 and 2011; Raj 2010; Ross et al 2010).

In the presented theoretical framework, frontier is understood, first of all, as a creative process of encounter rather than a metaphor for ‘naturally given’ contact. As a process, which by definition has a start and an end, frontiers have a history, depicting a trajectory of incorporation. Second, these frontier processes have a concrete setting; encounters produce spatial reorganizations. Third, this encounter is structured by asymmetrical power relations, yet has strategic potential for the most powerful as much as for the powerless involved in this encounter (Sassen 2012). As mentioned, there is an important analytical difference as well as interconnection between frontier (the process) and frontier zone (the space). Emerging from the dynamic frictions within and at the outer edge of the world-system, frontiers can be thought of as the ‘fault lines’ of incorporation, always asymmetrical and never ‘innocent’. Think about the ascent of new elites, the granting or denial of civil rights, the spread of transport infrastructure or ‘slumification’. These processes symptomize a systemic difference and move according to the rhythm of systemic expansion that transfers the social order of a systemic entity to new territories and peoples. The site where the change and continuity of that social order is negotiated is the locus of systemic difference, the frontier zone. In sum, the analysis of frontiers and frontier zones has a time, space and agency dimension and is instructive to questions on the functioning, the dynamics and the limits of systemic expansion.

Schematically, the trajectory of frontier processes can be envisioned as the delineation and classification of ‘fuzzy’ zones as ‘settled’ or ‘hooked’ zones (as rich, acculturated or opened up), their shakeup (revolutions and reforms) and their fragmentation (impoverishment,

resistance or isolation) (Hall 2000: 241; Kaup 2013: 112). From a world-systemic perspective, incorporation entails the ‘settling’ of zones that were first ‘open’, undecided or under negotiation into commodified social structures. Incorporation pretends to create a ‘settled’ uniform and hence controllable social order by eliminating the fictive limits between two different, delineated groups as between civilized versus barbarians (Boccaro 2005: 33). In remodelling intercultural contact from separation to interrelation, incorporation restructures encounter by imposing new limits functional to the envisioned social order. In this process, frontier zones provide in a vacuum for the unfolding of social change; the creation of a new order whose outlook is still wavering. Both in space and in time, frontier zones are fundamentally connected, mobile and mutable constructs. In that sense, they function as instances of discontinuity, testifying that “*global capitalism is far from being a homogeneous and continuous totality*” (Quijano 2000: 553-4 and 2008: 201).

Given these instances of discontinuity, incorporation proceeds in waves that follow an irregular rhythm, reflecting how the “*profit-centered rationality*” of capitalism is being “contaminated, consolidated, and continuously interrupted by other logics; where institutional arrangements must work overtime to ensure that circuits of capital accumulation do not come to a grinding halt” (Gidwani 2008: xxiv).

This ‘contamination’ points to the role of peripheral agency, entailed in the operation of feedback links that are generated through a process of negotiation over the terms of participation and autonomy of peripheral groups. This feedback demonstrates that, at the one hand, incorporating forces generally never aim at complete assimilation and, at the other hand, people in the periphery selectively adopted certain outside features, while rejecting others. Contrary to the first theoretical conceptualizations of frontiers, notably Turner’s work on the movement of the U.S. western frontier (Turner 1920), frontier processes no longer equal the one-directional transmission of ‘modernization’. Rather frontiers are being revealed

as the locus of both confrontation (war, resistance, lawsuits, intolerance, plunder, extraction, sabotage, ecological degradation, segregation) and cooperation (biological symbiosis, marriage, economic partnership, political bonds and treaties, celebration, conversion, gifts). Because the outcome of these confrontations and alliances seldom acquires an unalterable status, constant renegotiation ‘on the ground’ forms a fundamental process in the shaping of ongoing, accelerating, retreating or stagnant incorporation processes. This explains why peripheral agency, such as indigenous resistance movements, “simultaneously embrace Western law as a tool to consolidate rights, while at the same time working outside of it, whether through direct actions (marches, blockades, strikes) or electoral politics” (Hindery 2013: 7).

This multi-faceted renegotiation has a ‘boomerang’ potential that may alter the course of incorporation, for instance by forging of alliances, carving out of concessions or adopting “*strategic positionings designed to keep the state at arm’s length*” (Scott 2009: x-xi). This potential is what the idea of feedback alludes to, attempting to understand why the impression that global incorporation proceeds towards the eventual evaporation of frontiers is constantly countered by the observation of human creativity contesting and (re)creating frontiers. This creativity is evidenced in the formation and defence of autonomous ‘counter-spaces’ for communal action (Andolina, Laurie and Radcliffe 2009; Abercrombie 1998: 10) from where subaltern groups can tap into different (more, less or not-incorporated) spheres to advance alternatives. Rather than reading these spaces as instances of isolation or resistance, they must be interpreted as the lever that converts incorporation into a negotiated, hence instable process. Therefore, not so much the finiteness (the prevailing idea of a homogenizing world), but the permanence (the constant reproduction of instances of heterogenization) of frontiers must be questioned.

LAND RIGHTS COMMODIFICATION AND COMMUNAL LAND CONTROL.

As a way of clarifying abstract notions of frontiers and incorporation, this paper approaches the question of land control as a central point of friction, a systemic difference, between peripherally located groups and the development of a capitalist world-economy. The question of land is basically a question of rights, in the first place the right to self-determination. Rural peasant and/or indigenous groups usually maintain communal rather than individual claims to land, territory and resources (ILC 2013). This collective control over the land is interdependent with a larger ‘package’ of rights that allow them to secure a margin for territorial, economic, political and legal autonomy as self-organized group. In the context of state expansion and market integration, these rights have become seriously undermined by commodifying pressures to delineate, endorse and extend “*a systematic legal basis for what is called title to the land*” (Wallerstein 2012: 7). This process of land rights commodification can be regarded as a concrete –and possibly “*the single most important*”- frontier that has shaped the historical trajectory of capitalism expansion (Wallerstein 2012: 7; Araghi and Karides 2012: 1). In order to enforce a minimal degree of loyalty and obtain the necessary revenues to uphold centralized power, a homogeneous institutional framework for land ownership, use and transaction needs to be created, provided of property deeds and cadastres to make society ‘legible’ (Ubink, Hoekema and Assies 2009: 11; Richards 2009: 58; Scott 1998). There to, customary tenure arrangements are to be encapsulated within a standardized legal framework for land property.

The commodification of land rights corresponds to a legal-economic intervention that reshuffles labour, legal, fiscal and spiritual ties of the people that live from the land, those living from the property of the land and state structures to the land and amongst each other. Time and again, these ties have been reformulated and debated in the context of shifting

economic conditions and emergent political ideologies, fuelling an ideologically coloured, power-attributing and hence highly disputed transition process that pretends to put the future of ‘civilization’ at stake (Engerman and Metzer 2004: 17; Cole and Ostrom 2012). According to Araghi and Karides, the drivers of that transition can be defined as the formalization (the granting property deeds), fixation (defining physical and legal property boundaries), rationalization (in function of a standardized production), and privatization (in order to create a land market) of land rights (Araghi and Karides 2012: 1). These processes intersect with other frontier developments such as economic transformations in view of increasing resource competition (Barbier 2011), ecological changes (Moore 2008, 2010b) and the social reorganization of peasant livelihoods (Vanhaute 2012, Vanhaute, Cottyn and Wang 2015). Yet, despite having nurtured powerful historical transformations, these interconnected processes have not paved the way for the clear-cut and ‘neutral’ commodification of communal land rights systems. Rather, the outcome of successive incorporation pressures is witnessed in the constant (re)creation of new frontiers of land control, which “are not sites where ‘development’ and ‘progress’ meet ‘wilderness’ or ‘traditional lands and peoples’. They are sites where authorities, sovereignties, and hegemonies of the recent past have been or are currently being challenged by new enclosures, territorializations, and property regimes” (Peluso and Lund 2011: 668).

The expansion and contraction of these sites materializes through successive land reforms designed to convert land into a tradable commodity, reflecting the perception of land as a frontier of capitalist expansion (Weis 2007: 48-50; see also Hertel 2010). This is a state-driven process of incorporation by which customary systems are positioned on a continuum of tenure security (extensive-limited, short-long term, real-perceived, de jure-de facto, etc.) that suggests the superiority of private property arrangements (Lund 2000; Ubink, Hoekema and Assies 2009: 13-5; Ostrom and Schlager 1996; Ostrom and Hess 2007). Failing or refusing to

grasp the value and ‘normality’ of the pluralist character of most land systems and the responsiveness of the people managing them, the co-existence and overlap of private and public, open and exclusive rights is being substituted by an improbable uniformism. This allows for the imposition of (alienable/private) “*principles true in every country*”, achievable through capital and superior to deviant (inalienable/collective) principles (Mitchell 2002: 54-79). By intervening in local relations to the land, state actors mould and categorize those relations as ‘legible’ and hence extractable, contributing to the construction of a land system that is functional to state power (Van Bavel and Hoyle 2010: 367). The portrayal of alternative (spiritual, informal, communal, non-European) forms of access in terms of dichotomy and anomaly has been used to justify and further nurture the global trend in the incorporation and formalization of customary property relations into dualist and exclusivist frameworks (Van Bavel and Hoyle 2010: 12; RRI 2014).

Symbolically starting in 1492, the trajectory of land rights commodification and related processes of privatization, displacement and depeasantization lead to a secular growth in the concentration of land property through expropriation and accumulation (Araghi and Karides 2012: 2). However, the actual disparity in land right security for local communities hints at an important differentiation between world regions as well as within ecoregions underlying an apparent uniform trajectory. Property regime changes are not deployed in a vacuum, but negotiated between peasants, elite and broker groups, state institutions and the forces of nature. Reproduced and accelerated under post-colonial regimes, this colonially initiated trajectory took shape ‘in the process’ an ‘on the ground’, interspersed with counter-enclosures, revolutions and alliances. Hence, commodifying operations rarely produce a homogeneous property regime nor foster the desired social effects. The outcome is a hybrid and ‘uneven’ institutional control over territory with important achievements and bitter

setbacks for communal and indigenous land rights in relation to fluctuations in natural resource demand (Araghi and Karides 2012; Benton 2009; Serrão 2013; RRI 2014).



“European colonists arrive in America to appropriate land.”

Cartoon by Chris Madden (licence CartoonStock Ltd.).

Based on the erroneous equation between privatization and ‘development’ (Engerman and Metzer 2004), the endurance of plural, community-based land rights systems in which individual and collective access co-exist is commonly perceived as testimony of an anachronism desperately searching the way out to ‘progress’. On the contrary, abundant but generally overlooked evidence from local cases of resistance against privatization pressures counters the belief that private property entails the promise of long-term balanced social power relations. It is only “*when all else has failed*” that the pluralist principles sustaining the reproduction and reinvention of such complex systems are given up (Ghosh 2010). The abandonment of and local struggle over principles of collective rights and inalienability stems from the inability to secure one’s economic survival and should not necessarily be read as the ‘disappearance’ of peasants or indigenous groups (Johnson 2004). It is the erosion rather than the persistence of such systems that reinforces trajectories of marginalization and impoverishment. In that sense, communal ownership has been put forward as “*the most fundamental challenge to capitalism, (...) because it denies the overarching dominance of*

private property rights” (Hall and Fenelon 2009: 6; Bromley 1991; Hanna et al 1996). Here, it must be noted that the (globalizing) local struggles of self-organized resource communities are not against individual ownership *an sich*, but question the ‘absoluteness’ of private property arrangements because it negates that land is an intrinsic part of the landscape, something the capitalist logic has however a hard time to cope with (Greer 2013).

LAND REFORM IN THE ANDES: NEGOTIATING THE LIMITS OF COMMUNAL AUTONOMY.

The Andes constitute one of the first external world regions to be incorporated by the capitalist world-economy as it expanded its geographical reach out of Western-Europe. From a disconnected area, politically and economically tied to the Inca empire, it became an area of economic extraction and political influence through conquest and colonization. In the process, the rural landscape has undergone repeated and undeniable transformations. Starting with the early colonial reforms, the territorial, productive and representative organization of Andean rural communities was made functional to both the survival of the local population as to the extraction of their resources. As a result, external elements of distinctiveness evolved into internal disparities; the Andes transformed from an outside into an internal frontier zone of the modern world-system. In the process, exchange relations and political bonds tied the region and its people more closely to the pulsating rhythm of the modern world-system, yet in an asymmetrical way. This restructuring of the region and its people into a dependent position corresponds to a process of peripheralization, which is –rather than the unidirectional integration of local histories into more global flows- a dynamic and heterogeneous process. In that sense, we can speak of a ‘negotiated peripherality,’ defined by Kardulias as

“the willingness and ability of individuals in peripheries to determine the conditions under which they will engage in trade, ceremonial exchange, intermarriage, adoption of outside religious and political ideologies, etc. with representatives of expanding states” (Kardulias 2007: 55).

Andean peripheralization is most observable in the ecological and social effects produced by the organization of a colonial intercontinental silver economy, centred in the exploitation of the Potosí mines (Moore 2010). Ethnohistorical research has demonstrated how Andean rural communities contest or embrace the effects of incorporation processes as passive victims nor stubborn opponents “*to which world-historical forces suddenly arrived*” (Larson 2004: 5-6; Larson, Harris and Tandeter 1995). Rather, they intensively and continuously negotiate the ‘terms of incorporation’. Through legal action, exchange and labour relations, fiscal bonds, political alliances and violent conflict, Andean rural communities maintained a relative degree of autonomy, and meanwhile actively participated within this differentiated constellation (Cottyn 2014).

It is this combination of autonomy and participation, rooted in the ability to carve out concessions but also to reconcile to supra-local control systems, that explains the resilience of Andean communal action, particularly related to the defence of autonomous land control. This has contributed to the reproduction of systemic differences that defy the presumed end of peasant production modes and indigenous lifestyles in an ever globalizing world. While the commons disappeared in Europe, community land stands out as a decisive component in the constitution of Andean land systems. The result is reflected in the complex land systems maintained in the Andean region in which communal arrangements coexist with private land consolidation, cooperative property and state property (Galindo 2007: 85-6).

Elucidating the repercussions for and response of indigenous communities to nineteenth century state attempts at destroying the commons is key to understand the complexity of

Andean land systems. Restricting the focus to Bolivia, a wide debate on how to restructure the colonially inherited foundations of state-community relations only developed after half a century of independence. Under republican rule, the colonially installed land system, based on a ‘pact’¹ that protected the community as a landowning, taxpaying and representative entity, initially survived. However, the aspiration of a ‘modern’ homogeneous legal framework for land control undermined this pact. This transition was framed as a question of freedom and equality: equal laws, fair taxes, a free market and a civilized society. The principle of private property as the basic condition for the free movement of goods and labour sketched the outlines of that society and constituted the ideological basis for Bolivia’s land question. Because of the incompatibility detected between moveable private and ‘immobile’ corporative property, the way in which this question has been (and is being) played out in the Andes particularly targeted communal landholdings.

With the enactment of Bolivia’s first land reform, known as the Ley de Exvinculación (Alienation Act), in 1874, the government radically and one-sidedly terminated the existing guarantees for communal land arrangements. Under the designed disentailment policy, the position of communities evolved from their protection by a paternalistic pact with a weak state towards the formal (yet not absolute) dismantlement of the community as such. This is the moment in which the balance between haciendas (private estates) and communities was

¹ In Spanish America, the preservation of indigenous communities suited the Spanish crown, which installed a paternalistic/segregation model in which indigenous communities were tied to the colonial State through tributary bonds and the purchase of community titles. Under colonial rule, communal land rights were protected in return for labour and monetary extraction. Tristan Platt has coined this asymmetrical relation as a reciprocity pact (Platt 1982, 1984, 1987). According to this pact, the Spanish Crown guaranteed communal access to land in return for indigenous loyalty, ‘sealed’ with property titles and fiscal obligations and renewed through land inspections. Although the fiscal cornerstone of the pact was a prime mover of indigenous protest, it also entailed key benefits, both for the treasury and the communities. While securing the former of a major source of fiscal revenues, it granted the latter autonomous control over the customary organization of communal tenure, which entailed both individual and hereditary usufruct rights as access to collective lands, either way not-marketable and non-alienable.

broken, after the regionally varying distribution of rural (indigenous) labour over communities, haciendas and 'independent' households had been witnessing a growing communal control since independence (Griesehaber 1980). In regions with appropriate ecological conditions for agricultural surplus production, privatization logically had a remarkably stronger impact. The exclusion from the tragedy of the commons mainly corresponds to those regions dominated pastoralism, strong community organization and communal ethic, isolation from market forces, limited demographic pressures on resources (Guillet 1981: 145-6). While unattractive agricultural lands may temper privatization pressures by agricultural entrepreneurs, the success of customary systems must also be understood as the result of a deliberate state policy of oblivion and non-intervention. Still, this exclusion cannot be reduced to the equation between soil poverty with isolation, but stems from local negotiations and confrontations between local communities and agricultural entrepreneurs, and more importantly between those communities and state powers, and among communities.

Against the background of a varied rural landscape, indigenous communities in all regions –whether eventually maintaining their community lands or absorbed by the accumulating landlords - witnessed an erosion of their land rights security and social safety net. At the same time, this increased vulnerability incited a strong and coordinated reaction which, considering the reduced margin for communal action, was quite successful in defending key indigenous demands. While the drastic policy was taken as an unacceptable provocation by the indigenous communities, their reaction did not correspond to a 'simple' opposition, but entailed various forms and strategies of collective representation that took shape in legal procedures, political lobbying and violent revolts. These collective actions relied to great extent upon the mobilizing potential of communal structures, a ramified grassroots movement of community leaders, and an-not so surprising yet ambiguous- alliance between indigenous

leaders and rural elites. This multifaceted manoeuvring materialized in “*legal loopholes through which indigenous communities could evade or contest the new tax and land policies*” (Larson 2004: 220), not only slowing down but fundamentally altering the course and the intended effect of the reform process (Barragán 2012). Yet, the intermediation of elite groups, the adoption of state-centred juridical practices and the local (inter-ethnic, -community, -family) conflict involved in the legal strategies of the resisting communities entail a high level of ambiguity (Cottyn 2014). This indicates how the reconfiguration of collective land tenure systems stems from a process of renegotiation that contests the (apparently predictable) linearity of a global trajectory of land dispossession and concentration.

In the process of installing a national land legislation framework, the Bolivian state seems to have made a deliberate choice to ‘settle’ this frontier without completely incorporating communal systems. The fact that the legislation left room for heterogeneity which allowed the survival of communal land regulations must be understood in the light of the coordinated response on the part of indigenous communities and their leaders. In the second half of the 20th century, growing resistance against the excessive land concentration resulting from the wide-scale disentanglement operation would lead to a revolutionary counter-enclosure and a mediated restoration of community arrangements. Over the longer term, privatization pressures were ‘floored’ or eventually rectified, resulting in the official recognition of customary land tenure regulations as reflected in Bolivia’s latest constitution (Morales 2009). The concrete implication is that the Bolivian state has not, and never acquired full knowledge and a complete overview of communal land tenure systems nor did it intervene in internal procedures such as the transfer of land (Barragán 2012: 16). This means that by adjudicating communal land rights, the central state recognizes the tenure of a certain territorial unit, which may have broad dimensions, without determining or registering its internal organization and regularization of land use, tenure and property. This ‘vacuum’ creates an important margin for

autonomy that is nevertheless subject to recurrent pressures to conform and will hence be constantly renegotiated in the face of growing state and private claims on the land.

CONCLUDING REMARKS. TOOLS TO CAPTURE THE LOCAL IN THE GLOBAL.

Communal efforts to secure a margin for community-based land and resource management in specific zones of the world-systemic order such as the Andean highlands offer a concrete research entry into the question of frontier dynamics. These efforts deal with the attempts of national governments to subject access to land to a centralized and standardized (legible, accountable) legal framework. Driven by liberal ideas on property and state aspirations for ‘modernity’, the spatial and social structures of communal organization have been identified as to-be-incorporated. The consequent incorporation pressures trigger diverse repertoires of reaction developed by local communities and their leaders. The interaction of commodifying state initiatives and local responses drives the creation and movement of (new) frontiers of land control. Rather than following straightforward course, this frontier process covers multiple trajectories that reflect regional divergences as well as the ability of peripheral groups to extort concessions, compromises or retreats that enables them to secure a minimal margin for autonomy. In that sense, the incorporation of the rural Andes is unmasked as a process of negotiated incorporation instead of being reduced to a dichotomist interpretation of the community versus ‘the system’ incompatibility. The notion of negotiation does not neutralize the effects of commodifying pressures that push for a homogenization of spaces, but points to the simultaneity of counter-pressures that contribute to the heterogeneity of local spaces. The frontier perspective elaborated in this paper can thus be instructive to the analysis of peripheral agency in the context of incorporative processes in other temporal and spatial settings, in order to give more texture to our understanding of an ever more globalizing world.

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