

**PEDAGOGY IN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

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**Using Comparative Frontiers  
to Explore World-Systems Analysis  
in International Relations**

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This article presents one way to approach the case study versus theoretically driven approach to teaching comparative courses. The goal is to actively engage students in doing international studies, not simply reading about the work of others. The method derives a broad set of case studies from some theoretical approach. Students then conduct and present their own case studies. Students then use their own case studies and those examined by the class as a whole as vehicles for interrogating, critiquing, and extending that theoretical approach. These final exercises in theory-building are a significant part of this approach. The specific example presented here uses world-systems analysis as the vehicle for organizing comparative study of frontiers. However, this method could readily employ other theoretical models to examine other theoretical and/or empirical puzzles via specific case studies.

**Keywords:** frontiers, pedagogy, world-systems analysis

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A perennial problem in teaching any “macro” approach to intersocietal relations—world-systems, international relations, comparative studies of whatever—is how to help undergraduates engage in such studies as opposed to merely reading about them. One common solution is to use specially chosen case studies. A drawback to a case study approach, however, is that it seldom leads to systematic theory-building, and can leave students with the impression that there are many interesting cases, but no organizing principles. Another approach is to take one particular theoretical approach and use case studies to explore its nuances and limits. This approach, however, may leave students too wedded to one approach—especially if the cases examined are too carefully selected to illustrate the principles of the theoretical approach employed. This is especially problematic when the field has several competing theoretical approaches. Using only one theoretical approach also lends itself too easily to top-down explanations, thereby converting active adaptors—be they states or individual humans—into passive reactors. Yet, if one uses multiple, competing approaches, students who are not conver-

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sant and comfortable with competing approaches can easily get lost in the cases and assorted theoretical interpretations. So how might these problems be solved without creating other problems?

The first point to make about the approach I discuss below is that it is “a,” not “the” solution. It is one that judiciously combines the approaches noted in the preceding paragraph. This solution uses one theoretical approach as an organizing paradigm to frame comparative studies, but uses it heuristically and emphasizes its role as an organizing tool that itself is subject to continuous revision. A second point is to choose a problem that is an intriguing puzzle, because of either its intellectual qualities or its practical consequences or both. Ted Gurr and Barbara Harff have done this with ethnic conflict (Gurr and Harff, 1994; Hall, 1998). Another intriguing puzzle, I argue, can be found in the study of frontiers. In this article I illustrate this approach by focusing on the puzzle of frontiers and use an expanded version of world-systems analysis for the organizing framework. However, the same approach could be used with other topics, such as international contraband trade or ethnic conflict. Instructors could also use other organizing paradigms. Before launching into the discussion of frontiers in detail, I will sketch the general pedagogical approach I use.

The course begins with an overview, or introduction, to the puzzle or issue that is the specific focus of the course. Here, one or two interesting, yet problematic case studies can illustrate both the problem and what is puzzling about it. The course then turns to a sketch of the organizing paradigm. The key here is to give sufficient information to make clear how the paradigm is useful in organizing diverse comparisons. At this point I emphasize that the organizing paradigm is a tool for examining the puzzle, not an end itself of some fundamental “truth.” Since the goal is to explore the puzzle and seek solutions to it, a variance-maximizing approach to comparisons is most useful. That is, when the phenomenon under study is poorly understood cases should be chosen for their diversity, not their similarity. Conversely, were the goal to explore subtleties and nuances, the variance among cases should be minimized.<sup>1</sup>

During this phase I emphasize what is often an obvious point to teachers, but not to our students, about comparative methods. The legitimacy, or better, *utility*, of any comparison inheres, *not* in the objects being compared but in the agenda driving the comparison. Comparing apples and oranges is *not* inherently illegitimate. After all, both are fruits, both are “round-ish,” and both are edible—unless, of course, the goal was to compare only apples. The point is to be clear about the goals of the comparison. Indeed, if one of the goals is to explore the conceptual limits of the phenomenon being studied, then not only apples and oranges but also baseballs and geodes might be useful for comparison.

After examining a few exemplary case studies, students are directed to select their own cases to study. Here the instructor may want to structure the selection process in some way to ensure a diversity of cases.<sup>2</sup> As students pursue their own case studies, the instructor leads discussions and analyses of cases not chosen for the entire class. This is an opportunity for the instructor to model how case information is queried in a comparative strategy. Then students present their own findings and analyze and speculate about how their particular case extends, elaborates, contradicts, critiques, strengthens, or weakens the organizing para-

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<sup>1</sup> A good example of this latter strategy is the collection of studies in Guy and Sheridan, 1998a, where several scholars whose specialties were colonial La Plata or northern New Spain made comparisons among the various frontiers, which in broad strokes shared important similarities. Most importantly all were approximately contemporaneous parts of the Spanish Empire in the Americas.

<sup>2</sup> One way to do this is to divide the cases into types and have students pick the type they will study by lot. I have found that if left on their own, the types of cases chosen will tend to cluster and diversity will be lost. There are probably many other ways to diversify the cases chosen, but all seem to require some instructor manipulation.

digm. As students present their studies, the class as a whole begins to develop its own theory of the phenomenon under study, including the generation of suggestions for the kinds of further cases that might help clarify various ambiguous points. I prepared specific instructions on various issues related to the choosing and preparing of cases. The course syllabus provides a sense of the relative time devoted to lecture, discussion, and presentations. The syllabus and over one dozen supporting documents and handouts may be found on my web site at <http://acad.depauw.edu/~thall/hp1.htm>. Since these materials are available in their entirety I will not review the topics they cover here.

Enough of this abstract discussion! I will return to these issues in the end after I present a more detailed illustration through the study of frontiers and borders.

### The Puzzle of Frontiers

At first glance, all frontiers seem similar, which is why we label them frontiers. Typically, however, when scholars dig down into details and begin comparing frontiers they all seem different, if not unique. This, then, is the fundamental puzzle I wish to try to address: why do frontiers seem similar at first glance, yet diverge widely when examined closely? In broad strokes, frontiers are created by forces external to them, but are shaped by reactions to those forces by states, by regions, by local groups, and by individuals and the counter-reaction of those external forces to those reactions. This interaction can be, and often is, both intensive and extensive. It is also conditioned by a few other factors or variables. There are systematic processes that operate in all frontiers—hence the similarities. But they are manifest in myriad ways—hence the variety of manifestations. The concept of “frontier” is immediately problematic because in European usage *frontier* and *border* are typically synonyms, whereas in the Americas, especially the United States, typically they are seen as distinct. Borders refer to international boundary lines, whereas frontiers are zones of confrontation without necessarily having a specified international boundary (see, e.g., Donnan and Wilson, 1999). This suggests two problems: (1) why the different conceptualizations? and (2) how and why do frontiers (in the American usage) become borders? *One* way to sort these out is via the use of world-systems analysis as a heuristic device. I begin with some more specific discussions about what frontiers are.

#### *Frontiers as Loci of Social Change*

Long ago Frederick Teggart (1918, 1925, 1939) and more recently Jerry Bentley (1993) argued that interactions are major sources of social change. These occur most often on frontiers where peoples, products, processes mingle creating novel arrangements. The larger the number of different things encountering each other along a frontier, the larger the number of possible new combinations. This we know from the mathematics of combinations. These “things” can be people, products, ideas, religious or other concepts and practices, human genetic material, microbes, and so on.

Donna Guy and Thomas Sheridan see frontiers as areas of “contested ground” where peoples come into conflict over resources, territory, and political control (1998a, especially 1998b). Richard Slatta (1990, 1997, 1998) suggests thinking about frontiers as membranes separating two cultures or groups of peoples. This metaphor is, I think, singularly apt given what we know about membranes. First, membranes are differentially permeable to things passing through them, both with respect to the character of the things passing through *and* with respect to the direction of passage. That is, a frontier may simultaneously be a conduit for contact among some kinds of things, and barriers for others. For instance, along the frontier of northern New Spain (now New Mexico and Arizona) horses

readily passed through to indigenous peoples,<sup>3</sup> whereas guns did so only to a very slight degree—despite a strong desire for both. Furthermore, horses passed out from the Spanish colonies, whereas in the eighteenth century guns more often passed into the colonies coming from fur traders to the northeast (Hall, 1989b; Guy and Sheridan, 1998b; Jones, 1998; Slatta, 1998).

The membrane metaphor helps us to understand another aspect of frontiers. Viewed from a distance, say, the center of an empire, they are seen as thin lines, with a sharp definition, forming clear boundary lines. But viewed up close they are thick zones rather than sharp demarcations. Their edges can be, and often are, very fuzzy. This is especially true where the frontier zone is the boundary area between states and nonstate peoples. Often the boundary markers that states erect are not actually the border, but rather indicators of a shift from a zone of clear state control into the fuzzy zone where control fades. Although he does not use these words, this seems to be one of the clear implications of Luttwak's (1976) analysis of the Roman Empire. Donnan and Wilson (1999) also suggest that even in the contemporary world with precisely defined boundaries, such zones are typical of on the ground, day-to-day interactions.

These, then, are some clues to the puzzle. All frontiers are membranes, but for different things, and in different directions. Nearly all frontiers have clear markers—surrounded by fuzzy zones of transition. Hence they all have broad similarities, with sometimes immense differences in the details. This, of course, underscores the need to attend carefully to local conditions and processes.

Frontiers are often zones of contact between peoples with different ways of living, different interests, and different resources. Thus, they are typically regions of conquest, ethnocide, culturicide, and genocide, but also of ethnogenesis. Genocide is an attempt to eliminate a people by killing them. Ethnocide is an attempt to destroy their ethnic identity without necessarily killing individuals. Culturicide is an attempt to destroy a culture without necessarily killing either individuals or the group identity. As a rule of thumb, culturicide is more common where differences are racial or racialized. Ethnogenesis is the creation of a new group from differentiation, amalgamation, partial assimilation, or other similar processes.<sup>4</sup> All such processes are important, and seem to be of increasing concern in contemporary international studies. The point I wish to emphasize here is that frontiers are zones where group identities are formed, transformed, and destroyed. In short, they are simultaneously zones *both* of creation *and* of destruction, in this instance, of ethnic and/or racial identities.

This is one of the reasons why comparative studies of frontiers offer a window on social change processes that are difficult to observe in other settings—non-frontiers, core areas—but that are integrally bound up with wider social processes. Often in core areas these issues are relatively settled and stable (at least in comparison to frontier zones). This is why ethnic transformations are harder to observe in core areas than in frontier zones. Thus, to ignore frontiers will lead to the development of “bad,” that is to say, defective or wrong theories or explanations of social processes.<sup>5</sup>

World-systems analysis offers one way to organize comparative studies of frontiers and borders. I begin with an overview of it.

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<sup>3</sup> Virtually all terms for those peoples resident in the Americas before the arrival of Europeans have become highly politicized. For purposes of this article I alternate “indigenous peoples” and “Native American.” The former has the additional benefit in this context of suggesting parallel extension in other parts of the world. For a more detailed discussion see Hall and Nagel, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> For more elaborate discussion of these concepts see works by Chappell (1993a, 1993b), Fenelon (1997, 1998), and Hall (2000c).

<sup>5</sup> See works by Hall (1989a, 1989c); Jones (1994); Lattimore (1962); Mikesell (1960); Slatta (1997); or Weber and Rausch (1994) for useful examples of how to structure such comparisons.

### World-Systems Analysis

Immanuel Wallerstein defines a world-system as an intersocietal system with a self-contained division of labor. The roles and functions necessary to maintain the system are contained, albeit unevenly, within the system itself. He uses “world” in the sense of “self-contained,” not “global”—at least not until the latter part of the twentieth century. Wallerstein developed this perspective to explain the origins and, more importantly, the interrelations of what were typically called first, second, and third world countries. These were not separate and autonomous areas that could be studied solely with reference to what went on within their borders, but instead reflected different forces, processes, and positions within a single world-system. Nor were these separate “political,” “economic,” “social,” and “cultural” systems. Wallerstein sought to overcome the artificial compartmentalization of the social sciences, drawing inspiration from the *Annales* school of French historiography and dependency theory. He also sought to historicize the study of social relations. The modern world-system was not a current event, but the result of several processes that played out between c.e. 1450 and 1640 with the introduction of capitalism in Western Europe. Students may be introduced to this literature through accessible readings and lectures, and can be expected to take some critical lessons from world-systems analysis. These are presented in a very summary manner to provide the reader with a sense of the topics covered, not so much their content. (Those interested might further see Hall, 2000a, 2000b; Shannon, 1996; and Wallerstein, 1989, 1995, 1998.)

- There is now only one modern world-system, which emerged about 500 years ago and became global in the later part of the twentieth century.
- To be understood, the world-system must be studied in historical perspective.
- The world-system is the fundamental unit of analysis within which all other social processes and structures should be analyzed.
- All social processes are consequences of interactions between local conditions and their larger contexts, so interactions must serve as a focal point, and privileging either local conditions *or* their larger contexts is a mistake.

Responses, refinements, debates, and extensions of world-systems literature have been legion, and students should be made aware that our analytical tools are not “truth” but evolving structures of understanding. In the case of world-systems analysis, its extension to precapitalist settings (pre-c.e. 1450) has generated a rich literature (Denemark, Friedman, Gills, and Modelski, 2000). This extension is important to the application of the world-systems perspective to the analysis of frontiers. Here I present a summary of the works of Christopher Chase-Dunn and Thomas D. Hall (1997, 2000), Andre Gunder Frank (1966), Giovanni Arrighi (1994), and others in expanding the concepts and analytical techniques of world-systems analysis to settings preceding European global expansion:

- World-systems, or better, core-periphery structures, date back to the “Neolithic revolution” (approximately 10 to 12 thousand years ago).
- Core-periphery structures are a major locus of social change. That is, the “society” or group is not the major locus of social change, but the interactions among “societies” or groups.
- Still, *not all* change can be explained from the world-systems level, but system processes are a crucial part of all social change.
- World-systems or core-periphery structures, themselves, have evolved. The three broad categories (containing many subtypes and transitional forms) are:

kin-based world-systems, wherein the major forms of social organization are along kinship lines, and political structures are weak or nonexistent;  
 tributary-based world-systems, wherein the major form of accumulation of capital is through tribute collection, whether in highly centralized empires or diffusely organized “feudal” systems. These systems may encapsulate market systems and local regions of capitalist production, but the overall mode of organization is tributary;

the capitalist-based world-system, wherein the major form of accumulation of capital is through capitalist production and exchange.

- All core-periphery structures expand, thus incorporating new territories and new peoples.
- Core-periphery structures have several types of dynamic cycles:  
 all core-periphery structures *pulsate*, that is, expand and contract, or expand rapidly then more slowly;  
 all state-based world-systems (after *ca* 3000 B.C.E.) evidence cycles of *rise and fall* of core states, typically as a result of actions by semiperipheral *marcher states*;  
 in the capitalist world-system these become the *hegemonic cycle*: Dutch, British, U.S.;  
 state-based world-systems *oscillate* between public and private forms of capital accumulation.
- Core-periphery structures have multiple, seldom coinciding, changing, boundaries and bounding mechanisms:  
 a bulk goods exchange network (low value to weight ratio, relatively short distance);  
 a somewhat larger network of political/military interactions;  
 a still larger network of prestige or luxury goods exchange (high value to weight ratio, often very long distance);  
 another network of comparable size, but not coincident with prestige goods network, is an information exchange network. The concept of “information” includes all the conventional aspects of culture, such as religious and political concepts, tastes, conceptions about what is possible, and how things ought to be done, etc.

Among the consequences of the above properties of world-systems or core-periphery structures, a salient one noted earlier is that such structures continually, if sporadically, absorb, or incorporate, new territories and/or peoples. The processes of incorporation and its root causes are the external factors that create, transform, and destroy frontier zones. There are two sets of elaboration of the analysis of world-systemic incorporation that are particularly important to the analysis of frontiers. In class we therefore spend time in their consideration.

Hall criticized Wallerstein’s concept (e.g., 1989; Hopkins et al., 1987) of incorporation for being overly narrow, overly concentrated on its final stages (what Frank [1966] called the development of underdevelopment), ignoring weaker forms of incorporation, and ignoring the effects on nonstate peoples. Hall argued that incorporation was a much more complex process (1986, 1987, 1989b; Shannon, 1996:127–128):

- incorporation has a very wide range of possibilities from the slightest contact through full-blown peripheralization where the development of underdevelopment operates vigorously. The fuzziness of just how much contact constitutes the beginning of incorporation is *both* a theoretical *and* an empirical problem;
- this wider range is a matter of degree, *not* of stages. Stated alternatively, there is a continuum of incorporation;

- incorporation is only partially reversible. It tends to be grainy like corduroy or wood. In other words, incorporation-induced changes tend to persist;
- areas or peoples experience paths or trajectories of incorporation;
- early degrees of incorporation have an effect on any subsequent incorporation process. Stated alternatively, the history of incorporation for a region or people is vital to understanding subsequent changes.

To illustrate: the early Viking visits to coastal North America were “contacts” between Europe and Native Americans, but they had little or no lasting effects. However, the DeSoto or Coronado expeditions began an incorporation process. Both introduced new ideas, and probably new diseases. Subsequent colonization of the upper Rio Grande valley was intended to yield revenues for New Spain, but became a vast sinkhole for Spanish capital. Yet, on this “periphery of a periphery” (Weber, 1982) massive changes and reactions were unleashed among the indigenous populations, vitally altering the life-ways and histories of all these peoples. The vagaries of the Spanish Empire had a whipsaw effect on the far frontier. Slight shifts in funding for frontier garrisons had massive impacts in terms of occurrence and intensity of warfare, of localized trade, and in colonial Spanish society (see Hall, 1989b, for details).<sup>6</sup>

The situation is complex, as the extension of world-systems analysis to pre-capitalist settings predicts. First, incorporation is multidimensional along the four types of world-system or core-periphery boundaries: bulk goods, political/military, prestige goods, and information. Thus, second, there are often four different frontiers, each with its own trajectory and dynamics. Third, all other things being equal—and they often are *not*—incorporation begins at the furthest boundaries, either the prestige goods or information frontier, and moves inward toward the bulk goods frontier. Fourth, the relations among these four dimensions of incorporation and frontier zones are complex theoretically and empirically. Disentangling these relations will require a large variety of comparative studies. Among the many issues needing attention are the spatial aspects of frontiers.

Another elaboration of world-systems analysis regards the charge that it has been insufficiently spatial.<sup>7</sup> This is all the more surprising since so many of its concepts are inherently geographic. Several spatial dimensions are relevant to comparing frontiers.

First, several different geographical scales impinge on frontiers simultaneously and recursively: local, regional, national or imperial, and global. Local action is vital to understanding frontiers, as are the global forces that create, transform, and destroy them. In between are regional levels, typically less in scale than entire states but extending beyond the local. Beyond that is the national or imperial scale. For example, in what became the American Southwest, long the northwest of New Spain, there are the local scales of northern New Mexico, Texas, and California.<sup>8</sup> Then there is the larger scale of the *Provincias Internas*, the internal provinces of New Spain, whose membership and boundaries shifted with the fortunes of New Spain. At a somewhat larger scale are New Spain, and later Mexico. Then there is the scale of the Spanish Empire until the 1820s when the American imperial scale becomes increasingly important, culminating in the conquest of the region in 1848. One source of the richness or complexity of

<sup>6</sup> Others have used, critiqued, or extended both Wallerstein’s and Hall’s concepts of incorporation in a variety of useful ways: Dunaway (1994, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, 1997, 2000); Faiman-Silva (1997); Fenelon (1997, 1998); Harris (1990); Himmel (1999); Kardulias (1990); Meyer (1990, 1994); Pickering (2000); Volk (2000).

<sup>7</sup> Agnew (1982); see Shelley and Flint, 2000, for an extended discussion of these critiques.

<sup>8</sup> I use contemporary geographical terms for ease and familiarity, but clearly recognize this is projection of the present into the past.

frontier social processes is how these forces from these various levels interact, often in contradictory ways. Here, too, is a clue to the frontier puzzle. All frontiers share the interactions of several geographical scales, yet the actual interactions are specific to each frontier. So, again, broad similarities exist with immense differences in detail.

The same action may have opposite consequences or meanings depending on specific local conditions and intentions. For instance, if an expanding state is seeking new territory and the indigenous population flees, leaving that territory open to the state, one might say the state “won” since it acquired the territory, while the indigenous population “lost” since they fled their homeland. However, if the state was seeking new labor, then it “lost” since the potential laborers fled and the indigenous population “won” since they escaped enslavement or enserfment.

Even physical geographic features can be critical. Many historians have remarked on the differences between the steppe and the sown (that is, pastoral and agricultural land); others have noted differences between hill and valley peoples. Given no or low rates of technological change, such physical differences make for real limits in forms of adaptation, and create frontier zones between areas. Here, too, we see the interplay of larger forces. The advent of a new technology can radically shift such frontiers. Both these kinds of difference occur in many places in the world.

Often of equal or greater importance are the geopolitical roles a local area plays in the larger regions to which it belongs. Groups who form a useful barrier, typically called buffer groups, are often favored by surrounding peoples. But if the barrier is undesirable, they are often designated for attack and annihilation. This happened to both Comanche and Apache groups in the Southwest, but in opposite sequences. Under Spanish control Comanche groups were a useful buffer helping to keep encroaching Europeans away from the Southwest, and blocking any “backdoor” access to the lucrative silver mines in and around Zacatecas. Apache groups, on the other hand, were a barrier to trade between Vera Cruz and northern New Mexico. After the American conquest their roles reversed. Comanche groups were major barriers to the Santa Fe Trail trade, and consequently were all to be annihilated. Meanwhile, Apache groups were largely local nuisances, but irrelevant in the larger geopolitical scheme after the border with Mexico was established. This allowed space for many Apache groups to survive in much larger numbers and proportions into the twentieth century. The late twentieth century brought further changes. Technological shifts transformed former geologic curiosities into vital resources, notably coal and uranium—both of which were found on various reservations.<sup>9</sup> The border region began to boom.

There are other types of important geographical differences. One is the contrast between internal and external frontiers, which often, but not always, coincide with barrier and buffer roles. An internal frontier is a zone that separates two regions of a larger state. An example is the Apachean zone within New Spain, which made contact between northern New Mexico and what became Chihuahua difficult. An external frontier is the more familiar zone on the edge of an expanding state, empire, or world-system. Other types of distinctions are empty zones, and more typically *emptied* zones (from which people have been driven) by any number of factors. These often serve as refuges for wildlife—faunal and vegetative—to recover from overuse.<sup>10</sup>

In general, the further back in history one goes, the more world-systems or core-periphery systems one finds. Through time they have merged. These merg-

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<sup>9</sup> For further details see Hall, 1986, 1989b; Hämäläinen, 1998; or Kavanaugh, 1996.

<sup>10</sup> For examples see Anderson, 1994; Martin and Szuter, 1999.

ers in themselves create different kinds of frontiers between systems. One, though, is of particular interest. That is, zones that are able to develop by playing one world-system against another to maintain autonomy and gain access to goods, ideas, and personnel to allow enhanced development. The idea of such contested peripheries or especially semiperipheries warrants further development (see Berquist, 1995; Allen, 1997). In particular, Cline (2000) describes a millennia-long role for Megiddo in the Levant.

Some further brief examples will illustrate these points and raise a few cautions.

#### *Examples, Issues, Cautions*

I have already alluded to the differences in the transmission of horses and guns across the frontiers of northern New Spain. These processes offer a great deal in terms of explaining why the people we know as Comanches came to dominate the south plains (see Kavanaugh, 1996; Hämäläinen, 1998). The explanation is found in the crossing of the horse and gun frontiers (Secoy, 1953). Guns diffused from northeastern North America to the Southwest, spreading from fur traders who had ready access to neighboring peoples. Horses, on the other hand, spread outward from their source in northern New Mexico in all directions, but especially toward the northeast where they were exchanged for guns. The Spanish Empire attempted to control the spread of guns, not only to indigenous peoples, but to their own commoners. Accounts of the northern frontiers are replete with cries for more guns by governors, militias, and private citizens. These two frontiers crossed somewhere in what is now southeastern Colorado in the early eighteenth century, in the territory where the ancestors of Comanche peoples lived. This enabled them to move onto the Plains, prosper at buffalo hunting, and expand their territorial control toward the Southwest at the expense of Apachean and other groups. Later they were able to take advantage of their location to control extensive trade networks and breed horses for exchange (Hämäläinen, 1998). It is interesting that analogous processes occurred along the southern frontier of the Spanish Empire in the lower La Plata region (Jones, 1993a, 1993b, 1998; Slatta, 1998).

Many of the indigenous groups were radically transformed by frontier processes in the Southwest. The Navajo, or Diné, were a diffuse group of related Athapaskan language speakers whose sense of being “the people” far exceeded any formal or informal social organization. Over centuries of interaction with Spaniards and neighboring indigenous groups they began to form a consolidated group, which finally took shape under the American occupation. Other Athapaskan speakers, the Apachean groups, became progressively more fragmented as they had to deal with Spanish and Comanche slave raiding. They were increasingly driven into the basin and range areas of the Southwest and fragmented into smaller groups, obviating any overall political organization. Comanches, on the other hand, were compelled by Spanish governors in the late eighteenth century to elect one central chief as part of the peace treaty in 1786. Had this consolidation lasted they might have become a formidable chiefdom with strong central organization. However, the American intrusion placed pressures on them similar to those the Spanish had put on the Apachean groups, and promoted both their fragmentation and near destruction. The various transformations of the Apachean and Comanche groups are closely bound with their changing roles in the political economy of the frontier.

The clearest case of ethnogenesis in the Southwest is that of the *Genízaros* who were in a very real sense created by frontier processes. Spanish settlers were in the habit of taking captured nomadic Indians (whom they called *los indios barbaros*) as slaves. Spaniards drew a sharp distinction between “wild” or “nomadic” indigenous peoples and settled peoples, the Pueblos, whom they termed *gente de*

*razon* (people of reason) because they lived in permanent settlements, often laid out in a grid with a central plaza, much like Spanish towns. Spaniards favored children and women as captives and slaves, primarily because they were more tractable. Women became servants and concubines, and children were raised in the Spanish community. Spanish obsession with blood purity led to segregating these erstwhile Natives from Hispanic society. Within a few generations they became a separate group. In order to gain respect, status, and opportunity, *Genízaros* often moved to extreme frontiers where they bore the brunt of the endemic warfare between settlers and indigenous peoples. Over time, if they gained sufficient wealth and married well, *Genízaros* were absorbed into Spanish society. With the American conquest and cessation of endemic warfare this ethnic transformation abated and *Genízaros* disappeared as a distinctive group. Even today the term is heard occasionally in the Southwest as an epithet of opprobrium for one who is “wild.”<sup>11</sup>

These examples suggest some issues and cautions in studying and comparing frontiers. The first, following the work of Thomas Sheridan (1992), is the problem of “ethnographic upstreaming.” Ethnographic upstreaming is the reading of ethnographic practices and reports of one era into a more distant past. The tendency to “upstream” derives from a general tendency once common in the social sciences, and trenchantly critiqued by Eric Wolf in *Europe and the People Without History* (1982), for scholars to assume that a pristine ethnographic past existed for indigenous peoples. The assumption in its worst form was that change only happened when Europeans arrived, or in other parts of the world when sedentary, literate peoples arrived. Wolf’s ironic title and his critique underscore the point that such peoples do in fact have histories, even if they are only accessible via oral history and archaeology and not through written documents. An analogous, but less common problem might be dubbed “ethnographic downstreaming.” Ethnographic downstreaming assumes some unchanging, pristine past has been uncovered. The ethnographic practices and reports of this past, pristine culture are then read into subsequent events, where deviations are seen as disintegrations or deteriorations of culture, rather than as what they are: adaptations to changing circumstances.

The problem is that in the absence of solid documentary and other evidence, it is often reasonable to assume change is relatively slow, and thus to read known practices either backward or forward in time. If the time span is short this is a reasonable starting hypothesis, but not a fact. Frontier zones are extremely volatile, and change can often be rapid, which suggests extreme caution in following this strategy. This is best done by carefully combining firsthand observations and reports with other forms of evidence such as oral histories, archaeological data, ethnographic analogies, and on occasion astronomical data. David Anderson does a masterful job of this in his reconstruction of the DeSoto expedition. Barbara Mann and Jerry Fields (1997) do this for a reconstruction of the founding of the League of the Iroquois. In doing so they lay to rest debates about whether the League pre- or post-dated European contact. They show, through astronomical data, that the League was founded August 31, C.E. 1142. Interestingly, the astronomical data strongly support the accuracy of Haudenosaunee (Iroquoian) oral histories. Analogous data documented by Goodman (1992) lend strong support to Lakota claims to have been in the Black Hills many centuries before the arrival of Europeans—again contrary to some recent received wisdom.

The second major caution derives from the work of Brian Ferguson and Neil Whitehead (1992a, 1992b) on what they call “war in the tribal zone.” Their work is rich and complex, but a few points stand out. As in several instances noted

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<sup>11</sup> The origins of the term *Genízaro* are obscure. There is little evidence to support its origin in the homonym *janizary*, despite considerable similarity in the role they played in frontier defense (see Hall, in press).

above, when a state contacts and interacts with nonstate, indigenous peoples the effects of that contact often ripple well beyond the immediate contact zone. Two examples will suffice. First is the effect of virgin soil epidemics (Crosby, 1972, 1986). With increases in trade and often with simultaneous displacement of peoples, diseases may spread very rapidly well beyond the zone of contact. Second, displacement of peoples typically leads to intensified warfare, again, well beyond the contact zone. In the Southwest, war and the taking of captives became endemic as many of the more nomadic indigenous peoples had little else but captives to trade with Spaniards for horses, guns, or other goods.

Both processes, spread of disease and warfare, can vastly disrupt social systems. Where disease enters virgin soil, such a large portion of the population may die that the previous culture cannot be entirely continued. This is especially true among nonliterate peoples where preservation of tradition is a major role of elders—precisely the one group most likely to die in an epidemic (children being the other). Intensified warfare often disrupts gender-balancing mechanisms in favor of male warriors. Thus, even the earliest accounts of firsthand observers are suspect. What they are seeing are *not* pristine conditions, but conditions that are themselves products of the very processes that placed them in a position to make their observations. Anderson's (1994) discussion of the DeSoto expedition avoids this because of his careful attention to the problem, and his close knowledge of the supporting archaeological data, and because the DeSoto expedition was the first European exploration of much of the territory it traveled.

These are, however, precisely the kinds of problems that comparative study of frontiers can address, if they are attended to closely and seriously. What, then, does all this tell us about the frontier puzzle?

### Unraveling the Frontier Puzzle

“Conclusion” seems too strong a term for the end of this analysis. Rather, it is a discussion outlining potential solutions to the puzzle of frontiers: why they all seem similar initially, but on closer inspection all seem widely different. In short, the solution is that there are a few broadly similar processes, shaped by a few variables and conditions that yield a very large number of different concrete manifestations.

In schematic form the factors or variables that shape frontiers are

- 3 types of world-systems, multiplied by
- 4 types of system boundaries, multiplied by
- at least several (say, at least 3) types of nonstate groups (say, bands, tribes, and chiefdoms, to take a familiar, if problematic trinity) multiplied by
- at least 4 types of frontiers: buffer vs. barrier and/or internal vs. external, multiplied by
- at least 4 types of physical differences: steppe vs. sown and/or hill vs. valley.

This yields at least 576 potential types of frontiers.

If in addition we attend to factors such as

- the phase of world-system in terms of its various cycles, or what we might call world-system time,
- the motives for incorporation, especially the types of resources sought,
- the roles of the incorporated regions and peoples in the larger system,
- the overall trajectory of incorporation, including reversals of degree,
- the trajectories of change among the groups being incorporated *before* contact,
- the efforts of incorporated people to resist incorporation,
- and so on, then

the variety of frontiers and frontier processes becomes immense. This immensity rests on a rather small handful of basic factors. Thus, at one level, the puzzle is solved. This small number of factors accounts for the initial similarity or family resemblance, while myriad of possible manifestations accounts for the wide divergence among frontiers. At other levels, however, the puzzle has become more complex. These complexities revolve around the issue of just how the interactions of these processes might be untangled and more clearly explicated.

This, however, is not quite the end of the story. As always there are unresolved problems which clever comparative studies of frontiers might illuminate. Key among these problems is a closer examination of how people resist incorporation. As discussed above, running away may or may not be successful resistance, depending on several specific local circumstances. Often actions that those doing the incorporating were wont to label as "irrational" or "savage" (if, indeed, those two terms are not redundant in their view) are in fact quintessentially rational attempts at resisting incorporation and its consequences.<sup>12</sup>

There is also a need to examine how efforts at resistance and counterreactions to overcome that resistance rounded to the centers of world-systems and how they diffused throughout them. For instance, the Spanish administration rotated officials throughout the empire. Some of the governors who first held office in Peru, La Plata, or New Spain had tours in the Philippines. They even went so far as to call Philippine nonstate societies *indios* (Steinberg, 1987). Sidney Mintz in *Sweetness and Power* (1985) even suggests that methods of controlling slaves on early sugar plantations were used in the early organization of factories. Argentine generals explicitly followed U.S. strategies for subduing American Indians in their "conquest of the desert." Several countries have modeled their attempts to deal with indigenous peoples after the U.S. reservation system (Perry, 1996). This is one source of a frequent sense of *déjà vu* in accounts of the Roman Empire (e.g., Luttwak, 1976; Mattingly, 1992; Wells, 1992, 1999; Miller, 1993). None of these suggestions is definitive, only enticing.

Thus, several problems need further attention:

- How does resistance to incorporation in frontier regions affect both frontier processes and reactions in the core?
- Are there regular patterns or trajectories of frontier processes?
- How does the trajectory of incorporation shape subsequent frontier dynamics?
- How specifically do frontier processes *simultaneously* create ethnic homogeneity and ethnic heterogeneity?
- In precapitalist settings, how specifically do frontier processes promote and/or block secondary state formation?
- In detail how do frontier processes and trajectories of incorporation differ between capitalist and precapitalist settings?

I could list more such questions, but the point is obvious. There are many unanswered questions that might usefully be addressed through judicious comparative study. There is much to be learned about international relations through the study of frontier zones. I will even go so far as to claim that some processes are not only best studied there, but only studied there. To paraphrase Peter Sahlins's (1989:xv) epigraph from Pierre Vilar: The history of the world is best observed from the frontier. I would add that comparative studies of frontiers and borders can be fertile grounds from which to examine international relations.

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<sup>12</sup> For two interesting examples of resistance by indigenous women see Dunaway, 2000, and Ward, Stander, and Solom, 2000.

### **Bringing It All Back to the Classroom**

I return now to the general discussion at the beginning to show how the study of frontiers illustrates those points. First, one need not accept the major tenets of world-systems analysis, or of any given theoretical perspective, to use it to develop a framework for making comparisons. Second, this approach simultaneously seems to solve an initial puzzle even while creating many other, more complex, and one hopes, more interesting ones. On the one hand, that a small number of factors are common to most frontiers underscores why they all seem similar—at least at first look. On the other hand, the many ways the details of how those factors combine and interact raise many more puzzles and help account for the seeming uniqueness of each frontier. The litany of factors and processes offers guidance to students about the kinds of issues and processes that require close attention, and suggests attention to both top-down and bottom-up processes.

There is considerable potential here for engaging students in model- and/or theory-building by comparing the various cases as students present them. Here the instructor often must model this speculative process and help students overcome the mythical quest for “the right answer.” Rather, s/he must illustrate in this kind of work that there is no one right answer. Rather, there are many arguably plausible answers, and others that are far from defensible. In short, while there may be no one right answer, there can be wrong ones. A practical difficulty is getting the case studies done sufficiently early in the term that comparative discussion has time to emerge. Yet, with even only a small handful of cases, the point that comparisons can be structured in many ways to pursue different theoretical goals can readily be demonstrated. With due caution, the point that categories used to set up comparisons are tools, not ends in themselves, and that they are subject to continual revision can be underscored. To the degree that students become engaged in the model/theory-building process, they will have an easier time paying attention both to details in their own case studies, and to the ways they are reported by others. This will help them develop a healthy sense of skepticism about data and data sources, yet demonstrate to them that much can be learned even from “approximations,” such as the initial categories of frontiers and borders. Thus, in addition to its use in comparative work, this approach can help students develop their critical thinking skills.

I would be remiss if I did not sketch areas that require some caution. These have emerged in using a similar approach to teach about ethnic conflict and social problems, as well as frontiers. Would that I had a “magic bullet” for each, but I do not. First, students must be pushed to start their case studies early. They can begin general background work as they refine the issues they wish to address. Second, it is important to have diverse cases. Third, especially when the number of reports is large, the presentations can become almost ritualistic. Here assigning some specific students responsibility for interrogating those reporting can help jump-start discussion. Fourth, occasionally individual case studies, or even the general discussion, can become mired in a plethora of details. This is where returning to the issues of the organizing paradigm can be useful in another way—it offers a common “big picture” to which discussions can be anchored.

Teaching a course this way is not easy. It requires more, or at least a different kind of instructor work, and requires lots of adjustments “on the fly” and a readiness and willingness to “seize the serendipitous moment” to make various points. For this reason, a final caution is for the instructor to choose an organizing paradigm that s/he is comfortable with, knows in detail, and can work with extemporaneously. I think the rewards are worth it. Students become more actively involved in the material. Indeed, they are empowered by taking “ownership” of their own case study. They become engaged in doing social science, not just reading about it. This helps them develop a much better sense of what goes

on behind the scenes in developing all those papers and texts they have read. This in turn helps them develop their critical skills.

As always with such courses, much depends on the details of the execution. This entails not only what the instructor can do, and does do, but also a knowledge of how this fits into the students' overall experiences at each particular institution and within each department or program. Finally, there is another, often very important dividend for the instructor. It keeps her/him fresh by examining new materials in "real time" in front of the students, and quite often provides help with his/her own research agenda from the level of newly encountered case material to various insights arising from classroom discussions, to offering a chance to work through ideas. In this latter aspect, it can help transform the often perceived conflictual relationship between teaching and research into a synergistic one.

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