From Frontiers to Borders

How did modern territoriality emerge and what are its consequences? This book examines these key questions with a unique global perspective. Kerry Goettlich argues that linear boundaries are products of particular colonial encounters, rather than being essentially an intra-European practice artificially imposed on colonized regions. He reconceptualizes modern territoriality as a phenomenon separate from sovereignty and the state, based on expert practices of delimitation and demarcation. Its history stems from the social production of expertise oriented towards these practices. Employing both primary and secondary sources, *From Frontiers to Borders* examines how this expertise emerged in settler colonies in North America and in British India – cases which illuminate a range of different types of colonial rule and influence. It also explores some of the consequences of the globalization of modern territoriality, exposing the colonial origins of boundary studies and the impact of boundary experts on the Paris Peace Conference of 1919–20.

KERRY GOETTLICH is Lecturer in International Security at the University of Reading. His research has appeared in journals including the *American Political Science Review*, the *European Journal of International Relations*, and *International Political Sociology*. He has received numerous awards for his work including the Mary Parker Follett Prize from the American Political Science Association, the Merze Tate Prize from the International Studies Association, and the Best Dissertation Award from the European International Studies Association.

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From Frontiers to Borders

How Colonial Technicians Created Modern Territoriality

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Preface

This book began its life in 2015, in two different places. One was a proposal for a PhD thesis that would have explored the trajectory of a set of historical myths about the 1916 Sykes–Picot Agreement between Britain and France regarding Ottoman territories and the political consequences of those myths. The other was an essay I wrote as part of my master's degree, in which I struggled, with varying success, to understand why International Relations scholars, with very few exceptions, spent so little time thinking about what territory is, how it has changed historically, and how it shapes international politics.

I owe it to my brilliant doctoral supervisor, Prof. Tarak Barkawi, that this book became just as much a response to the concerns motivating the essay as it is to those of the PhD proposal. Successive versions of the thesis migrated from exploring the consequences of the myth of Sykes–Picot, to exploring the history of the myth, to retracing the history of the borders themselves that the myth referred to, to analyzing the late nineteenth-century surge in colonial boundary-drawing all over Asia and Africa. Teetering dangerously on the brink of going from there to the history of all borders everywhere, I came across, by accident, an account of the 1728 Virginia–North Carolina boundary survey written by Virginia's representative which suggested what appeared to me as an entirely novel explanation for the origins of modern territoriality, at least in North America. It was in working out the relation between the transformation of North America that this opened up, on the one hand, and the late nineteenth-century boundary-drawing I had been previously interested in, on the other, that the project finally found the rationale it should have started with. All the while, I realized that Tarak had been constantly doing the exact opposite of what most people (perhaps correctly) think most PhD supervisors do: he was challenging me to think bigger, take a wider historical view, and critique more scholars.

So the project originally had two aims: first, to work through some of the limitations of attempts to understand the effects of borders left

behind by colonialism; and second, to identify, with greater precision than had been done so far, what is unique about territory in modernity, how it came about, and why it matters. In the process it became clear – and the coherence of the book stands or falls on this – that these two aims pointed in the same direction. The basic argument is that modern territoriality, in global perspective, is largely (though not exclusively) a technical practice of colonialism, centring not on sovereign states and nations but instead on what practitioners call 'delimitation' and 'demarcation'.

The book uses history to make this essentially conceptual argument, which itself could not have been arrived at without a close encounter with primary and secondary historical sources of various kinds. But it is not unlikely that historians, especially historians of particular places and regions, but not only them, will find much in this book to quarrel with and even more that is omitted. The question of when – if not why – in any particular place in the world, linear boundaries began to be delimited and demarcated in a recognizably modern way, may seem to a casual reader to be an uncomplicated one, to which an answer must be already available somewhere, or at least an answer must be readily available once all the relevant evidence is compiled together. But, as many historians know well, especially historians of medieval European boundaries, the frame of reference brought to bear by the inquirer, and developed and refined in consideration of many kinds of evidence, is at least as important as the evidence itself. With this in mind, it is primarily the way in which this book attempts to shift the frame of reference with which we see modern boundaries which gives it its rationale and purpose. My best hope is that the book is judged as a first attempt to put together the pieces of a large question that has barely yet been asked.

The book has benefitted from conversations with countless people who have read earlier versions of parts of it, or otherwise shared their perspectives with me in conversations on themes related to this project. It would be impossible to name all of them here, and unfair to name only some of them. But to be slightly unfair, I would like to thank Jens Bartelson, Martin Bayly, Andreas Behnke, Sarah Bertrand, Didier Bigo, Jordan Branch, Julian Go, Mark Hoffmann, Jef Huysmans, Oliver Kessler, Jorg Kustermans, George Lawson, Jeppe Mulich, Himadeep Muppidi, Christopher Patrick Murray, Iver Neumann, Kerem Nişancioğlu, Joseph O'Mahoney, Lauren Pinson,

Hendrik Spruyt, George Steinmetz, Rob Walker, Peter Wilson, Joanne Yao, and Ayşe Zarakol. I have learned something from each of them, although perhaps not enough. In its formative stages, the project benefitted from an excellent community of PhD students at the London School of Economics International Relations Department, and I would like to thank all of them for their exemplary comradeship and for creating an exceptional intellectual environment. The book also benefitted from the help of Isha Patil as a research assistant through the University of Reading's Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme, from the assistance of Joan C. Snellen van Vollenhoven of the Corts Foundation, and from that of Katie Carey, the Hodson Curator of the Johns Hopkins University Archives. And, of course, I could not have written this book, and would not be who I am, without the love and encouragement of my parents, who told me I could do anything I wanted, on what authority I know not.

My greatest debt of gratitude in writing this book is to Alvina Hoffmann, whose support for me and whose endurance, through thick and thin, amid interminable conversations about borders in every odd part of the world has been unshakeable. She has had no small influence on the project over the years, from introducing me to Pierre Bourdieu's notions of practice, field, and habitus, which lie in the background of the text but shaped my thinking in fundamental ways, to making possible the use of some crucial source material from the French colonialist journal *L'Asie Française*. I dedicate this book to her and to our son Leo, who has made a fine contribution to the late stages of working on this project in the form of comic relief.