

Introduction

Of Flies and Ants

Hurbut Tongloyn, Thangliena, and Thomas Herbert Lewin were some of the names of a man renowned in British circles and, supposedly, among frontier inhabitants for his escapades beyond the eastern edge of Bengal from the 1860s to 1880s.¹ He was given to outbursts of maniacal ambition, as when he confided to his diary ‘I am now founding a new colony here – among the Lushai’.² His first forays into the uplands resulted from a determination to gather information on the Lushai people, coupled with imagined journeys through frontier space. ‘I had arrived at the conclusion’, he later recalled, ‘that by going some distance southwards and then striking east I should get to Burmah, perhaps, if I went far enough, to China’.³ This mixture of scientific-observational motives with fantastical schemes was a key constituent of high imperial frontiers, areas in which neat delineations between knowing and desiring did not hold. Frontiers disrupted conventions not only at the grandiose level of legal frameworks and scientific techniques but also at intimate scales: interpersonal encounters, the body, and the self. By the later nineteenth century, when normalised processes of knowing and governing seemed to have spread across most of Britain’s imperial possessions, agents of empire widely construed India’s frontiers as what Michel Foucault termed ‘spiritual’ spaces.⁴ Comprehending and acting in these spaces seemed to demand not a masterful and removed subject-position, but rather that frontier officials became other than they were before and elsewhere. In short, British agents of empire conceived of frontiers as productively strange.

¹ J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), frontispiece. See also John Whitehead, *Thangliena: The Life of T.H. Lewin* (Gartmore: Kiscadale, 1992).

² Senate House Library, University of London (hereafter ‘SHL’), Lewin Collection, MS 811/II/27, f. 53, xxv.

³ T. H. Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel, or How I Helped to Govern India* (London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1885), pp. 221–6.

⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York, NY: Picador, 2005), pp. 15–9.

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In the event, on this journey Lewin did not reach China, nor anywhere near Burma. Shot by one of his guides (whether accidentally or not remained a mystery), he laboured back from the first village that he reached beyond administered colonial territory.⁵ During the following years, however, he persistently pierced the formal limits of British rule, developing a conceptual apparatus to justify his activities to others and to himself. He praised the hill dwellers in primitivist terms while critiquing ‘civilization’ for its fixation on luxury.⁶ Yet he could not bring himself to extol the frontier communities’ existing state in its entirety: to do so would not only remove his role but would obliterate the self that the uplanders allowed him to be – the ‘Hurbut Tognloyn’ or ‘Thangliena’ that he apparently came to consider no more affected than ‘T. H. Lewin’. He accordingly proposed something between ‘civilization’ and the ‘simple people like our hill men’ – and that something was, implicitly, his own self. ‘If’, he mused in 1869, ‘these people could be taught to live according to Nature in its higher sense, to rise above all gross and base indulgences, mindful of those higher laws of which only self-denial and self-command can render observance possible, I am not prepared to say but this be the wisest and the grandest ideal’.⁷ Such tuition would come from ‘not measures but a man . . . an officer gifted with the power of rule; not a mere cog in the great wheel of government’.⁸ He felt that this approach held out the promise of a double flourishing. Guided by someone aware of the pitfalls as well as the promises of civilisation, frontier communities would become ‘not debased and miniature epitomes of Englishmen, but a new and noble type of God’s creatures’.⁹ This was a case of a British imperialist self-deifying as an awesome agent of reform; but it was also something more. Lewin believed that he too would benefit through immersion among frontier communities that ‘live according to Nature as the old Stoic philosophers taught’.¹⁰ Here, then, was a scheme in which the colonising self and the colonised frontier were inseparable, with changes in one implying and requiring shifts to the other.

Lewin did not unquestioningly adhere to this entwined ideal of frontier and self. In January 1871 he wrote a poem entitled ‘Change’, the sentiment of which evidently lasted or returned, as he transcribed the words into his diary once again in early 1873.

Cast away these phantasmatic aimless wanderings erratic
 And forswearing moods prismatic cease to roam
 Pleasure seek not in things strange, true love only knows no change
 There’s true pleasure, true variety at Home.¹¹

⁵ Lewin, *Fly*, pp. 255–77.

⁶ T.H. Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein; with Comparative Vocabularies of the Hill Dialects* (Calcutta: Bengal Printing Company, 1869), pp. 115–16.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 115. ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 118. ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 118. ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

¹¹ SHL, Lewin Collection, MS 811/II/27, f. 53, xxvii.

The struggle against his frontier-self and all it represented – casting off the normality and stasis of Home in favour of wanderings erratic and things strange – was one that Lewin wanted to lose. He was seemingly unable to be content with the unchanging, favouring instead the fragmentation of his personality, scattering differing selves like light shone through a prism. Yet his efforts to maintain these multiple selves were also destined to seem forlorn.

Lewin's memoirs, published in 1885, attest to a man still unconvinced by the merits of cultivated civilisation and prone to seeing in Lushai society another world, one of 'contentment and well-being', set against 'the feverish anxieties of civilized life'.¹² By this stage, however, he acknowledged that this other world was one that he could never fully enter. He referred to the dream-like moods that the frontier had inspired, which at their most extreme expressed an urge to disappear completely and merge with the upland landscape. '[The mist] gave one an impulse to spring out into the soft white fleece . . . [I] watched the rushing torrent cast its masses of topaz-coloured water over the dark rocks, foaming, raging, and tumbling headlong down, with such an uproarious sympathy with the wild water'.¹³ But he became increasingly convinced that being enveloped by Lushai society and landscape was simply not possible. As early as 1873, he related to his diary the exotic and erotic allure of 'the girls in the country . . . almost a gold colour, they are like statues of transparent gold through [which] shines out the life light'. No sooner had he projected his domineering, desiring gaze outwards than it reflected back, as if he imagined the eyes of Lushais on his own body and experienced a sharp apprehension of his entrapment in a pallor that signified, at least momentarily, not power but self-disgust.¹⁴ 'I feel almost ashamed of my dead white skin – it looks leprous & unhealthy among these gun metal beauties'.¹⁵

By 1885, Lewin felt, with evident misgivings, that his Thangliena persona could not mediate all racial and civilisational differences. The Lushais, he insisted, were 'happy' with their materially limited lot. 'We English people' – the first-person pronoun is notable – were mistaken in promoting 'civilization as the antidote for all earthly ills' in the manner of 'some good old country dame with a turn for doctoring'.¹⁶ Gone was any sign of faith in Thangliena's ability to perfect the Lushais as archetypes of a community living in accordance with Nature. Lewin instead quietly admitted that he could not be Thangliena. The final paragraph of *A Fly on the Wheel* contained the final repudiation of his claim sixteen years earlier that the Lushais needed 'not measures but a man' and of his efforts to be that man:

¹² Lewin, *Fly*, p. 428. ¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 457–9.

¹⁴ On the recursive quality of the imperial gaze, especially in frontier environs, see Erik Mueggler, *The Paper Road: Archive and Experience in the Botanical Expedition of West China and Tibet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), p. 60.

¹⁵ SHL, Lewin Collection, MS 811/II/27, f. 53, xxv. ¹⁶ Lewin, *Fly*, p. 428.

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I knew and loved my hill people. I lived among them and was their friend . . . But, after all, I was only ‘a fly on the wheel’; they were not *my* people. I did but represent and make known to them the impartial justice, the perfect tolerance, and the respect for personal freedom which characterise the British rule in India.¹⁷

The elegiac ‘after all’ acts as a pivot between the dream of Thangliena’s fluid frontier identity and Lewin’s realisation that he had been nothing more than a conduit of imperial ideals in which he had little faith.

In this light we can see that Lewin all along conceived of salvation as a two-way track: saving the Lushais was always an attempt to save himself as well. In November 1871, Lewin had journeyed off from Chittagong into the hills as part of a colonial force sent to enact violence against Lushai villages. Despite the pressures of his official role with the expedition – and notwithstanding his admission a couple of years later that his ‘head becomes silly’ when reading Descartes and Kant¹⁸ – his diary entry that day consisted mainly of musings on the fallibility and limitation of human senses. He then turned to consider the animal kingdom. ‘Can it be that ants have some other new sense or some variation of sense more refined and delicate than ours that leads them to find their food – else how do they find a fly on a pot of jam?’ A note to the side of this train of thought abruptly halted the tone of scientific investigation, stating that ‘No data are obtainable by which to estimate the powers of scent of these creatures’.¹⁹

The importance of sensory intensity and inadequacy to British dealings in frontier environs suggests that we should read this entry as more than a mere oddity. Still more significance emerges if we take seriously the apparently arbitrary example of the ants and the fly. In his memoirs published fourteen years later, Lewin denoted his insignificance and the limitations of his Thangliena self with a nod to Aesop’s fable of the fly on the wheel: he was the fly that believes for a time that he kicked up all that dust from the track. Narrating in that book the final stages of the 1871 expedition, when the colonial party came across the last band holding out against it, Lewin wrote: ‘[there] surged myriads of Lushais; the jungle was like an ants’ nest. As I was led forward by my white-bearded conductor, there was a cry from the crowd of “Thangliena! Thangliena!”’ Here was something more than merely a dismissive rendering of frontier inhabitants as insects, the irritating yet ultimately crushable animalistic mass that many of Lewin’s administrative contemporaries invoked when describing communities at the edge of empire. It was the ants that called into being Thangliena, the frontiersman. Among members of the expeditionary force, he was simply T. H. Lewin, stuck with executing measures that seemed farcical and feeble in comparison to the rich, ‘magical’ Lushai culture.²⁰ Lewin was the fly mired in the jam, trusting that the ants, with their delicate and unknowable

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 465–66. ¹⁸ SHL, Lewin Collection, MS 811/II/27, f. 53, xxxiii.

¹⁹ SHL, Lewin Collection, MS 811/II/27, f. 53, xxiii. ²⁰ Lewin, *Fly*, p. 407.

means of negotiating frontier environs, would find, change, and save him. That this did not happen was a crushing blow.

Many of his contemporaries shared both Lewin's insistence on India's frontiers as an invaluable margin for self-fashioning and his sense of being complicit in the narrowing of this space of freedom and play.²¹ Looked at from established imperial hubs, the later nineteenth century was an era of confidence in the technologies and ideologies of European global supremacy. Viewed from the frontiers, these things seemed simultaneously fragile and threatening, and high empire appeared to be not just an age of progress but one of belatedness and shortcomings. British frontiersmen were troubled as much by the extension of conventional forms of imperial power as by the excessive challenges that frontiers often presented. Staving off these twin threats and maintaining frontiers as spaces of productive difficulties entailed sustaining a host of laborious discursive and material strategies. This was difficult, perilous work – and for Lewin and many others, it proved impossible.

The State of Power and Knowledge

India's frontiers were spaces in which the colonial state was both dramatically present and frequently ineffective. There was no essential contradiction here but rather symbiosis between the spectacular and the chaotic. British power at frontiers was only occasionally predicated on categorising and codifying, emanating more often from indeterminacy and upheaval. Decades before the likes of Lewin conceived of them as ambiguous counterpoints to core features of high empire, the British were already construing India's frontiers as sources of productive difficulties. The annexations of Assam (1826), Sind (1843), and Punjab (1849) brought agents of empire into sustained contact with the areas that became frontiers until the British quit the subcontinent in 1947. Early dealings with these regions did much to set the tone and agenda for the significance of frontiers in the era of high empire. From the outset, the supposed unruliness of upland and desert-bound regions beyond the formal administration of the Company-State was prized as well as feared. Frontier communities and terrain threatened to overwhelm the state's resources by impacting prestige and income alike, not to mention the danger they presented to the life and limb of British personnel and colonised subjects. But for these very reasons frontiers became celebrated as proving grounds for individual men and for colonial rule.

²¹ On the importance of 'play' to British men in another fringe space of the Indian empire, the Andaman Islands, see Satadru Sen, *Savagery and Colonialism in the Indian Ocean: Power, Pleasure and the Andaman Islanders* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p. 11. Hannah Arendt also comments on 'crimes committed in the spirit of play' as a hallmark of colonial activity: Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 3rd ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967), p. 190.

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The ideas and practices established during the initial flurries of activity following annexations were vital influences on, and resources for, the intensified burst of theorising and fashioning frontiers from the late 1860s onwards. India's fringes could only become peculiarly significant to imperial personnel towards the close of the nineteenth century because of theories and materials that had accumulated during the preceding decades.

High imperial frontiers did not emerge from the development of stable governmental logics and the cumulative acquisition and dissemination of information as the nineteenth century progressed. Instead, the colonial state developed ways of comprehending and working in these regions that relied on strategies of forgetting, overlooking, and occluding. Just as Ann Laura Stoler has shown in the case of the Dutch East Indies, colonial statecraft in India's frontiers was as much about disconnecting events to render them 'insignificant or unintelligible' as it was about gathering them together and making them 'legible'.²² Even in those instances in which information on frontiers accumulated, its meaning often remained indeterminate. The concept of the frontier as a space of openness and exception was a prime example of the power of vague categories. It allowed agents of the colonial state to act in ways that contravened notions of what was viable or acceptable elsewhere and to ignore similar undertakings in the past that had conspicuously failed. Frontier forgetting was sometimes bound up in the state's shortcomings and quotidian cases of information blockages and interpretative confusions, but in many cases it was a deliberate strategy. Imperial personnel perceived that their status as frontier experts depended on limiting the spread of certain types of knowledge and wilfully disregarding others. They engaged in activities that Stoler assigns to what she terms 'aphasia' in postcolonial French attitudes to empire, including 'active dissociation' and the 'occlusion of knowledge'.²³ In significant ways, British men at India's frontiers sought to avoid becoming enmeshed in bureaucracy and abstraction, instead exhibiting 'no will to know'.²⁴

This characteristic of colonial engagements with frontiers compels us to rethink the motives and logics of British power in India and of modern states more widely. Postcolonialist accounts, most notably those emanating from the Subaltern Studies tradition, suggest that colonial domination in the subcontinent was premised on epistemic projects of defining and taxonomising. The

²² Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 29.

²³ Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France', *Public Culture*, 23, 1 (2011), pp. 121–56, here p. 125.

²⁴ Keith Breckenridge, 'No Will to Know: The Rise and Fall of African Civil Registration in Twentieth-Century South Africa', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 182 (2012), pp. 357–83; see also Keith Breckenridge, *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

unflinchingly confident projection of Western rationality provided the epistemic and moral sovereignty that simultaneously enabled and justified the subjugation of India to British rule and logics of capital.²⁵ According to this interpretation, substantial opposition to empire's tyrannical imposition of supposedly universal categories came from what Partha Chatterjee termed 'the fragmentary, the local, and the subjugated', through which colonised people created a 'spiritual' domain beyond the sovereignty of the colonial state.²⁶ Focusing on frontiers suggests a related but distinct story, which pays attention to the importance of the fragmentary and the local to British colonial power. At India's frontiers, the categories supposedly foundational to modern empire – spatial and intellectual delineations, notions of representational truth, and the investment of uniform sovereignty in a unitary state – frayed at the edges. These regions called into question the notion that all people and spaces could be subsumed within a single field of analysis, the field of 'historicism' that Dipesh Chakrabarty identifies as integral to European imperial thought and practice.²⁷ Helen Tilley's assessment of early to mid-twentieth-century colonial Africa applies to many agents of empire engaged at India's frontiers: 'the very people engaged in creating and maintaining structures of imperial domination . . . were, ironically, among those who shared with postcolonial scholars a desire to "provincialize Europe" . . . challenging truth claims that accepted European examples and standards as the norm'.²⁸ The men who imagined and enacted colonial frontiers often made the 'assumption that historical time is out of joint with itself'.²⁹ Practices derided as barbaric were co-opted into supposedly civilised projections of state power, while the divine and fantastical inhered within ostensibly disenchanted schemes to know subject peoples and spaces.

The very different perspective on colonial power from India's fringes can be understood by revisiting Michel Foucault's theories on power and recasting the way in which they have been put to work in accounts of British India. Frontiers were a kind of reverse 'heterotopia', inverting Foucault's notion of a 'space as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled'.³⁰ They came to be constituted precisely as the 'messy' spaces that enabled escape from the 'meticulous' structures that supposedly bound ruled

²⁵ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), xi.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, xi; pp. 6–13.

²⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), xiv; pp. 6–9.

²⁸ Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870–1950* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. 314–15.

²⁹ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing*, pp. 15–16.

³⁰ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16, 1 (1986), pp. 22–7, here p. 27.

and ruler elsewhere in India. It was no coincidence that these land frontiers far from the shores of the Indian Ocean developed at a time when the challenges offered to the early colonial state by an ‘unruly’ maritime frontier had drawn to a close.³¹ Faced with the prospect of becoming, in Foucault’s terms, a ‘civilisation without boats, where dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates’, colonial agents strived to construct and maintain the productive tensions and freedom of action derived from partially unsubjected spaces.³²

Even when frontier administrators attempted to impose what James C. Scott terms ‘state simplifications’,³³ they tended to be disrupted both by contact with the would-be objects of power/knowledge and by disputes and misunderstandings within the state itself. The colonial state was not a unitary entity but, in the words of Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta, ‘a multilayered, pluri-centred, and fluid . . . ensemble that congeals different contradictions’.³⁴ And British interventions at India’s frontiers did not necessarily fail as Scott (intermittently) has it, but nor did they straightforwardly succeed.³⁵ Born of varying intentions, their effects were more variable still, often seeming unclear even to their initiators and looking very different from distinct vantage points. As Nayanika Mathur has shown in the case of contemporary upland India, agents of the state are in many cases as befuddled as subjects regarding governmental projects and direct their energies to make it appear ‘*as if*’ these projects were functioning as much as to actually implement the substance of the projects.³⁶ And, to quote Matthew Hull, ‘state control can be extended not only through specification, but through ambiguity, by leaving matters undocumented’.³⁷ One vital element of bureaucratic confusion and the emphasis on spectacle at India’s high imperial frontiers was the colonial state’s engagement in open-ended cycles of violence.³⁸

³¹ S.H. Layton, ‘Hydras and Leviathans in the Indian Ocean World’, *International Journal of Maritime History*, 25 (2013), pp. 213–25, here p. 221.

³² Foucault, ‘Other Spaces’, p. 27.

³³ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like A State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 2–3.

³⁴ Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta, ‘Introduction: Rethinking Theories of the State in an Age of Globalization’, in id (eds.), *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 1–41, here pp. 9–10.

³⁵ Scott, *Seeing*, p. 6; elsewhere, Scott instead supposes the crushing effectiveness of state schemes: for example, p. 83.

³⁶ Nayanika Mathur, *Paper Tiger: Law, Bureaucracy and the Developmental State in Himalayan India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), quotation on p. 3.

³⁷ Matthew S. Hull, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), p. 248.

³⁸ On the need for historians of modern empire to focus on physical violence rather than epistemic violence, see Richard Drayton, ‘Where Does the World Historian Write from? Objectivity, Moral Conscience and the Past and Present of Imperialism’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46, 3 (2011), pp. 671–85, here pp. 679–81. On the limitations of interpretations of British rule in India that prioritise ‘epistemic violence’, see Jon Wilson, *The Domination of Strangers: Modern Governance in Eastern India, 1780–1835* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008);

Egregious destruction and farcical ineffectiveness were not at distant ends of a linear spectrum but resided in proximity to each other – a proximity that was devastating to many frontier people, perplexing for some colonial officials, and difficult for scholars of empire to account for.

The fragmented quality of India's colonial frontiers can be engaged through recent theories that go beyond assumptions that modern states necessarily seek to create uniform sovereign territories. Political geographers such as Stuart Elden and John Agnew have argued that territory is not 'a static terrain' but 'a vibrant entity' and 'a process, made and remade, shaped and shaping, active and reactive'.³⁹ Sovereignty, meanwhile, is not an innate capacity 'pooled up neatly in territorial spaces' but a set of practices exercised by multiple agents prone to substantial variations across time and space.⁴⁰ As Lauren Benton's work has shown, such insights are well suited to understanding modern empires, which 'did not cover space evenly but composed a fabric that was full of holes, stitched together out of pieces, a tangle of strings'.⁴¹ Just as these analytical tools shed light on the quirks of administrative space at colonial India's frontiers, so focusing on these regions allows us to further develop understandings of sovereignty and territory in empire. Frontiers push against the lingering notion that the era of high empire saw the global spread of uniform and comprehensive sovereign space.⁴² Contrary to the established analysis centred on North America and settler colonies, the period around the turn of the twentieth century did not see the collapse of locally mediated borderlands into state-imposed borderlines in British India.⁴³ Instead, unusual sovereign arrangements and territorial vagueness were pushed to imperial fringes,

Jon Wilson, 'How Modernity Arrived to Godavari', *Modern Asian Studies*, 51, 2 (2017), pp. 399–431.

³⁹ Quotations from Stuart Elden, 'Land, Terrain, Territory', *Progress in Human Geography*, 34, 6 (2010), pp. 799–817, here p. 810; Stuart Elden, *The Birth of Territory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 17.

⁴⁰ Quotation from John Agnew, 'The Hobbesian Excuse: Where Is Sovereignty and Why Does It Matter?', in Saul Takahashi (ed.), *Human Rights, Human Security, and State Security: The Intersection* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2014), pp. 119–36, p. 119.

⁴¹ Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 1.

⁴² For example, Charles S. Maier, 'Transformations of Territoriality: 1600–2000', in Gunilla Budde, Sebastian Conrad and Oliver Janz (eds.), *Transnationale Geschichte: Themen, Tendenzen und Theorien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), pp. 32–55.

⁴³ On North America, see Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, 'From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History', *American Historical Review*, 104, 3 (1999), pp. 814–41; Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 321–41; Pekka Hämäläinen, 'What's in a Concept? The Kinetic Empire of the Comanches', *History and Theory*, 52 (2013), pp. 81–90, here p. 90. On settler colonies, see James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). On nineteenth-century borderlands in general, see Paul Readman, Cynthia Radding, and Chad Bryant, 'Introduction: Borderlands in a Global Perspective', in id (eds.), *Borderlands in World History, 1700–1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 1–23.

where they continued to thrive. India's frontiers also give invaluable insights into how indeterminate spaces of government were not only outcomes of states' limitations but also the product of the ways in which states functioned. Many imperial agents and institutions saw distinct advantages in ensuring that the territories in which they acted were not smooth but patchy, and went to great lengths to ensure that this was the case. Taking a bottom-up approach to territory and sovereignty builds on recent work by foregrounding the deliberate and often laborious nature of constructing and sustaining uneven state spaces.

As scholars of British India pursuing otherwise diverse approaches such as Bernard Cohn and C. A. Bayly have recognised for some time, forms of colonial power were thoroughly entwined with forms of colonial knowledge.⁴⁴ The partially wilful rendering of frontiers as spaces beyond the means of normal government and conventional sovereign arrangements was mirrored by, and reliant upon, the conviction that methods and forms of knowledge had to be adapted to function in these areas. Teasing out the epistemic peculiarity and significance of British India's frontiers requires engagement with recent work on the history and geography of 'colonial' and 'global' sciences. Work in the past two decades has made clear that sciences did not simply spread from Europe or the West to the rest of the world during the modern era.⁴⁵ Colonies were not mere scientific peripheries, mined for data that could then be implanted into rigid, predetermined frameworks: they impacted sciences in multiple ways.⁴⁶ Generating knowledge and putting it to work over long distances involved the amalgamation of diverse material, necessitating long-distance connections that were delicate and often prone to failure.⁴⁷ What Felix Driver has termed 'disturbance' was widespread: people, instruments, and terrains alike inflected what could be known and how it could be known.⁴⁸ Strategies for occluding and overcoming the 'states of disrepair' that afflicted sciences and their components were similarly prevalent.⁴⁹ Making knowledge

⁴⁴ C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Cohn, *Colonialism*. See also William Pinch, 'Same Difference in India and Europe', *History and Theory*, 38, 3 (1999), pp. 389–407.

⁴⁵ This work is often posited against George Basalla's 'diffusion' model: George Basalla, 'The Spread of Western Science', *Science*, 156, 3775 (1967), pp. 611–22.

⁴⁶ For example, Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Pratik Chakrabarti, *Western Science in Modern India: Metropolitan Methods, Colonial Practices* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004); Marwa Elshakry, 'When Science Became Western: Historiographical Reflections', *Isis*, 101, 1 (2010), pp. 98–109.

⁴⁷ For example, James A. Secord, 'Knowledge in Transit', *Isis*, 95, 4 (2004), pp. 654–72; Mark Harrison, 'Science and the British Empire', *Isis*, 96, 1 (2005), pp. 56–63.

⁴⁸ Felix Driver, 'Distance and Disturbance: Travel, Exploration and Knowledge in the Nineteenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, 14 (2004), pp. 73–92.

⁴⁹ Simon Schaffer, 'Easily Cracked: Scientific Instruments in States of Disrepair', *Isis*, 102, 4 (2011), pp. 706–17.