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Deposited in DRO:

27 October 2022

Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Anthias, Penelope and Hoffmann, Kasper (2021) 'The making of ethnic territories: Governmentality and counter-conducts.', *Geoforum*, 119 . pp. 218-226.

Further information on publisher's website:

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.06.027>

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The making of ethnic territories: governmentality and counter-conducts

Abstract

“Ethnic territories” were a central political technology of colonial rule, which also shaped strategies of anti-colonial resistance in diverse contexts. Today, in former colonies, the making of ethnic territories remains a key site of both governmentality and political struggle. This Special Issue brings together six ethnographic case studies (from Argentina, Bolivia, Cambodia, DR Congo, Paraguay and Peru) to explore how discourses of ethnicity and territory are combined and deployed in various technologies of government and resistance – from colonial native policies, to land titling programs, to struggles for territorial self-rule and recognition. In this Introduction, we set out an analytical approach to understanding the contemporary nexus between ethnicity, territory and governmentality in postcolonial states. Rather than being the result of “top-down” governmental projects, or forms of resistance “from below”, we explore how “ethnic territories” are created by diverse subjects engaged in situated struggles over categories, recognition and boundaries. Our approach draws on Foucault’s concepts of “governmentality” and “counter-conducts” in order to capture how struggles may simultaneously contest and reproduce dominant ethno-territorial regimes of truth, and how subjects may consciously refuse the “conduct of conduct” of governmentality. We extend this analysis by drawing inspiration from postcolonial and decolonial scholarship to highlight how subaltern actors engage with, appropriate, problematise or refuse governmental interventions in pursuit of their own political projects and visions for self-determination, which may exceed the scope of governmental knowledges. At the same time, we seek to problematise accounts that essentialise ethnic territories as bounded sites of ontological difference and indigenous resistance. Building on recent work by indigenous scholars, we propose an approach that takes seriously subaltern agency and the endurance of alternative ways of being and knowing, while keeping the persistent constraining effects of the colonial nexus between ethnicity, territory and governmentality firmly in view.

Key words: ethnicity, indigeneity, territory, governmentality, counter-conduct, colonialism, decoloniality.

1. Introduction

The nexus between ethnicity and territory is crucial a vector of political struggle and governmentality in the contemporary world. Diverse social movements and activists mobilise discourses of indigeneity and territory to resist ongoing processes of dispossession and make claims to recognition. Ethno-nationalist projects seek to map ethnicity to space by drawing on exclusionary and essentialist notions of culture, autochthony, people and nation. Meanwhile, a variety of governmental actors – from international development agencies and states, to NGOs and local militias – attempt to govern space, populations and “natures” through the coproduction of ethnic territories and subjects.

The continuing salience of ethnicity and territory must be understood in the context of longer histories of colonial and postcolonial rule. Together, ethnicity and territory constituted an underlying grid of intelligibility that rationalised European expansion and domination. “Ethnic territories” played a central role in colonial governmentality in diverse contexts, facilitating both the dispossession and the biopolitical management of colonised populations. They also shaped discourses and practices of anti-colonial resistance. Following the creation of independent

“postcolonial” states, the discourse and practice of ethnic territories has endured and evolved in a variety of different forms. Some of these are recognised and part of the political and administrative organisation of the state, such as chieftaincies in Sub-Saharan Africa, indigenous territories in Latin America, Scheduled Areas for “tribal” communities in India, or Indian Reservations in the USA. However, others are not recognised nationally or internationally and remain more or less viable political projects or aspirations. These include secessionist and anti-colonial rebellions, such as the Free Papua Movement seeking independence from Indonesia, The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad seeking independence from Mali, and The Kachin Independence Army in northern Myanmar. Other groups self-identifying as “indigenous”, “autochthonous”, “aboriginal”, or an “ethnic minority”, seek inclusion through the recognition of their political and legal rights, and territorial self-rule. These include the Banyamulenge in eastern Congo, several groups in the People’s Republic of China, the Guaraní in Bolivia, the Mapuche of Chile, the Lao of north-eastern Cambodia, and many others. Hence, throughout the world, the nexus between ethnicity and territory is a crucial vector of rationalities and practices of government and violent and non-violent modes of contestation.

The ethnicisation of territory and territorialisation of ethnicity have long been a concern of postcolonial scholars. Edward Saïd showed that “imaginative geographies” (1978) were central to imperial culture, charting a series of mappings through which places and identities were deterritorialised and reterritorialised (Gregory 1994). More recently, Mahmood Mamdani has shown how the production of tribal territories during the colonial era led to the formation of racialised and ethnicised modalities of citizenship and identities in Sub-Saharan Africa (1996). Scholars inspired by Foucault’s work on governmentality have explored the emergence of new kinds of “ethnic territories”, as states, international institutions and private corporations try to render space and populations legible and governable (Watts 2004; Moore 2005; Li 2010; Hale 2011). However, other work has pointed to the empowering effects of “mapping identity to place” following histories of colonial dispossession and erasure (Offen, 2003b). Even where ethnic territories are a legacy of colonial rule, they may represent important sites for the reassertion of indigenous sovereignty (Simpson, 2014; Mamdani, 1996). Influenced by Latin American debates and social movements, a growing body of scholarship explores territory as a site of resistance to extractivist capitalism and the construction of alternative world-making projects (Escobar, 2008; Zibechi, 2012). The making of ethnic territories is thus situated ambivalently in the literature, as a site of both governmentality and resistance.¹

This Special Issue examines the making and unmaking of “ethnic territories” in postcolonial states. It brings together six ethnographic case studies to explore how discourses of ethnicity and territory are combined and deployed in various technologies of government and resistance, from colonial native policies, to land titling programs, to struggles for territorial self-rule and recognition. Drawing on examples from Argentina, Bolivia, Cambodia, DR Congo, Paraguay and Peru, contributors explore how “ethnic territories” are created by diverse subjects engaged in political struggles over categories, recognition and boundaries.

In this Introduction, we set out an approach that locates the making of ethnic territories within broader governmental technologies, while also taking seriously the agency of diverse individuals

¹ This is exemplified in the literature on “counter-mapping” and indigenous territorial claims. See for example Peluso, 1995; Bryan, 2012; Wainwright and Bryan, 2009; Mollett, 2013; Oslender, 2004; Hooker, 2005; Herlihy and Knapp, 2003; Hale, 2011; Ng’weno, 2007; Asher, 2009; Anthias, 2018.

and collectives engaged in such processes and their potentially transformative effects. We highlight that, in order to grasp how territory is ethnicised and vice versa, the analysis must move beyond binary analytical categories, including “bottom-up” vs. “top-down”; “power” vs. “resistance”; “modernity” vs. “tradition”; “autochthony” vs. “allochthony”; “global/national” vs. “local”; and “internal” vs. “external”. Not only do such binaries obfuscate more than they reveal, they also reproduce essentialised and bounded understandings of ethnicity and territory. Instead, we develop an approach that situates contemporary struggles over ethnic territories in a wider history of globalised power relations and regimes of truth. These processes were initially set in motion by European colonial expansion, but they continue to evolve through new modalities of governmentality, such as land reforms, land surveys, mapping, boundary-making, and the making (up) of ethnic categories.

At the same time, we seek to highlight the ways in which those targeted by, or supposed to benefit from, these schemes and strategies relate to them. That is, how do people targeted by governmental interventions aiming to govern the relation between ethnicity and territory engage with, problematise, appropriate, refuse or instrumentalise them? As the case studies reveal, political struggles over ethnic territories do not simply pit a united front of “ethnic minorities” or “indigenous people” against the “ruling classes”, the “state”, “capitalism” and “governmentality”. While we fully recognise the seriousness of the threats that indigenous and ethnic minorities are confronted with, what emerges from the various case studies is a muddy terrain of ambiguous, dynamic, shifting positions, and fluid boundaries and subjectivities - even in situations where discourses of ethnicity and territory support the harshest forms of racialised inequality, exploitation, extraction, dispossession, and violence. Hence, the discourse of “ethnic territory” is neither a priori in service of the ruling classes, nor simply a vehicle for subaltern resistance. Rather, we argue, it constitutes an underlying grid of intelligibility, which shapes people’s understanding of the world, their place within it, and modes of political action. In what follows, we outline the theoretical engagements and contributions of our argument in more detail. Our discussion is structured in three sections: colonial legacies of ethnicity and territory; governmentality and counter-conducts; and indigeneity, territory and decoloniality.

2. Colonial legacies of ethnicity and territory

The contemporary nexus between ethnicity and territory in post-colonial states must be understood in the context of historical genealogies of colonial and postcolonial rule – and anti-colonial struggle. Concepts of ethnicity and territory were part of the “organising grammar”² of colonial rule, which rationalised and legitimated class hierarchies and territorial ordering (Saïd, 1978; Fanon, 1963; O’Tuathail 1996; Mbembe, 2001; Mudimbe, 1988; Thongchai, 1997; Stoler, 1995; Hoffmann, this issue). As Edward Saïd argued, geographical markers such as grids and surveys enacted boundaries between coloniser and colonised that designated “both their territory and their mentality... as different from ‘ours’” (1978: 54). European ideas of race *became* territorialised through colonial dispossession and techniques of rule that rested on racialised understandings of difference (Moore 2005).³ Similarly, Fanon observed that: “the colonial world is a world divided into compartments” (1967: 29). A defining feature of many colonial states was the juridico-political division between “civil society” of the colonial citizenry and the “native sphere” of colonised subjects. This division

² We do not differentiate strictly between terms such as race, ethnicity, indigeneity, people, community, culture, etc. Rather we see them largely as metonyms of the “organising grammar” of colonial and post-colonial states.

³ Similarly, in European societies, governmental technologies were predicated on spatialised understandings of race, performed in urban spaces such as exhibitions, department stores, and museums (Mitchell 1991).

was territorialised both through segregated urban spaces and through the production of rural “ethnic territories”, which existed in various forms across the colonial world (Mamdani 1996, Chanock 1991, Hodgson and Schroeder 2002; Jewsiewicki 1989; Hoffmann, this issue; Li 2010; Simpson 2014, Gotkowitz 2008).

Donald Moore describes the administration of Africans into ethnically discrete spaces as an *ethnic spatial fix*, which constituted a central project and template for colonial rule (2005: 14, 154). The creation of ethnic territories served multiple, often contradictory objectives. On the one hand, colonial officials sought to make colonies profitable and generate revenue to support the costs of administration; on the other hand, they were charged with enforcing order and stability, and caring for the well-being and “progress” of the colonised population. To such ends a multitude of biopolitical practices were deployed such as censuses, ethnography, taxation, internment, control of population movement, infrastructural projects, health measures, map-making, and demographics, which had various territorialising effects (Li 2007, 2010; Hoffmann this issue). The making of “ethnic territories” served both economic and biopolitical ends, allowing colonial regimes to balance demands for profit and self-financing with objectives of indirect rule, maintaining order, managing dispossession, and upholding racial boundaries and hierarchies.

Anthropological and geographical scholarship were instrumental in producing the ethno-territorial grid of intelligibility through which colonial rule functioned. Classic ethnographic maps purported to show the spatial distribution of tribes, peoples, and cultural spheres, producing a territorially bound and homogenised understanding of culture and ethnicity (Stocking, 1985).⁴ Over recent decades, critical scholars have subjected these knowledges to extensive critique, highlighting the arbitrary character of such ethno-spatial boundaries and their role in justifying colonial violence, racial segregation, socio-economic injustices, and interstate and civil wars (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, Malkki 1992, Agnew 1994, Dodds and Atkinson 2003, Ó Tuathail and Dalby 1998, Ra'anan et al 1991; Verweijen and Vlassenroot 2015; Yiftachel 2006; Mathys 2017; Newbury 1991). Yet, the idea of distinct and spatially bounded cultures, nations and ethnicities has proved remarkably durable. [maybe nation-state blurb to explain why it is so durable. International law.]. In post-colonial contexts, the nexus between ethnicity and territory remains powerfully shaped by the colonial legacy of racial segregation, dispossession, extraction, labour exploitation, repression, and indirect rule (Goswami 2004).

However, colonial technologies of government were not simply imposed from above by a monolithic and omnipotent state (Stoler and Cooper 1996, p. 6). Rather, they were diffusely dispersed throughout the colonial world, as colonial subjects appropriated, reinterpreted, resisted and instrumentalised them (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997; Pels 1997). The same is true of ethnic territories. As Moore notes of colonial Rhodesia, “the ethnic spatial fix was a project of indirect rule, never a secure and settled accomplishment” (2005: 155); not only was it continually undermined by situated practices and mobilities, but ethnic territories became an important site of anti-colonial revolt and resistance (see also Mamdani 1996; Simpson 2014).

This Special Issue departs from a recognition that colonial power is not confined to the past, but remains an enduring and pervasive present-tense reality that demands our analytic attention (Stoler, 2016). We see the continuing salience of ethnicity and territory in contemporary governmentalities to be an indication of these (post)colonial continuities. Yet, we also recognise the continuing agency of colonised populations in shaping regimes of rule. By historicising the contemporary

⁴ See Couttenuer (2005) for a thorough history of anthropology in the Congo.

nexus between ethnicity and territory, the papers in this Special Issue shed light on the sedimented effects of historical (colonial and postcolonial) ethno-territorial orderings (Moore 2005; Stoler 2016) and the ways in which individuals and collectives navigate these shifting governmental formations over time (Erazo, 2013). For example, while Correia's paper reveals a persistence in forms of racial dispossession in Paraguay, Rasmussen's account reveals how geographies of conservation tourism are transforming and reworking ethno-territorial relations at the Patagonian frontier.

3. Governmentality and counter-conducts

In order to understand the complex and intimate relationship between power, appropriation, and resistance in relation to ethnic territories, we draw on Foucault's concept of governmentality. Governmentality concerns the supplementing of older forms of disciplinary and sovereign power with more indirect forms of modern power, manifested in micro-practices and systems of thought, that aim to conduct people's conduct from a distance.⁵ From a governmentality perspective, then, power is not concentrated in institutions or ruling authorities; rather, it works by shaping individual subjects' ways of seeing, knowing and acting. In this regard it is capillary and dispersed throughout the social body.

Governmentality's European roots have led to criticism concerning its applicability to non-Western contexts.⁶ Moreover, Foucault's work has been critiqued as Eurocentric for his failure to acknowledge the role of colonialism in the emergence of racial knowledges in Europe (Stoler, 1995; Young, 1995). Nevertheless, the concept of governmentality has been widely taken up and reworked by critical scholars working in diverse fields in the Global South, including anthropology (e.g. Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Comaroff, 1998); international development (e.g. Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1992; Li 2007; Mitchell 2002); critical security studies (e.g. Bachmann 2012; Abrahamsen 2003; Duffield 2007); environmental governance and political ecology (e.g. Fletcher 2017; Death 2016; Bluwstein 2017; West et al. 2006; Nepomuceno 2019; Luke 1995; Agrawal, 2005; Oels, 2005). Like these and other scholars, we contend that the concept of governmentality can be employed fruitfully in non-European contexts precisely because its rationalities and techniques of power have spread around the globe. A whole host of discourses – for example, relating to “development”, “territory”, “race”, “health”, “the environment”, “the market”, “the economy”, “property”, “security”, etc. – can be linked to various governmentalities initially invented in the West.⁷ Yet, as we argue, governmentality does not emanate from powerful institutions; rather it works, at least in part by shaping, activating, and incorporating individuals' beliefs, existing knowledge, motivations and desires. Just as “discipline” and “sovereignty” were not simply replaced by bio-political “government” in Europe in the early modern period, but rather became integrated into it, so too do emergent practices of governmentality incorporate, mobilise,

⁵ Foucault offered a threefold definition of governmentality: a form of exercising power, the pre-eminence of governmental power over time, and the governmentalisation of the state (Foucault, 2007a, pp.108–109).

Governmentality concerns the supplementing of older forms of disciplinary and sovereign power with more subtle modern ways of conducting populations (which were termed biopower, or power over life). These forms of power conduct people's conduct from a distance, as aggregate populations and as individuals, so as to secure semi-natural processes (such as population, society or economy).

⁶ While some scholars have questioned governmentality's applicability outside Europe (Williams, 1997; Joseph, 2010), others have countered that governmentality has spread around the globe as a result of European colonisation (Abrahamsen, 2003) as well as noting the constitutive role of the colonies in shaping European societies (Stoler, 1995).

⁷ We acknowledge the constitutive role of colonial relations in shaping the emergence of these discourses within the West (see Stoler, 1995; Mitchell, 1991).

and reactivate a variety of indigenous and other alternative systems of knowing, modes of being and practices of power into its modes of operating. Therefore, it takes very different forms in different time-space contexts. Hence, any analysis of governmentality must be properly historicised and situated (Mbembe 2003).

Of particular relevance to this Special Issue are analyses that address the relationship between governmentality and territory. While Foucault acknowledged that territory formed part of the ensemble of relations that “government” targeted, in his writings (2007a), the issue of territory is somewhat eclipsed by a focus on population. Subsequent work has drawn attention to the emergence of calculative strategies targeting territory in conjunction with those brought to bear on populations (Elden, 2007a, b; Braun, 2000; Hannah, 2000), including in the Global South (e.g. Ballvé, 2012; Moreira, 2001; Vigneswaran, 2014; Watts, 2004).⁸ For example, Rose (1999: 32) describes various “governable spaces” through which “government” is “territorialized”, including the factory, neighborhood, commune, region, and nation. Other work has explored “cartographic calculations of territory” (Crampton, 2010) where statistical knowledge is applied cartographically, from street addressing (Rose-Redwood, 2010), to population trends (Crampton & Elden, 2006), to maps of homelessness (Marquardt, 2015) and crime (Vigneswaran, 2014), to classifications of “failed states” and terrorist threats (Amoore, 2006; Cutter et al., 2003).

This Special Issue contributes to this literature by examining how territory figures in a range of contemporary governmental projects, in ways that are intimately linked to the production of racialised bodies, collectives, identities and power relations. However, much of the existing literature in the field of governmentality studies has focused on the techniques, knowledges and strategies deployed by governing institutions, or what Mitchell Dean has called the “programmer’s view” (Dean 2007; 83).⁹ The focus on governing institutions has attracted criticism as it tends to bracket out the political struggles over governmentality’s realisation as well as its actual effects and side-effects (O’Malley et al. 1997, 505). According to Dean, a “programmer’s view” tends to assume a coherence of political agendas and pays insufficient attention to gaps and discrepancies within rationalities, as well as to the messy effects of the resulting practices (see Anthias, this issue). This, in turn, risks casting governmentality analyses along a conventional ruler-subject axis. Ultimately, as O’Malley et al. (1997, p. 504) have argued, this “schematism” and the “lack of attention to social relations” can undermine the approach’s critical potential.

This debate also has methodological implications. As Donald Moore (2005: 5) has argued, a focus on “rationalities of rule” has tended to privilege institutional sociologies and histories over ethnographic studies. In contrast, ethnography can uncover the situated practices and micropolitics that constitute governmental landscapes, where “subjects’ conduct both sustains and challenges regimes of rule” (Moore: 5-6). Moore’s analysis highlights that the knowledges, rationalities, and techniques of power shaping governmentalities cannot be traced to clearly identifiable “centres”, but are instead embedded in everyday practices of power and implicate the subjects of government.¹⁰ Papers in this Special Issue use ethnographic and archival research to highlight both

⁸ As Braun notes, the task of improving population “necessarily brought the state directly into contact with its territory and more precisely, with the qualities of this territory” (2000, p. 12).

⁹ However, the literature on processes of self-subjectification and techniques of the self has been growing in relation to the production of territory and subjectivity. See, for instance, Howell (2007); Legg and Brown (2013); Holloway and Morris (2012); Holloway Holt, and Mills (2018); Alene (2018); Cadman (2010); Legg (2016); Nepomuceno et al., (2019); Hoffmann and Verweijen (2019).

¹⁰ See also Hoffmann and Verweijen (2019).

how governmental actors problematise and seek to intervene in the relationship between ethnicity, community, space, and territory, *and* how specific localised groups and individuals contest and engage with such interventions, or produce their own ethnic territories and subjectivities.

This focus on local agency and forms of resistance resonates with Foucault's later work on "counter-conducts" – a term used to capture those forms of behaviour that consciously refuse the "conduct of conduct" of governmentality.¹¹ Here, resistance is identified at the micro-level, "in the transgression and contestation of societal norms; in the disruption of metanarratives of humanism; ... in the 're-appearance' of 'local popular', 'disqualified', and 'subjugated knowledges'; and in the aesthetic of self-creation" (Kulynych, 1997, p. 328). Recent literature on governmentality in the postcolonial world is beginning to focus on counter-conduct as a way of foregrounding the production of political subjectivities enacted through protest and dissent whilst breaking with the resistance-domination binary (Death 2010). For instance, Italà Nepomuceno et al. (2019) examine attempts to produce "green subjects" in relation to "green" logging and mining in Brazilian Amazonia. They argue that governmentality is "equally constituted by counter-conducts as the 'conduct of conduct'" (2019: 126). It is important to note that a focus on local counter-conducts does not negate the importance of social, economic and political transformation at other scales; indeed, it may serve to highlight the limits to what can be achieved without such changes, as well as the creative ways in which people struggle within and against these limits from their specific locations (Anthias, 2018).

In sum, an effective governmentality analysis must go beyond a narrow focus on how governmental institutions seek to manage territory and population processes, and account for the heterogeneous ways in which subjects of governmentality engage with it. Such engagement may take any number of forms, from uncritical self-conduct, to tactical appropriation and pragmatic survival strategies, to various forms of counter-conduct (e.g. refusal, contestation, or rebellion). Correia's study of the struggles of Sanapaná and Enxet-Sur indigenous peoples to gain recognition of their land rights from the Paraguayan state highlight the heterogeneous ways in which people engage with governmentality. He shows how achieving access to land requires a combination of pragmatic negotiation and a stubborn refusal to move (Correia, this issue).

Other papers in this Special Issue provide further examples of counter-conducts, which draw on knowledges, temporalities and sovereignties that exceed the scope of governmental institutions (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012; see Anthias, Leeman, Killick in this collection). Indeed, we argue that an ethnographic focus on the production of territory can shed light on the ways in which governmental projects are contested, reappropriated, or transformed *in situ*. In postcolonial contexts, territory is characterised by a complex overlaying of sovereignties and spatialities following sedimented histories of racialised dispossession, and colonial and postcolonial rule (Moore, 2005, p. 223). Official geographies and governmental knowledges tend to hide such struggles, eclipsing both indigenous forms of political space, and the nation-state's own colonial origins (Saïd, 1978; Rubenstein, 2001; Sparke, 2005; Quijano, 2007, Wainwright, 2008; Radcliffe, 2011). Thus, rather than simply critiquing governmental knowledges of territory, papers in this Special Issue make

¹¹ Counter-conduct is described as "the will not to be governed thusly, like that, by these people, at this price" (Foucault, 2007b, p. 75). In this sense, "counter-conduct" denotes struggles against procedures implemented or conceived for conducting others, and can be found in the form of individual behaviour, and in strongly organised groups (Foucault, 2007a, pp. 201–204). The notion of counter-conduct resonates with Foucault's late ideas of the constitution of oneself as a moral subject, and the related notions of 'modes of subjectivation' and 'practices of the self' (2007a, p. 205; 1984, pp. 36–45; 2001b, pp. 1437–41). See also Davidson (2011).

visible the territorial struggles that underwrite and unsettle their production. Ethnography and historicising enable us to capture these heterogeneous encounters, and the new arrangements of culture, power, and territoriality that emerge from them (Tsing, 2005).

4. Territory, indigeneity and decoloniality

In taking this approach, papers in this Special Issue contribute towards debates around territory as a site of decolonial politics. While Anglophone scholarship has tended to associate territory with the domination of abstract space by the colonial state (Elden, 2010),¹² this definition has been critiqued as Eurocentric due to its failure to consider alternative conceptualisations (Halvorsen, 2019; Santos, 2014), including those emergent from subaltern modes of being in particular landscapes. As Halvorsen notes, “territory – as idea and practice – has been (re)produced in multiple contexts beyond the narrow confines of the modern, Western state” (2019: 794). For instance, in Latin America, *territorio* has been a key axis of struggle for a range of indigenous, peasant and urban social movements (Porto Gonçalves, 2012; Zibechi, 2012; Escobar, 2008). Recent work on socio-territorial movements identifies territory as a material basis for identity production and the construction of alternative relations and forms of development, beyond state and capitalist logics (Halvorsen et al., 2019; Fernandes, 2005; Svampa, 2015). Some of this scholarship takes inspiration from Lefebvre’s work on the social production of space through heterogeneous struggles (Lefebvre, 1991a and 1991b; Merrifield, 2006; Brenner & Elden, 2009). The “ontological turn” in anthropology, and the influence of post-humanism across the social sciences, have taken these discussions in new directions, fuelling interest in territory as a site not only for non-capitalist relations, but for alternative ontologies and world-making projects.¹³

This debate hinges, in large part, on how territory is defined (Elden, 2010: 81; Halvorsen, 2018) – as a Western concept and practice or as a signifier for diverse and alternative spatial imaginaries and practices. To critique the former as Eurocentric is something of a tautology. Yet, as Halvorsen argues, there are real implications of Anglophone political geography’s treatment of territory as a universal human category, as it fails to acknowledge the co-existence of radically different spatial ontologies and projects. In this regard, Radcliffe and Radhuber call for a “decolonial turn” in political geography, which “would entail divesting core political geography concepts of western norms [and] including plural epistemologies of space and power in analysis” (2020: 1). Papers in this Special Issue contribute to such a project, by revealing how local populations challenge Eurocentric notions of territory in pursuit of alternative forms of belonging (Leemann, this issue) and visions of a good life (Killick, this issue).

At the same time, to focus only on pluralising territory risks obscuring the ongoing violent and disciplining effects of modern understandings of territory, as they are refracted through diverse regimes of postcolonial rule and political struggles (see papers by Hoffmann, Leeman, Anthias). Crucially, these effects work not only in opposition to, but also *through* socio-territorial movements

¹² Stuart Elden defines territory as “a political technology [comprising] techniques for measuring land and controlling terrain” (2010: 811). To Elden “territory” is a specifically Western “conceptual frame”, which can be traced back to Ancient Greece, and “within which the emergence of the modern state and its territory occurred” (Elden, 2010: 811). While we find Elden’s conceptualisation valid on its own terms, it does not shed light on how territory is contested and appropriated in diverse geographical contexts. Much like Foucault himself, Elden mainly analyses western modes of thought.

¹³ For an overview of the ontological turn in anthropology, see Holbraad and Axel Pedersen, 2017; Kohn 2015; on post-humanism see Braidotti, 2013.

and the activist scholars who often act as their diplomats (Povinelli, 2018). Approaching territory as a site for ontological difference and resistance “from below” obscures how the nexus of ethnicity and territory remains a key site of colonial knowledge and governmental power (Simpson, 2014; Anthias 2017; Radcliffe and Radhuber, 2020). This is particularly evident when considering the nexus between territory and indigeneity. As Audra Simpson argues, “to speak of Indigeneity is to speak of colonialism and anthropology, as these are means through which Indigenous people have been known and sometimes are still known” (2007: 67). As colonial techniques of knowing, “Indigeneity” and “culture”, did the same work for Empire that “race” did in other contexts, containing difference into “neat, ethnically-defined territorial spaces that now needed to be made sense of, to be ordered, ranked, to be governed, to be possessed” (Simpson, 2007: 67). Simpson argues that a process of “anthropological accounting” is required to move away from such bounded notions of cultural difference towards alternative modes of analysis.

And yet, invocations of indigenous peoples within some academic debates seem to be moving in the opposite direction, reinscribing notions of essentialised and territorially-bounded difference, without accounting for the origins of such representations. For example, within British geographical debates around the Anthropocene, indigenous peoples are increasingly invoked as a source of philosophical and ontological alternatives to Western humanism (Chandler and Reid, 2020; Hunt, 2014), whose place-based knowledges are available for appropriation by Western researchers and, potentially, “global humanity”. Such representations not only fail to account for Indigeneity, but also reinscribe whiteness by obscuring the racial origins of the current planetary crisis (Baldwin and Erickson, 2020). Meanwhile, in the field of indigenous geographies, “the local comes to equal resistance equals subaltern knowledge equals new theoretical insights, belying the politics of knowledge production at each step in a chain of (contested, heterogeneous and variously participatory) research processes” (Radcliffe, 2014: 90).¹⁴ In a similar vein, activist and policy moves to recognise and protect “indigenous natures” obscure the production of indigeneity *through* broader (historical and contemporary) relations of political economy and power (Radcliffe, 2017). This is evident, for example, in the continuing influence of cultural ecology (a colonial racial knowledge) within legal, policy and activist discourse around indigenous land claims (Anthias, this issue; Bryan, 2009). Thus, as Sarah Hunt notes, “the potential for Indigenous ontologies to unsettle dominant ontologies can be easily neutralized...as powerful institutions work as self-legitimizing systems that uphold broader dynamics of (neo)colonial power” (2014: 30).

There are further reasons to be sceptical of accounts that depict a stark dichotomy between “western” and “alternative” understandings of “territory”. To do so risks reproducing an imaginative geography organised around a binary of “West” vs. “non-West”. Not only is such a dichotomy wholly untenable in light of how flows of capital, ideas, people, and practices circulate and are assembled in today’s globalised world (Ong and Collier, 2005), it also casts indigeneity as an ethnicised non-modern identity in a way that reduces the heterogeneity of indigenous modes of knowing and being to a one-dimensional ethno-territorial and philosophical position (Ramos, 2012).¹⁵ As Killick notes in this Issue, “there is a danger that indigenous ideas and practices continue to be manipulated, particularly through the reification of specific, idealised forms, such that the voices of indigenous peoples themselves become ventriloquised, co-opted or suppressed”

¹⁴ See also Smith (2011).

¹⁵ Like colonial forms of racial othering, this construction is merely a negative projection of “the West”, viewed here not as a marker of civilisation, rationality and progress, but as a symbol of colonial violence, ecological destruction and philosophical decadence.

(7). Moreover, a simple dichotomisation of Western, state-centric readings of territory and alternative conceptualisations obscures their messy imbrication in practice, as subaltern groups seek to navigate dominant regimes of recognition predicated on modern understandings of ethnicity, space and territory (Correia; Anthias; Leemann; Hoffmann, this issue). In this regard, this Special Issue responds to Halvorsen's call for attention to "how the modern political technologies of controlling terrain and measuring land have been resisted, appropriated and (re)defined by political actors from below in different historical and geographical contexts" (2019: 793).

These arguments also have implications for debates around decoloniality. While decolonisation remains an important concept to denote efforts to contest and transform colonial legacies of racialised dispossession, subjugation, erasure, exclusion and inequality, we are sceptical of theories of decoloniality that reproduce colonial dichotomies. For example, Latin American scholars involved in the Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality (MCD) Project have been critiqued for reproducing binary distinctions "between the West and the Rest, metropole and colony, rural and urban, capital and culture, aborigine and national culture, and western philosophy/science and indigenous knowledge/episteme" (Asher, 2013: 839).¹⁶ As Asher asks, drawing on Guyatri Spivak: "Isn't the decolonial challenge precisely to disrupt such boundaries?" (Asher, 2013: 839). Bolivian Aymara scholar Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) develops a more politically grounded, but related critique, arguing that these theories reproduce multicultural discourses of indigeneity as territorially-bounded cultural difference, denying indigenous peoples their place in modernity and capacity to affect the state - that is, obscuring the *ch'ixi* nature of the contemporary world.¹⁷ Resonating with North American indigenous scholars' critiques of Anglophone writings on decoloniality (Tuck and Yang, 2012; de Leeuw and Hunt 2018), Rivera Cusicanqui also challenges these theories' detachment from real-life indigenous struggles, insisting that "there can be no discourse of decolonization, no theory of decolonization, without a decolonizing practice" (2012:100).

In reviewing these discussions of territory, indigeneity and decoloniality, we have sought to make visible how even critical theories aimed at contesting colonial knowledges and power relations can end up reproducing essentialist understandings of ethnicity and territory, and dichotomous understandings of power and resistance, which become detached from and may even delegitimise the actual struggles of indigenous and other subaltern peoples grappling with ongoing legacies of colonisation. Taking on board the critiques of such tendencies by indigenous scholars and others, we seek to take seriously the ways in which subaltern actors appropriate and rework concepts of ethnicity and territory in pursuit of their own agendas, while keeping the constraining effects of the modern nexus between ethnicity, territory and governmentality firmly in view. While we do not aim to define decoloniality, or frame our own scholarship as decolonial, the case studies provide opportunities for empirically grounded critical reflection on what decolonisation might mean to different people, and how it is conceptualised and pursued in diverse global contexts.

¹⁶ More recent work by these scholars goes some way to redressing these critiques through an emphasis on decolonial praxis (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018)

¹⁷ Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) uses the Aymara concept of "ch'ixi" to describe a Bolivian socio-cultural reality in which indigeneity is present amongst, but not subsumed by, the modern. Ch'ixi denotes "a color that is the product of juxtaposition, in small points or spots, of two opposed or contrasting colors. . . ch'ixi combines the Indian world and its opposite without ever mixing them" (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012: 105). What emerges is "the parallel coexistence of multiple cultural differences that do not extinguish but instead antagonize and complement each other" (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012: 105).

5. Ethnic territories: beyond power vs resistance

In the preceding pages we have engaged with different debates about the nexus between territory and ethnicity. We began by identifying “ethnic territories” as integral to colonial governmentalities, while also acknowledging how, in practice, colonised populations disrupted or reappropriated such territories as sites of anti-colonial struggle. Scholars inspired by Foucault, highlight the ongoing centrality of ethnicity and territory to contemporary governmentalities, including those associated with development, security, conservation, and urban planning. However, this literature has tended to focus on a critique of dominant institutional knowledge practices, paying less attention to the micro-practices that constitute relations of rule, or the place-based histories of struggle that shape their contours. Echoing Moore (2005), we believe that ethnography can contribute towards a more geographically sensitive and provincialised understanding of contemporary governmentalities, including those targeting ethnicity and territory. Contributors to this Issue advance such a project. They do so by examining how individuals and collectives in a range of postcolonial contexts engage, rework, contest or refuse governmental interventions around ethnicity and territory. These “counter-conducts” do not take place “outside of” governmental power, but they do sometimes draw on ontologies, memories, sovereignties¹⁸ and notions of belonging that exceed the scope of governmental knowledges.

In analysing these struggles, we have argued for the need to move beyond stark dichotomies, such as (modernity vs. tradition; indigenous vs. non-indigenous; subaltern vs. ruling classes; power vs. resistance). These binaries not only reproduce the longstanding colonial tradition of sorting the world’s people into crude ideal types, they are also readily recuperated and set in motion in political struggles, whether by poor farmers in Bolivia or well-off consultants for international development banks. Even if by now the vast majority of scholars working on issues related to ethnicity and territory would argue that ethnic groups or races or nations are not fixed, bounded or given, but historically emergent and mutable, there seems to be a renewed effort to naturalise the notion of ethnic territory. Furthermore, there are efforts to articulate these as sites of decolonial resistance. While we fully recognise the serious existential threats indigenous populations and other ethnic minorities and subaltern people are faced with across the world, we are sceptical of the prospects that the notion of ethnic territories can serve as an abstract philosophical foundation for emancipation. As we, and others, have shown, the notion of ethnic territories can be traced back to the colonial era when they were objectified as the “Other” of the modern nation-state territory. In our view, therefore, it is part of the ethno-territorial grid of intelligibility and its attendant rationalities and practices of power, in which the postcolonial world is wrought, not outside of it. Ethnic territories are politically salient precisely because people believe in them, have vested interests in them, and ultimately because they are constitutive of the governmentalities that people’s lives are folded into. Hence, a political struggle aimed at counteracting the essentializing, oppressive, and territorializing effects of the discursive practices of “ethnic territories” must entail a reckoning with its underlying grid of intelligibility – or what Audra Simpson terms “anthropological and *colonial* accounting” (2007: 75).

However, this does not imply that ethno-territorial discourses cannot be vectors of resistance against wealthy and powerful corporations, states, transnational organisations, or local elites. As the

¹⁸ While many governmental projects take the state’s territorial sovereignty as a given, indigenous peoples may refuse or seek to unsettle state sovereignty, by pointing to how it is predicated on the violent erasure of indigenous systems of self-governance and land tenure (Simpson, 2014). In some contexts, this contestation refers to colonial treaties that recognised indigenous sovereignty over particular territories.

case studies show, ethno-territorial discourses are deployed in many creative ways to claim access to resources, territorial autonomy and political rights. However, ethno-territorial discourses can also be deployed to other ends. As Leemann shows, in this issue, a communal titling project was harnessed by youths to shift village hierarchies between generations in Cambodia. Moreover, it is important to recognise that ethno-territorial discourse can be activated to sanction exclusion, persecution and violence beyond the state. As Hoffmann shows in this issue, a virulent ethno-territorial discourse organised around the opposition between “autochthons” and “foreigners” emerged during the Congo Wars, which legitimated violence and hatred against “foreigners” by local militias of so-called “autochthonous” tribes in the name of the defence and liberation of the Congolese of the nation-state. Hence, ethno-territorial discourse is polymorphous, polyvalent and strategically reversible. This is why we find inspiration in Foucault’s analytics of power, wherein governmentality is considered to be immanent in the social body, constitutive of subjectivities, bodies, beliefs and rationalities, and which therefore also shapes “counter-conduct”. In this view, “decolonial” resistance through notions of “ethnic territory” should be seen as a heterogeneous discursive political practice, which is situated in the interstices between governmentality and “counter-conduct”; neither fully one, nor fully the other.¹⁹ Often such practices draw on a number of heterogeneous modes of knowing and practices of power. Some of these may pre-date European influence, others may be derived from Christianity or other world-religions, and still others are related to colonial and postcolonial understandings of ethnicity and territory. From the point of view of a governmentality analysis, this is not inconsistent; on the contrary, it simply shows that governmentality is contextual and that subjectivities and discursive practices are internally heterogeneous and plural.

The articles

Hoffmann’s paper combines archival and ethnographic research to examine competing constructions of ethnicity and territory in the Democratic Republic of Congo, from the colonial period to the present. He develops the concept of ethnogovernmentality to describe a “heterogeneous ensemble of biopolitical and territorial rationalities and practices of power concerned with the conduct of ethnic populations” under colonial rule. Rather than a totalising model implemented from above, Hoffmann identifies multiple fields of struggles in which various indigenous and colonial actors were engaged. Tracing these struggles into the present – a period marked by violent ethnicised conflicts over territory – he reveals how indigenous elites have reworked colonial cartographies to produce their own ethnic subjectivities and territorial claims. As such Hoffmann reveals how colonial logics of ethno-territorial rule have durable effects on postcolonial subjectivities and spatial imaginaries, and how these shape the contemporary violent conflicts in eastern Congo.

The next three papers focus on contemporary indigenous territorial claims and the politics of state land titling. Leeman’s paper examines the struggle of a group of villagers of the Bunong ethnic minority in Bu Sra commune in Northeastern Cambodia to register themselves as indigenous communities with collective rights to land. She reveals how the process of gaining state recognition brought to the fore contrasting ontologies of community, place and belonging, as state land titling created territories that were incommensurable with Bunong notions of group affiliation and ancestral land rights. She also uncovers intergenerational differences and ontological divides *within*

¹⁹ We acknowledge that decolonial practices are not necessarily counter-conducts; indeed, practices that are not defined by governmentality and the politics of ethnicity and territory may be equally or more important.

the Bunong, as “old” knowledge of territories based on lineage conflicted with “new” knowledge produced by a younger generation willing to adapt to state expectations. Leeman’s analysis powerfully highlights how defining boundaries of belonging and territory is a power-laden process, as differently positioned community members seek to mediate the relationship between local ontologies and governmental knowledges. However, she highlights that conforming to, or resisting state logics is not a binary choice; rather, pragmatic accommodations and engagement with government policies may coexist with alternative ontologies of territory.

Correia’s contribution examines the struggles of Sanapaná and Enxet-Sur indigenous peoples to gain recognition of their land rights from the Paraguayan state following a history of territorial dispossession by a settler population of cattle ranchers. Correia’s account highlights the difficulty of obtaining state recognition in the context of enduring forms of settler colonial power, in which non-indigenous rights continue to be prioritised. In response, he shows how Xákmok Kásek community members employed “a dialectics of refusal and engagement”, blockading a road to force the state to comply with a favorable legal judgment from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Rather than rejecting the politics of recognition or conforming to multicultural expectations, Correia’s account highlights how indigenous peoples engage and rework double-edged forms of recognition in line with their own visions of self-determination. This case also highlights how, for many indigenous peoples, territory is not a pre-given site of struggle; rather, achieving access to land requires a combination of pragmatic negotiation and a stubborn refusal to move.

Anthias’s paper examines another indigenous struggle for territory in the Chaco region of Bolivia. Contrary to Correia’s paper, which addresses the initial quest for state recognition of indigenous territorial rights, the focus of Anthias’s paper is on the legacies of an indigenous mapping and land titling process created in 1996. In a novel theoretical contribution to debates on Latin America’s “territorial turn”, Anthias highlights the contradictory effects of territory and property in indigenous land claims processes. Combining insights from indigenous studies and critical legal theory, Anthias charts how the discursive and cartographic representation of Native Community Lands as bounded, contiguous spaces of indigeneity has been undermined by the socio-spatial effects of propertisation, which has reinscribed colonial hierarchies of race and property, leaving indigenous villages isolated within discontinuous fragments of marginal land. Anthias makes clear that neither multicultural imaginaries of territorially-bounded indigeneity nor the fragmented outcomes of property correspond with Guaraní spatial ontologies and aspirations for “reclaiming territory”. Nevertheless, the contradictory effects of territory and property continue to haunt indigenous resource politics in the Bolivian Chaco, from everyday boundary disputes to negotiations with oil companies.

Shifting focus to a less studied group of people, Rasmussen focuses in his contribution on the experiences of non-indigenous settlers within one of Argentina’s flagship national parks. Historically, settlers held a secure place in dominant imaginaries of race, territory and nation in Argentina. Seen as pioneers and consolidators of state space, they played a central role in state territorialisation at the Patagonian frontier – a process predicated on indigenous genocide. However, in the present era of multiculturalism and conservation tourism, Rasmussen reveals how settlers have come to be seen as “relics of the past”, a status that is institutionalised through precarious forms of property. Rasmussen’s account powerfully highlights how shifting configurations of ethnicity and territory can produce contradictory effects, as newer governmental formations are haunted by previous sedimentations and local subjects are forced to grapple with their changing position. It also reveals how new ethno-territorial configurations may be shaped as much by

capitalist geographies (in this case, a boom in conservation tourism) as by indigenous movements and multicultural regimes of rights.

The final paper in this collection, Killick's article looks beyond state property regimes to examine local practices of community organisation and house building among Ashaninka people in the Peruvian Amazon, as they intersect with shifting state expectations and governmental techniques targeting indigenous communities. The article traces the origins of contemporary Ashaninka communities to the 1974 Law of Native Communities, showing how their form and function has been produced through the constant interplay between external and internal conceptions of the proper organisation of communal life. Drawing on anthropological concepts of bricolage and creolisation, Killick focuses on everyday constructions of hybrid forms, arguing that the ability to combine and mix old and new forms of living remains a key component of contemporary indigenous lives in Amazonia. He pays particular attention to "hybrid houses" as material manifestations of how indigenous peoples creatively engage with state expectations and broader ideas of "modernity", while also preserving older Ashaninka notions of living well. Killick contrasts his analysis with academic discussions that associate "Buen Vivir" with specific, idealised forms, warning that such notions can easily become a form of governmentality in their own right. Alongside other papers in this collection, Killick's analysis powerfully illustrates how ethnographic attention to local practices can help transcend dichotomous understandings of power and resistance, revealing the creative and pragmatic ways in which local populations adapt to the demands of shifting governmental regimes.

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