



BENJAMIN D. HOPKINS

RULING THE SAVAGE PERIPHERY

Frontier Governance and the **Making**
of the **Modern State**

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the Modern State*

➔ BENJAMIN D. HOPKINS ➔



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To Eliana, Tobias, and Olivia
You are the suns of my day, the moons of my night,
the loves of my life.

—PAPI

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Introduction

The Edges of Authority

The edges of today's global political and economic order—the world's modern-day frontiers—are seen as dangerous and often bloody places. These peripheral spaces are characterized as contact zones between order and anarchy, peace and violence, “civilization” and “savagery.” They provide portals between the modern world and an indefinite, atemporal past where aberrant ideas of tribe, tradition, and fanatical religious bigotry predominate. They are, in short, the land that time forgot, and that the world has done its best to ignore. The toxic combination of premodern identities, penchant for irrational and unpredictable violence, and the ability to access modern weaponry make such places of special concern today. They require constant vigilance and policing. These spaces, and the people who inhabit them, need to be contained and confined, lest the ever-present, though abeyant danger they hold ever manifests itself.

Yet sometimes it does, and spectacularly so. In April 2015, Al-Shabaab militants stormed the grounds of Garissa University in the North Eastern Province of Kenya, killing 147 people in the attack. Five months earlier, in December 2014, gunmen of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan took over the Army Public School in Peshawar, in northwest Pakistan, and murdered 145 people, including over 130 children. Earlier that same year, Boko Haram fighters abducted 276 schoolgirls from Chibok in Borno state in northeastern Nigeria.¹ All three incidents involved self-described terrorist networks advocating violent jihad to establish an Islamic political order akin to the Caliphate.

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The latent violence of the world's limits exploded in dramatic fashion, and sadly not for the first, nor likely the last time. But these attacks are bound by more than the so-called War on Terror. The geography of violence they present is neither accidental nor coincidental. Rather, it is connected by deep historical roots. All three episodes occurred on what were previously the frontiers of imperial systems and today are the peripheries of states and the modern global order. It is the liminal character of these spaces, and, more importantly, the people inhabiting them, that has made them systemically vulnerable to the bloodletting so gruesomely put on display.

Kenya, Pakistan, and Nigeria were all important linkages in Britain's global empire. But not all the spaces within those linkages were of equal importance to that empire. The spaces subject to these recent atrocities sat astride the imperial limits. Indeed, it was the advent of the British Empire in the latter half of the nineteenth century that rendered these spaces frontiers. It was here, along these edges, that Britain's colonial enterprise, and the successor states it gave rise to, defined themselves—not only spatially, but also conceptually. For the way the empire and its constituent colonial parts conceived and wielded power along these frontiers had a profound effect on how they did so elsewhere.

The practices of frontier rule that the British imperial juggernaut authored, maintained, and replicated were part of a global paradigm attending the rise of the modern state-based international order in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. British imperial practices were decidedly more imperial than British. Their administrative doppelgangers could be found in other contemporary European empires, as well as the neo-European states of the Americas, such as the United States and Argentina, which were at the same time constructing the foundations of their rule and authority along their expanding limits. Though not formally empires, at least in their own estimations, the actions of these states were substantively imperial. In structuring their own systems of frontier rule, these neo-European, neo-imperial states evinced a decidedly colonial face, at least to those subject to such systems.

This book tells a story, one likely familiar in its contours if not its contents, about the way states defined and governed their frontiers and the indigenous people inhabiting them in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In many ways, it is a history of the global periphery—both place and peoples. As the modern state system filled in the map through conquest and colonization, its constituent parts time and again encoun-

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tered seemingly stateless peoples inhabiting “wild” lands along their limits. The peoples were invariably “savage,” in contrast to the “civilized” states that encountered and, in many instances, exterminated them. They were “tribal”—non-sedentary and bound by ties of kinship and timeless precepts of “custom” and “tradition,” which governed them collectively. Further, they were inherently violent. But their violence lacked either method or meaning, making it seem dangerously irrational. To state officials they presented an undifferentiated mass marked by cruelty, barbarity, and ignorance. As such, they were seen as a threat to the civilized order of the expanding state-based societies of the day.

The lands such people inhabited were equally characterized as dangerous and “savage.” In nearly all the cases examined in the following pages, the peoples subject to the regime of rule along the frontiers of the global order shared the distinction of occupying lands marginal in the eyes of the imperial exchequer or national treasury. That marginality lay rooted in the fact that these lands were relatively unproductive of settled agriculture. Officials viewed them as ecologically barren. They failed to produce tax receipts sufficient to support regular administration. These lands were too poor to pay for themselves, or more precisely for their own governance. They were thus nothing more than fiscal sinks—bottomless money pits draining the state’s limited resources. It was not worth the state’s investment to erect the normal architecture of administration on such parsimonious lands. Nor was the extermination of the inhabitants of such lands—violent and “savage” as they supposedly were—worth the costs either in terms of blood or treasure. Why waste resources to conquer resourceless wastelands and eradicate recalcitrant “barbarians”?

How, then, were states to deal with these “savage” people inhabiting “savage” lands? How were the limits to be governed? Or, more precisely, what strategies and tactics did states develop and deploy over time to govern these spaces and their unruly inhabitants? This is the central question animating this work. What is arresting is that despite the geographic distance and cultural difference between sites of governance and subjects of rule, the states of the late nineteenth century turned to a nearly identical model of governance. Whether they were Apaches or Afghans, Zulus, Somalis, or Mapuche, the peoples of the periphery were ruled in substantively the same way. While details differed from place to place, a striking continuity of power, both in its structure and deployment, clearly reveals itself. This book documents this seemingly universal phenomenon of frontier rule.

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The increasingly powerful states of the time could conceivably deal with such nuisances and potential threats in any number of ways. But three administrative options quickly rose to the top of the procedural pile. First, following the logic of liberalism, the “savage” inhabitants of these spaces could be remade, civilized and assimilated into the expanding body politics of the day. The land could be tamed through cultivation, turning the barren desert into a blooming garden by the now-pacified peoples of the periphery. Second, the inhabitants could be eliminated—a potential strategy that their relatively small numbers, combined with expanding state power and capabilities of the time, made more and more realistically possible. The lands could then be turned over to people—almost invariably colonial settlers—who would make productive use of them, and thus sported a superior moral claim. Third, the people as well as the land could be contained—both physically and culturally. The frontier dwellers could be encapsulated in their own “customs” and “traditions” and exiled to impoverished lands of little interest to the states and their land-hungry populaces. Such encapsulation of the people and enclosure of the land proved the most economical as well as, in many ways, the easiest option. It had the advantage of separating the “savage” peoples and their wasteland from the surrounding state sphere, which both physically and culturally enveloped them. Such a strategy quarantined the chaos, and in so doing it promised to inoculate the modern, civilized societies from the premodern anarchy infecting the indigenous “barbarians.”

While all three strategies were tested weapons of the arsenal of expansion employed by the states of the late nineteenth century, the third is the focus here. The policy of encapsulation and enclosure proved one of significant contemporary popularity, with modern, as well as modernizing, polities around the globe pursuing it. Yet it was not only widespread. It also relied on deep historical antecedents whose temporal reach forward in time extend to today, giving the policy continuing valence in the twenty-first-century world.² Within the Western canon at least, this was a strategy pursued by the Roman Empire against the Germanic tribes in the first century BCE.³ As such it provided a time-tested strategy of subjugation for dealing with the “barbarian” hordes of beyond. The prominence of this policy transformed it into nothing less than a standard administrative practice for how modern states dealt with the premodern peoples of the periphery. It became an administrative archetype, widely replicated the world over.

That archetype produced particular types of spaces to contain the people subject to this administrative regime. The spaces assumed many

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different names that are still in use today—reservations, native reserves, tribal areas, and indigenous agencies. Yet an altogether different moniker is more appropriate for them both individually and collectively—frontiers. These spaces were not frontiers because of their locations. Some, if not all of them, were eventually enveloped by the expanding states they lay along the limits of. Rather, they were frontiers because of their character, a character constituted by the state practices that defined and delimited them. They were not frontiers because of place, but rather because of practice—the practice of administration that states used to govern them. That practice constituted a singular regime of rule I call frontier governmentality.

While frontier governmentality assumed many guises, all its forms manifested the same basic skeletal structure. There was invariably a legal component—most often a code or regulation. This reflects the fact that the powers that deployed frontier governmentality nearly all justified their expansion, conquest, and authority—to themselves as well as others—in terms of the “rule of law.” These states were bringing the light of order into the darkness of anarchy, and the torch that shone the light was the law. But laws are inanimate abstractions which must be affected by people. In the case of frontier governmentality, the laws themselves did not structure a highly bureaucratic form of governance, but rather a highly personalized one that empowered the “man on the spot.”⁴ This was a system of personal administration, justified and stiffened by the objective independence of the law, but nonetheless reliant on its subjective interpretation and application by men. In nearly all the instances detailed here, individual frontier administrators left their imprimatur on the regime of rule, bestowing their monikers in lasting popular memory on the system. But imperial administrators were not the only players on the stage. The ruled also played a central role in their subjugation to the system of frontier governmentality as they were entailed in its structures of power and strictures of exploitation. Local tribesmen provided the first line of colonial muscle to enforce the precepts of the regime’s legal code and personal administration within frontier societies. As tribal police and militia, they became the coercive arm of the state complicit in their own suppression and in that of their fellow tribesmen.

To both explain and illustrate the meaning and content of frontier governmentality, the following pages consider a series of episodes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to analyze this globally ubiquitous form of governance constructed along the expanding bounds of state

authority.⁵ From the North-West Frontier of British India, to the Northern Frontier Province of colonial Kenya, to the San Carlos Apache reservation in southern Arizona, to the “Pais de las Manzanitas” at the edge of the Argentine Pampas, one finds the near simultaneous construction of a system of frontier administration on a cosmopolitan canvas. While some instances stand as clear reproductions of administrative practices honed elsewhere and brought to bear by the mobile careers of imperial servants, others evince a seemingly autochthonous origin in both conception and execution. Yet in all, the frontier governmentality that emerged and embedded itself along states’ limits—through administrative transmission or original authorship—retained and shared the same four centrally defining elements: indirect rule, sovereign pluralism, imperial objecthood, and economic dependence.

Expanding empires and nation-states constructed and entrenched a regime of rule along their frontiers that was both strikingly similar and remarkably consistent across divides of distance and culture. The inhabitants of these spaces were at the edges, or rather beyond the edges of “civilization” with which empires and contemporary states justified themselves. The states neither had the appetite nor made the pretense of ruling the peoples of the periphery directly. Instead, employing colonially sanctioned “customs” and “traditions,” the states exerted their authority indirectly. As a consequence, the tribesmen were portrayed as “sovereign” if not “independent” by colonial officials, though they were in fact neither. This rhetorical exercise excluded them from the colonial sphere. Not subjects of the Queen’s law, nor those of the republic, they were nonetheless objects of imperial action. These frontier dwellers lay beyond the sovereign purview of the colonial state, though they nonetheless remained trapped within the suzerain one of the imperial sphere. And although judicially excluded from the colonial regime, the tribesmen were rendered economically dependent on it.

Invariably, these forms of frontier rule were considered exceptional and temporary administrative expedients necessary to deal with less advanced peoples not yet suited to the legal complexities of regular administration. They were often thought of, then and since, as passing aberrations—glitches in the triumphal procession of state formation. But nothing could be more removed from the truth. Rather than the unintended detritus of modern political development—a step in the progressive advancement of peoples—these systems were the consciously intended outcome. They were a central part of the blueprint, a foundational element to the

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state-centric order constructed at the time. And they continue to have lasting impacts today. The imperial pasts of Kenya, Pakistan, and Nigeria have an ensanguined and pressing legacy on the postcolonial presents of the people populating their peripheries. While in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the stateless peoples of the periphery, at the edges of governmental power, were discussed in terms of “savagery” and “barbarism,” the updated lexicography of the early twenty-first century is that of “failing” or “fragile” states.⁶

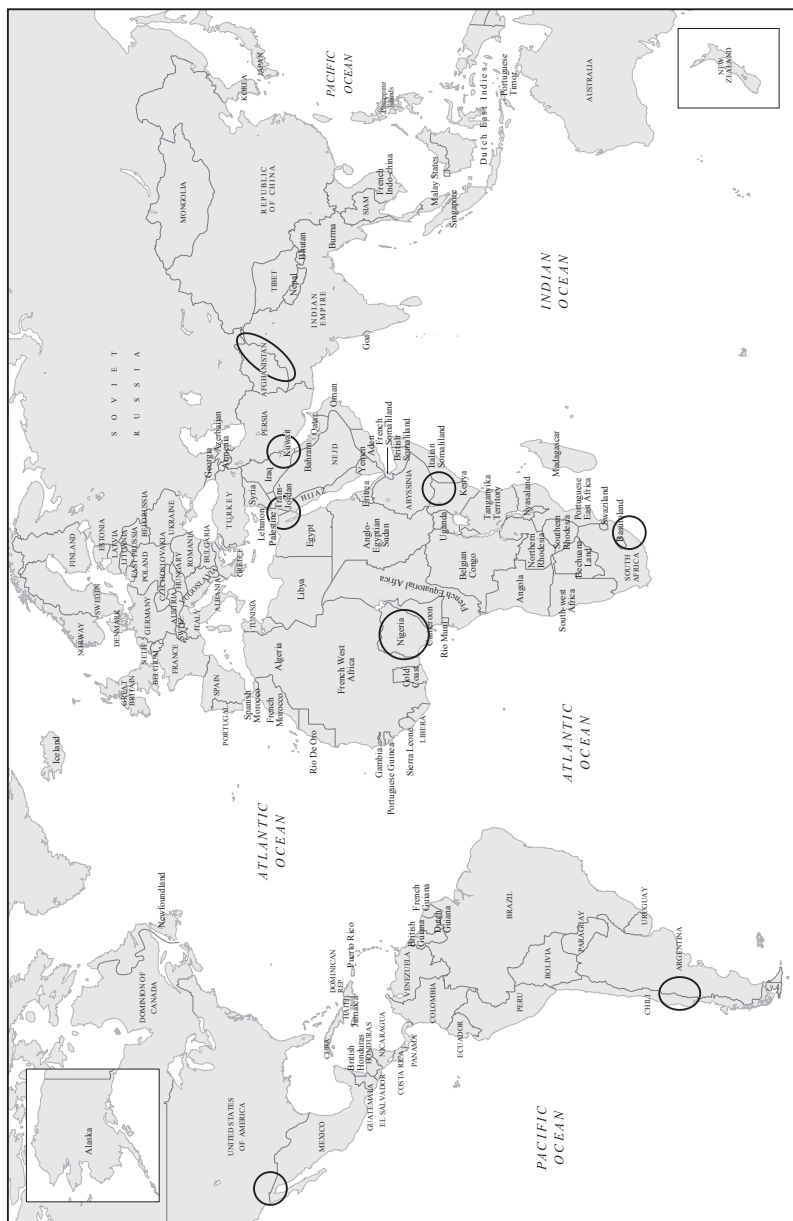
Viewing the periphery through the lens of frontier governmentality offers a markedly different vantage than the ways these spaces are generally characterized. Others have depicted the frontier as either “states of exception” or as places to practice “the art of not being governed.”⁷ As a subject of inquiry, frontiers are thought to constitute a liminal case on the margins of normalcy, interesting either for their aberrance or for what they do not tell us about the state order. But precisely the opposite holds. Frontier governmentality argues that the frontier is far from exceptional. Rather, it constitutes an integral, and in truth pedestrian, part of state design. The frontier underlines the fragmented and varied character of the state-based order. Likewise, frontier governmentality contests the notion that the people of the periphery practice some art of not being governed. Instead, it demonstrates yet another way that states govern those they abjure from their direct gaze and administration. The people subject to forms of frontier governmentality are the people of the proverbial hills—those who by choice or circumstance are removed from the confines of normal state administration. While some romanticize the hills, by the late nineteenth century they were not retreats and redoubts of freedom, but prisons and sites of enforced exile.⁸ Expanding states transformed these hills not through conquest and assimilation, but rather through containment and encapsulation. Far from not being governed, the peoples of the hills and peripheries were very much ruled, through state sanctioned “customs” and “traditions.” This was another form of subjugation and governance rather than the absence of it.

Though states may have governed the peoples of the periphery through their own “customs” and “traditions,” such regimes of authority were a consequence of state weakness rather than strength. States were neither omnipresent nor omniscient along their peripheries—in ambition or in reality. Their presence was both geographically and temporally episodic at best. Frontier governmentality is what states did when they could muster neither the will nor the resources to affect their presence in a more penetrative or

permanent manner. This, then, was not a case of dominance without hegemony, but rather of the ephemerality of authority.⁹ Recognizing such, although this regime of rule may have minimized political and fiscal expenditure, it was by no means without costs. Frontier governmentality, like much of the colonial regime, was a regime of rule predicated on difference. Such rule of difference necessitated the particularization of both colonial and frontier populations. They were to be divided and governed by their distinct social identities, which were bounded by their communal customs and traditions. For states to effect a rule of difference along their limits, they needed to be able to erect, maintain, and police that difference. Not all states of the nineteenth-century world, or indeed today, could convincingly do so. Thus while frontier governmentality may reflect state weakness where the state abjures its sovereign authority, that weakness is relative.

The story of frontier governmentality is first and foremost a history of the state, and in particular the state of colonial regimes. Though indigenous people play a central role, it is a history of what states did to those indigenous peoples rather than how those people escaped, resisted, or ultimately succumbed to the state. In a way, this history arguably replicates epistemically the violence perpetrated by the state on these people physically—a violence of domination that silences their historical voice. That is certainly not the intention here. Rather, this work is offered as a critical consideration of the ways states composed and constructed themselves through the practices of governance they employed. And as a reflection on the lasting effects of such systems and practices. By looking at what the state did to the peoples of the periphery, we are in fact examining what the state did to itself. The story that emerges, while one of dominance, subjugation, and violence, is also one of complexity. For what it reveals is a history of state construction and governance predicated not on the erection of a universal order—a flat political topography—but rather on the intentional structuring of a layered political reality that included some and excluded others by design.

To effect that design, frontier governmentality had to be enacted and performed by the apparatuses and personnel of the imperial state. The everyday practice of frontier governmentality was played on a global stage by a cast of characters who enter and exit, some with dazzling cupidity and avarice, others with a deeply held conviction about the righteousness of European imperialism. While many of the places and people may seem wholly disconnected from one another, they are deeply bound together



Map 1. The world, c. 1920. Circles indicate frontiers discussed.

by sinews into a discernable if not unitary whole, highlighting global circuits of ideas, administrative practices, and personnel. At the core of the story of frontier governmentality sit two central characters—one a law and the other a man. The former is the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR), the legal code used by the British to govern their Afghan frontier. The latter is Sir Robert Groves Sandeman, the first head of the Baluchistan Agency of British India. Together, these two personify, as well as arguably document, the origins and rise of frontier governmentality globally during the last three decades of the nineteenth century and into the opening years of the twentieth century.

The book begins in the borderlands between British India and what would later become Afghanistan. The issues of territorial demarcation, practical governance, and economic penetration were particularly pressing here. By the 1870s, the British had over twenty years of direct administrative experience and an even longer history of encounter here, beginning with the First Afghan War (1839–1843). It was along this frontier, which was not demarcated in theory until the Durand Agreement of 1893 and in practice until much later, that the British developed and deployed their system of frontier governmentality in full. This system was embodied by a draconian legal regime known as the Frontier Crimes Regulation, initially promulgated in 1872. The Regulation created a system of governance relying on indirect rule and encapsulating frontier tribesmen in what were, in effect, native reserves, though it neither used that language nor explicitly proclaimed that vision. The outworking of the Regulation over time made the inherent suppositions of the law clear in their political and administrative implications.

The FCR proved an imperial template subsequently exported around Britain's burgeoning global empire. It was first duplicated within British India, where it was quickly copied and enforced along the Raj's northeast frontier in the highlands bordering Burma during the 1890s. Its last instance of imperial reproduction was in Kenya's Northern Frontier Province in 1934. In the interval between, the law, as well as the substance of its administrative structure, was constructed time and again along a widely dispersed array of frontiers globally. In South Africa in the late 1870s and the early 1880s, Sir Bartle Frere, the Governor of the Cape Colony, applied the lessons learned from his days as Commissioner of Sindh along the Afghan frontier in British India to his dealings with the Zulus, with disastrous results. He was preceded in these efforts by Theophilus Shepstone in Natal, who eventually produced the Natal Code. Twenty years

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later, at the turn of the twentieth century, Frederick Lugard, the alleged architect of indirect rule in Africa in the eyes of subsequent generations of imperial administrators, cribbed his notes from his days in Peshawar in the 1870s and 1880s to construct a system of frontier governmentality in northern Nigeria. The British Indian Empire's involvement in the First World War on behalf of the King Emperor brought the FCR, originally designed for the particular problem of the Pathan tribesmen in the Hindu Kush, to the marshlands of the Basra *vilayet* taken from the disintegrating Ottoman Empire. From there, it traveled the deserts of the Middle East, settling, in modified form, in the Negev of mandatory Palestine and Trans-Jordan. Through the careers of various imperial officials, the FCR had an imperial career of its own.

Yet the ideas of indirect rule, and, more importantly, the practices of frontier governmentality, were not the singular purview of the British Empire. Nor were the underlying norms and values that provided the intellectual foundation on which these governing practices rested. A number of contemporary thinkers—scholars, administrators, and scholar administrators—held a common view of the “savagery” of the peoples of the periphery and how their “savage” state not only justified but also necessitated their subjugation and rule. Men like Sir Bartle Frere in Britain, Frederick Jackson Turner in the United States, and Domingo Sarmiento in Argentina collectively authored and maintained an intellectual edifice on which the rule of frontier governmentality was built. Their transnational intellectual milieu points to the fact that the rationale for and practice of frontier governmentality proved a regime of rule with global reach. In Argentina, the republic's expansion into the Pampas and Patagonia at the end of the 1870s and through the mid-1880s—known as the *conquista del desierto* (conquest of the desert)—was precipitated by the same impulses concurrently driving the British into Afghanistan.¹⁰ With the former's success, they tried to put in place forms of rule strikingly similar to those embodied by the FCR. At the same moment, the United States—in one of its many wars of expansion along its rolling continental frontier—created a reservation system for the Apache in the Arizona territory that embodied the elements of frontier governmentality. This was clearly a global phenomenon linking geographically far-removed corners of the world inhabited by peoples who, though individually quite distinct, collectively constituted an archetype of frontier dwellers who had to be dealt with in a similar fashion by the expanding state order of the nineteenth century.

Frontier governmentality facilitates a deeper understanding of the modern world we live in—both past and present. Through an examination of the “peripheries” of the global order, it throws a revealing light on the “centers.” For the construction of both was not a dichotomous project where the interior defined its limits, but rather a wholly entangled enterprise in which the two mutually constituted one another. Frontiers defined the centers as much as centers defined the frontiers. Yet this is no simple collapse of categories, for those definitions were differential. Indeed the story of frontier governmentality is really about how the state system, so often characterized as driven by the universalizing, and flattening impetus of modern political power, intentionally constructed and included an undulating, uneven political terrain of difference, which remains central to our world today.

That system affected, and continues to affect, peoples’ lives in a direct and malicious manner. The inhabitants of the frontier—the objects of this story as well as the actions of the imperial states—are the forgotten peoples of the periphery who only seem to explode into popular consciousness when they perpetrate or are more often the victims of spectacular and ostensibly unintelligible acts of violence. The world looks with horror as the bodies of massacred children are removed from the Army Public School in Pakistan, as the bloodied remains of young students are put into body bags in Kenya, or as the hooded heads of pubescent girls are shown in the propaganda videos disseminated by Boko Haram. As such violence is so alien to the daily lives of so many, we struggle to make sense of such bloodletting, reaching for the interpretive lens of terrorism and thus understanding these people and places as “fanatical”—and thus deviant and dangerous. Yet there is a deep structural logic at the heart of these incidents along the global periphery, embedded in the very construction of these spaces as peripheries from the late nineteenth century onward. These are not spaces of exception, aberrations in our modern global system of nation-states. Rather, these are central parts of the system’s design—intended outcomes, not unexpected accidents. As such, they sit as damning indictments of the political, economic, and social order constructed over the last century and a half.