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Processes of Spatialization  
under the Global Condition

Gabriele Pisarz-Ramirez

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**Spatial Fictions: Imagining  
(Trans)national Space in  
the Southern and Western  
Peripheries of the Nineteenth  
Century United States**

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**Gabriele Pizarz-Ramirez, Steffen Wöll, and Deniz Bozkurt**  
Spatial Fictions: Imagining (Trans)national Space in the Southern and  
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***“In the first sixty years of U.S. history, in the aftermath of the colonial period, the country’s sense of national identity was as uncertain, as provisional, as its cartography.”***

Paul Giles, *The Global Remapping of American Literature*<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The nineteenth century emerges as a pivotal period in the spatial formation of the United States; it is an era marked by expansionism and the consolidation of the nation. Up until today, many historical writings relate the nineteenth century to spatial concepts such as the Frontier and the Errand into the Wilderness—the settlement of the territory of the United States on an East-West trajectory.

In the rhetoric of expansionism that was dominated by the ideology of Manifest Destiny, the westward movement appeared as a natural, continuous process, whereas the territories beyond the moving frontier were considered “empty” or at least economically “unused” and thus in need of being settled and cultivated. The widespread conviction that the populations of these areas did not properly “use” the land<sup>2</sup> was symptomatic of the limited perspective by which Americans traditionally have viewed the West.<sup>3</sup> Not only was the continual expansion of the nation presented as a natural process, the new territories also needed to be represented and described to the average American. Therefore, as Bruce Harvey points out in *American Geographics*, in the decades before the Civil War “geographical writing was considered [...] a patriotic genre” that “affirmed the American way.”<sup>4</sup> Harvey moreover emphasizes the importance of geographical texts as “the primary means by which U.S. subjects defined themselves, not just within a global context but also by virtue of that context. That is, national self-definition—the feeling of nationhood itself—required the illumination of geographical comparison.”<sup>5</sup> In a similar vein, literary critic Paul Giles talks of the “territorializing impulse” of early-nineteenth-century American culture, i.e. the desire to “fill in the blank spaces on the map, to subjugate the continent in a cartographic as well as a military sense.”<sup>6</sup>

The acquisition and representation of the new territories was guided by the vision of an agrarian United States dominated by farmers. Thomas Jefferson imagined the American as a farmer: “Our governments will remain virtuous for many centuries as long as they are chiefly agricultural; and this will be as long as there shall be vacant lands in any part of America.”<sup>7</sup> While the inhabitants of the acquired areas were deemed part of these “vacant lands”, the only disputed issue was the question as to how far the expansion of the United States would progress, i.e. where the “natural” limits of this expansion were. While this natural border was first located in the Appalachian Mountains, it later moved to the Mississippi, and as the settlement of the western territories progressed, to the Rocky Mountains and eventually to the Pacific Ocean.<sup>8</sup>

The spatial patterns related to the concepts of the Frontier, the Errand into the Wilderness, and Manifest Destiny eventually began to dominate history writing and became canonical by the end of the nineteenth century with Frederick Jackson Turner’s famous lecture held at the Chicago World’s Fair Columbian Exposit-

1 P. Giles, *The Global Remapping of American Literature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, p. 5.

2 The agricultural practices of the native populations, which were often adapted to the climatic and geological conditions of the area were, as Marshall has noted, “so unusual as to be largely invisible to Euro-Americans” (A.G. Marshall, “Unusual Gardens: The Nez Perce and Wild Horticulture on the Eastern Columbia Plateaus”, in: Dale D. G. and Paul W. H. (eds.), *Northwest Lands, Northwest Peoples: Readings in Environmental History*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999, pp. 173–187, quoted in: R.T. Hayashi, *Haunted by Waters: A Journey through Race and Place in the American West*, 1st ed., Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2007, p. 27).

3 R.T. Hayashi, *Haunted by Waters: A Journey through Race and Place in the American West*, 1st edn, Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2007, p. 27.

4 B.A. Harvey, *American Geographics: U.S. National Narratives and the Representation of the Non-European World, 1830-1865*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002, p. 28.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

6 P. Giles, *The Global Remapping of American Literature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, p. 7.

7 T. Jefferson, “Letter to James Madison December 20, 1787”, 20 December 1787, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/letter-to-james-madison-19> (accessed 3 August 2017).

8 J. Eue, *Die Oregon-Frage: Amerikanische Expansionspolitik und der Pazifische Nordwesten, 1814-1848*, Münster: LIT, 1995, p. 96.

tion in 1893 about “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.”<sup>9</sup> However, as many texts produced by American writers show, this narrative about American space was by no means the only one that existed during the nineteenth century. As Americans tried to make sense of their surroundings in the early period of the nation, they imagined a multitude of spatial forms and formats. Especially on the peripheries of the nation as spaces in which the power and influence of the nation state was not very strongly felt and where the identification with a national agenda was comparatively weak, spatial narratives developed that reflected the different topographical, social, economic, ethnic, and cultural conditions in these areas. In fact, many of the resulting narratives collided with or diverged from the concept of Manifest Destiny; many did not follow the logic of a predestined East-West movement and were not directed inwardly towards the nation but extended their imaginations outwardly beyond its borders. On the peripheries, it thus became evident that the United States were what Ian Tyrrell has called a “transnational nation”—a nation that was “deeply connected to the world, its peoples, its traditions.”<sup>10</sup> Hence, as much as the development of the nation was determined by domestic forces and internal debates, as much was it shaped by transnational forces and by the connections that linked it to other continental cultures as well as to Asia, Europe, and other places of the globe.

This insight then represents the starting point for our endeavor to explore the imagination of space in the southern and western peripheries of the United States in nineteenth-century texts. We are fully aware that, in view of the mobile borders during most of this period, the terms “southern” and “western” are, like any geographic and spatial designators, semantic constructions. Using a wide variety of fictional and non-fictional textual sources—novels, pamphlets, poems, speeches, essays, etc.—our project investigates the geographical imagination of American writers regarding these peripheral spaces by asking questions such as: How did Americans think about the peripheries, and how do American literary and cultural discourses produced in and about the margins of the United States reflect ideas about space? How did these spatial imaginations relate to—or contradict—the dominant national narratives? Trying to answer these questions, we also aim at uncovering the complexity of discursive reactions to the then undetermined position of the United States both nationally and globally, between expansionism and consolidation, between the desire to acquire ever more territories and the need to define the essential character of a nation that was simultaneously embedded in a network of economic ties with other places on the continent and abroad. Building on frameworks such as globalized American Studies, Critical Regionalism, and New Geography, our project wants to help overcome the dichotomy of national/local and transnational/global perspectives in explaining spatial narratives about the United States, endorsing the validity of both perspectives as well as their mutual dependencies in American nineteenth century spatial discourses.

## State of Research and Theoretical Contexts

Our project is situated at the intersection of theories about space and the geographical imagination as proposed by New Cultural Geography<sup>11</sup> as well as theories aimed at the explanation of the relationship between local/regional/national identities and extra-national processes as they have been developed in the fields of Transnational American Studies, Atlantic Studies, Critical Regionalism,<sup>12</sup> and Global American Studies.<sup>13</sup> We

9 F. Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History”, in: J.M. Faragher (ed.), *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” and Other Essays*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998, pp. 31–60.

10 I. Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective since 1789*, London: Palgrave, 2007, p. 1.

11 B.A. Harvey, *American Geographics: U.S. National Narratives and the Representation of the Non-European World, 1830-1865*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002; D.B. Massey, *For Space*, London: SAGE, 2005; D.B. Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994; E.W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, New York: Verso, 1989.

12 K. Frampton, “Towards a Critical Regionalism. Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Seattle. Eds. H. Foster, and K. Frampton. Bay Press, 1983; D.R. Powell, *Critical Regionalism: Connecting Politics and Culture in the American Landscape*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

13 D. Armitage, and M.J. Braddick (eds.), *The British Atlantic World 1500-1800*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002; p. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993; W. Johnson, *River of Dark Dream. Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom*, Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2013; J. Muthyala, *Reworlding America:*

also draw on explanatory models and methods from the fields of Comparative Studies, Intercultural Studies, Critical Race Studies, and Hemispheric Studies.

Beginning in the mid-nineteen-eighties, as result of the reinsertion of space into the social sciences and the humanities in what has been termed “spatial turn”, space has received renewed attention as an important category of inquiry in American Studies. The spatial turn encouraged a reconceptualization of central concepts such as culture and nation from a spatial rather than temporal perspective, privileging metaphors such as margin, border, deterritorialization, center, periphery, and mapping.<sup>14</sup> The most visible effect of this development was a shift of critical attention from the spatial “center” towards the “peripheries” of the United States, zooming in on liminal zones such as the US-Mexican border, as well as real and imagined spaces of cultural encounter, e.g. “contact zones”,<sup>15</sup> “borderlands”,<sup>16</sup> and “thirdspaces”.<sup>17</sup> In this process, the spatial narratives that had dominated American cultural history writing for a long time such as the Frontier and the Errand into the Wilderness were re-interrogated as spatio-cultural constructions. Of course, the idea of an “empty” West had always been opposed by the people who had lived in these regions before they became involved in the process of Euro-American expansionism, predominantly Mexican and Native Americans. The establishment of ethnic studies departments at many universities in the wake of the civil rights movement enabled scholars of Mexican and Native American history to begin unearthing texts and artifacts that documented the complex history of the border regions, including the history of the 2000-mile-long border between the US and Mexico and the territories that exist north and south of this border. These critical voices were joined by historians such as Patricia Limerick and Annette Kolodny who pointed out the limitations of the Frontier myth and argued for a revised conception of the Frontier as a “meeting ground”<sup>18</sup> or a space of “ongoing first encounters”.<sup>19</sup> Beginning in the 1990s, new fields of critical inquiry like Atlantic Studies and Circum-Atlantic Studies<sup>20</sup> as well as American Postcolonial Studies and the “New Americanists” began to investigate the entanglements of the United States with regions beyond its borders in the context of endeavors to uncover the imperial history of the United States.<sup>21</sup>

In her presidential address to the American Studies Association in November 2004, Shelley Fisher-Fishkin identified a “transnational turn” in American Studies that “pay[s] increasing attention to the historical roots of multidirectional flows of people, ideas, and goods and the social, political, linguistic, cultural, and economic crossroads generated in the process”. Concretely, she referred to the many efforts taken by Americanists in recent years to theorize “the need for seeing America as part of a world system”.<sup>22</sup> These transnational approaches did not only offer critical interventions into previous, more essentialist conceptions of ethnic identity but also complicated traditional narratives of “American” identity and exceptionalist notions of the United States’ role on the continent and in the world. They aimed at what Rachel Adams has termed the “worlding of American Studies”: the endeavor to examine “U.S. culture within the context of the

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*Myth, History, and Narrative*, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006; D.R. Powell, *Critical Regionalism: Connecting Politics and Culture in the American Landscape*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007; I. Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective since 1789*, London: Palgrave, 2007.

- 14 D. Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften*, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2010, p. 304.
- 15 P.M. Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*, New York: Norton, 1987; M.L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London: Routledge, 1992.
- 16 G. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera*, San Francisco: Spinsters / Aunt Lute, 1987; J. Limón, *American Encounters: Greater Mexico, the United States, and the Erotics of Culture*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1999; J.D. Saldívar, *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- 17 E.W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, New York: Verso, 1989.
- 18 P.M. Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*, New York: Norton, 1987; M.L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 269.
- 19 A. Kolodny, “Letting Go Our Grand Obsessions: Notes Toward a New Literary History of the American Frontiers”, *American Literature* 64 (1992) 1, pp. 1–18, at 13.
- 20 D. Armitage, and M.J. Braddick (eds.), *The British Atlantic World 1500–1800*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002; p. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993; p. Linebaugh, and M. Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, Boston, MA: Verso, 2000; J. Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- 21 W.C. Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006; A. Kaplan and D.E. Pease (eds.), *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1993; J. Radway, “What’s in a Name? Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 20, 1998”, *American Quarterly* 51 (1999) 1, pp. 1–32; J.C. Rowe, *Literary Culture and US Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- 22 S. Fisher-Fishkin, “Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies—Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004”, *American Quarterly* 57 (2005) 1, pp. 17–57, at p. 21–22.

Americas and larger world systems".<sup>23</sup> Alongside these developments were critical endeavors, aimed at an internationalization of American Studies in order to include views of the United States from the outside, as well as the investigation of the inter-American<sup>24</sup> and global entanglements<sup>25</sup> of the United States—a discussion that had wide-ranging consequences for the debates about spatial formats and spatial orders in international academic contexts. These efforts continued the critical interrogation of exceptionalist interpretations of American literature and culture.

The tendency of transnational studies to privilege space over time, as well as the fact that the critical toolset and the major strategic approaches of transnational studies were developed over the past few decades complicate the investigation of early texts from a transnational perspective. This poses the question of what it means to look at transnational space historically. Can we just replace national perspectives on earlier periods in American history and culture with transnational ones, and what can we gain by doing so? Taking up this question, Frank Kelleter has pointed to the fact that a mere application of contemporary critical methods to the study of the early national period may not be very productive. He refers to Janice Radway's influential suggestion to rethink the name of the discipline "American Studies" so as to "make it less dependent on nation-centered perspectives," and argues that "if we want to understand the peculiar, indeed unique, status of the word *America* among national names in the world today, we need more than merely a desire to overcome national perspectives or to supplant them with supposedly more advanced models of trans- or even post-national hybridity".<sup>26</sup> One reason for this, Kelleter observes,<sup>27</sup> is that Americanist transnational scholarship usually proceeds from the assumption of a constructed coherent national identity (which it then sets out to deconstruct), without asking how and under which circumstances this construction has emerged "[a]s if hoping to theorize the United States out of existence".<sup>28</sup> A historical transnational research, Kelleter observes, needs to examine the conditions and specific situations that actuate the emergence of the nation and national identity constructions. However, the increased interest in American Studies in the deconstruction of the ideological foundations of American exceptionalism has, according to Kelleter, privileged approaches that view the nation as an ideological fiction, aiming to expose the nation not as an inherent but an "imagined community".<sup>29</sup> Resulting from Kelleter's critique for our project is the necessity to complicate spatial approaches to nationality—not to overcome national perspectives but to explore the multiplicity and diversity of spatial imaginations in the early national period.

In the field of inter-American literary studies, a number of books have made inroads into the investigation of transnational spaces from an early American perspective. For instance, Anna Brickhouse has stressed the unstable boundaries of the nation within a New World arena characterized by the overlap and simultaneity of different claims not only upon geographical territories, but also upon texts and traditions.<sup>30</sup> As Brickhouse shows in *Transamerican Literary Relations and the Nineteenth Century Public Sphere*, a study of transamerican literary networks, even some of the most influential writers of the period—Hawthorne, Cooper, Bryant, Melville, and others—were embedded within a hemispheric network of literary cultures and lines of influence that "provide[d] crucial ways of understanding and delineating their character as national writers".<sup>31</sup> In *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (2002) Kirsten Silva Gruesz proposed a shift of attention away from the conventional landmarks of nineteenth-century history—

23 R. Adams, "The Worlding of American Studies", *American Quarterly* 53 (2001) 4, pp. 720–732, at p. 15.

24 R. Bauer, "Colonial Discourse and Early American Literary History: Ercilla, the Inca Garcilaso, and Joel Barlow's Conception of a New World Epic", *Early American Literature* 30 (1995) 3, pp. 203–232; D. Kadir, "America and Its Studies", *PMLA* 118 (2003) 1, pp. 9–24; R. Saldivar and P.M.L. Moya "Fictions of the Trans-American Imaginary", *Modern Fiction Studies* 49 (2003) 1, pp. 1–18; C. Sadowski-Smith, *Border Fictions: Globalization, Empire, and Writing at the Boundaries of the United States: Architecture and the Native Elite*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2008; H. Tinsman and S. Shukla, eds. *Imagining Our Americas: Toward a Transnational Frame*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2007.

25 A. Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996; B.T. Edwards, and D. p. Gaonkar, "Introduction: Globalizing American Studies", in: B.T. Edwards, and D. p. Gaonkar (eds.), *Globalizing American Studies*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010; W. Johnson, *River of Dark Dream: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom*, Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2013; J. Muthyala, *Reworlding America: Myth, History, and Narrative*, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006.

26 F. Kelleter, "Transnationalism: The American Challenge", *Review of International American Studies* 2 (2007) 3, pp. 29–34, at p. 29.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 29–31.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

29 B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, 2006.

30 A. Brickhouse, *Transamerican Literary Relations and the Nineteenth-Century Public Sphere*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 7.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 10.



Jacksonian individualism, the Civil War, and the rise of urban industrial capitalism—towards moments that from a hemispheric perspective were equally important to the intellectual and cultural life of the period, such as the Monroe Doctrine, the Mexican-American War, as well as the filibustering of North Americans in Central America and the Caribbean. Moving away from canonical scenarios of literary activity toward a more expanded vision that takes into account additional languages and other spaces, Gruesz shows that there was indeed a literary scene for which the global sphere was as important as the local one, which then calls for “a new geography of American literary history that emphasizes its formation within and around a culture of the Americas”.<sup>32</sup>

In 2011, literary critic Paul Giles described the colonial period and the decades until the Civil War as a “transnational era” in American literary history, a periodization which he distinguishes from the “national period” (1865–1980) that followed in its wake. Due to the country’s “more amorphous territorial framework” in the colonial and early national period, Giles observes certain similarities between this early period and what he describes as the “globalized era” after 1980<sup>33</sup> concerning uncertainties “about the status and authority of American discourse”.<sup>34</sup> As Giles states, “the identification of American literature with U.S. national territory was an equation confined to the national period and not something that was equally prevalent either before or afterward”.<sup>35</sup> From such a perspective, internationalizing American Studies means opening up the traditional frameworks of perception and interpretation to more comparative approaches.

Other studies such as Gretchen Murphy’s *Hemispheric Imaginings: The Monroe Doctrine and Narratives of US Empire* (2005) have aimed to understand “how ‘the hemisphere’ became a meaningful cultural and geopolitical frame for American nationalism”.<sup>36</sup> Murphy undertakes a cultural analysis of the Monroe Doctrine, tracing its impact in literary works of the antebellum period. Seeking a framework of a “wider cultural imagination that is expressed through romance novels and other popular entertainments as well as political texts”, the study demonstrates how “these intersecting arenas of the cultural and political were the spaces where the Monroe Doctrine rose to ideological hegemony”.<sup>37</sup> Like Murphy’s study, Robert May’s *Manifest Destiny’s Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (2004) also focuses on imperial expansionist ventures. It surveys the history of filibustering in the Caribbean and in Central America from its early beginnings in the late eighteenth century to the 1850s and argues that the filibusters, who have largely vanished from our historical memory, had a critical impact on contemporary American culture and politics. The imagination of a circum-Caribbean community of slaveholders is at the center of Matthew Pratt Guterl’s *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation* (2007), which situates the US American South in a hemispheric spatial context and shows the connections Southern slave owners had to other slaveholders in the Americas through “institutions, cultures, and ‘structures of feeling’”.<sup>38</sup> Guterl’s hemispheric perspective allows him to juxtapose places as distant as Mississippi and Jamaica, New Orleans and Havana, and figures such as Toussaint L’Ouverture and George Washington, as he offers a transnational look on slavery and emancipation. While many of these studies provide an important basis for our project, none of them is primarily concerned with space.

Although our research draws on this important groundwork in the field of American Studies, another significant context is formed by the recent scholarly field of Critical Regionalism that is aimed at the internationalization of regional studies. The concept of Critical Regionalism as a description for the productive tension between local and global spaces first became prevalent in Kenneth Frampton’s essay “Towards a Critical Regionalism” (1983) and was later adopted by Douglas R. Powell (2007) and others. It addresses the dialectics of globalization processes and local / regional socio-cultures, resulting in new perspectives on traditional regional constructs. Whereas regionalism is often seen as a form of provincial localism as opposed to a more fluid and postmodern cosmopolitanism, Critical Regionalism attempts a negotiation between these

32 K.S. Gruesz, *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002, p. 6.

33 Giles argues that the multidimensional effects of globalization have reconfigured the premises of US national identity in relation to a wider sphere since about 1981.

34 P. Giles, *The Global Remapping of American Literature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, p. 1.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

36 G. Murphy, *Hemispheric Imaginings: The Monroe Doctrine and Narratives of U.S. Empire*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2005, p. 4.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

38 M.P. Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008, p. 1.



two poles, permitting temporal and spatial connections between individual, localized moments of cultural struggle and the wider patterns of history, culture, and politics that it relates to (Powell 2007). Gretchen Woertendyke's study on *Hemispheric Regionalism* (2016) shows how such an approach can be used to study the southern peripheries of the US, which she describes as "a shared yet shifting geography,"<sup>39</sup> thus emphasizing the instability and relationality of concepts like nation and region. Woertendyke reads the area between the southern national peripheries and the territories surrounding the Gulf region as "a series of connections between loosely configured areas and spaces adjacent to the southern frontier."<sup>40</sup> A recent volume on *Critical Regionalism* (2016) edited by Heike Paul, Klaus Lösch, and Meike Zwingenberger collects essays that also address the region as a category of difference and a point of view from which hegemonic positions and spatial formations can be scrutinized.<sup>41</sup>

## Project design: Hypotheses, objectives, and guiding questions

Our project sets out to examine spatial discourses about the peripheries of the United States between national, regional, and global contexts as imaginations of national and transnational space. We examine spatial narratives that are conflictive with or ambivalent regarding dominant national spatial formats and in which regional, transnational, and global spaces intersect. We proceed from the assumption that the change from the colonial status to independence and the consolidation and expansion of the nation were accompanied by conflicting imaginations of different spatial formats that coexisted in the early period of the nineteenth century and that were particularly prevalent on the highly mobile southern and western peripheries of the nation.

Concretely, we ask which imagined spatial formats are discernible from the conflicting national, regional, and transnational perspectives regarding the southern and western peripheries, and which conflicts and negotiation processes between these different formats become visible. How do the discourses about the internal and external borders of the nation complicate linear versions of Manifest Destiny? How do these imagined spatial formats relate to the spatial narrative that was later canonized as the dominant vision of American national history? How did spatialization change in the period after the Civil War and how can we relate nineteenth-century spatialization patterns to globalization discourses that range to the present day?

The peripheries in the South and the West / Northwest will be at the center of our investigation. Our central argument is that the (fictional and nonfictional) texts from and about the peripheries generate a much more complex mosaic of territorial imaginations of national spaces than canonized narratives of territoriality and nationality would have us believe. We argue that the spatial format of the Frontier, which began to dominate the view of the United States retrospectively after its canonization via Turner's thesis, was only one among several competing spatial ideologies. In fact, the geographical imagination<sup>42</sup> regarding the US peripheries was dominated by two central patterns of conflict. First, the conflict between centrifugal and centripetal forces, namely those forces that endorsed the consolidation of the nation versus those arguing for further expansion. The idea of an ever-enlarging agrarian "empire of liberty" was a vision propagated early on by Thomas Jefferson,<sup>43</sup> as well as by early maps like the one drawn by John Melish that represented

39 G.J. Woertendyke, *Hemispheric Regionalism: Romance and the Geography of Genre*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 9.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

41 H. Paul, K. Lösch, and M. Zwingenberger (eds), *Critical Regionalism*, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter 2016.

42 D. Harvey, "Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80 (1990) 3, pp. 418–443.

43 As Jefferson's well-known letter to Archibald Stuart in 1786 emphasizes, he saw the United States as "the nest [...] from which all America, North and South, is to be peopled" (T. Jefferson, "To Archibald Stewart", in: P.L. Ford, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 5, 12 vols, New York: p. Putnam's Sons, 1905, pp. 73–76, at 75). He later added in a letter to James Monroe on November 24, 1801 that "our rapid multiplication will [...] cover the whole northern if not the southern continent, with people speaking the same

the early republic as a continental entity, ignoring national boundaries.<sup>44</sup> It collided with fears of disintegration of the expanding United States and doubts about the possibility of settling the entire continent. For many Americans, the expediency of the imperial mission of moving further and further westward was more than doubtful in the light of the topographic and climatic conditions in parts of the continent. These doubts became particularly audible whenever the use or the feasibility of successful settlement was questioned, particularly in parts of the South (e.g. the swamplands in Florida or southern Louisiana) and the West (e.g. the deserts of Arizona and New Mexico).

A second conflict pattern concerns the social, economic, and cultural conditions in the western, north-western and southern peripheries. In these peripheries, the United States were in multiple ways connected to its neighbors and the rest of the world, thus contradicting the idea of national space as a static “container”.<sup>45</sup> The southern peripheries were connected with other plantation societies in the Caribbean and in South America via the gulf ports and were largely shaped by the cultural heritage of previous Spanish and French colonists and settlements. On the Pacific coast and in the Northwest—areas of cosmopolitan settler and trader populations—the United States was economically linked to Asia and Europe. In these regions, the nation appears over the larger part of the nineteenth century as a “semi-peripheral” country<sup>46</sup> on the world stage—a country that by many writers was perceived not so much as a coherent entity, but imagined as a “loose collection of local and international economies”,<sup>47</sup> namely economies that were deeply rooted in continental and global contexts. In these peripheral regions far away from the northeastern political centers of the nation state, space thus was imagined differently. As a result, it can be assumed that the spatial formats imagined in and about these peripheries were, at least in part, a more appropriate response to the upcoming “global condition” of the United States than the paradigm of an expanding agrarian state as envisioned by Jefferson and Crèvecoeur.

For instance, in 1854 the South saw the emergence of the Knights of the Golden Circle, a secret society that had its beginnings in the formation of Southern Rights Clubs in various cities. In the years preceding the Civil War, the society aimed at expanding the southern plantation society and its structures of slavery to Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. The vision of the Knights was the creation of a prospering—“golden”—southern empire based on slavery and global trade. The society’s plan included the acquisition of Mexico, which was then to be divided into fifteen new slave-holding states that would shift the balance of power in Congress in favor of slavery. Facing the Gulf of Mexico, these new states would form a large crescent or “golden circle”. Similar ideas about expanding slavery were at the center of discourses surrounding North American expansionist filibustering projects into Nicaragua (e.g. by William Walker) that also envisioned the influence of US southern states in Central America<sup>48</sup> and guided debates about a possible annexation of Cuba.<sup>49</sup>

While the cotton and slave-based economies in the South generated visions of a “greater South” reaching out to Brazil and Cuba, the peripheral swamp areas in Florida and Louisiana were perceived as unassimilable and transitory spaces, home to marginal and unruly populations such as runaway slaves, pirates, and natives. African American discourses about these “southern rimlands” included visions of transnational slave rebellions spreading from the Caribbean to the southern states. In the areas acquired by the United States through the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, US American ideas of settlement and “cultivation” collided with French models of expansionism, a conflict resulting in controversial discourses about the advantages and drawbacks of both models. In discourses about the West and Northwest, the American nation appears as

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language, governed in similar forms, and by similar laws; nor can we contemplate with satisfaction either blot or mixture on that surface” (T. Jefferson, “To the Governor of Virginia (James Monroe) Washington, Nov. 24, 1801”, in: P.L. Ford (ed.), *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 9, 12 vols, New York: p. Putnam’s Sons, 1905, pp. 315–319, at 317).

44 J. Melish, *Geographical Description of the United States, With the Contiguous British and Spanish Possessions, Intended as an Accompaniment to Melish’s Map of these Countries* (Philadelphia: John Melish, 1816). For an interpretation of Melish’s map, see M. Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity*, 1st edn, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006; DW. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History, Vol. 2: Continental America, 1800-1867*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

45 D. Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften*, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2010, p. 295.

46 I. Wallerstein, *Modern World-System III*, San Diego, CA: University of California Press, 1989.

47 S. LeMenager, *Manifest and Other Destinies: Territorial Fictions of the Nineteenth-Century United States*, Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004, p. 15.

48 See A. Beer, *A Transnational Analysis of Representations of the US Filibusters in Nicaragua, 1855-1857*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

49 See R.E. May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973.

the site of a commercial rather than an agrarian empire given its trade connections to Asia, Russia, and other parts of the globe. These discourses have only begun to be explored,<sup>50</sup> and none of these investigations has explicitly addressed spatialization.

Consequently, the objective of our study is to uncover the heterogeneity and multiplicity of spatial formats about the peripheries generated in the geographical imagination of nineteenth-century Americans as it becomes manifest in the body of literature from that period. We aim to show that these peripheral interventions were not only significant in the local contexts in which they emerged but that they essentially contributed to the negotiation processes concerning national identity. Our project thus addresses the complex discursive reactions to the situation of the US between the search for a common national identity, expansionist interests, and global economic entanglements. It examines the geographical imaginations regarding the peripheries against the background of the mobile and unstable national borders of the United States, the topographical, social, economic, and cultural conditions at the peripheries, as well as the transnational embeddedness of the country in continental and global contexts. Moreover, we want to get a better understanding of how these alternative spatial formats may relate to the spatial construct of a gradually consolidating nation that aimed at cultural coherence, as well as the regulation processes that resulted in the gradual disappearance of the perceived heterogeneity of spatial formats towards the end of the nineteenth century. As result of our work, we expect to be able to create a "discursive map" that reflects the cultural work of the early geographic imagination concerning these negotiation processes.

## Research units and investigation period

The period of investigation comprises the entire nineteenth century. In the first project phase, we will direct our attention to the southern peripheries, the area of the Louisiana Purchase, the peripheral spaces that emerged as a result of the expansion into Mexican territories (1846-1848), and the Northwest in the decades before the Civil War. In the subsequent research phase, we will examine the spatialization processes that took place during the last decades of the nineteenth century under the altered economic and political conditions following the Civil War and the entrance of the United States into a period of intensified expansionist policies.

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50 C.C. Apap, *The Genius of Place: The Geographic Imagination in the Early Republic*. Lebanon: University of New Hampshire Press, 2016; ; D.N. Cohn, *History and Memory in the Two Souths: Recent Southern and Spanish American Fiction*, Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1999; D.N. Cohn, and J. Smith (eds.), *Look Away! The U.S. South in New World Studies*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2004; M.P. Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008; S. LeMenager, *Manifest and Other Destinies: Territorial Fictions of the Nineteenth-Century United States*, Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004; R.E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America*, Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002; E. Watts, *In This Remote Country: French Colonial Culture in the Anglo-American Imagination, 1780-1860*, Annotated edition, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006; E. Watts, *In this Remote Country: French Colonial Culture in the Anglo-American Imagination, 1780-1860*. Chapel Hill: university of North Carolina Press, 2006; E. Watts, and D. Rachels (eds.), *The First West: Writing from the American Frontier 1776-1860*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

## Research unit I: The South

***"[The] South that we hold collectively in our minds is not—could not possibly be—a fixed or real place. It both exceeds and flattens place; it is a term of the imagination, a site of national fantasy."***

Jennifer Rae Greeson, *Our South*<sup>51</sup>

This research unit analyzes the imagination of space in US American writings about the peripheries of the South. Since the founding of the republic, the South in the national imaginary functioned, as Jennifer Greeson observes, as "a remarkably fertile spatial nexus of the domestic and the foreign."<sup>52</sup> US nationalism—like other forms of nationalism—depends on dynamics of exclusion and uses constructed images of "others" (Europe, "Indians", African Americans, the "Orient") in order to define its own unique identity. Throughout the processes of nation formation its consolidation in the US, however, the South has presented "a different sort of juxtaposition":

*As an internal other from the start of U.S. existence, it lies simultaneously inside and outside the national imaginary constructed in U.S. literature. Our South thus serves in that literature as an unparalleled site of connection between 'the United States' and what lies outside it—a connection to the larger world [...].*<sup>53</sup>

In fact, the rich history of nineteenth-century southern states of the United States is laden with wide-ranging and controversial political, economic, and social events and phenomena that must be understood as both interrelated and fluctuating within space and time. Probably the most crucial and highly debated of these concern slavery, which many scholars interpret as the factor that first created the South as a distinct space. When the northern states began to abolish slavery in the aftermath of the War of Independence, the distinction between "free" versus "slave" states, that is, between the North and the South, increasingly became geographically underlined. This discrepancy was triggered even further with western expansion: With each new state incorporated into the country's borders, questions about expansion or abolition of slavery in the new lands, and thus the question of the future of slavery in the US and states' rights were raised. These controversies shaped the intellectual productions in the antebellum south intensely, while also marking the South as an "internal other" within the borders of the nation.

The condition of the South as a transitional space between the US and other regions—in particular the Caribbean and Latin America—has deeply influenced its interpretation. Vera Kutzinski points out that "in cultural terms, the southernmost parts of the United States are really rimlands of the Caribbean, and have been so ever since slaves were traded between the two areas, well before the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Their unacknowledged rimland status has all kinds of imaginative, political implications."<sup>54</sup> One of these implications was the fear that undesired tropical "contaminations"—e.g. slave rebellions, diseases like yellow fever, and Catholicism—would enter the nation through its southern ports. Another source of fear was the notion that the South was itself a site of degeneracy caused by sinfulness and hedonism, moral corruption and vice, and most of all miscegenation, given its racially heterogeneous population.

Coleman Hutchison argues that "the history of southern literary nationalist discourse in the three decades prior to the American Civil War [...] provides a history of the future—or, better, a history of possible futures."<sup>55</sup> He claims that antebellum nationalist literature in the South, which consisted of different visions and projections regarding its future, "offers us an uncommon opportunity to trace the relationship between 'slavery and the literary imagination':"<sup>56</sup> In our project, we argue that these diverse literary discourses about the future of the "slave South" find their expression in ways that translate into spatial imaginations, thus making

51 J.R. Greeson, *Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010, p. 1.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

54 V.M. Kutzinski, "Borders, Bodies, and Regions: The United States and the Caribbean", in: C.L. Crow (ed.), *A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2003, pp. 171–192, at p. 61.

55 C. Hutchison, *Apples and Ashes*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012, p. 62.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

it necessary to go beyond visions that see the South as a distinctive region within the nation and highlight its own ties to its southern neighbors which have long gone unacknowledged. The spatial view of the South regarding its own position in the nation reflected its marginality, but also a consciousness of its connectiveness to other regions in the hemisphere. As Matthew Pratt Guterl points out in *American Mediterranean*,

*The Southern slaveowners [...] were not just citizens of the United States. They were also citizens in a complicated tropical topography, criollos in a composite imaginary [...] who could, when they wished, transcend the divides between the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America. They were bound together as slaveholders in the New World, possessed of a shared 'white Creole consciousness,' marking them off from Europe and bringing their hemispheric identities into sparkling alignment.*<sup>57</sup>

Guterl emphasizes the global consciousness of southern slave-owners who located “the South in a global historical context, by emphasizing a common past of bondage and mastery, and by worrying over a shared future of emancipation.”<sup>58</sup> His study reminds us that the power of the nation-state to “delimit experience, meaning, and influence was, in the nineteenth century and in the Americas, both limited in scope and contradicted by alternative identifications, experiences, and communities.”<sup>59</sup>

Against this background, in the first of three discursive complexes, we will explore texts that imagined a transnational slaveholding South. These texts envision the South as part of a larger spatial formation. Instead of a peripheral region, it becomes the core of a southern slaveholding empire reaching from Jamaica to Cuba to Brazil with many global connections and the center of a global trade empire based on cotton and slave labor. In this envisioned space, New Orleans and Havana are associated with each other, just as Mississippi and Liverpool are. Many of these ideas are reflected in the contemporary popular literature of the nineteenth-century South,<sup>60</sup> as can be observed in a statement by William Gilmore Simms:

*The African seems to have his mission. He does not disappear but he still remains a slave or a savage! I do not believe that he ever will be other than a slave, or that he was made to be otherwise; but he is designed as an implement in the hands of civilization always. [...] If he ceases to exist in Virginia or Carolina, Georgia or Louisiana, it is only because he is doing the allotted task of his master in regions farther South. I look upon Negro Slavery as the destined agent for civilization of all the states of Mexico, and all the American states beyond.*<sup>61</sup>

In Simms' and other authors' conceptual maps, African slavery thus becomes the glue that ties together the fates of different regions of the southern US with other southern parts of the American continent. In some texts, these ties are seen as an extension of the Union, which consists of autonomous states connected by their love for (white) liberty, established through activities like filibustering. In others, southern expansionism becomes part of a secessionist rhetoric that envisions an empire distinct from the US by connecting its fate with other southern regions on the continent by drawing on ideals like slave agrarianism.

Second, we will investigate texts by African American and abolitionist authors who developed visions of space that stood in opposition to those imagined by slave-owners. Their writings drew on the power and emancipatory promise of slave rebellions as well as on utopian visions of black hemispheric nationalism. One

57 M.P. Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008, p. 6.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

60 The emergence of a southern literature was, as Greeson points out, “a self-conceived countertradition” (J.R. Greeson, *Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010, p. 294), resulting from what Richard Gray has called the South’s “consciousness of its own marginality” (R. J. Gray, *Southern Aberrations: Writers of the American South and the Problems of Regionalism*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000, quoted in: *Ibid.*, p. 294 n.27), combined, in the years before the outbreak of the Civil War, with the hardened ideological positions of southern pro-slavery elites. “North” and “South”, as Greeson emphasizes, were “foundationally hierarchical terms: rather than denoting an equally weighted, descriptive binary, ‘North’ serves as center and norm, while ‘South’ stands as deviation” (*Ibid.*, p. 12). As such, in the eyes of northerners, the plantation South became “the exception to U.S. exceptionalism” (*Ibid.*, p. 95).

61 W.G. Simms, “The Morals of Slavery”, in: *The Pro-Slavery Argument as Maintained by the Most Distinguished Writers of the Southern States, Containing the Several Essays on the Subject of Chancellor Harper, Governor Hammond, Dr. Simms, and Professor Dew*, Charleston: Walker, Richards, & Co., 1852, pp. 175–285, at pp. 270–271.

example for such a vision is Martin R. Delany's novel *Blake or the Huts of America*, in which he envisions the African American future on the African continent:

*The foundation of all great nationalities depends as a basis upon three elementary principles: first, territorial domain; second, population; third, staple commodities as a source of national wealth. The territory must be extensive, population numerous, and the staple such as the world requires and must have; and if the productions be not natural, they must be artificial. [...] Africa, [...] has five thousand miles of latitude, and four thousand longitude, with two hundred millions of homogenous population, all of whom readily assimilate themselves to civilized customs, and their continent, as shown before, producing the greatest staples of wealth to the world.<sup>62</sup>*

While Delany's imagination for the future of African Americans extends beyond the transatlantic borders of the US, it shares a common feature with some other abolitionist texts that envision the prospects of African Americans in connection with the legacies of countries in the Caribbean (Haiti) and in Central America (Nicaragua) that had already abolished slavery. Besides setting a hopeful example of emancipation for slaves in the US, these countries also served as imagined alternative spaces of belonging for the future of African American populations in the United States, which are manifest in texts by authors such as Theodore Holly and William Wells Brown:

*Who knows but that a Toussaint, a Christophe, a Rigaud, a Clervaux, and a Dessalines, may some day appear in the Southern States of this Union? That they are there no one will doubt. That their souls are thirsty for liberty, all will admit. The spirit that cause the blacks to take up arms, and to shed their blood in the American revolutionary war, is still amongst the slaves of the south; and, if we are not mistaken, the day is not far distant when the revolution of St. Domingo will be reenacted in the South Carolina and Louisiana. The Haytian revolution was not unlike that which liberated the slaves of Sparta.<sup>63</sup>*

Like in Brown's passage, using not only the Haitian Revolution but also historical Sparta as a role model, these texts establish invisible networks in space and time through shared experiences and expectations, thus complicating the presumed borders of the South by ascertaining associations with and anticipating futures in lands beyond those boundaries. In addition, they seem to create a spatial imagination regarding the same foreign regions that is distinct from the texts explored in the first discursive complex and that primarily envision a slave-holding South.

Third, the research unit will explore Florida as a space that—because of its geographical and topographical conditions (swamplands, islands, etc.)—was regarded as transitory and unassimilable, while at the same time being imagined as an important gateway for the gulf trade. We will explore Florida as a space that in the period between its acquisition from Spain and its permanent settlement by Americans generated a wide variety of spatial narratives. The peninsula at the southeastern tip of the United States in many ways contradicted visions of an ever-expanding agrarian empire that guided many discourses of expansionism. Indeed, large parts of it were considered useless and inhospitable: too wet to raise crops, too unpredictable to settle, constantly plagued by hurricanes and storm surges, and bordered by dangerous reefs. Amos Doolittle's map of the United States (1784),<sup>64</sup> one of the first maps of the US published and distributed after the American Revolution that reached thousands of students,<sup>65</sup> depicted Florida's southern part as a barely defined, fragmented assembly of islands. As Michelle Currie has pointed out, this is the way Americans came to think of Florida in the late eighteenth and throughout the early part of the nineteenth century.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, US governments were eager to take possession of Florida: First, in order to establish complete control over the

62 M.R. Delany, *Blake Or the Huts of America*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1970, p. 262.

63 W.W. Brown, *St. Domingo: Its Revolutions and Its Patriots: A Lecture Delivered Before the Metropolitan Athenaeum, London, May 16, and at St. Thomas' Church, Philadelphia, December 20, 1854*, Philadelphia: Historic Publications, 1969, p. 32.

64 A. Doolittle, "Map of the United States of America [map], 1784" from Houghton Library, Harvard University, in: M. Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity*, 1st edn, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006, p. 117.

65 M. Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity*, 1st edn, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006, p. 116 n. 24.

66 M.A.E. Currie, "Founding Florida: Language and Geography at the Edge of America", Dissertation, University of California, 2009, p. 66.



Gulf Coast and of the areas bordering on the Caribbean, and second to stop the exodus of slaves who fled from the plantations in the Carolinas and Georgia and hid in the swamps of Florida. The divergent representations of Florida in texts by American writers reveal how the peninsula became a projection surface for quite different agendas. These texts include travel narratives and novels, as well as captivity tales and historical writings. For example, ornithologist John James Audubon's travel diaries<sup>67</sup> presented audiences with an image of Florida that was guided by an expansionist vision of cultural annexation and appropriation. In contrast, captivity narratives such as the story of Mary Godfrey<sup>68</sup> illustrate the Floridian Frontier as a zone of contact and conflict between natives and settlers, depicting it as a "desert" or wilderness, hence emphasizing its distance from civilization; James Fenimore Cooper's *Jack Tier: The Florida Reef*<sup>69</sup> imagines Florida and particularly its bordering reefs as a liminal space that exposes the nation to dangerous forces from abroad. In turn, congressman and abolitionist Joshua Giddings' *The Exiles in Florida*,<sup>70</sup> a history of the Black Seminoles who resisted re-enslavement and removal throughout several decades, narrates Florida's landscape of swamps and forests as a space of liberation and empowerment for the maroon communities dwelling there. These and other texts about Florida show that as a spatial nexus of the domestic and the foreign situated between the US and the Caribbean, the peninsula played a crucial role in debates about nationhood, expansionism, and slavery, as well as in the conflict between the forces that proposed the consolidation of the nation versus those pressing for further expansion.

## Research unit II: The West/Northwest

***"[The West] is a powerful symbol within the national mythology, but as soon as we attempt to connect symbol with substance, to assess the relationships between the West as a place in the imagination and the West as a piece of the American continent, we are confronted with great variation from place to place."***

D.W. Meinig<sup>71</sup>

Research unit II addresses the imagined spaces in the western and northwestern peripheries of the United States. In the conceptual model of Frederick Jackson Turner, this area was the one that best explained America: "The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward", he claimed, "explain American development".<sup>72</sup> For Turner, the Frontier was "the meeting point between savagery and civilization"<sup>73</sup> and "the line of most effective and rapid Americanization".<sup>74</sup> He laid down his imagination of the West not as a geographically distinct region, but as a catch-all term for the social and cultural dynamics that commenced at the Frontier, which functioned as a contact zone between civilization and wilderness. As a consequence, Turner suggested that the chiefly Anglo-European mindsets and institutions that still pervaded America's East Coast society had been altered and reformed by the westward movement of both true-born Americans and newly arrived immigrants as they adapted in tandem to the harsh frontier conditions throughout the nineteenth century. Newly founded settlements and communities were challenged to negotiate the gaps between primitivism and civilization by novel means of democratic cooperation, reformed religious morals, technologies, and business models. As a result of this unprecedented-

67 J.J. Audubon, "The Wreckers of Florida" in: *Ornithological Biography: or an account of the habits of the Birds of the United States of America*, vol.3, Edinburg: Adam and Charles Black, 1832-39, pp. 158-163; J.J. Audubon, "The Florida Keys I", in: *Ornithological Biography: or an account of the habits of the Birds of the United States of America*, vol.2, Edinburg: Adam and Charles Black, 1832-39, pp. 312-316.

68 "An Authentic Narrative of the Seminole War; and of the Miraculous Escape of Mrs. Mary Godfrey, and her Four Female Children (1836)", in: K. Z. Derounian-Stodola, *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*, New York: Penguin, 1998.

69 J. F. Cooper, *Jack Tier; Or, The Florida Reef*, New York: Appleton, 1901.

70 J. Giddings, *The Exiles of Florida: The Crimes Committed by our Government against the Maroons who Fled from South Carolina and Other Slave States*, Columbia, OH: Follet, Foster and Company, 1858, <http://archive.org/details/exilesoffloridao00giddrich> [accessed: 3 August 2017].

71 D.W. Meinig, "American Wests: Preface to a Geographical Interpretation", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 62 (1972) 2, pp. 159-184, at 159.

72 F. Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920, p. 1.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 4.



ed spatial interaction between a malleable eastern center and powerful imaginative potential of the western peripheries, an exceptionally “American” character emerged while an entirely new “breed” of people—mainly through their relationship to the liminal territories that they traversed and settled—continually pushed westward throughout the nineteenth century:

*The West [...] is a form of society, rather than an area. It is the term applied to the region whose social conditions result from the application of older institutions and ideas to the transforming influences of free land. By this application, a new environment is suddenly entered, freedom of opportunity is opened, the cake of custom is broken, and new activities, new lines of growth, new institutions and new ideals, are brought into existence.<sup>75</sup>*

The adaption to scarcity at the frontier then led to the synthesis of conflicting cultural traditions and a unique recombination of their most useful aspects, e.g. Swedish techniques of log cabin construction, English law and map-making, Mexican watering methods, and native traditions of crop cultivation and food preparation. The justification for the westward movement with all of its violence and displacement of indigenous populations thus became the metaphysical unfolding of a Manifest Destiny (a term coined by the journalist John O’Sullivan in 1845) where the virtues of this new and exceptional American culture “naturally” translated into the mission to transform an entire continent into a democratic, “civilized”, and capitalistic space. Through this process of “westerling”, the US could finally break free from their own colonial history by defining itself as a counter-space to the Old World, which was often regarded as corrupt and undemocratic. Journeying into the western unknown in a quest to find a common identity thus becomes an example for a rare spatial dynamic, namely a case in which the periphery transforms (and even dominates) the center. In the following decades, the Frontier Thesis was canonized as a central part of the United States’ national historiography, serving as a meta-explanation for domestic expansionism and territorial appropriation of native territories that were designated as uncultivated wilderness. Simultaneously, the Thesis could also be used to justify the self-attribution of a special status in the transnational environment after the country entered the geopolitical and colonial arenas at the end of the century.

Beginning in the 1980s, a scholarly movement termed New Western History seriously began to question Turner’s concept by addressing the history of the West’s minorities, some of which, as Patricia Limerick points out, were in fact majorities prior to their decimation and displacement during the westward movement of Euro-Americans.<sup>76</sup> Concretely, Limerick defines the West as “the point where Indian America, Latin America, Anglo-America and Asia intersected”<sup>77</sup> and hence as an intercultural and transnational contact zone. In this way, the West was respatialized as a distinct region in contrast to its previous function as an ideological metanarrative. Other New Western historians have continued to deconstruct Turner’s epistemology of the West by proposing new imaginations and analytical metaphors for the western peripheries such as “borderlands”<sup>78</sup>, “thirdspace”<sup>79</sup>, “rhizome”<sup>80</sup> site of transnational flows,<sup>81</sup> or a space of victimhood in the face of “internal colonialism”, white supremacy, and capitalist exploitation.<sup>82</sup> Against the background of these sometimes conflicting, sometimes overlapping conceptions, the West has become a highly contested space in academia in which local, regional, national, and transnational approaches from various (inter)disciplinary angles intermingle and claim the prerogative of interpretation. While these newer approaches, with some exceptions, do not view the West as the central driving force of national development, they nevertheless contribute to a semi-Turnerian discourse by unhinging the marginal status of the West and by, similar to the Frontier Thesis, defining the peripheral as central for the nation. As a result, the myths and symbols of the American West continue to occupy the imagination of society and academia alike, effortlessly attaching themselves to historical and contemporary issues, themes, and controversies. Owing to the fact that these New Western approaches are themselves not clearly delimited but overlap, interconnect, and sometimes

75 F. Turner, “The Problem of the West”, *The Atlantic Monthly* 78 (1896), pp. 289–97, at p. 289.

76 P.M. Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*, New York: Norton, 1987, p. 22.

77 Ibid., p. 27.

78 G. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera*, San Francisco: Spinsters / Aunt Lute, 1987.

79 E.W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other Real and Imagined Places*, Malden: Blackwell, 2011.

80 N. Campbell, *The Rhizomatic West: Representing the American West in a Transnational, Global, Media Age*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008.

81 P. Giles, *The Global Remapping of American Literature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011;

82 P.M. Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*, New York: Norton, 1987.

contradict each other, methodological tools like the TPSN schema (territory, place, scale, network)<sup>83</sup> and particularly the concept of assemblages are being used to help in alleviating the resulting complexity.<sup>84</sup>

In the first project phase, we will investigate the Pacific Northwest as well as the central and northern parts of the Louisiana territory, which the young republic acquired from Napoleonic France in 1803. Much of this space was considered either too difficult to access (such as the Pacific Northwest, which could only be reached from the East by crossing expansive deserts and the Rocky Mountains) or useless because of its aridity, including large parts of what is now Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Arkansas that were only cultivated for agricultural usage after the Civil War. In addition to those topographical difficulties, many of these regions were also inhabited by an ethnically and culturally diverse population—a fact that raised doubts in many Americans whether these populations could—and should—become a part of a nation whose elites and middle class were overwhelmingly of white European descent. Representative for such doubts is Washington Irving's description of the Far West as

*a lawless interval between the abodes of civilized man, like the wastes of the ocean or the deserts of Arabia [...] Here may spring up mongrel races, like new formations in geology, the amalgamation of the "debris" and "abrasions" of former races, civilized and savage [...] the descendants of wandering hunters and trappers; of fugitives from the Spanish and American frontiers; of adventurers and desperadoes of every class and country, yearly ejected from the bosom of society into the wilderness. We are contributing incessantly to swell this singular and heterogeneous cloud of wild population [...] by the transfer of whole tribes of savages from the East of the Mississippi to the great wastes of the far West.*<sup>85</sup>

In fact, Irving's description reflects an opinion held by many Americans concerning the territories situated outside of what was seen as the center of civilization in the northeastern states. As Paul Giles points out, in the first decades after its independence, "the country's sense of national identity was as uncertain, as provisional, as its cartography."<sup>86</sup> The anxieties about adding more and more uncharted territories and unknown populations to the spatial extent of the nation thus reflected "a fear of boundlessness and a need to impose form on space."<sup>87</sup>

Throughout the antebellum period, the Louisiana territory in particular remained a problem in the imaginative respatialization of the United States. Often viewed as a passageway on the route to Asia, Louisiana continued to exist as a space that in terms of power relations, geographic boundaries, and social rules was only vaguely defined. From the moment of its conception as a prospective federal territory, it was more of "an imperial *project* than an imperial *reality*."<sup>88</sup> In terms of its population, immigrants from France and the Caribbean, as well as trappers, traders, sailors, Native Americans, Creoles, and white Americans made it a highly diverse and cosmopolitan space. In analyzing primary texts about the Louisiana territory, we ask how the resulting cultural dynamics translate into spatialization patterns, for instance in spatial interaction, segregation, or displacement. Particular attention is given to the collision of antithetic spatial conceptions, found for instance in the American and French approaches to settlement and treatment of indigenous peoples within the Louisiana territory. The former often regarded Indian customs as degenerative and hostile to civilization and therefore enacted aggressive, racially exclusionary spatial policies, whereas French approaches were often more inclusionary by envisioning toleration, trade practices, and racial mixture as conditions for a peaceful coexistence.

When New Western historians first began to investigate the multiplicity of experiences in the American West, they put enhanced focus on the situation of the people who already inhabited the territory en-

83 See B. Jessop, N. Brenner and M. Jones, "Theorizing Sociospatial Relations", in: *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26 (2008) 3, pp. 389–401.

84 Ong and Collier define an assemblage as a "product of multiple determinations that are not reducible to a single logic" (A. Ong and S.J. Collier, *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005, p. 12). Every spatial imagination—of a nation, landscape, or city—from this understanding is thus an assemblage that may appear linear and streamlined on the outside, but is in fact a pattern of heterogeneous constituents that can be identified, deconstructed, and analyzed through the engagement with literature.

85 W. Irving, *Astoria*, M. D. Peterson (ed.), New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1977, p. 200.

86 P. Giles, *The Global Remapping of American Literature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, p. 5.

87 A. Baker, *Heartless Immensity: Literature, Culture, and Geography in Antebellum America*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006, p. 27.

88 P.J. Kastor and F. Weil, "Introduction", in: P.J. Kastor and F. Weil (eds.), *Empires of the Imagination: Transatlantic Histories of the Louisiana Purchase*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009, pp. 1–22, at p. 6; original emphasis.

compassed by the Louisiana Purchase. As Richard White suggested, their world was one that was itself in movement throughout much of the eighteenth century; the ways of life of many people living in this area underwent important changes in the immediate period before the Louisiana Purchase, particularly through shifts of prevalence among the colonial powers France and Spain.<sup>89</sup> Due to the impact of external forces like European colonialism, but also the introduction of horses, metal tools, firearms, and the fatal spread of diseases like smallpox,<sup>90</sup> some native tribes relocated to Louisiana with the goal to engage in trade, while others formed new alliances, sometimes with and sometimes against the European newcomers and old colonial rulers. Against the background of these complicated and often barely researched socio-spatial configurations, the Louisiana territory, which Thomas Jefferson had originally imagined as a replication of the agrarian and domesticated East Coast society that he knew and embraced, proved difficult to understand and control. As White states, the Lewis and Clark expedition (1804-1806), which for many Americans still constitutes the most famous foray into to the West,

*moved through a space they neither knew nor controlled [...] After Lewis and Clark had passed, things continued much as before their passage [...]. [Upper Louisiana] would continue to be beyond the domain of empires and states for roughly a half century after the return of the expedition.<sup>91</sup>*

The Pacific Northwest in the eyes of many American policy makers was even less likely to become a part of the nation. Even after the acquisition of California from Mexico and as late as 1849, President Zachary Taylor was convinced that "California and Oregon [are] too distant to become members of the Union" and that it would be better for them "to be an Independent Government".<sup>92</sup> In a similar vein, John Quincy Adams related to congressional members in 1846 that "I want the country for our western pioneers [...] for them to go out to make a nation that is to arise there, and which must come from us as a fountain comes from its source, of free, independent, sovereign republics".<sup>93</sup>

In the Oregon Territory, the economic interests that governed the expansionist venture to the Pacific Northwest comprised both the landed and marine fur trade, catering primarily to the lucrative Chinese market.<sup>94</sup> Apart from furs, other goods such as sandalwood were exported to the Far East, mainly in exchange for spices, tea, fabrics, and precious metals. As Eue points out, the significance of the trade with China was considered enormous, given that Oregon was seen as "the American window on the Pacific". As the Governor of Virginia and advocate of the settlement of Oregon John Floyd proposed in 1824:

*We must govern the Canton trade. All this rich commerce could be governed, if not engrossed, by capitalists at Oregon, making it the Tyre of America, to supply the whole coast below, and thus obtain the silver and gold of those rich countries on that coast [...] The ginseng of the Oregon, the fur trade of that river and that sea, with sandal wood, and other valuable productions of the [Sandwich] Islands, will purchase all we want, not only to supply our own wants, but to dispose of in Europe, and return the proceeds to our own country.<sup>95</sup>*

Against this background of divergent spatial imaginations, we take into account both dominant and alternative literary visions of the Louisiana territory and the Pacific Northwest. We are interested in spatial fictions related to the dynamic cultural contact of Americans within formerly French and Spanish territories and their inhabitants as a result of the Louisiana Purchase, the annexation of Texas and the Mexican American War, as well as texts that focus on the diverse settler and trader populations on the Pacific Coast and in the Oregon Territory. We investigate the spatialization patterns that become visible in John Jacob Astor's vision of a

89 R. White, "The Louisiana Purchase and the Fictions of Empire", in P.J. Kastor and F. Weil (eds.), *Empires of the Imagination: Transatlantic Histories of the Louisiana Purchase*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009, pp. 37–61, at pp. 37–40.

90 Ibid., p. 38.

91 Ibid., pp. 54–55.

92 President Z. Taylor, quoted in: D.W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History, Vol. 2: Continental America, 1800-1867*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, p. 159.

93 J.Q. Adams, quoted in: Ibid. p. 160.

94 J. Eue, *Die Oregon-Frage: Amerikanische Expansionspolitik und der Pazifische Nordwesten, 1814-1848*, Münster: LIT, 1995, p. 75.

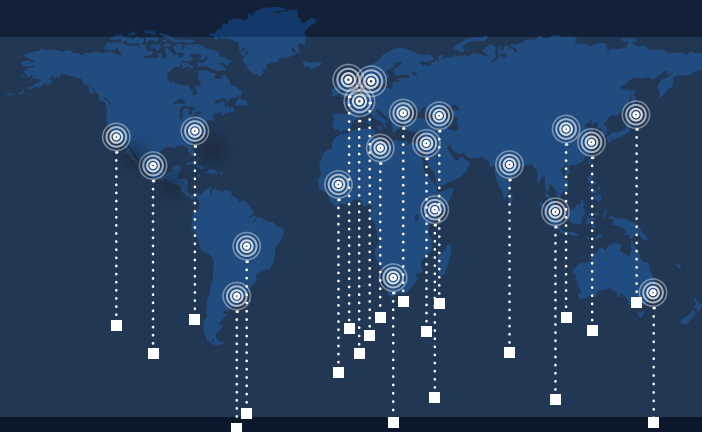
95 J. Floyd, quoted in: Ibid. 81.

global "Empire of Astoria" spanning to Asia and Russia, and ideas of a "Pacific Republic" made independent from the United States by the supposedly insurmountable barriers of the Rocky Mountains and Great Plains.

Due to the wealth of material, we are focusing on the Pacific Northwest and Louisiana territory during the first project phase. In the second phase, we will investigate how the expansionist politics of the United States at the end of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century in the Transpacific as well as the circum-Caribbean translated into spatialization processes in American literature, as well as how the presence of immigrants from Asia and the Caribbean complicated and complemented canonized perspectives like East/West by introducing alternative viewing angles like North/South or West/East.

Finally, we consider fictional and non-fictional cultural discourses to be important sources in the exploration of the geographical imaginations of the early national period. But literature and cultural studies also provide us with the tools that enable us to describe and make sense of processes of spatialization. Investigating these discourses helps us understand the ways in which the diversity of spatial formats that are connected to flexible perspectives on the nation as a loose conglomerate of states and individuals was gradually replaced by a nationalist narrative dominated by the spatial formats of the Frontier and Manifest Destiny. We hope to unpack how imagined spatial formats became part of negotiations about the identity of the American nation between expansionism, economic regional and global entanglement, and national consolidation. By exploring the role of the United States as a source of powerful ideas about space, we believe that our research contributes to understanding how negotiation processes about spatial formats in the US have impacted the discussions about spatial formats and orders elsewhere. In the light of the common objectives of the Collaborative Research Center 1199, we therefore suggest that analyses of fictional and nonfictional texts provide productive impulses for our joint attempts in understanding and describing spatialization processes and thus our own academic narrative of spatialization from a self-aware and critical standpoint.

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