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2 "Through Impenetrable Thicket and Swamps": Negotiating US National Space in Popular Narratives about the Florida Frontier

1 Introduction

How do literary texts become part of space-making processes? How do they contribute to the emergence, consolidation, and deconstruction of spatial formats? Who are the actors in the field of literature when it comes to space-making? And how has literature participated in the territorialization of newly acquired spaces at the nation's peripheries and in the creation of spatial literacies about these spaces during the period of US expansionism? This chapter takes up some of these questions, focusing on a concrete region – the Florida frontier in the early nineteenth century – and a concrete literary corpus – popular narratives of shipwreck, captivity, and piracy published between 1810 and 1830. Focusing on highly successful popular texts from this era, I argue that these texts and the spatial ideas about the Florida frontier negotiated in them helped define, confirm, and stabilize collective ideas of the nation's periphery and of the spatial order of the nation.

Literary texts – other than newspapers or reports, for example – confront their readers with fictional worlds that do not necessarily have a direct reference in real-world spaces. They do not simply reflect the extra-literary space but reimagine and remodel it.[1] Authors, as creators of literary texts, translate abstract ideas about space into concrete fictional worlds and thus contribute substantially to collective spatial imaginations. They can therefore be considered relevant actors in the space-making process. Literary scholar Jörg Dünne assumes that the spaces created in literature play a constitutive role in the creation of spatiality as they are themselves cultural techniques of spatialization.[2] Not only do authors of

1 D. Müller and J. Weber, "Einleitung: Die Räume der Literatur: Möglichkeiten einer raumbezogenen Literaturwissenschaft", in: D. Müller and J. Weber (eds.), *Die Räume der Literatur: Exemplarische Zugänge zu Kafkas Erzählung "Der Bau"*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013, pp. 1–22, at p. 8.

2 Dünne speaks of "Kulturtechniken der Verräumlichung", J. Dünne, "Dynamisierungen: Bewegung und Situationsbildung", in: J. Dünne and A. Mahler (eds.), *Handbuch Literatur & Raum*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015, pp. 41–54, at p. 45.

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literary texts take up existing ideas about a particular space and consolidate them, but they also introduce new ideas and perspectives.

Authors, however, as Pierre Bourdieu has observed, are not the only players – or actors – in the literary field. Publishers, booksellers, and audiences play an important part in the production and distribution of literary texts as well. Moreover, the literary field, according to Bourdieu, is interlinked with other fields in the social space in a relation of mutual dependence.[3] In the early decades of the US nation, the field of literature included a growing US book market where a variety of different popular genres circulated. Increased literacy and mechanized production led to an explosion of print culture in the early 1800s that transformed the formerly small and localized book production into a large market with a steadily increasing demand for print material. In this market, until well into the nineteenth century, it was not unusual to publish books without the author's name on them; printers were much more influential in the business of publishing than authors because they decided which books were available for readers, at what price, and where they were sold.[4] Often, the price of books decided what people read, with chapbooks, story papers, and pamphlets among the cheapest and most widespread publications.[5] The recognizable conflict patterns and plot structures of popular texts published within these formats appealed to multiple audiences and their reading practices,[6] and many of these texts catered to the contemporary taste for the melodramatic and the sensational.

Space-making in literary texts, then, does not depend on the creative imagination of an author alone; there are many other factors – and actors – that impact on the way in which literary texts contribute to the emergence and consolidation of collective ideas about space. One might even say that the texts themselves become actors as they offer potentially influential spatial imaginations with which many readers might affectively identify, thus helping to shape and perform a particular spatial order. This is especially true for popular texts that reach large audiences, as is the case with the narratives discussed here.

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3 P. Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Cornwall: Stanford University Press, 1996.

4 V. E. Neuburg, "Chapbooks in America", in: C. N. Davidson (ed.), *Reading in America*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, p. 106.

5 Another factor that influenced the US book market was the absence of copyright. While growing audiences and the popularization of the public sphere allowed for the profitable marketing of popular fiction, American writers suffered from the overwhelming presence of cheap reprints from the British book market.

6 G. Ebersole, *Captured by Texts: Puritan to Postmodern Images of Indian Captivity*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995, p. 165.

The role of US literature in space-making processes became particularly crucial in the early nineteenth century, a formative period in the construction of the US nation. Americans, as Hsuan Hsu reminds us, were "literally witnessing the emergence of new spaces"[7] as the nation kept expanding westwards and southwards. Few people had a clear idea of what these new spaces at the nation's periphery looked like. Even the question where the peripheries and the centres of the national space – made up of the former thirteen colonies and its territories of expansion – lay was a point of dispute in a country that in its beginnings was conceptualized as an "empire without peripheries", as Thomas Jefferson had phrased it.[8] The endeavour to add more and more new spaces to the territory of the young nation was controversially discussed, with two competing spatial ideologies: while some endorsed the consolidation of the nation, fearing the disintegration of the expanding United States and discounting the possibility of settling the entire continent,[9] others argued for further expansion in order to gain control of the continental landmass and displace European competitors. The advantages and disadvantages of occupying new territories were debated in newspapers and political writings, but it was literary texts – novels, stories, travel narratives, and diaries – that translated landscapes and people in these areas into concrete scenarios and included an affective dimension, allowing readers to create a connection with these spaces.[10] Benedict Anderson describes the rise of print culture as a key element in the formation of national consciousness, an observation that highlights the impact of literature on the ideological formation of nations.[11] Discussing the role of literature in the production of regions, Hsuan Hsu observes that literary texts "responded to the unsettling transnational connections brought on by territorial and commercial expansion by moving readers to identify with spatial scales such as the home, region, city, nation, and globe".[12] Literature thus

7 H. Hsu, *Geography and the Production of Space in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 4.

8 P. S. Onuf, "'Empire for Liberty': Center and Peripheries in Postcolonial America", in: C. Daniels and M. V. Kennedy (eds.), *Negotiated Empires: Centers and Peripheries in the Americas, 1500–1820*, London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 301–318, p. 310.

9 G. Pisarz-Ramirez, S. Wöll, and D. Bozkurt, "Spatial Fictions: Imagining (Trans)national Space in the Southern and Western Peripheries of the Nineteenth Century United States" (Collaborative Research Centre 1199, Working Paper 10), Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2018, p. 10.

10 On the connection between landscape and affect, see T. Michalski, *Projektion und Imagination. Die niederländische Landschaft der Frühen Neuzeit im Diskurs von Geographie und Malerei*, München: Fink, 2011, p. 33.

11 B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983.

12 Hsu, *Geography and the Production of Space*, p. 1.

indeed played a fundamental role not only in consolidating known ideas about national space but also in imagining newly acquired or desired stretches of land as being or potentially becoming part of the nation, allowing readers to envision a national unity that at that time was far from being real.

Popular texts about frontier spaces – areas that were still seen as "wilderness" but in the process of being controlled, settled, and in turn integrated into the nation – became part of the debate about Americanness in the period that Malini Schueller and Edward Watts call the "messy beginnings" of American identity.[13] By this, they refer to the decades after independence when Americans tried to determine who they were as a nation with respect to Europe, their neighbours on the continent, and the global arena. Colonial Americans had been faced with European prejudices about their backwardness: the idea that white settlers in the American colonies would sooner or later degenerate into barbarism had dominated European discourses about the American continent.[14] The image of a civilized US nation therefore required a clear distinction from the non-civilized; hence the first decades in the history of the young nation were a period of complex negotiations of defining national space and a national self against its others, negotiations in which popular fiction played a significant role. Popular writers served their economic interests while taking up discourses and debates of their time and addressing issues of national concern.

2 Florida's Frontiers

In his 1893 lecture "The Significance of the Frontier in American History", Frederick Jackson Turner used the concept of the Frontier to develop a foundational narrative of the American nation, arguing that the Frontier as a transitional

13 M. Schueller and E. Watts, "Introduction: Theorizing Early American Studies and Postcoloniality", in: M. Schueller and E. Watts (eds.), *Messy Beginnings: Postcoloniality and Early American Studies*, New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2003, p. 5.

14 Even before the French naturalist George Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, tried to prove America's inferiority to Europe due to its supposedly inferior climate, there had been suggestions of the "weakness" or "immaturity" of the American continent that also included its inhabitants. See G. Blanke, *Amerika im englischen Schrifttum des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*, Bochum-Langendreer: Heinrich Pöppinghaus, 1972; A. Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750–1900*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973.

space produced democracy of a uniquely American kind.[15] The narrative of the Frontier as a moving line marking the progress of civilization framed settled land as an expression of a continuously growing nation "spreading" across the continent. Whereas the Frontier has usually been associated with the westward expansion from the East Coast to the Pacific Ocean, the expansion to the south-east has received much less attention. Situated between the USA and the Caribbean, Florida became a contested frontier zone between various rival powers. One may in fact, as Paul E. Hoffman does, speak of several "Florida frontiers":[16] Florida was explored and colonized by Spain in the sixteenth century and remained Spanish until 1763, when it fell to Britain, before being returned to Spain in 1783. The newly independent United States disputed the northern border of West Florida (the "Panhandle"), which had not been clearly established by the Treaty of Paris (1783). Conflicts continued after the Louisiana Purchase (1803) as the eastern boundary of the Louisiana territory remained a point of contention between the USA, France, and Spain, specifically the question whether West Florida was included in that territory (see Figure 1).

The main reason for the US government's desire to obtain the entire peninsula from Spain was to establish full control of the Gulf Coast. A second reason was the pressure exerted by Southern slaveowners, who kept losing slaves to the Spanish colony. Florida became a major destination for runaway slaves who fled from plantations in North and South Carolina and in Georgia to the peninsula and sometimes from there to the Bahamas. Spain granted these fugitives freedom and protection; moreover, members of the Seminole tribe in Florida provided shelter to and allied with these maroons in their resistance against armed parties of slaveowners who entered Florida in search of their slaves.[17] The Florida Keys – along with the Bahamas – also became a basis for pirates who attacked American ships, as well as for wreckers who made a living by ransacking vessels wrecked on the Florida reefs.

Unsurprisingly, official rhetoric surrounding the conflict about Spanish Florida declared the colony a source of trouble and in dire need of control: if Florida was not dominated, the narrative went, it would become dangerous to the US nation. Florida's closeness to the Bahamas and Cuba linked it to the Caribbean

15 F. J. Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History", in: *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" and Other Essays*, ed. by J. Faragher, New York: Holt, 1994, p. 32.

16 P. E. Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002, p. xiii.

17 G. Pisarz-Ramirez, "'A backcountry out of control:' Tropical Spaces of Radical Resistance in Joshua Giddings' 'The Exiles of Florida'", *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 63 (2018) 3, pp. 351–366, at p. 352.

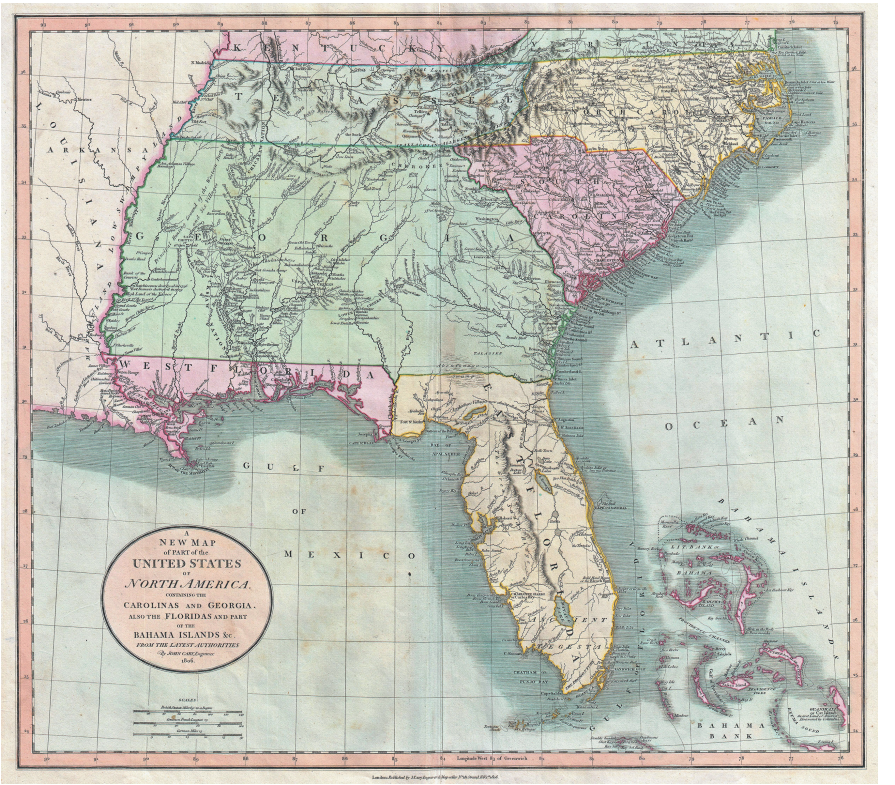

Figure 1: John Cary's map (1806) shows West Florida (still under Spanish rule), separate from the US-held Louisiana Purchase (Source: John Cary, *New Universal Atlas, Containing Distinct Maps of all the Principal States and Kingdoms throughout the World. From the Latest and Best Authorities Extant*, London 1808).

archipelago, leaving its boundaries wide open. In the words of President John Quincy Adams during negotiations with Spain, the whole province was "a derelict, open to the occupancy of every enemy, civilized or savage, of the United States, and serving no other earthly purpose than as a post of annoyance to them".[18]

Nevertheless, expansion into Florida was not undisputed among US politicians, mainly because large parts of the peninsula were considered useless and inhospitable, too wet to farm, too unpredictable to settle, hit by hurricanes and

18 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. 29.

bordered by dangerous reefs. One congressman who criticized president Andrew Jackson's intrusion into Florida called the area "a worthless prize", and he observed that "it is a land of swamps, of quagmires, of frogs and alligators and mosquitoes! A man, sir, would not immigrate into Florida [. . .] no, not from hell itself!"[19] Eastern Florida became an organized territory of the United States in 1821, completing the acquisition of the peninsula from Spain. However, this did not stop black fugitive mobility south, and attempts to retrieve escaped slaves and to remove the Seminoles from Florida were met with severe resistance by the fugitives and their Seminole allies, resulting in multiple military conflicts which became known as the Seminole Wars.[20] Florida thus remained a frontier in the first decades of the nineteenth century, a situation that kept the peninsula in the limelight of public interest and made it a subject of popular literature.

In what follows I explore fictional representations of Florida's frontier spaces in three narratives – a tale of shipwreck, a captivity narrative, and a story of piracy – that represent three highly popular genres among American audiences in this period. I will argue that the cultural work of these texts is twofold: first, the writers, in positioning Florida and its coast as an 'uncivilized' periphery in contradistinction to the world of their readers, address anxieties about the fragility of the American nation, concerns about the preservation of whiteness and about the maintenance of social and racial hierarchies. And second, the producers of these tales provide their readers with new spatial literacies[21] about America's expanding peripheries: unlike the settings of the more well-known frontier stories set on the western borders of the nation which foregrounded a geography that was solid and cohesive, the spaces described in these stories are marked by their tropical, terraqueous, and unpredictable nature. Rocky cliffs, swamps, or the ocean itself formed the landscapes in which Americans were shown to brave perilous situations and which envisioned Florida, its maritime coast and possibly other tropical areas further south as prospective parts of the nation. Although all stories emphasize the engagement with an environment that was perceived as unpredictable and hazardous, the agendas of their authors varied as much as the concrete offers they made to their audiences to affectively appropriate the spaces at the nation's periphery.

19 M. Grunwald, *The Swamp*, New York: Simon & Schuster 2006, p. 32.

20 The three Seminole Wars took place in 1817–18, 1835–42, and 1855–58.

21 On the concept of spatial literacy, see M. Middell, *Raumformate – Bausteine in Prozessen der Neuverräumlichung* (Collaborative Research Centre 1199, Working Paper 14), Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2019, p. 9.

3 Spatializing the Florida Frontier in Narratives of Shipwreck, Captivity, and Piracy

The Narrative of a Shipwreck and Unparalleled Sufferings of Mrs. Sarah Allen (1816, 1817) is a tale of shipwreck that appeared as a pamphlet in two successive Boston editions. It is one of hundreds of shipwreck stories that were published by the mid-nineteenth century in the USA and that reflected the role the oceanic frontier played in the construction of Americanness.[22] As Robin Miskolcze emphasizes, especially women in sea narratives "contributed to the construction of a national rhetoric of exceptionalism at a crucial time in American history" as they served as figures who tested the nation's self-image.[23]

The anonymously published narrative tells the story of Sarah Allen, an American woman who travels on the ship Mary from New York to New Orleans in the recently acquired Louisiana territory, where her husband awaits her. As the ship enters the Gulf region, disaster strikes: "threatening" clouds darken the sky, the ship springs a leak, and a tropical storm causes the vessel to founder on a rock and sink, casting the protagonist onto Florida's north-western coast together with a few other survivors. The small group travels through the wilderness for several weeks before they are rescued by Indians of an unspecified native tribe. The tale, which is most probably a fictionalized account[24] penned to be sold for popular entertainment, is narrated in the form of a lady's letter to her sister. The epistolary form allows readers an intimate view of the letter writer's thoughts and feelings without authorial intrusion, creating an affective bond between her and the reader, which makes it easy to identify with her and her (spatial) views. The narrator's description of shipwreck at the Floridian coast immediately situates Florida in the Caribbean tropics, emphasizing the various deadly dangers emanating from its nature: Sarah Allen describes the gale sinking the ship as "a hurricane", and while the "rain fell in torrents" and the "enraged ocean" threatens to "swallow us up in its bosom", she fears to be "dashed to pieces against the rocks" bordering the coast. Although relieved to be spared a death in the ocean, she perceives the shoreline as equally dangerous, a "desert coast" without any signs of civilization:[25]

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22 R. Miskolcze, *Women and Children First: Nineteenth-Century Sea Narratives and American Identity*, Lincoln: Universioty of Nebraska Press, 2007, p. xiii.

23 Ibid., pp. x, xiv.

24 Ibid., p. 26.

25 "Desert" at the time of publication referenced both "desolate, barren" and "a wild, uninhibited region, including forest-land". It can also describe a swamp (W. McMullen, "English Topographic Terms in Florida, 1563–1874", PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1950, pp. 163–164).

> As the storm had now somewhat abated we began to think more seriously of our deplorable situation. We had esteemed ourselves happy when we looked back upon our miraculous escape: but ceased to be so when we looked forward to our future safety. We were cast upon a desert coast – we perceived no beaten path to conduct us to any inhabited spot: we had great forests to pass through where we must run the hazard of losing our way every step. Wild beasts were to be apprehended, and the meeting of savages, perhaps, not less dangerous than they.[26]

As the group tries to find their way to St. Marks – then a Spanish settlement – they run into a "rapid river;" the "violence of the stream which no strength could stem"[27] forces them on a long detour. Not only are readers able to imagine Florida as a tropical wilderness of impenetrable forests and treacherous waterways, but they are also invited to identify with an American woman cast into this "desert" space. The tale dramatizes the travellers' suffering by sensationalizing the effects the hostile landscape and fauna have on their bodies. Labouring through brambles, thorns, and various kinds of prickly plants and stung by mosquitos, sandflies, and other insects, the travellers' bodies swelled "to an enormous size", as the narrator explains, assuming grotesque shapes:

> Our clothes hanging in rags, our eyes concealed by the bloated prominence of our lived cheeks, the monstrous bulk to which all our limbs were swelled, our hair flowing in disorder down our shoulders, must, altogether, have given us a frightful appearance.[28]

This spectacularized description of calamity sets Florida and its nature in contradistinction to the geographies readers were familiar with. The iconography Americans recognized as "national landscape" and that was propagated in visual representations of the nation was pastoral and agrarian, prominently epitomized in the farmer who worked on his own fields.[29] While Florida was a region so different from the collective imagination that its integration into the nation was hard to envision, Sarah Allen's story, beyond entertaining audiences, suggested that Americans could even master such hostile and alien terrains. The tale reinforces notions of American exceptionalism by putting much emphasis on supposedly "American" (republican) values displayed by the travellers such as fortitude, self-abnegation, and virtuous masculinity. It thus establishes an order in the "desert" space of Florida that readers found easy to recognize as "American" – by

26 S. Allen, *A Narrative of the Shipwreck and Unparalleled Sufferings of Mrs. Sarah Allen, (late of Boston) on her Passage in May last from New York to New Orleans: Being the Substance of a Letter from the Unfortunate Mrs. Allen to her Sister in Boston*, Boston: Benjamin Marston, 1816, *Early Visions of Florida*, http://earlyfloridalit.net/?page_id=220 (accessed 12 December 2022).
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Michalski, *Projektion und Imagination*, p. 33.

emphatically demonstrating model behaviour representing the young republic at a time when this republic was still in need of a unifying identity. And it imagines Americans practising these republican virtues on foreign soil, suggesting that superior American values were spreading across territories that would eventually be claimed for the nation.

Jefferson's proclaimed vision of the United States as "the nest [. . .] from which all America, North and South, is to be peopled"[30] in the narrative becomes a concrete spatial vision that Americans were able to affectively relate to. Nicole Tonkovich observes that the geographical markers in the tale point to the possible purpose and background of her trip. She links Sarah Allen and her husband to the settlers who spread through the Spanish south-east in the wake of the War of 1812 and the husband's stay in "the Louisiana country" to a possible employment as a soldier in Andrew Jackson's troops. These troops were involved in a series of military manoeuvres against the Creek tribe in the frontier area of the northern Gulf Coast, intended to open land to settler colonialism. According to Tonkovich, the area in which Sarah Allen moves – she mentions that the group tried to reach St Marks – was still a possession of Spain, although claimed by the USA.[31]

The tale thus highlights a historical moment in which the Spanish part of Florida was already invaded by squatters and soldiers who anticipated the acquisition of the territory a few years later. Although these events were publicized in newspapers, it was stories such as *The Narrative of Sarah Allen* that made these developments graspable for ordinary readers and that helped develop a geographical imagination and spatial literacy allowing audiences to emotionally relate to the prospective new territories. Remarkably, the emphasis in this tale is on Sarah Allen's suffering and endurance, and her stay in the wilderness of Florida appears as a test of her and her companions' moral strength:

> Behold us now, dear sister, about to penetrate a wild and pathless forest, without resource, without food, and without arms to procure subsistence, and without an article of cloathing [sic] except what we wore on our backs! What a shocking situation! What hope, what possibility, even was left us now![32]

30 Th. Jefferson, "To Archibald Stewart", Paris, 25 January 1786, in *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. by P. Leicester Ford, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1905, pp. 73–76, at p. 75.

31 Nicole Tonkovich notes that the ship ran aground "somewhere between the mouth of the Apalachicola River and the St. Marks River". N. Tonkovich, "Of Compass Bearings and Reorientations in the Study of American Women Writers", *Legacy* 26 (2009) 2, pp. 242–261, at p. 247.

32 Allen, *A Narrative of the Shipwreck and Unparalleled Sufferings of Mrs. Sarah Allen*.

Direct appeal to the reader was a widespread literary convention in early nineteenth-century literature, employed to arouse sympathy in readers for suffering fellow Americans and to create a sense of community. The sentimental mode frequently used in epistolary texts even permits the narrator to mention that her male companions shed tears of compassion for her suffering. In the scene where the narrator, in a moment of utter exhaustion, asks her fellow travellers to leave her behind, they refuse to do so, insisting on protecting and sustaining her:

> My unhappy companions could only answer me with tears and moans; their sensibility affected me; it is a consolation to the unhappy to see themselves the objects of compassion. The captain took my hands between his, and pressed them with the utmost tenderness, while I continued to persuade him to our separation, urging the absolute necessity of it, in vain. "No, my dear friend (said he) I will not abandon you; exert your spirits, and you [sic] strength may return again – we will now go in search on the borders of the sea, for some fresh nourishment, which may possibly recruit your strength once more".[33]

The party of Americans in the Floridian wilderness therefore displays sincerity, combined with sentiment and perseverance, thus beginning the work of "civilizing" Florida. At the same time, the presence of Americans in Florida is presented as happening with God's consent, and Sarah Allen's deliverance is seen as an act of God's will. Upon arrival on the rocky shore, the travellers fall to their knees and thank God for saving them, a moment also emphasized by an illustration published with the pamphlet in which audiences can see Sarah Allen kneeling on a rock against the background of the sinking ship and a darkly clouded sky. The gesture evokes an iconic scene in American history at the beginning of colonial settlement, the Pilgrims's arrival on Plymouth Rock that was framed by William Bradford as an act of providence: "[T]hey fell upon their knees and blessed the God of heaven, who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean, and delivered them from all the perils and miseries thereof, again to set their feet on the firm and stable earth."[34]

Fittingly, the indigenous men whom the travellers encounter are not shown to behave like stereotypical 'savages,' as the travellers had anticipated. Rather, they act like natives depicted in narratives of discovery, with fear and surprise. Upon seeing the group of shipwrecked whites, "they stopped, as if their feet had been nailed to the ground. They looked stedfastly [sic] at us, motionless with surprise and horror".[35] Miraculously, one of the natives also speaks English, and

33 Ibid.

34 W. Bradford, *Bradford's History of 'Plimoth Plantation'. From the Original Manuscript. With a Report of the Proceedings Incident to the Return of the Manuscript to Massachusetts*. Project Gutenberg ebook, release date 2008, https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/24950 (accessed 13 October 2022).

35 Allen, *A Narrative of the Shipwreck and Unparalleled Sufferings of Mrs. Sarah Allen*.

after learning the travellers' fate, the men lead them to their village, where they receive food and shelter. This unexpected outcome is attributed to divine powers: "But by providence it appeared to be ordained, that there should now be an end to our sufferings".[36] Tonkovich – who reads the text as a historical document – attributes the apprehension of the natives upon encountering a group of white people in this area to their fear of new invaders.[37] But if we assume that the tale is fictional (as Miskolcze does and I do),[38] the depiction of the natives as being terrified can be read as part of an authorial strategy in which the fearful natives are contrasted with the courageous American protagonists: while the peninsula is imagined as a peripheral wilderness, the Americans in it are clearly not part of this wilderness and can be assumed to dominate it soon.

Like shipwreck narratives, captivity tales had a large distribution in the early national period. Captivity narratives are a genre of popular literature closely connected to frontier reality and the contact zones where settlers and natives collided.[39] They stage the capture of a white person (often a woman) by native Indians, enacting the conflicts between settlers and natives during the period of forced displacement of the native population. They allow audiences to imagine frontier spaces from the perspective of the captive, who functions as an informant reporting from the captor's territory, usually contrasting the "savage space" of the Indian village to the captive's familiar "civilized space".

Many nineteenth-century captivity narratives are completely fictional even if the first-person narrators that tell them try to make the reader believe that they are true. Various strategies of authentification include subheadings such as "An authentic narrative" or paratextual material, such as notes, prefaces, or editorial comments designed to establish the narrator's credibility. The spatial entrepreneurs

36 Ibid.

37 Tonkovich, "Of Compass Bearings", p. 249.

38 Miskolcze (*Women and Children First*, p. 173, n. 2) refers to the extensive bibliography Keith Huntress provides of shipwreck narratives in which Huntress lists Sarah Allen's account but offers no proof that her shipwreck occurred. Cf. K. Huntress, *A Checklist of Narratives of Shipwrecks and Disasters at Sea to 1860, with Summaries, Notes, and Comments*, Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1979.

39 For an extensive discussion of captivity narratives, see P. Baepler, *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity Narratives*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999; M. Burnham, *Captivity & Sentiment: Cultural Exchange in American Literature, 1682–1861*, Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997; C. Castiglia, *Bound and Determined: Captivity, Culture-Crossing, and White Womanhood from Mary Rowlandson to Patty Hearst*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996; K. Z. Derounian, "Puritan Orthodoxy and the 'Survivor Syndrome' in Mary Rowlandson's Indian Captivity Narrative", *Early American Literature* 22 (1987) 1, pp. 82–93; Ebersole, *Captured by Texts*.

behind the purported authors created imaginary worlds that sensationalize the experience of being captured by "savages" in order to market these tales successfully. They thus worked with existing abstract ideas about the frontier as an uncivilized periphery, creating from them concrete story worlds and characters that substantiate these ideas and thus produce and perform the spatial order of manifest destiny.

The *Narrative of the Tragical Death of Mr. Darius Barber* (1818) was published in 1818 by David Hazen, a Boston printer, and refers to incidents during the First Seminole War (1817/18) between US troops and Seminole Indians at the Georgia-Florida border. The tale dramatizes the precarious life of squatters in the frontier zone between Georgia and Spanish Florida. It relates the fate of Eunice Barber who was taken captive and brought into Florida by Seminoles after they had raided her home and killed her husband Darius Barber and their seven children. The narrator establishes the Florida frontier as a perilous space for white peaceful settlers who had imprudently failed to "secure the doors of the house as usual", thus opening their civilized and ordered home to the fury of the "savages" who frequently attacked "Christian settlements".[40] While the tale recalls the pattern of well-known captivity narratives such as Mary Rowlandson's, it describes a tropical version of the wilderness that stressed the alien aspects of the landscape that Barber traverses. Like Mary Rowlandson, Eunice Barber emphasizes the spatial, cultural, and mental distance between her frontier home and the wilderness where the Indians take her. But while Rowlandson had measured the increasing distance from her village quite abstractly in "removes", Barber highlights the concrete experience of walking across an unfamiliar and terraqueous region, describing a lengthy trip of "six days, over steep mountains" and through "impenetrable thicket and swamps".[41] Both during her captivity and her escape she repeatedly has to walk through wet and unstable terrain: she crosses "pathless swamps", traverses "dismal swamps", and hides in a "thick swamp" from her pursuers; her path is obstructed by a river that ends in a "prodigious waterfall" and "craggy cliffs along the water edge" that make passage impossible; the food she finds after her escape also points to the hot and humid climate, as she survives on "the juice of young cane sticks".[42] The tale thus dramatizes the tropical features of what emerges as a "liquid" landscape, contrasting the Florida frontier with the New England world of the tale's readers in Boston.

40 E. Barber, *Narrative of the Tragical Death of Mr Darius Barber, and his Seven Children, Who Were Inhumanely Butchered by the Indians*, Boston 1818, *Early Visions of Florida*, http://earlyflori dalit.net/?page_id=449 (accessed 22 November 2022).

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

The ideological functions of this text are folded into a textual framework that made the story attractive to large audiences by privileging the representation of the scandalous, titillating, or harrowing aspects of captivity while appealing to the readers' sympathy for the captive. Like in the Sarah Allen shipwreck tale, there is a particular focus on the body of the white female protagonist. Both texts showcase the body as a site of suffering: but while the Sarah Allen tale names thorns and the stings of insects as causes, in the Barber tale the body becomes a foil of projection for the display of native savagery. Eunice Barber is forced to live in a "filthy wigwam"; she is made to carry heavy loads; she is stripped naked as a form of punishment, she is forced to eat "filthy" food, and she sleeps on a dirty floor.[43] The white vulnerable and denigrated body of the narrator is employed to constitute the Florida frontier as a chaotic space where white women are endangered and where the nation is at stake. Creating a binary distinction between the pure and the impure, the civilized and the savage, Eunice Barber's suffering body stages the nation as vulnerable and in need of protection. This idea is emphasized in Barber's detailed report of the fate of a fellow captive, a Mrs White, who appears as a perfect model of sentimental womanhood:

> [Her story] I am certain could not be read without emotion [. . .]. She was still young and handsome as the troubles which she had experienced had taken somewhat from the original redundancy of her bloom, and added a softening paleness to her cheeks, rendered her appearance the more engaging. Her face, that seemed to have been formed for the assemblage of dimples and smiles, was clouded with care. The natural sweetness was not, however, soured by despondency and petulance; but chastened by humility and resignation.[44]

The virtuous yet helpless body of Mrs White points not only to the threatened nation but also to the captive's strength in enduring her fate. This white female management of feeling is contrasted with an exposure to the Indian economy of feeling, which is described by the narrator as abnormal and "truly savage":[45] while captives adopted by the Indians were treated with kindness, the narrator observes, captives doomed to be killed were exposed to cruelty and torture. Torturing practices are highlighted in gruesome detail with a clear intention to denounce the Indians as "unfeeling brutes",[46] as in the following scene:

> The unhappy captives were first stripped, and bound to three posts that had been erected for the purpose, their bodies were next stuck from their necks to their waists with small

43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.

> pitch pine splinters, the blood gushing out at every puncture; all this the unfortunate victims sustained without a complaint! – in this situation they were compelled to remain for more than one hour, while the men, women and children of the whole village, were permitted and encouraged to torture them, in whatever manner they pleased, each striving to exceed the other in cruelty – the small splinters were then set on fire, which very soon placed the miserable sufferers beyond the reach of savage torture![47]

The melodramatic rendering of Barber's fate and the circumstances of her captivity invited sympathy and feelings of outrage against Indians. Spatializing the Florida frontier as a tropical torture chamber where bodies were burned and scalped and other war cruelties were committed helped to convince popular audiences that the expansionist incursions by US troops into the peninsula were justified and necessary.

The tale, however, does not only establish the Florida frontier as a precarious and dangerous space; like the Sarah Allen story, it hints at an emerging territorial control of the frontier area by Americans and at the affirmation of (racial) hierarchies in this space. Unlike Mrs. White who passively endures her fate, Eunice Barber is presented as a courageous frontier woman who takes her destiny into her own hands, embracing individual agency and the pursuit of what she considers her natural right to liberty. After a few weeks of captivity, she manages to kill her owner by bashing his head in with a hatchet during a conflict of her captors with tribal enemies.[48] Running away, she spends several days trying to find her way out of the "miry swamp", eventually hearing the "pleasing sound of the woodman's axe" and immediately concluding that this sound signals the proximity of an American settlement. The captive is then indeed saved by a woodsman who takes her back to his village and thus returns her to civilization. On the cover of the published narrative, the coffins of the dead members of the Barber family are depicted and a text passage highlights the leadership of General Andrew Jackson in taking control of the area and exterminating the tribe. Not only did captivity tales like the Darius Barber text cater to the desires for sensational reports from frontier areas, but they also allowed the internal tensions characterizing the new nation to solidify into a joint rage against the nation's others in the frontier space. From this perspective, it was possible to displace disorder and the uncivilized to the nation's periphery, thus stabilizing the spatial order of the nation. Using

47 Ibid.

48 There is a historical figure that might have served as a model for the Eunice Barber character. Hannah Duston was a colonial Puritan woman who was taken captive in 1697 and who killed and scalped ten of the Native American family members holding her hostage, with the assistance of two other captives. The story of Duston became legendary in the eighteenth century.

literary texts such as captivity narratives as a means to create an "imagined community", Americans also reassured themselves of their assumed supremacy.[49]

While captivity tales are usually set on the mainland, piracy tales extend the contentious frontier space of Florida into the coastal waters of the Gulf of Mexico. These texts could be read as stories of adventure but also reflect anxieties about pirate attacks on US ships, which occurred frequently in the early nineteenth century in the Caribbean Sea between Cuba and Florida.[50] It is therefore not surprising that the pirate emerged as a fascinating character in popular print culture. According to Daniel Williams, beginning in the 1790s and steadily appearing until the 1850s, hundreds of pirate narratives were published for a popular audience.

A remarkable tale that brings piracy and the oceanic frontier together with the space of the slave plantation is John Howison's *The Florida Pirate*, which first appeared in England in 1821 but then was reprinted nine times in the United States, evidencing the enormous interest by American audiences.[51] Like in the tales of shipwreck and captivity, in this pirate story Floridian space is constructed as lawless, disordered, and contested. However, at the narrative's centre is the life story of a black pirate captain for whom the coastal waters around Florida are not a realm of distress and alienation, but a utopian space. *The Florida Pirate* relates the life of Manuel, a former slave who fled from a plantation in the Southern states to the Bahamas and who now roams the ocean, attacking US ships. The sea around Florida is here spatialized as a site that allows fugitives and outcasts such as the black captain and his crew to hide from persecution, restore their natural rights, and live in liberty beyond the control of whites. The pirate ship emerges as a space of mobility, liberty, and freedom from tyranny for its black crew and captain. In contrast, the southern plantation in Manuel's account embodies the dehumanized

49 J. C. Brezina, "A Nation in Chains: Barbary Captivity Narratives and American Identity", in: J. Haslam and J. M. Wright (eds.), *Captivating Subjects: Writing Confinement, Citizenship and Nationhood in the Nineteenth Century*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005, p. 210.

50 According to one 1823 report in the Niles' National Register, nearly 3,000 acts of piracy had been committed against American ships in the Caribbean since the end of the War of 1812 (D. Williams, *Liberty's Captives: Narratives of Confinement in the Print Culture of the Early Republic*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006, p. 74).

51 The tale was first published as one in a series of tales by this author in the British *Blackwood's Magazine* and later as *The Life and Adventures of Manuel the Florida Pirate* in New Hampshire and as *The Florida Pirate or An Account of a Cruise in the Schooner Esperanza* in New York. John Howison was a Scottish writer who lived in Canada and had travelled in the United States before he went to Bombay to work as a surgeon for the British East Indies Company. See G. Woertendyke, *Hemispheric Regionalism: Romance and the Geography of Gender*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 50.

space of chattel slavery and racial hierarchies and an endless temporal spiral of excruciating work and racialized violence. Drawing on literary traditions of the romance and the Gothic, Howison stages the plantation as a gothic site, detailing the brutal abuse and humiliation Manuel suffered there. The tale anticipates many elements of the fugitive slave narrative, a genre that emerged as a mass popular format in the 1850s and that often frames the South in biblical terms as an infernal space. Unlike in the two texts discussed so far, here it is not the white body that claims attention but the bodies of the black pirates. The violence executed on these bodies on southern plantations is visible in the scars on the pirates' backs, as well as in the distortions of their limbs caused by shackles. The narrator explains: "Many were half naked, and I could distinguish the marks of the whip on the shoulders of some of them. The limbs of others had been distorted by the weight and galling of fetters, as was evident from the indentations exhibited from their flesh."[52]

The devastation of the black body under slavery is also epitomized by Manuel's loss of one hand that was cut off after he had stood up against his master. Torture in his story is shown to happen not in the disordered frontier space, performed by "savages", but in the supposedly ordered, civilized, and progressive space of the nation, perpetrated by white people. The tale thus questions the definition of the US nation as an exceptional country guided by Christian values, reflecting the increasingly controversial debates about slavery.

Manuel's life story is embedded into a frame narrative told by a white storyteller who functions as a mediator between the audience and the black protagonist. The narrator describes himself as a physician who by unfortunate circumstances is stranded destitute on the Bahamas where he decides to offer his services to the pirate.[53] Explaining his decision to work for a pirate, the narrator admits that he "shuddered at the idea of forming a league with the outcasts of society",[54] but he claims that he has no choice because otherwise he would face poverty and "the horrors of want".[55] The narrator gradually wins the trust of the black captain, who

52 J. Howison, "The Florida Pirate", *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, April 1821, *Early Visions of Florida*, http://earlyfloridalit.net/?page_id=227 (accessed 22 November 2022).

53 This scenario was not that unlikely because the Bahamas indeed became the destination of many escaped slaves who transitioned through Florida and travelled on to the British-owned islands. Moreover, as Kenneth Kinkor points out, the Bahama Islands "whose population included large numbers of seafaring mulattos and runaway slaves" were the preeminent recruiting grounds for pirates. K. J. Kinkor, "Black Men under the Black Flag", in: C. R. Pennell (ed.), *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader*, New York: New York University Press, 2001, p. 198.

54 Howison, "The Florida Pirate".

55 Ibid.

then tells him how he became a pirate. Eventually, the narrator comes to consider Manuel as having "more dignity than any negro I had ever before seen".[56]

Howison places his black pirate character in a larger hemispheric scenario of slave rebellions, a plot device that might explain the interest of audiences in this tale at a time when the threat of slave revolts was a widely discussed issue. Bemoaning the loss of his hand, the captain calls for rebellion as he declares that his remaining hand

> may [. . .] never be better employed than in resenting the tyranny of slave-masters. Oh! that every negro in the Southern States would risk the loss of his right hand by doing what I have done! Then would we prove that our race was not made to be trampled upon.[57]

Howison has his black character take revenge for the loss of his hand, showing him burning down his master's plantation before becoming a pirate. As Manuel binds his master to a tree to face his burning mansion, he tells him to "look to the south" – a view where "a bright glare of light extended far over the sky, and tinged the tops of the trees like the setting sun".[58] Howison thus creates the vision of a South in flames, a South of burning plantations and revengeful slaves taking their liberty, thus addressing fears by slaveowners and abolitionists alike. Moreover, the request to "look to the south" evokes the memory of violent slave rebellions in the hemisphere – particularly on St. Domingue. The call for violent resistance and rebellion from the slave-pirate creates a link between piracy and slave rebellions: while dramatizing white fears of black rebelliousness and violence, it also presents empowered blackness as a possibility. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot has argued, the slave rebellion in Haiti had come as a "shock wave" and a fact that was "unthinkable in its time".[59] The Seminole Wars in Florida seemed to announce more black rebelliousness: slaves from raided Florida plantations joined the rebels and fought together with Seminoles and maroons against the US troops.

The story moreover evokes the legend of Henri Caesar, a legend that contemporary audiences were familiar with. Caesar was a feared black pirate who had his base in Spanish Florida and who roamed the sea around the Florida Keys in the early nineteenth century. Also called Black Caesar, he was a former slave from Haiti who had participated in the slave rebellion led by Toussaint L'Ouverture during the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804). One of the pirates expresses his

56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 M.-R. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1997, pp. 82–83.

desire to go to Haiti as well: "If I could but scrape together four hundred dollars, I would give up cruising, and go to St. Domingo."[60] The tale thus connects St. Domingue, the Caribbean Gulf waters around Florida, and slave plantations as spaces where the dominant order is imperiled.

Howison's tale, however, ends with a restoration of this order as the pirates are attacked and captured by an American brig of war, anticipating the control of the coastal waters around Florida by the US. Manuel is sentenced to death and bequeaths his money to the narrator, a large bag full of gold coins that make him a wealthy man. This ending can be seen as a concession to audiences for whom the story of a black pirate in charge of a distant ship might have been entertaining only on the condition that their worldviews were reconfirmed at the end. In spite of the conventional closure, the success of the narrative in the US may be attributed to its felt relevance for crucial issues the nation was struggling with: the concept of liberty, the question of slavery, the Seminole Wars, expansionism, and the threat of slave rebellions. Moreover, the text also resonated with the fears of black piracy as it was publicly debated in the Barbary captivity crisis, adding a global dimension to its interpretation. In the period between 1785 and 1815, hundreds of Americans were taken captive by black pirates from the North African coast, who attacked US ships in the Mediterranean and sold their crews and passengers into slavery in the so-called Barbary states. Some of these captives were ransomed, some of them remained and died in captivity. These highly publicized events resulted in the production of hundreds of so-called Barbary captivity narratives, which dramatized the sufferings of American captives in North African slavery.[61] Howison's story of black piracy would lead most readers to immediately think of that context, echoing the menace of the Barbary crisis.

4 Conclusion

At a time when most Americans relied on narratives about frontier areas as a source of information considering that travel to these areas was impossible, the performative role of popular texts in space-making processes can be assumed to have been considerable. Although we do not know exactly how audiences appropriated the texts discussed in this chapter, we can assume that these tales contributed to the creation of a discursive formation about the peripheries of the nation that helped define, confirm, and stabilize the spatial order of the nation as a

60 Ibid.

61 For a detailed discussion, see Baepler, *White Slaves, African Masters.*

civilized entity versus its uncivilized margins. Notwithstanding that all three texts emphasize the engagement with an environment that is perceived as unpredictable and hazardous, they create divergent spatial scenarios and literacies while opening different avenues for their readers to endorse expansionism and to affectively appropriate the Florida frontier space as future part of the nation. In the Sarah Allen tale as well as in the Eunice Barber narrative, Florida is constructed as a wilderness and a testing ground for national virtues where model Americans, framed as pioneering characters in a "savage" space, are shown dealing with perilous situations. But while the author(s) of the Sarah Allen tale suggest that Florida's incorporation into the nation is just a question of time, the spatial actors who created the Barber tale stress the need for military action and the dangers the Seminoles represented for white settlers in the area. Howison's story creates the Florida coast as a space of black liberty and rebellious tropicality, addressing the fears of (hemispheric) slave revolts, but by its ending suggests the possibility of keeping insurgent blacks in check. Written in the 1820s, the text anticipates the ambivalent image of blackness that would become a characteristic of abolitionist discourses in future decades: in spite of the fact that Howison highlights the dignity of the black captain and seems to invite an understanding of his actions, the other pirates are depicted through stereotypical images of black inferiority. Of the three stories, Howison's text is the most unsettling, as it asks readers to consider the incongruity of liberty and slavery. All tales participate in the differentiating process of the early national period and reflect how writers of the early republic were beginning to define the ideological borders of America.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Florida changed from a back country into a modern tropical tourist space. After the Civil War (1861–1865), as steamboats and railroads began to connect the peninsula to the rest of the country and travel became easy, the subtropical landscape of Florida – the same impenetrable forest and "miry swamps" that had threatened the protagonists of early popular tales– became part of a touristic discourse that reinterpreted Florida as an exotic and attractive space. Events such as Jacksonville's world fair in 1888, which hosted the Subtropical Exhibition and attracted thousands of visitors, helped people to develop a new spatial literacy of Florida. Magazine writers who in the 1870s framed Florida as a kind of "domestic Africa" contributed to this new narrative, as Jennifer Greeson shows. These writers adopted conventions of British colonial travel writing about Africa's interior, a strategy that marked a "global reframing" of the nation's relationship to its Reconstruction South, as Greeson points out, and asserted a new status of the USA among the imperial powers of

the world.[62] In this discourse, Florida is marketed either as an adventure playground for hunting, alligator watching, and boat swamp tours, or as a tropical luxury resort for the wealthy and for people desiring to escape the cold northern winters.[63] In 1912, railroad magnate Henry Flagler completed the Over-Sea Railroad that linked the entire east coast of Florida from Jacksonville to Key West, followed by the construction of hotels at points along the railroad. The swamps and alligators remained, but the frontier and its narratives moved elsewhere – to the Far West and Alaska, and later to Cuba, the Philippines, and Hawaii, where America's new imperial interests lay.

62 J. R. Greeson, *Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010, p. 244.

63 J. C. Clark, *Hidden History of Florida*, Charleston: The History Press, 2015, p. 65.