

# [Global Histories]

## A student journal

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/GHSJ.2018.175>

Source: Global Histories, Vol. 4, No. 1 (May 2018), pp. 146–165

ISSN: 2366-780X

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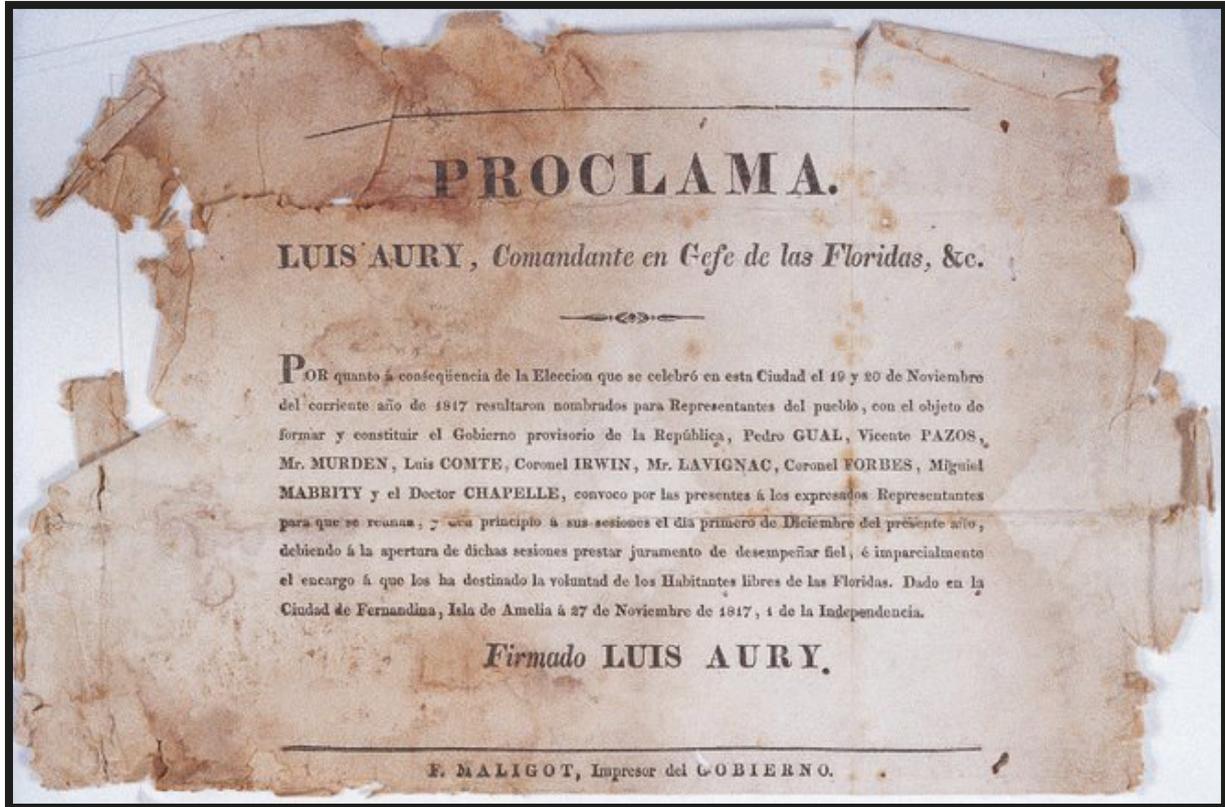
#### Publisher information:

'Global Histories: A Student Journal' is an open-access bi-annual journal founded in 2015 by students of the M.A. program Global History at Freie Universität Berlin and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. 'Global Histories' is published by an editorial board of Global History students in association with the Freie Universität Berlin.

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ELECTION RESULTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF THE FLORIDAS. 1817.

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

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# The Amelia Framers, 1817: Farce as a Historiographical Model

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In 1817, a group of privateers attempted to establish an independent nation-state on an island just below the southern U.S. border. At that time, the Monroe administration was in negotiations for East Florida, the region to which the island belonged. The administration decided to invade the island and provisionally restore Spanish sovereignty so that it could legally purchase East Florida without further complications. This study argues for the utility of narrativizing this event as a farce. Previous historical accounts have deemphasized its farcical elements, and as a result have failed to articulate the discrepancy between performances and intentions on each side of the conflict. To recognize this discrepancy allows us to recognize how the privateers consciously manipulated the notion of nation-statehood to serve their particular ends. To the extent this manipulation was successful, the Monroe administration was forced to actively evade the legal uncertainties surrounding their decision to invade.

## *Introduction*

It was a dispute between an apparently real and an apparently fictive nation-state. Spain, for the most part, watched from the sidelines. The dispute concerned the capture of Amelia Island and its port town, Fernandina, at the northeastern corner of what was then Spanish East Florida. The captors remained in control for roughly six months, from June to December 1817. John Quincy Adams, then U.S. Secretary of State, summarized the event as follows:

Possession [of Amelia Island] was first taken early in the course of last summer, by a party, under the command of a British subject named [Gregor MacGregor], *pretending* authority from Venezuela. He was succeeded by persons...*pretending* authority from some *pretended* Government of Florida; and they are now by the last accounts...contesting the command of the place with a Frenchmen [Louis-Michel Aury] having under him a body of Blacks from St. Domingo, and *pretending* au-

thority from a Government of Mexico. In the mean time the place from its immediate vicinity to the United States, has become a receptacle for fugitive negroes, [and] for every species of illicit traffic.... President [Monroe] after observing the feeble and ineffectual effort made by the Spanish Government of Florida, to recover possession of the Island...has determined to break up this nest of foreign Adventurers, with *pretended* South American commissions, but among whom not a single South American name has yet appeared. Should you find that any of the Revolutionary Governments with whom you may communicate have *really* authorized any of these foreign Adventurers to take possession of those places, you will explain to them that this measure could not be submitted to or acquiesced in by the United States; because...Amelia Island is too insignificant in itself and too important by its local position in reference to the United States, to be left by them in the possession of such persons [*italics added*].<sup>1</sup>

The summary comes from Adams's instructions to a Special Commission of U.S. diplomats about to leave for the United Provinces of the Rio de la Plata, based in Buenos Aires, to determine whether it deserved recognition as an independent country. Up to this point, the U.S. had maintained official neutrality between the peninsular Spanish government and the creole insurgencies in South and Central America. The immediate context of the Commission was the ongoing negotiation between the U.S. and Spain over the remaining Spanish territories in North America (East and West Florida; Texas). Recognition of the United Provinces—a decision that might be re-applied across the continent—was held out as a bargaining chip against Spain in order to expedite the cession of the Floridas.<sup>2</sup>

Adams's instructions are dated November 21, 1817, roughly a month before the United States military occupied Amelia Island, holding it “in protective custody” on behalf of the Spanish regime with the expectation that Spain would cede the island, along with the rest of East Florida, to the U.S. upon the finalization of a treaty.<sup>3</sup> Between the date of Adams's note and the invasion, the Amelia party had drafted a “Constitution and Frame of Government” for the “Republic of the Floridas” and run elections for public office.<sup>4</sup> They asserted that Spanish sovereignty over the region was defunct, and thereby imperiled a clean territorial transfer from

<sup>1</sup> William Ray Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States Concerning the Independence of the Latin-American Nations, Vol. I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1925), Document 44, 21 November 1817.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to this short-term angle, David Meirion Jones has argued that the Monroe administration was seriously weighing the possibility of a pan-hemispheric alliance. David Meirion Jones, *A Luminous Constellation Pointing the Way? The Connectivity of Rioplatense & US Union and State-Formation, 1815–1820* (MA diss., University of York, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Charles H. Bowman, “Vicente Pazos and the Amelia Island Affair, 1817,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (1975): 295.

<sup>4</sup> For an in-depth summary see: David Head, *Privateers of the Americas: Spanish American Privateering from the United States in the Early Republic* (Athens: London University of Georgia Press, 2015), 107–122.

Spain to the U.S. By ordering the special commissioners to stamp out any political relationships with the “pretended government” in Fernandina, Adams preempted objections to a U.S. intervention. Despite his efforts, a debate over its legality embroiled Congress, as well as the press, for months after the invasion. Congress, with some misgivings, ultimately affirmed the President’s decision. The cession of the Floridas to the U.S. followed in 1819 after prolonged negotiations with Spain, during which time the U.S. military committed further unpermitted incursions beyond the Spanish Floridian border.<sup>5</sup>

I quote and contextualize Adams’s letter for two reasons: first, to provide the official U.S. narrative of the Amelia Island Affair, with its emphasis on the volatility of operations on Amelia as well as its inhabitants’ mixed nationalities and race; and second, to draw attention to the word “pretend,” which appears, in a single paragraph, five times. The forcefulness of this repetition, in my reading, is necessitated by its contradiction in the penultimate statement (“Should you find that any of the Revolutionary Governments...have *really* authorized any of these foreign Adventurers...” etc.) In effect, if we combine these statements, we see that the commissioner’s instructions are to convey the following: *Whether or not you authorized the Amelia party, the authorization is a fake*—which, in the context of the Commission itself, carries the explicit warning that—*if you did, your government will likewise be judged a fake*.<sup>6</sup> Adams then ties it back into a justification for invading the island: “Amelia Island is too insignificant in itself and too important by its local position in reference to the United States,” etc. In other words, *beyond any external reference, Amelia Island has no political existence to be violated—and the U.S. is its only reference of ontological certainty*.

Political figures in and outside the U.S. opposed this line of thinking and protested the decision to invade. Some commentators (then and since) have emphasized the pretexts for a U.S. invasion, and others the fraudulence of the Amelia insurgents’ demands. This paper demonstrates how the narrative form of farce, by stressing how these pretenses functioned reciprocally, can function for a historical telling of the Affair, and how doing so reveals meanings neglected in previous accounts. Beneath the surface of the conflict lies an insight into the nature of national statehood: the difficulty of theoretically distinguishing a genuine from a forgery. This insight was utilized by the so-called “Adventurers,” who wagered on the acceptance of a conceptually sound (if perceptibly ludicrous) argument:

<sup>5</sup> Other incursions by the U.S. leading up to the Treaty (before, during and after the Amelia Affair) were related to the anti-Seminole campaigns. Head, *Privateers of the Americas*, 30; Adam Wasserman, *A People’s History of Florida, 1513–1876: How Africans, Seminoles, Women, and Lower Class Whites Shaped the Sunshine State* (USA: self-publishing, 2009), 158–90.

<sup>6</sup> Adams spells out the threat in the next paragraph: “the licentious abuse of [South American] flags by these freebooters...has [a]...tendency to deter other countries from recognizing them as regular Governments.” He expands the threat by stating that, if they do not disavow the Amelia excursion, the U.S. will claim “indemnity for all losses and damages” that have resulted from it. Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, Document 44.

*we are a sovereign nation because we have the necessary documents.* The U.S. executive, in turn, evaded this argument and invaded the island.

The discrepancy between the leaders' dramatics and their unspoken pragmatism supplies the comic tension of the farce. Monroe and Adams loudly insisted that the U.S. military was defending international law and order while quietly securing a clean purchase of the territory. The Amelia Framers, cloaking themselves in the construct of sovereignty, refused to acknowledge their own lack of substance as a nation and own short-term interests in the territory. Maintaining this tension in the historical telling allows for an inclusion of two critical narratives that are hard to reconcile: anti-Amelian and anti-U.S. Any trace of a tragic telling (i.e. that the expansionist U.S. government dismantled a genuine republican project) must confront the simulacrum aspect of the Republic of the Floridas. Conversely, if one ridicules the emptiness of the Amelian claim to nationality, one must also contend with the soundness of their legal argument—and thus the political-legal construct of the nation-state itself.

The next section elaborates on the notion of emplotment and shows how farce, as a mode of emplotment, can reveal the Amelia Affair's inner workings. It gives a review of the existing historiography, which has tended to refute the self-consciousness of the historical actors, and thus, the farcical duality of their intentions and performances. I then introduce what Benedict Anderson calls the "modular" aspect of early nation-building projects, and how this problematized the notion of legitimate statehood. This provides a framework for understanding the basic plan of the Amelia Framers, as well as the rationale of Monroe and Adams. Section three summarizes the legal arguments for and against the U.S. invasion—the surface-level performances of the farce. Section four contextualizes this legal defense within the procession of "modular" nation-building projects of the era and region, providing the backdrop against which the legal arguments appear farcical. Section five shows how the emplotment of the Amelia Affair as a farce—pre-figured in some contemporary accounts—conveys an unsolved contradiction between the emergent legal paradigm upon which "modular" states are built and a realistic<sup>7</sup> assessment of how political power operates transnationally.

### *Historiographical Review and Theoretical Framework*

Hayden White asserts that all historical explanations derive, if somewhat obscurely, from literary structures, and can be categorized into various modes of emplotment (romance, comedy, tragedy, etc.) Historians, he argues, rely on these modes to make their work intelligible. Emplotment is not simply forming a chronology of incidents; it is understood as the synthesis of heterogeneous evidence

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<sup>7</sup> I use 'realistic' and 'realism' in this essay to denote a commonly shared perception of reality or common sense that does not bear the burden of proof on a legal or philosophic basis.

in order to make it meaningful, i.e. followable at the sequential, explanatory, and interpretive levels. White favored Ricoeur's extension of emplotment to include traces of the historical actors' own consciousness—that is, a narrative link to the event itself. People narrate their own actions in real-time in order to make sense of their consequences; their actions are “in effect lived narrativizations.”<sup>8</sup> To emplot the Amelia Affair is more than the “displacement of the facts onto the ground of literary fictions.” It is a point of entry for making sense of what happened.

Farce denotes a form of satire in which the contradiction of a character's words or actions against their context is raised to such a tenor of exaggeration that no self-conscious individual could recognize them as anything but fraudulent—yet the character continues to speak and act as if this were not the case.<sup>9</sup> By emplotting in this format, I assert that historical figures involved were conscious of playing roles, of committing forgeries, of a discrepancy between their actions and the surface level of their public explanations. The implication of this beyond the Affair itself—which I return to in the conclusion—is that contemporary politicians did not merely think within ‘the nation’ as a pre-understood thing. When they claimed a nationality, they were playing with, constructing, and exploiting the meaning of ‘nation.’

As it specifically pertains to the debate around the Amelia government's legitimacy, my theoretical line is reinforced by the observation that materiality, or physical bodies in space and time, were no more important than the abstractions in play, such as the legal recognition of sovereignty and land speculation. The U.S. and Amelia governments were in effect competing speculators on the Floridian territory, engaged in a narrative battle over sovereignty. This battle occurred

<sup>8</sup> Ricoeur argues for a “metaphysics of narrativity” based upon the interrelation of “ordinary representations of time...as that ‘in’ which events take place,” and “historicality,” the apparent capacity for events to be repetitive. “The narrative function provides a transition from within-time-ness to historicality, and it does this by revealing what must be called the ‘plot-like’ nature of temporality itself.” White called this “the strongest claim for the adequacy of narrative to realize the aims of historical studies made by any recent theorist of historiography.” Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 50–54.

<sup>9</sup> White mentions Marx's essay on the 1848 Revolution in France as an example of history emplotted as farce. Marx designates it as a farce in that the language and ideals of the authentic (thus tragic) 1789 Revolution were cynically reused half a century later as a front to disavow the original revolutionary project. There is a two-tiered resonance between Marx's description of the 1848 *Brumaire* and James Monroe's description of the declaration of independence of the Republic of the Floridas as a fabrication “where the venerable forms, by which a free people constitute a frame of government for themselves, are prostituted by a horde of foreign freebooters for purposes of plunder.” The second tier is that the Amelia Framers accused Monroe himself, leader of an (ostensibly) authentic revolution 40 years prior, of leading a conquest in the cloak of liberal values. Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” as discussed in Hayden White, “Interpretation in History,” in *Postmodernism: Critical Concepts. Vol. III: Humanities and Social Sciences*, ed. Victor E. Taylor and Charles E. Winsquist (London: Routledge, 1998), 218. Monroe is quoted from Vanessa Mongey, *Cosmopolitan Republics and Itinerant Patriots: The Gulf of Mexico in the Age of Revolutions (1780s–1830s)* (Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2011), 245.

in real-time, both in the press and privately, shaping events as they unfolded. Earl Weeks contends that “the very legitimacy of Aury’s nascent patriot government at Amelia Island was what constituted the threat to the United States, by creating another obstacle to the acquisition of the Floridas.”<sup>10</sup> I would revise Weeks’ argument to emphasize that the legitimacy of the Republic of the Floridas<sup>11</sup> *in the abstract* constituted the threat, whereas the counter-perception that nothing concrete existed to support this abstraction served as an implicit authorization for U.S. military response. The threat, though real, was cornered in symbolism.

Among previous historical emplotments of the Affair, there has been a fatal preoccupation with the question of Aury and MacGregor’s sincerity—perhaps working to diffuse the underlying ambiguity around the nation-state that I wish to emphasize. Most historians make a comment as to whether the leaders were acting for the genuine cause of republicanism *or* for personal profit.<sup>12</sup> T. Frederick Davis, for instance, who wrote the first academic study of the Amelia Affair in 1928, asserts that while MacGregor’s proclamations were sincere, Aury’s were not.<sup>13</sup> This focus on character, even where it does not reproduce the Monroe administration’s propaganda, provides no usable evidence towards the fundamental questions of political legitimacy at play. Furthermore, it ignores the fact that privateering operations, while profiting individuals, were simultaneously understood as essential to the South American Republican insurgencies from a military standpoint.<sup>14</sup> In this study, every statement and action shall be read as a means to a particular end. The declaration of the Republic of the Floridas was a means to create a legally-sanctioned, temporary port of trade, privateering, and war-supplies to support the South American independence movements and to make money doing so.<sup>15</sup> The designation of the republic as a fraud was a means to justify the invasion of Amelia Island while legitimating the U.S.’s own claim to the territory.

<sup>10</sup> William Earl Weeks, *John Quincy Adams and American Global Empire* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 64.

<sup>11</sup> The use of “Aury’s government,” instead of the formal title, implicitly discredits the formal existence of the government and reduces the government synecdochally to Aury, as if it were his personal project. Likewise, the general use of scare-quotes around “Republic,” “constitution,” and “legislature,” are uncritical acknowledgements of the ambiguity between authentic and counterfeit nationhood.

<sup>12</sup> Bowman quotes (and implicitly concurs with) a contemporary observer of Aury’s crew: “All came ostensibly ‘to aid the cause of the patriots of South America, but their real motive is, no doubt, to prey upon whom they can.’” In conclusion, Bowman writes: “[Pazos’] faith in republicanism for the Floridas proved to be misplaced.” Bowman, “Vicente Pazos,” 283, 295.

<sup>13</sup> This point is reiterated in Frank Owsley and Gene A. Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists: Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny, 1800–1821* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2014), 137. Head reaches the same conclusion, *Privateers of the Americas*, 144–46.

<sup>14</sup> Rafe Blaufarb, “The Western Question: The Geopolitics of Latin American Independence,” *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 3 (2007): 753, 758.

<sup>15</sup> “J. Skinner to John Quincy Adams, 30 July 1817” from Gregor MacGregor and J. Skinner, “Letters Relating to Macgregor’s Attempted Conquest of East Florida, 1817,” *The Florida Historical Society Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (1926): 56–57.

Klaus, in his study of financial frauds in the 19th century, writes that “fraudsters were often the most attuned to the social processes through which trust was built.”<sup>16</sup> Instead of condemning MacGregor or Aury for being “fraudsters” or ridiculing them for being sincere, but ineffectual, the point is to understand how they analysed and acted upon shifting standards of political legitimacy. David Head writes, for example, that “[MacGregor’s] vision looked noble, but the reality was different.”<sup>17</sup> Here is a double mistake: first in judging MacGregor’s sincerity; second in creating a false division between “reality” and “vision.” Vanessa Mongey shows how the “vision” behind the Republic of the Floridas actually *sprang from* the emerging political realities. Mongey focuses on the “foundational fiction” of statehood as it arose in the late 18th century, and the attempts of “itinerant patriots” such as MacGregor and Aury to utilize it.<sup>18</sup> She risks falling into the sincerity-trap, too, when she compares the Amelia constitution to a “state fantasy,” a phrase borrowed from Sybille Fisher’s study of the early constitutions of Haiti. To re-apply this term from the context of the Haitian revolution, with its idealistic aspirations, to the Republic of the Floridas, with its conspicuous utilitarianism, seems incongruous.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, by turning our attention to the sheer repetitiveness of Amelia-like projects (including the reappearance of many participants), Mongey has advanced the theoretical analysis of the Amelia Affair the furthest.<sup>20</sup>

Mongey’s shift in emphasis towards repetition owes a lot to Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, which describes nationhood as “modular”: a conceptual blueprint “capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains.”<sup>21</sup> Anderson turns specifically to “the large cluster of new political entities that sprang up in the Western hemisphere between 1776 and 1838, all of which self-consciously defined themselves as nations, and...as (non-dynastic) republics[,]... the first such states to emerge on the world stage, and therefore inevitably...the first real models of what such states should ‘look like’ ....” Anderson situates these national projects within the context of industrial print-capitalism, and specifically the spread of the novel and

<sup>16</sup> For a summary of MacGregor’s “Poyais Scheme,” see: Ian Robert Klaus, *Virtue is Dead: A History of Trust* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 97–130.

<sup>17</sup> Head, *Privateers of the Americas*, 107.

<sup>18</sup> Mongey, *Cosmopolitan Republics*, 94.

<sup>19</sup> Mongey’s work sets out to redeem the cosmopolitan vision of “itinerant patriots” as an alternative trajectory for nationalism that has vanished from historical writing. I do not dispute the main thrust of her work—only that the Amelia Island project, specifically, was not aimed *directly* at the fulfillment of any Republican ideal. Sybille Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

<sup>20</sup> The most complete reconstruction of the Amelia Affair (without a theoretical drive) is Heckard’s 2006 dissertation. This includes (what appears to be) the only detailed account of the prolonged congressional debates in 1818. Jennifer Heckard, *The Crossroads of Empire: The 1817 Liberation and Occupation of Amelia Island, East Florida* (PhD diss., University of Connecticut, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 4.

newspaper as mass-produced commodities.<sup>22</sup> The possession of a printing press (in addition to the physical occupation of the island) enabled the Amelia government to declare its own existence with apparent firmness.

And yet, in reference to all attempts at nation-building in this period and region, Anderson notes a distinct “social thinness,” a lack of the features that tend to substantiate nationality: linguistic distinctiveness, social inclusiveness, and a national myth extending into the indefinite past.<sup>23</sup> The first manifestations of national statehood were accompanied by a persistent ambiguity about *what a nation is*, even as ‘the nation’ served to justify the existence of ‘the state’ with increasing firmness. “By the second decade of the nineteenth century, if not earlier,” Anderson writes, “a ‘model’ of ‘the’ independent national state was available for pirating.”<sup>24</sup> This did not mean, however, that varying levels of “social thinness” were imperceptible to people of the period. The visible extremity of “piratical self-consciousness” behind the government on Amelia Island lent the Affair its irony: the module of the national state was arguably fulfilled even though none of its citizens were viewed as possessing Floridian nationality—any depth of community to tie them together or to the land.

The Special Commission to Buenos Aires and the Amelia Affair were two instances of a relatively new state (the U.S.) deciding upon the inclusion of relatively newer states (the United Provinces and the Republic of the Floridas) into a shared model of national statehood—defining and solidifying its own national legitimacy by judging the legitimacy of neighbors. The emergent paradigm of national horizontality—of New World nations existing in parallel to the Old World regimes and to each other, fundamentally comparable in their nation-ness<sup>25</sup>—was what the Amelia Framers attempted to shield themselves with. However, the persistently recognized *verticality* of international relationships and state-legitimacy (based largely on military, economic, and demographic power) implied a realistic incomparability between the U.S., the United Provinces of Rio de la Plata, and the Republic of the Floridas, on three respective tiers. In light of this verticality, and furthermore the seeming eventuality of the U.S. gaining possession of East Florida, the dispute has an air of inconsequentiality. This, along with the general flagrancy of political double-dealing, lays the groundwork for the Amelia Affair as farce.

### *Debate on the Legality of the U.S. Invasion*

I will begin with the surface level of the farce: the lines of legal argumentation given both by the Amelia Framers and the Monroe administration—respectively,

<sup>22</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 34–35.

<sup>23</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 46–49.

<sup>24</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 81.

<sup>25</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 192.

the argument for Floridian national sovereignty and the distractive counter-argument around racial unrest and illegal operations on the border.

Vicente Pazos, a journalist and lawyer from Peru, laid out the legal argument against the United States occupation of Amelia Island. Pedro Gual, then diplomat and later president of Venezuela, served as the personal connection to substantiate Pazos' argument that the new republic was the result of a genuine *patriot* revolution, within the context of the South American wars of independence.<sup>26</sup> Directly after the U.S. occupation, Pazos traveled to Washington to demand reparations from the U.S. for its unlawful seizure of neutral territory beyond its borders.<sup>27</sup> His "Exposition," (presented first to the President, then to Congress) attempts to show how the Republic was founded upon the same legal groundwork as the United States. Pazos makes this comparison both in terms of history (the fight against a colonial oppressor<sup>28</sup>) and political values (their "Constitution and Frame of Government" was based quite explicitly on the United States' own.)<sup>29</sup> He writes, "The establishment of Amelia was a school, where the patriots would have been taught to imitate the heroic conduct held out by this nation [the U.S.] forty years ago." *We modeled ourselves in your image, and you have forsaken us.*

Pazos cites the law of nations, the legal standard (at least nominally) assented to by European and American governments, to argue that, "Either Spain, or the republics of the south, possess the right of invading the other's territory...without any neutral power having the right to question them."<sup>30</sup> He presents the original commission to invade Florida given to MacGregor in March, three months prior to his invasion, by three South and Central American diplomats. Given this authorization, and the unbroken transfers of authority from MacGregor to Aury (in September) and Aury to a civil government (in November), the U.S. was legally bound to treat them as one party of a civil war, and—given their success—a sovereign, neutral state.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> It is plausible that Adams, who claims above that "not a single South American name has yet appeared" in relation to the Amelia government, had not yet been informed of Pazos and Gual's arrival in Fernandina on October 4th, 1817. Bowman, "Vicente Pazos," 281.

<sup>27</sup> Bowman, "Vicente Pazos," 295.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Pazos' laudatory references to George Washington, as well as Benjamin Franklin, who was known to have commissioned privateers during the War of Independence. Vicente Pazos Kanki, *The Exposition, Remonstrance and Protest of Don Vincente Pazos: Commissioner on Behalf of the Republican Agents Established at Amelia Island...* (Philadelphia: [publisher not identified], 1818) 25–27.

<sup>29</sup> Aside from citing Hamilton's Federalist Paper No. 70 directly, the framework included three branches, military subservience to civil authority, and freedom of speech and conscience. Bowman, "Vicente Pazos," 289.

<sup>30</sup> At that time Emer de Vattel's 1758 "The Law of Nations..." was the definitive source. In a civil war, according to Vattel, arbitration by a neutral government must be consented to from both sides. J. C. A. Stagg, "James Madison and George Mathews: The East Florida Revolution of 1812 Reconsidered," *Diplomatic History* 30, no. 1 (2006): 30; Kanki, *The Exposition*, 19.

<sup>31</sup> There was a brief interlude where neither man was present on the island, which is referred to in the initial summary by Adams. After some contention, the rule of Aury was accepted with

The primary issue at hand, he writes, is the violation of national sovereignty: “The [US invasion], whether on the boundary or the center, would be called criminal. If the limits of public, as well as private properties, were not held alike sacred, the frontiers of a country might soon thus extend themselves to the extremities of the world...”<sup>32</sup> Unlawful “extension” is precisely what Pazos identifies as the goal of U.S. policy: to take the territory for itself. Even if they were in negotiations with the Spanish for the Floridas, he writes, “They cannot...have lost what did not actually belong to them.”<sup>33</sup>

Senator Henry Clay was Pazos’ most vocal advocate in Congress. In addition to criticizing executive overreach (Monroe had ordered the invasion without congressional approval), Clay shared Pazos’ view that the U.S. was covertly helping the Spanish under the guise of neutrality. He pushed for official recognition of the southern republics (whom he saw as natural ideological and geographic allies) and tied the issue directly to the question of the Republic of the Floridas, which (as a sovereign body) had the right to commission privateers.<sup>34</sup> Sympathizers in the press, part of the anti-Spanish “propaganda machine” operating in Baltimore and Philadelphia,<sup>35</sup> lambasted the U.S. invasion for months.<sup>36</sup> Many reiterated Aury’s own claim, on the brink of surrender in December, that, “The only law you [President Monroe] can adduce in your favor is that of force, which is always repugnant to Republican Governments and to the principles of a just and impartial nation.”<sup>37</sup>

Technically, the strongest counter Monroe could offer was to question the authenticity of MacGregor’s original commissions from March 1817. But Monroe had still not received confirmation of Bolivar’s stance, and considering that the U.S. had already threatened potential sponsors of the Amelia expedition, his disavowal in late 1818 cannot be accepted at face value.<sup>38</sup> Rather, as a red herring, Clay’s main opponent on the floor sounded the alarm of a “bad neighborhood of free, armed blacks” on the southern border, an argument that particularly held sway among southern representatives.<sup>39</sup> There is little indication that Aury was opposed to slavery—much to the contrary. But reports had circulated in the press

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apparent unanimity. Head, *Privateers of the Americas*, 105.

<sup>32</sup> Kanki, *The Exposition*, 21.

<sup>33</sup> Kanki, *The Exposition*, 18–19.

<sup>34</sup> Heckard, *The Crossroads of Empire*, 226–27.

<sup>35</sup> See: Laura Bornholdt, *Baltimore as a Port of Propaganda for Spanish American Independence, 1810–1823* (PhD diss., Yale University, 1945), 254–64.

<sup>36</sup> Heckard, *The Crossroads of Empire*, 220–23.

<sup>37</sup> *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive of the Congress of the United States, Class I, Vol. 4*, ed. Walter Lowry and Walter S. Franklin (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1834), 140.

<sup>38</sup> Two of the three commissions (from Pedro Gual and Lino de Clemente) could be traced by chain of command back to Bolivar. The United Provinces of Rio de La Plata had already decommissioned Martin Thompson, the third signer, in 1817. Heckard, *The Crossroads of Empire*, 245; Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, Document 73.

<sup>39</sup> This was Representative Alexander Smyth of Virginia. Heckard, *The Crossroads of Empire*, 228–29.

that Amelia Island served as a gateway for fugitive slaves, and in reverse, for smuggled imports. Furthermore, Aury's crew included Haitians who "insisted upon equal rights and privileges with the whites"—a fact that Adams himself emphasized in a series of anonymous newspaper editorials leading up to the invasion.<sup>40</sup> Aury had anticipated these claims early on. One of his first executive actions was to outlaw the passage of fugitive slaves; but this gesture went unnoticed.<sup>41</sup>

The first justification was a well grounded yet narrow appeal to law (in respect to smuggling) and an erroneous appeal to racial order. The second was an outright admission that the U.S. wanted the territory for itself. Ultimately, few representatives were willing to undermine negotiations with the Spanish for Florida. Neither justification directly addressed the question of what constitutes sovereignty. The congressional debate was a reminder that no impartial venue existed to judge the sovereignty of states, and that the U.S. government could—according to its own convenience—decide to serve as such a venue, as it had in sending a commission to Rio de la Plata, or not.

In the final analysis there is little to indicate that any branch of the U.S. government strongly considered recognizing the Republic of the Floridas as a sovereign state. Chief Justice John Marshall, hearing a piracy case in 1818, declared all privateering commissions made by Aury to be null based upon the "de facto" non-existence of a Mexican insurgency.<sup>42</sup> Monroe and Adams were determined to invade the island months before, by October at the latest.<sup>43</sup> Few in Congress backed up Clay in his defense of the Republic. By 1818, repeated U.S. military incursions into the region had reinforced the expectation that U.S. possession was inevitable. The 1817 occupation of Amelia Island was in fact the second instance on the same island, under similar circumstances, within only five years.<sup>44</sup> Campaigns against Seminole and free black settlements in Spanish territory had stepped up since 1816.<sup>45</sup> Between late 1817 and early 1818, King Ferdinand VII and the Spanish governor of East Florida rapidly issued land grants totaling roughly 780,000 acres "as land speculation anticipating the American takeover."<sup>46</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Head, *Privateers of the Americas*, 107. On the generally ambiguous stance of "itinerant patriots" towards race, see: Mongey, *Cosmopolitan Republics*, 186–239. For quotes from Adams's anonymous editorials, see: Heckard, *The Crossroads of Empire*, 172–75.

<sup>41</sup> Bowman, "Vicente Pazos," 288.

<sup>42</sup> James Brown Scott, *Prize Cases Decided in the United States Supreme Court 1789–1918*, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 1080–85.

<sup>43</sup> Bowman, "Vicente Pazos," 292.

<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of the 1812 filibustering mission in East Florida and its ties to the Madison administration, see: Stagg, "James Madison and George Mathews," 23–55.

<sup>45</sup> See Wasserman on the destruction of the Negro Fort: Wasserman, *A People's History of Florida*, 158–65.

<sup>46</sup> Paul E. Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers: A History of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 270–74.

The refusal to recognize the Republic of the Floridas may have appeared an eventuality to most people, but this very appearance helped evade the technical basis of Pazos' argument. The fact that the Amelia government could exhibit documentary evidence of its constitutional framework, repeated victories over Spanish forces,<sup>47</sup> successful democratic elections, and at least one credible commission<sup>48</sup> from a native party engaged in civil war with its European colonizer were comparable to the facts which substantiated the U.S. government's own domestic sovereignty. Beyond that, the U.S. claim to East Florida, whether or not Congress authorized military intervention,<sup>49</sup> derived from spoliation claims against the Spanish Crown that were extrinsically linked to the specific territory—and arguably invalid in the first place.<sup>50</sup>

### *The Republic of the Floridas as a Modular Nation-State*

To accept Pazos' argument at face value, however, would be to ignore its place in a rapid succession of “ephemeral states”<sup>51</sup> in the region. Florida itself had seen at least six short-lived separatist republican experiments since the mid-1790s.<sup>52</sup> This context underlies the general perception of the Republic of the Floridas as yet another forgery. The defense of the Republic was not thrown together to legally substantiate a pre-existing political or demographic reality. Rather, the semblance of reality (being there in the flesh; printing documents) was a hasty effort to manifest a pre-existing legal model—to speculate upon an inchoate political order where abstraction, or documentary verification, was the primary form of legal substance.

To tell the story of the Republic of the Floridas from beginning to end (June 29<sup>th</sup> – December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1817) is insufficient. The Republic is a point of fleeting intersection between “modular” careers leading towards and away from the contemporary independence movements of South and Central America. Pazos, after the Amelia Affair, went on to live in the U.S. for some years lobbying for South American recognition. Pedro Gual, born in Caracas, was involved in the Venezuelan insurgency since early on. After his time in the United States as an agent of Bolivar,

<sup>47</sup> In addition to the original capture of Fernandina in June, they withstood a Spanish attempt to retake the Island in September (immediately after MacGregor left). Head, *Privateers of the Americas*, 105.

<sup>48</sup> Manning, *Document 73*: January 28, 1819.

<sup>49</sup> Monroe defended the invasion with the No Transfer Resolution of 1811, a secret law passed by Congress to assure that no foreign power would seize Florida from Spain, denying its potential cession to the U.S. According to Pazos' argument, however, the Republic of the Floridas was not the result of a foreign invasion, but an insurrection. Head, *Privateers of the Americas*, 112.

<sup>50</sup> Stagg, “James Madison and George Mathews,” 32–33.

<sup>51</sup> Term borrowed from William Bryk, “The Ephemera of Fictional States,” *Cabinet Magazine*, Issue 18, (2005).

<sup>52</sup> Notable examples include the Trans-Ocenee Republic and the Free State of Muscogee. For an overview of political projects in the period, see: Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers*, 247–63.

and then as a politician on Fernandina, he served as a minister for Gran Columbia and negotiated the first bilateral agreement between the U.S. and any Latin American polity (ratified in 1824).<sup>53</sup> MacGregor and Aury came to prominence as officers under Bolivar in the early-to-mid teens. Thus the Venezuelan Republic could be called the original module of all three careers. MacGregor's first attempt at leading a sovereign state was on Amelia Island. Aury, who arrived at Fernandina at the urging of Gual (then residing in Philadelphia) had at that point already formed a government at Galveston, Texas. After the project in Florida—which he attempted to resurrect in 1818—MacGregor established a government in Portobello and attempted unsuccessfully to extend control to the rest of Panama. After his time on Amelia Island, Aury established another independent republic on the Island of Providence.<sup>54</sup>

Each project followed a remarkably similar template. Mongey identifies its origins in the print-discourse of the 1790s, in which “programs or road maps [were published] that indicated how the revolution was going to unfold and how the post-revolutionary state was going to come into existence.”<sup>55</sup> The influence of this discourse is reflected in both Aury's and Macgregor's proclamations and constitutions, which referenced or borrowed language from the U.S., French, and Venezuelan revolutions.<sup>56</sup> Each successive project expanded on the articulation of modular institutions. At Galveston, Aury had set up a customs collector, judges and clerks for civil, criminal, and maritime courts, a marshal, and a notary public.<sup>57</sup> On Amelia, MacGregor established a post office and a police force, consulted with a mayor and board of aldermen to make laws, including curfew for slaves, and issued naturalization papers for anyone that wanted to become a citizen.<sup>58</sup>

Each of the new republics had its own press; this was seen as an immediate priority upon landing.<sup>59</sup> The ability to print documents allowed the Amelia Framers to communicate in the same medium as any other political authorities. It permitted the publication of official acts, proclamations, and constitutions, of currency, of advertisements for various forms of investment,<sup>60</sup> and of legal authorizations, such as privateering commissions or titles to private property, including land. In a

<sup>53</sup> The “Anderson-Gual Treaty.” Alvaro Mendez, *Colombian Agency and the Making of US Foreign Policy: Intervention by Invitation* (Milton: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 45.

<sup>54</sup> See; “Roads out of Fernandina,” in Heckard, *The Crossroads of Empire*, 233–64.

<sup>55</sup> Mongey, *Cosmopolitan Republics*, 79.

<sup>56</sup> Mongey, *Cosmopolitan Republics*, 100–4. Bowman claims that Aury was “quite illiterate,” and that Gual and Pazos drafted his proclamations at Amelia—a fact worth further investigation, and relevant to the notion of an emergent hemispheric discourse. Bowman, “Vicente Pazos,” 282.

<sup>57</sup> Head, *Privateers of the Americas*, 95.

<sup>58</sup> Head, *Privateers of the Americas*, 104.

<sup>59</sup> On the role of the portable printing press and the small class of itinerant printers, see: Mongey, *Cosmopolitan Republics*, 109–14.

<sup>60</sup> Vicente Pazos founded a Spanish-language newspaper on Amelia Island (the second ever printed in Florida) with the intention of drawing support from across Latin America. No known copies exist. Bowman, “Vicente Pazos,” 291.

sense, the printing of a constitution was the main defensive act of the Republic of the Floridas. It was drafted in December as Aury prepared for a U.S. invasion, and was used as the mainstay of Pazos' legal argumentation.<sup>61</sup> In his analysis of the privateering establishment at Galveston, which Aury declared a province of Mexico, Head notes that "Mexican commissions looked just like the commissions of other nations," allowing the open, legal importation of goods seized from Spanish vessels into the United States. Maritime courts thus had the capacity to "cleanse" goods.<sup>62</sup> All these practices lie in the field of indeterminacy between authentic and forged statehood: the validity of the documents derived from a political authority, yet the legitimacy of this authority derived circularly from the practices of a state-in-operation.

The ephemeral states noted above can be viewed on a spectrum of solidness. As Anderson notes, even Gran Colombia and the United Provinces of the Rio de la Plata were ultimately short-lived, with no long-lasting basis for nationality.<sup>63</sup> On the other end of the spectrum was an absurd scenario wherein the simulation of statehood was not supplemented by any "original" reality whatsoever.<sup>64</sup> In 1822, a group of "itinerant patriots" headed for Puerto Rico (including Baptis Irvine, who helped as a propagandist for the Republic of the Floridas in New York)<sup>65</sup> was detained in Curacao before even arriving. On board, they had proclamations, a declaration of independence, and a constitutional draft already printed.<sup>66</sup> In this case, the legal defense literally preceded the establishment of the state.

Despite the absurdity of this inversion, the Amelia Framers had a reason to trust in the power of the model itself (once it had achieved a minimum of implementation). First of all, given enough time, the mutual reinforcement of legitimacy and practical operations outlined above may have progressed to a point where the Amelian nation-state leaned away from forgery, towards authenticity. Furthermore, the United States' own plan to incorporate the territory could similarly be described as the extension of a political-legal model over land that, despite being contiguous geographically, bore no greater sign of U.S. nationality than Amelian. It was only due to its tremendous power advantage that the Monroe administration could skirt the issue of sovereignty altogether, create a counter-narrative about border chaos to justify an invasion, and then acquire sovereignty through a purchase as opposed to an act of political self-determination.

<sup>61</sup> Heckard, *The Crossroads of Empire*, 178.

<sup>62</sup> See: Head, *Privateers of the Americas*, 97–98. Likewise, Pazos submitted evidence that all goods passing from Amelia Island to the U.S. had been deposited at the St. Mary's custom house. Kanki, *The Exposition*, 22.

<sup>63</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 53.

<sup>64</sup> I owe the notion of models supplanting an 'original reality' to Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983).

<sup>65</sup> Bowman, "Vicente Pazos," 280.

<sup>66</sup> Mongey, *Cosmopolitan Republics*, 106.

*The Amelia Island Affair as Farce*

The “modular” reality of the Republic of the Floridas, to whatever extent it was materialized, remained in constant tension with its perceived lack of substance. Likewise, the Monroe administration’s stated justification for invading Amelia Island remained in tension with its underlying rationale. There is evidence of some contemporary recognition of these discrepancies in several depictions of the affair in the U.S. press, some of which even used the word “farce.”<sup>67</sup> To take one example, the *Aurora General Advertiser* of Philadelphia, in a series of editorials sympathetic to the Amelia Framers, published a piece in 1818 satirically portraying the moment when Bankhead, the U.S. commander, meets Aury to accept his surrender. Bankhead comments:

‘Florida ought to be no object to you commodore Aury, who have the immense and inviting bodies of the finest lands in the universe, from Cape Horn to Mexico.’ We can imagine how Aury must have laughed at the information—and though he did not say, he might have said—and pray Mr. Proconsul, do you not think the land between the St. Croix and St. Marys, of which you are already in possession, might have afforded you elbow room?<sup>68</sup>

Aury’s retort (which he does not say) calls the U.S. out for its hidden expansionist agenda. The land between St. Croix (today the U.S. Virgin Islands) and the St. Mary’s river (then the southern border of the U.S.) encompasses the entire Caribbean. Why is it that Aury cannot acknowledge it explicitly? Either because, in such a vulnerable position, he is afraid of being punished for his impertinence, or because recognizing the pretense of U.S. intervention would reveal that nothing stands in the way of what it has “already in possession.” In other words, Aury must keep the discussion on the level of pretenses, where his position is commensurate with—potentially even superior to—that of the U.S. To openly admit the concealed relations of the Affair would be to sacrifice his ability for a *serious* defense of Floridian sovereignty. This necessity for concealment supplies the farce with its comic tension.

There is strong evidence that Adams himself—but only privately—saw the claims of the Amelia Framers as funny. After the congressional neutrality-debates in early 1818, Adams wrote to his brother, referring to the Amelia Framers: “Surely to compare these heroes and Legislators with Sancho...is doing injustice to the moderation of the squire of the valiant knight of La Mancha. In all this tragic

<sup>67</sup> For example, in response to Aury’s Nov. 16 proclamation of the opening of elections and constitutional committee, “a resident of St. Marys wrote to the southern papers deriding the ‘farsical proclamation’ and mocked its republican pretenses.” From the *Charleston Courier*, quoted in Heckard, *The Crossroads of Empire*, 150.

<sup>68</sup> Heckard, *The Crossroads of Empire*, 174–75.

Comedy of passions for South America, which is [illegible] in our Country[,] there is an underplot, as yet but partially disclosed.”<sup>69</sup> Adams here draws a comparison between Don Quixote (the sham knight) and Sancho Panzo (his squire) to the governments of South America and the Amelia “Legislators,” respectively. Adams furthermore commends Sancho for his “moderation”: he, at least, acknowledged his limited role as a squire, whereas the Amelia government fancied *itself* a knight (that is, an independent nation). The letter suggests that in Adams’s eyes, the new republics based in Venezuela, Argentina, and elsewhere had an air of comedy—not in that they were illegitimate *per se*, but that they would never be able to reach their ideal as the U.S. had (of becoming accepted among the community of nations). If the South American republics were themselves comical—while maintaining an authentic, “tragic” element—then their outgrowth, the Republic of the Floridas, was doubly so.

Besides the fact that they controlled only a miniscule portion of the land they laid claim to (both East and West Florida, hence “the Floridas,” territory for which they had already begun issuing land grants),<sup>70</sup> two basic characteristics lent the Republic of the Floridas its hue of illegitimacy. First, the leaders and citizens lacked any credible form of nativity or bond to the land, and secondly, the romanticized, universal form of republican sovereignty was applied in a conspicuously utilitarian manner.

One of the crucial passages of Pazos’ *Exposition*, written without any context or explanation, responds obliquely to the first point: “[T]he diversity of people which composes an army, has never altered its *national character*: as long as they acknowledge the same power, they form but one body; as individuals of different origin, united under the same laws, form but one nation.”<sup>71</sup> On the level of statehood, here conflated with nationality, Pazos’ contention is airtight: states exist based upon a contract among citizens, irrespective of their birthplace. But the conspicuous fact that those residing in East Florida before the arrival of MacGregor were not in charge, and that the “heterogeneous set” under MacGregor and (later) Aury’s command hailed from North America, Europe, and to a lesser extent Central America and the Caribbean, undergirded the impression of a “nest of foreign Adventurers” the U.S. had promoted.<sup>72</sup> There was no apparent naturalness to the claim of patriotism or nationality coming from a group of foreign invaders, newly arrived.

Any romantic (and thus tragic) conception of an independent Republic of the Floridas cannot withstand the plain fact—acknowledged by most historians, and some sympathetic commentators of the day—that the Amelia Framers had only a temporary purpose in mind for the territory. John Skinner, the postmaster of Balti-

<sup>69</sup> Heckard, *The Crossroads of Empire*, 231.

<sup>70</sup> Bowman, “Vicente Pazos,” 282.

<sup>71</sup> Kanki, *The Exposition*, 26.

<sup>72</sup> For example, see Adams’s letter to the Special Commissioners. Manning, Document 44.

more, was in close communication with MacGregor while he was still touring the U.S. He wrote to John Adams, a month after the Spanish lost control of Amelia Island, to inform him of MacGregor's aims:

...he should immediately call on the inhabitants by proclamation to designate... some of their most respectable fellow citizens to form a constitution on the model of some of the adjoining States.... [He] would encourage the existing disposition of the People in that Section to confederate with the United States.... [I]n the meantime he would endeavor to hold them as the most eligible depot to collect and organize the supplies necessary to the establishment of South American independence. In connection with that great object he was inclined to view the temporary possession of the Floridas as under a provisional government as of the highest importance and utility.<sup>73</sup>

Skinner also emphasized the plan's utility for the United States. Since the invasion derived from a South American authority, Spain and Britain (Spain's ally at the time, and the primary threat of military retaliation in Florida) could not find the U.S. culpable for violating neutrality in taking possession of the land. A slightly different trajectory was later imagined by Gual, Pazos, and Aury. According to their plan, the Floridas would remain a dependency of Mexico until they became independent, "recognized as part of confederation of South America, but such recognition did not preclude the right of the people to join the confederation of the north, should the US desire to annex the territory."<sup>74</sup> This strategy is incongruous with the lofty argument put forward by Pazos, built upon the idea that national borders and self-determination are "sacred," political ends-unto-themselves.

The conception of the Republic of the Floridas resembles Blaufarb's suggestion of a "borderland variant on Latin American Independence...in which annexation rather than self-determination provided a way out of the Spanish monarchy."<sup>75</sup> Peculiar to the Amelian variant, however, was the factoring-in of a transitional period of self-determination that would precede annexation *in order to serve an external purpose*. For those sharing in this knowledge, part of the appearance of a farce (the lack of tragic consequences) was that the U.S. Executive and the Amelia Framers had no fundamental conflict of interests. In fact, their basic indistinguishability was the basis of the Spanish interpretation of events. Onis charged the U.S. with simulating the entire occupation from beginning to end in order to facilitate their ultimate annexation of the region. The obvious evidence, from Onis's perspective, was that the primary manpower and funds for MacGregor's expedition were drawn (privately) from the U.S.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>73</sup> MacGregor and Skinner, "Letters Relating to Macgregor's Attempted Conquest," 57.

<sup>74</sup> Bowman, "Vicente Pazos," 286.

<sup>75</sup> Blaufarb, "The Western Question," 750.

<sup>76</sup> Heckard, *The Crossroads of Empire*, 170.

In a way, though there is evidence against the Spanish allegation of collusion,<sup>77</sup> their general perception is confirmed by the fact that both the Amelia Framers and the Monroe administration were both (if not together) working towards the same goal: the absorption of East Florida into the United States. The leadership in Fernandina simply tried to cut itself—and its allies—into the deal. Meanwhile, Washington possessed the final decision-making authority in that its military was incomparably larger, and that no other foreign powers could be expected to intervene on behalf of the Amelia government. Both of its options were in effect simulations of national sovereignty. The state on Amelia Island did not control East Florida; nor did the Spanish. The Amelia Framers' plan was to simulate national sovereignty over the Floridas in order to transfer the territory to the United States. In choosing to occupy and hold Amelia indefinitely, the U.S. simulated Spanish control over the territory so that it could credibly buy it from them later on.

The farce is grounded in the perception that, one way or another, the entire debate was inconsequential to the outcome for Florida. Yet the necessity of counter-balancing that perception in the historical telling, of maintaining its dramatic tension with the surface of legal posturing, is that the legal questions at play were indeed consequential. The hidden pragmatism of both the Amelia Framers and the U.S. Executive might suggest the emptiness of national sovereignty as a political-legal construct, yet this emptiness had to remain hidden precisely in that both sides relied upon it. In other words, there was no desire to leave the legal construct behind, because the construct itself wielded considerable power. In the telling of the event, there is no escaping this paradox.

### *Conclusion*

The conflict between the U.S. and the government on Amelia Island can be emplotted as a farce, a category of satire in which the contradiction of a character's words or actions against their context is intensified to an absurd extreme. The emplotment builds upon the farcical elements of contemporary accounts, which alternatively classified the Republic of the Floridas as an outpost of pirates pretending to be a sovereign nation, or the U.S. government as a group of land-grabbers pretending to defend international law and order. The realistic observation in tension with each party's posturing was that abstract legal relationships were ultimately subservient to concrete relations of force. Eventual U.S. possession of the territory was seen as a given. The legal arguments thrown together on either side were only simulations to facilitate this possession: either the simulation of independent sovereignty on the part of the Amelia group, or the simulation of continuous Spanish sovereignty on the part of the U.S.

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<sup>77</sup> U.S. officials, suspecting a privateering operation, stopped a vital shipment of supplies from N.Y. to Amelia after its successful seizure in June. Head, *Privateers of the Americas*, 103.

By identifying the Affair as a farce, I do not mean to prompt the facile conclusion that international politics was just a charade. Anderson, for instance, describes another theorist of nationalism as “so anxious to show that nationalism masquerades under false pretenses that he assimilates ‘invention’ to ‘fabrication’ and ‘falsity’, rather than to ‘imagining’ and ‘creation’”. In this way he implies that true communities exist, which can be advantageously juxtaposed to nations.”<sup>78</sup> On one level, there is a sound equivalence between the United States and the Republic of the Floridas as legal fictions. But the urge to laugh at this equivalence should not be ignored: it suggests an opposing truth about how international politics works, which likewise cannot be accepted as the whole truth.

The Amelia Framers walked along the edge of this contradiction, and the driving intention of this study is to grapple with their self-awareness. If we attribute them self-awareness, we must also recognize that they were not mental prisoners to any fixed notion of nationality. Mongey writes generally of itinerant patriots that “[t]hey did not think in terms of transition from English, French, Spanish subjects into US-American, Haitian, or Mexican citizens; they barely thought in ‘national’ terms; rather, they thought of themselves as members of the same republican community—regardless of their place of birth or residence—who were fighting to create a republic that conformed to their political ideals.”<sup>79</sup>

What is missing from Mongey’s summary is precisely the slander that she works to overcome, namely that itinerant patriots were a bunch of pirates and adventurers. The piratical portrayal of Aury and MacGregor has its grain of truth. MacGregor himself went on to establish “Poyais” in 1820, which Klaus calls the “quintessential fraud of Britain’s first modern investment bubble.”<sup>80</sup> MacGregor sold land titles and government bonds for a “potential colony” (advertised as already existent and thriving) in an uninhabited area in modern-day Honduras. Settlers, carrying detailed instructions from MacGregor to establish “bureaucracy, property rights, taxation and fiat currency,” arrived from England to find the area deserted.<sup>81</sup> A massive opportunity arose from reconsidering and toying with the concept of the nation-state precisely when a new model of political legitimacy came into currency. To seize this opportunity was to open up an ethical no-man’s land, and the beneficiaries walked many paths within it.

<sup>78</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

<sup>79</sup> Mongey, *Cosmopolitan Republics*, 4.

<sup>80</sup> Klaus, *Virtue is Dead*, 98.

<sup>81</sup> Klaus, *Virtue is Dead*, 120.