From American California to Californian America: internal Transnationalism and Settler-Colonial Expansion

Nathaniel Sikand-Youngs

University of Nottingham

ABSTRACT
Transnationalism is largely understood as a cross-national or international phenomenon, but the globalising forces of imperialism, capitalism, and decolonisation also undermine national hegemony from within the nation itself. This underexamined concept of ‘internal transnationalism’ is vital to settler-colonial spaces like California in its early US statehood, where national sovereignty is decoupled from national territory. The transnational implications of western expansion prompted different spatial imaginaries of California under US rule, two of which this article focuses on. James Mason Hutchings in his touristic Hutchings’ California Magazine (1856–1861) – most famous for promoting the Yosemite Valley in its debut issue but critically neglected thereafter – portrays an American California as a ‘pointillist’ geography, in which American sovereignty emanates from myriad colonial outposts rather than being a property of the land itself. After the Civil War, John Wesley Powell and Clarence King, two federal surveyors conventionally seen as scientific adversaries, each pointed towards a bioregional Californian America, where local environmental conditions supersede national sovereignty. Through these case studies, I contend that California as a settler-colonial space cannot be taken for granted as domestically ‘American’, and that California and America instead represent a transnational pairing.

Imperialism and global capitalism have produced an interconnected world where the nation-state can no longer be taken for granted as the base unit of social organisation and historical action. Instead, cultural, political, and economic activities and networks increasingly detach themselves from national formations of territory, identity, and authority. For scholars of the United States who accept those propositions, as Shelley Fisher Fishkin does in her landmark American Studies Association presidential address of 2004, the concomitant ‘transnational turn’ almost always means ‘looking beyond the nation’s borders’ so that they ‘no longer delimit the subject of our study’ (2005, 20 and 22). Ironically, while providing a much needed corrective to the traditional hubris of the field, this dominant approach to transnationalism actually relies on borders to demarcate itself: to extend beyond them becomes the one defining condition of the transnational, which then stands as the antithesis of ‘mononational narratives’ and ‘single-nation

CONTACT Nathaniel Sikand-Youngs nathaniel.sikand-youngs1@nottingham.ac.uk Department of American and Canadian Studies, University Park, Nottingham, NG7 2RD, UK
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genealogies’ (Ramazani 2009, 23). Critics rightly observe that such an embrace of the cross-border risks affirming the neoliberal conception of a borderless world for capital (Curiel et al. 2000, 8; Voelz 2011, 362), yet it also poses the more fundamental problem of reducing transnationalism to a near synonym for the cross- and inter-national. Scholars then struggle to disentangle the concept from the ‘discourses of internationalism, cosmopolitanism, and globalization’ and the critical approaches of comparative or global studies (Fishkin 2009, para. 12; Jay 2010, 5; Hornung and Morgan 2019, 2). Often the terms simply become interchangeable (e.g. Rhodes 2012, 900; Nischik 2016). This both reflects and reinforces an obfuscation of the distinct purview, the distinguishing raison d’être, of a transnational approach, which is to ‘decenter the nation’ in a globalising world (Goyal 2017, 1). In terms of the US, that means providing a framework for how ‘American studies exceeding the nation-state might be practiced’ – in other words, an ‘American studies without “America” as the object of study’ (Rhodes 2012, 900). The nation-state, if we really are to look beyond its borders, is defined by its authority, spatiality, and sociality rather than its scale or extent; ‘exceeding’ and ‘decenter[ing]’ it are therefore matters of power and structure, not magnitude or expanse. The multinational corporation and the ethno-cultural diaspora – perhaps the two paradigms of transnationalism – each represent a border-crossing scale jump upwards from the level of the nation, but this in itself means only that they are inter- or supra-national in their breadth. What instead constitutes their trans-nationality is how they, in the course of advancing global integration, supersede a nation-centric organisation of political power, social life, and our own scholarly inquiry.

In an increasingly interconnected world, transnationalism emerges then in dialectical opposition to the primacy of the nation-state, not its ‘internality’ as conventionally framed (Hornung and Morgan 2019, 2). Yet processes of globalisation, from capitalism and imperialism through to decolonisation and neoliberalism, undermine and transcend that hegemony as much through fractures and formations within the nation as interactions and exchanges across its borders (Voelz 2011, 365; Agnew 2005, viii). After all, nothing else has brought the United States closer to dissolution than its own internal sectionalism, while today the most plausible socio-political risks to an American national futurity reside in the domestic sphere. Just as an aversion to the belligerent unilateralism of US foreign policy in the 2000s motivated scholars to emphasise the integrative, international side of transnationalism (Fishkin 2005, 20; Goyal 2017, 4), so too current political volatilities – stoked in large part by grievances against globalisation – should occasion overdue attention to how transnationalism encompasses not just the interconnections between nations but the accompanying disconnections inside them, whether along regional, ethnic, class, ideological, or some other social fault line. Indeed, increasing global integration is so fundamentally intra- as it is inter-national that Erik Swyngedouw even proposes that we use the portmanteau ‘glocalisation’ (2004). However we term it, globalisation broadly conceived has rendered the myth of impermeable borders a divisive (but by no means fringe) dogma, meaning that the prevailing orientation of transnational American studies towards an interrogation of ‘the “naturalness” of political, geographical, and epistemological boundaries’ engages merely a contentious, not the consensus, basis of the modern multicultural nation (Fishkin 2009, para. 2). Instead, the integral constitutive claim of an American nationhood – the very thing that a transnational approach intends to scrutinise – depends much more on
the impression of an internal sovereignty and a cohesive polity; those foundations are only reinforced by a transnationalism focused on the inter- at the expense of the intra-national.

Few settings demonstrate more provocatively the need for a language and framework of internal transnationalism than settler-colonial space, where the sovereignty of the ruling nation is recent, contested, and rootless. At what point do the relations, customs, and practices of the imperial power cease to be extraneous to that annexed land, its environmental conditions, and the peoples already there? And for as long as the governing nation does remain in that sense ‘foreign’ to the land that it occupies, does the relation between the two become transnational, despite being located entirely within the borders of one country? Those questions are foundational to the development of California under the rule of the United States. Neither its annexation by the US in 1848 nor its obtainment of statehood two years later identify when, how, and to what extent California became American, at least not in any more socially substantive sense of the term than the designation of a particular national jurisdiction. Alta California – the province ruled first by the Spanish and then later by the Mexican Empire – ceased to exist as a political territory with the US conquest, but its Californio culture and society did not disappear. Likewise, Indigenous peoples who avoided the Spanish Mission system still maintained their diverse original ways of living, albeit persecuted and in fewer numbers, in the interior Central Valley as California changed imperial hands. Similarly in the natural world, the disparate range of environments in California frequently existed beyond a collective American ecological knowledge and experience. In short, becoming a territory and then state of the United States meant only that California (or indeed any other annexed area) now belonged to an American political territory, not necessarily that it had become part of an American national space. The decoupling of these two spheres of nationhood through the globalising process of settler-colonial expansion represents a condition of transnationality, albeit produced below rather than above the level of the nation. This is not to say that developments and interactions on a larger scale were any less important to early US California. Prospectors from across the Americas and the wider world joined the gold rush in the late 1840s and early 1850s. Chinese labourers built the first transcontinental railroad at the beginning of the 1860s, and capital and commodities flowed into and out of the region in a sprawling international market (Robbins 1994). But the point is that these cross-national relations actually advanced the sovereignty of the nation-state, supporting the reproduction of a US economic regime, racial hierarchy, and spatial contiguity in its new westernmost state. To call them ‘transnational’ simply because they traverse national boundaries is not only misleading; it also elides how the very existence of an American ‘State of California’ is intrinsically transnational to begin with.

Indeed, the apparent ‘foreignness’ of California in relation to the US pervaded American writings on the region from as early as the 1840s all the way into the twentieth century. Comparisons of the so-called golden state with Mediterranean countries were especially common (Starr 1973, 365–414; Fender 1981, 9 and 123). Exemplifying those tendencies, William Henry Bishop, a novelist from Connecticut, wrote of his travels through the vineyards of northern California that ‘the surroundings are as exclusively Italian or Portuguese. One feels very much abroad in such scenes on American soil’ (1883, 359). These recurring analogies with Southern Europe proved a staple in
promotional writing on the state (Sackman 2005, 3–4). But for all the alluring exoticism intended by such descriptions of California as ‘our Mediterranean . . . our Italy’ (Warner 1890, 820), they also contain a more radical and unsettling obverse: that the foreignness here resides neither in the unfamiliar landscape nor its existing inhabitants but rather in the very nation that claims sovereignty over them. The latent threat to national cohesion emerges more clearly in an 1861 entry from the journal of geological surveyor William Brewer. He remarks of the old Spanish Mission at Santa Barbara in southern California that ‘I find it hard to realize that I am in America – in the United States, the young and vigorous republic as we call her – when I see these ruins. They carry me back again to the Old World with its decline and decay with its histories of war and blood and strife and desolation, with its conflict of religions and races’ (1949, 58 [original emphasis]). This understanding, even anxiety, that western space was ‘simultaneously national and foreign’ provided the very basis for the idea of a frontier (Hsu 2010, 33), which was essentially an attempt to nullify the transnational implications of land being territorially of the United States but not yet integrated with the rest of the nation. By proclaiming this liminality as the archetype of a supposedly buccaneering and masculinised national identity, frontier narratives repurpose the cultural, economic, and ecological unfamiliarity of those marginal regions into hallmarks of a quintessentially ‘American’ space.

As much as the frontier still dominates scholarly discourse of the far west, it was not the only settler-colonial spatial imaginary to respond to the transnational incongruities of a US-ruled California. One such alternative geography is exemplified by the San Francisco-based Hutchings’ California Magazine, which ran from 1856 to 1861. Designed broadly to promote tourism to the region, the magazine portrays the new state as alluring, accessible, and safe for American exploration and habitation, but only when the key establishments of US rule – from post offices and army bases to Anglo settlements – are proximate, conspicuous, and dominant. Wherever American power seems remote or contested, the Californian landscape in Hutchings’ returns to a state of social, cultural, and ecological unfamiliarity and inaccessibility: a far more subversive kind of ‘foreignness’ from the benign exoticism underlying the popular comparisons of California with Mediterranean Europe. To borrow a term used to characterise US imperialism after the Second World War, Hutchings’ depicts a ‘pointillist’ geography, where settler-colonial sovereignty emanates from myriad concentrated outposts of US power rather than being inherited in the territorial status of the land itself.

A second pattern of spatial representation emerged in the wake of the Civil War when a surge in American westward migration prompted the federal government to fund four so-called ‘great surveys’ of the far west, which would map in unprecedented detail its natural resources and industrial potential. Two of those survey directors, the geologists John Wesley Powell and Clarence King, each insisted that a continent-spanning nation could not be spatially cohesive and instead needed to adapt to the contours of local climates, environments, ecosystems, and cultures. This ‘bioregional’ perspective redraws political power, social identification, and spatial sovereignty along subnational rather than national lines. Powell and King’s intervention anticipated the subsequent emergence in Gilded Age California of a socially conscious and reformist literature, which broadly saw the state as defined less by its American jurisdiction and more by non-sovereign social relations and antagonisms, from class and racial conflict to rapacious ecological destruction. By tracing a line from Hutchings’ magazine to the later scientific literature of
Powell and King, this article contends that writers in the decades after the gold rush became progressively more insistent that the United States itself was a transnational presence in California. Especially after the Civil War, regional literature increasingly (but by no means consistently) suggested that an American sovereignty could not become ‘domestic’ to California nearly as easily as the teleology of the frontier assured, if indeed it could at all.

Hutchings’ magazine and the writings of Powell and King each depict a transnationality internal and intrinsic to an expanded US through two contrasting geographies: a pointillist American California, whose interstices reflect a protracted interregnum before the full establishment of US hegemony, and a bioregional Californian America, where environmental regionality supersedes political nationality in the production of social space. Contrary then to the self-defensive, almost apologetic admission in the recent History of California Literature that focusing on ‘the writing of a particular state’ appears ‘quaint’ when scholarly discourse seems so interested in far larger-scale ‘global relations, comparative literatures, and diaspora studies’ (Allmendinger 2015, 5), the widespread treatment of those supranational subjects as the only possible sphere for transnationalism actually lends a new relevance and purpose to the study of subnational regions. Indeed, the need and justification for a more locally focused internal transnationalism is already apparent in existing literature. Scholars widely frame transnational interventions as anti-nationalist in their intent; in studies of the US, that means challenging an American exceptionalism whose functions are to ‘shore up some sense that the United States is an internally and internationally coherent body’ and to create an impression of national ‘spatial homogeneity’ (Rhodes 2012, 902 [my emphasis]; Hsu 2010, 4). The deviation of transnational studies in practice from that broad interrogation of the presumed cohesion of the nation to a narrower critique of its proclaimed self-containment occasionally manifests as a perceived vacancy for an entirely new approach, most notably with the call for a ‘postnational American Studies’ (Curiel et al. 2000).

In an American context, only scholars in Indigenous and Native Studies regularly contest the prevailing treatment of transnationalism as a near synonym for the cross- or inter-national, recognising instead ‘the existence of domestic dependent nations – literally internal trans-nations – within the boundaries of . . . the United States’ (Deloria 2009, 371). Shari M. Huhndorf (2009, 1–3), Carolyn Sorisio (2012), and Joseph Bauerkmper (2014, 399–401) for example each characterise cross-tribal allegiances and identifications between distinct Indigenous groups as transnational relations inside the borders of the American nation. In another similar study, Philip J. Deloria encourages ‘scholars of US empire and culture’ more broadly to take up the ‘comparative opportunities . . . found in internal transnationalism’; suggestively, he does not here specify that such transnationalism from within resides exclusively in Indigenous societies. Indeed, important and enlightening work in the past two decades has engaged with the same issues of transnationality (even if not using that term explicitly) that we find exemplified in California – how American expansion ‘creates a hybrid liminal space that is neither fully outside the United States nor comfortably a part of it’ (Kaplan 2002, 11–12). Those studies have typically focused on, and brought much-needed scholarly attention to, overseas US possessions like the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Hawai‘i, where that liminality was (and in some cases still is) both obvious and codified through the legal
status of unincorporated territory (see, Kaplan 2002; Love 2004; Immerwahr 2020). This leaves room for a study of California to contribute to the field a discussion of how internal transnationalism can occur not only through American imperial expansion beyond the continent but also from settler-colonialism within the contiguous United States itself.

**Hutchings’ California Magazine and a Pointillist American California**

That *Hutchings’ California Magazine* could exist at all makes it a worthy subject for a conventional transnational study, one orientated towards the inter- rather than intra-national. Its founder, James Mason Hutchings, was born in Towcester in Northamptonshire, England, in 1820. In his early twenties, he saw an exhibition in Birmingham of George Catlin’s paintings of Native Americans in the trans-Mississippi West. Inspired by that encounter with America in England, he soon became an Englishman in America, moving first to New York in 1848 and then in the following year to the gold fields of California, joining a global rush of prospectors. Hutchings struck the proverbial mother lode, but not with pick, shovel, or pan; rather, he found his fame and fortune in the regional printing press. In 1853, the Placerville Herald newspaper published his ‘Miner’s Ten Commandments’, an often humorous, utterly sanguine, but essentially sincere code of conduct. In the gold fields and mining towns, its fanciful decrees may well have gone largely unobserved, from ‘thou shalt not steal . . . from thy fellow-miner’ to ‘neither shalt thou destroy thyself by getting “tight,” nor “stewed,” nor “high,” nor “corned,” nor “half-seas over,” nor “three sheets in the wind,” by drinking’ (Hutchings 1853). But in the literary marketplace, the piece was a roaring success, reportedly selling close to 100,000 copies when it was reprinted as an illustrated letter sheet (Henkin 2006, 128). With revenue from those sales, Hutchings in 1856 established his eponymous magazine, which aspired to promote California to prospective tourists in particular (Witschi 2015, 80; Holmes 2015, 89). He and his lithographers personally travelled to the locations profiled for the feature article in each issue; Hutchings later recalled having ‘spent some two years and four month’s [sic] time, and over $6000, before a single line was ever published or an engraving made’ (1901, 10). Despite therefore producing ‘by far the most ambitious and costly publication among its contemporaries in California’, Hutchings subsidised his title throughout its print run, keeping the price competitive with regional rivals and selling subscriptions at a significant loss (Olmsted 1962, v).

*Hutchings’* was therefore a magazine of a new multicultural state on the Pacific coast, by a man from the English East Midlands, and for a readership predominantly based in the eastern United States. In this respect, the text exemplifies – in the prevailing internationalist sense of the term – the transnational social fabric of early US California. Yet to achieve its primary objective of attracting tourists to the new state, *Hutchings’* engaged much more with an *internal* as opposed to that external transnationalism. Its primary method of promotion is to describe ‘you’ the reader traversing, exploring, and interacting with the places in the article, thereby assuring a largely out-of-state audience that the new state is as safe and enjoyable to visit in person as it is to experience vicariously through the narrative on the page. But when the magazine turns to areas or subjects where American rule is still contested or insecure, the ‘you’ disappears from the article, thus
keeping the reader at a distance from the places in California that remain socially ‘foreign’ to the United States. This promotional strategy presupposes that the reader benefits from a US spatial order: the exclusion of those who do not is for the most part implicit, though it surfaces for example when one issue expresses its ‘hop[e] that the reader has received very interesting correspondence from his friends’ during its tour of the gender-segregated San Francisco post office (1858, 294 [my emphasis]). The magazine also presumes that settler-colonial society is safe, stable, and sustainable once its dominion over the land is clearly established, a claim that the scientific surveyors who came after the Civil War would scrutinise much more closely. But where Hutchings’ made no assumptions was in its awareness that national jurisdiction did not reliably indicate its actual sovereignty, least of all in settler-colonial space.

The transnationally conscious approach to promoting tourism emerges in the very first issue of Hutchings’, where the main feature article introduces the then largely unknown Yosemite Valley to an American readership. Hutchings, who in these pieces always leaves himself as an unattributed author, writes that ‘on descending the mountain, towards the valley, the first object that attracts your notice, and invites your wondering admiration is “The Giant’s Tower,” . . . Before you is spread the beautiful green valley’ (Hutchings 1856a, 3). The article continues to describe ‘you’ the reader both seeing and physically exploring the Yosemite Valley, which, with the accompanying illustrations, mimics the same ‘impression of traveling over the landscape’ that the moving panorama also did at the time, often with the same intention – to transmit the spectacle of the American West to a wide audience (Avery 1999). ‘Advancing up the valley, and threading your way among the trees . . . every few steps presents a change of scene’ (3); ‘you secure safe footing . . . to witness another magnificent fall’ (4). Indeed, the touristic second-person voice proves to be contingent on ‘secure safe footing’ more broadly conceived. Halfway through the article, Hutchings turns to recount the recent history of Yosemite, where a state-sponsored American militia, the Mariposa Battalion, launched a war of aggression against the Ahwahneecs, the peoples indigenous to the valley (Madley 2017, 189–94). Recounting those events, Hutchings immediately evacuates the ‘you’ from the suddenly dangerous landscape, which he now approaches through a detached past tense narration (4–8).

While indicating just how recently (and brutally) American dominion over the land was established, Hutchings does not undermine his promotional objectives. He assures his readers that Yosemite in the present day is now devoid of any Indigenous inhabitants who might contest US rule over the valley. Approaching the end of the article, he describes how ‘when we arrived there, scarcely an Indian track could be seen. The trails were overgrown with grass, and nothing remained but the whitened bones of animals, and an old acorn-post or two, to tell of the once flourishing settlement, and numerous tribe of the Yo-Ham-i-tes’ (8). Indeed, that misspelling of Yosemite, repeated throughout and even in the title of the article, results from Hutchings having misheard the name when it was spoken by Kos-sum, one of his two Indian guides. The presence – though not the names, which appear only briefly in a later book (Hutchings 1886, 85–86) – of Kos-sum and the second guide So-pin during Hutchings’ journey through the Yosemite is barely any more conspicuous in the article than those vanishing signs of the ‘numerous tribe’ that once inhabited the valley. Hutchings mentions the pair for the first time only in passing in the penultimate paragraph of the seven-page feature. By stressing the absence
of the original Ahwahnecee residents of the valley and obscuring those Indigenous people (Kos-sum and So-pin) who return there, Hutchings presents the Yosemite as securely and undisputedly white American land, even while it remained virtually inaccessible to settler-colonial society.

In its closing sentences, the article prophecises that ‘this valley . . . will become famous as a place of resort’ (8). Fanciful though it might have seemed at the time, the prediction proved correct. In 1864, less than a decade after *Hutchings*’ launched, Abraham Lincoln signed into law the Yosemite Grant Act, which gave ownership of the valley to the State of California ‘upon the express conditions that the premises shall be held for public use, resort, and recreation’. This land use designation was the first of its kind in US history and a harbinger of the national park system. Contemporary commentators and later scholars each broadly recognise Hutchings for having ‘made [Yosemite] known to the outside world through the medium of his magazine’ (Cummins (1893/1982), 42; see, Kurutz 2000, 308–09; Huntley 2011, 5–6). In one way, the role of its very first issue in promoting Yosemite virtually guarantees *Hutchings* and its eponymous founder a mention in any literary, historical, or cultural survey of California (e.g. Starr 1973, 181; Holmes 2015, 89). But in another respect, that recognition paradoxically leaves the magazine utterly neglected, with a dearth of critical interest in its 59 subsequent issues. The Yosemite piece may very well be the most important, but we cannot fully understand it and its evidently efficacious method of promotion in isolation from all the other feature articles from the magazine’s five-year print run, which were often far more representative of contemporary tourism anyway: typical leisure travel in California entailed daytrips from San Francisco to its immediate natural surroundings, not extravagant adventures into the remote interior (Kurutz 2000, 305–06).

Reading all of the *Hutchings*’ feature articles in tandem, attune to how certain techniques for representing California recur while others do not, we see much more clearly that the emphasis on superlative scenery merely demonstrates to readers why they should want to go to the Yosemite Valley. Instead, it is the forced Indigenous displacement – proof of a supposedly uncontested American sovereignty – that means ‘you’ the intended audience actually can visit, see, and explore the place, first vicariously as a reader of the text and then later physically as a tourist. Nowhere in the magazine demonstrates that relation more forcefully than its depictions of the substantial American military presence in California. In one article, we the reader join the narrator on a steamboat en route from San Francisco to Sacramento when we make a detour to Alcatraz Island, which at the time was a US Army base charged with deterring both Indigenous attacks and incursions by rival imperial powers. Hutchings describes how ‘the first building you notice after landing at the wharf . . . has embrasures for 24 pound howitzers’, reassuring us that, with a one-million-dollar appropriation for further fortification beyond the ‘94 guns’ already installed, ‘a murderous fire could be poured upon its assailants at all parts of the island’ (Hutchings 1859c, 6–7). Owing to a tight schedule, the narrator then informs us – a participant in the journey – that ‘we must not linger here, not even in imagination’ (7). Likewise, in the main feature of the previous issue of *Hutchings*, a touristic ‘you’ explores San Francisco within the safe orbit of a nearby US Army installation. The narrator begins by inviting ‘the pleasure of the reader’s company’, which is realised throughout the article with the participatory use of ‘we’ and ‘us’ (Hutchings 1859b, 530, 533–34, and 536). Hutchings then points out another
establishment of US hard power: the army base at Fort Point, located on the northern edge of the San Francisco Peninsula, just beneath where the Golden Gate Bridge would later span. (536). By serving as proof of an American sovereignty over an otherwise new and unfamiliar landscape, the US military base performs the same reassuring role in Hutchings’ that it did in the journals of early gold rush settlers a decade earlier (see, Fender 1981, 66–67).

Projections of US power in and control over the region provide the foundation for the reader’s presence in the locations being described. When those are absent or obscure, the ‘you’ in the narrative is sidelined. In the most remote setting of any writing in the entire magazine, Hutchings describes his tour of the Farallon Islands. The islands were graphically at the very margins of the American imperial sphere, territorially part of the State of California but located in the Pacific Ocean some thirty miles west of San Francisco. After landing on the island, the narrator turns to address us, ‘Reader, were you ever seasick?’ (Hutchings 1856b, 50). Unusually for Hutchings’, it is ambiguous here whether the reference is to events within the text, in this case our imaginative participation in the preceding voyage, or to the reader’s real-life experiences. The reader’s marginal position in relation to the narrative voice persists on the island itself, where Hutchings’s narrator lapses uncharacteristically from an inclusive present tense to a non-participatory past tense, leaving little scope for us to feel encompassed by the ‘we’: ‘looking at the wonders on every side, we were astonished that we had heard so little about them’ (52). The accompanying illustrations suggest that such an exclusionary narration may well be preferable for the reader, depicting white visitors to the island – presumably members of the narrator’s party – in various states of distress and embarrassment, including throwing up over the side of a boat and being almost lifted off the ground by the mouth of a sea lion (Figures 1 and 2).

But halfway through the feature, Hutchings turns from the natural features and wildlife of the apparently unpeopled island to observe for the first time an object indicative of American control over the Farallons, which suddenly restores the position of ‘you’ the reader within the landscape. ‘Now, with the reader’s permission, we will leave the birds and animals . . . and take a walk up to the lighthouse’ (54). Implying maritime traffic, the lighthouse represents the first evidence in the landscape of what Hutchings has.

Figure 1. (Hutchings 1856b, 50). Public Domain, Google-digitised. Courtesy of HathiTrust.
so far articulated only as an abstract concept: that the islands are a significant resource for the US mainland, providing ‘vast quantity of eggs . . . annually gathered, for the California market’ (49). Having made visible that the sphere of domestic American trade encompasses the Farallons (even if the accompanying ecological destruction remains ignored), Hutchings proceeds with his usual practice of placing the reader in the landscape alongside his narrative voice. ‘Let us watch [the sea lions] for a moment . . . we are very near them’ (55); ‘through the arch you can see a ship that is just passing’ (56); ‘let us not linger too long here’ (57); ‘from this point we can get an excellent view’ (57). With the lighthouse marking the economic proximity of the US mainland, the remote islands become as much a part of a traversable national space as a centre of American power like the San Francisco branch of the US Mint, which ‘the reader’ explores and interacts with in a later issue of Hutchings’ in exactly the same way as they do here on the Farallons (1856c, 146–47). Such faith in the capacity of settler-colonial processes to overcome geographical and environmental conditions proves a sharp point of contrast between Hutchings’ and the postbellum surveyors of California.

The same alignment of the touristic ‘you’ with visible demonstrations of a secure American dominion occurs in the remote landscapes of interior California too. Despite its rural setting, the feature ‘Scenes in the Valleys and Mountains of California’ from the May 1859 issue is replete with evidence of American colonisation in the environment. The accompanying engravings show rugged, undeveloped landscapes, but in their foregrounds, every river is traversed by a vessel, nearly every flat has houses and log cabins, and every town suggests thriving local commerce and culture (Figures 3 and 4). Against that backdrop, the narrator encourages us to join directly in the exploration and observation of the region. ‘If the reader has no objection, we will climb the mountain [Diablo] – at least, in imagination – and see what further discoveries we can make’ (Hutchings 1859a, 483). Even that parenthetical concession to the fact that we travel vicariously as opposed to physically appears forgotten once we reach the summit, where ‘the sight of the glorious panorama unrolled at our feet, we need not tell you, amply repays us for our early ride’ (484, my emphasis), as though we are actually present with the narrator and witness to the same view. From the summit, the reader sees

![Image of a depiction of lions, captioned: "He thinks he will take a young calf home, but his parents raise objections." ](124 N. SIKAND-YOUNGS)

Figure 2. (Hutchings 1856b, 51). Public Domain, Google-digitised. Courtesy of HathiTrust.
the Pacific Ocean; the city, and part of the bay of San Francisco; Fort Point; the Golden Gate; San Pablo and Suisun Bays; the Government works at Mare Island; Vallejo; Benicia; the valleys . . . with their rivers, creeks and sloughs, in all their tortuous windings; the cities of Stockton and Sacramento; and the great line of the snow-covered Sierras; with numerous villages dotting the pine forests on the lower mountain range—are all spread out before you.

(484)

Compare that scene of conspicuous American development in California ‘all spread out before you’ with another feature on Californian mountain landscapes from Hutchings’ three years earlier, this time based deeper in the interior of the state. ‘Packing in the Mountains of California’ concerns the perilous occupation of transporting freight across the ‘rugged and almost inaccessible mountains’ (Hutchings 1856d, 241). Here, American commodity capital – ‘buggies, windows, boxes, barrels, bars of iron, chairs, tables, plows’ (244) – circulates not by the industrial marvels of railway or steamer but rather on the backs of overburdened and exhausted mules. Hutchings cites myriad examples of the animals, their loads, and occasionally the packers themselves perishing in their work. Arresting illustrations make plain the dangers (Figures 5 and 6). In one incident, Hutchings notes that a printing press intended for the Yreka Herald – a northern Californian newspaper most cited now for
having acknowledged a ‘war of extermination’ in its reportage on the treatment of Indigenous people (Madley 2017, 39) – fell down a mountain along with the mule carrying it and the rest of the 430-pound load (245). In this environment where the flow of American capital is so precarious, with such high rates of both human and material losses, Hutchings never describes the scenery from the point of view of ‘you’ the reader and only very sparingly from a collective ‘we’. Instead, he adopts an impersonal voice: ‘one is astonished to see the often singular goods that are often packed across the Trinity and Scott mountains’ (244); ‘on the trail . . . there is a hollow tree, measuring thirty five feet in diameter’ (246). Such a dissociation of the reader from the landscape has nothing to do with the visual qualities of the scenes, which Hutchings often acclaims: ‘it is truly astonishing to see . . . these useful animals pack their heavy loads’ (245); ‘there is something very pleasing and picturesque in the sight of a large pack of train mules quietly descending a hill’ (246). Rather, the reader finds
themselves estranged from the land because the harsh, forbidding environment supplants the American nation as the hegemon in the mountains.

Over the course of Hutchings’ print run, the patterns of presence and absence of ‘you’ in the landscape trace the variegated coverage of American sovereignty across California. The cartographic portrait that results does not depict a straightforward frontier, neatly dividing an uninterrupted national realm from an equally unbroken but inexorably receding wilderness. Instead, the California of Hutchings’ more closely resembles what Rankin (2016, 4) and later Immerwahr (2020, 18) call a ‘pointillist geography’, where imperial power emanates from myriad individual points that exercise a sphere of influence over putatively autonomous countries, as opposed to occupying whole territories in the way that a frontier visualises. For Rankin and Immerwahr those ‘points’ are the hundreds of US military bases scattered across the globe after the Second World War, whereas in Hutchings’ they take the form of towns, post offices, even a lighthouse, as well as military installations. Projected abroad, such pointillism represents a geography of empire, but it becomes something else within the boundaries of the metropole: a spatial metaphor for an ongoing settler-colonialism where sovereign authority remains patchy across its enlarged area of jurisdiction, leaving transnational interstices internal to the nation itself.

Scientific Literature and the Californian Bioregion

As much as it might seem subversive to suggest that American California was still not yet coterminous with the territorial extent of the state over a decade after its annexation by

Figure 6. (Hutchings 1856d, 247). Public Domain, Google-digitised. Courtesy of HathiTrust
the US, *Hutchings’* neither intends to be nor actually reads like a radical publication. Its representation of an internal transnationalism was all in service of the promotion of tourism. The magazine’s pointillist depiction of American California differs from a normative settler-colonial geography in form and appearance but not political substance: the closing of the frontier merely becomes the filling of the blank spaces between the dots. But what happens when it is no longer taken for granted that those spaces can be filled, or even that the points themselves are securely imprinted – in other words, if the very nature of national expansion so far is unsustainable? The federally employed scientists who surveyed the rapidly developing Far West after the Civil War grappled with precisely those questions. Two of them in particular, the geologist Clarence King and the future second director of the US Geological Survey John Wesley Powell, realised that the social relations and environmental assumptions that prevailed in the eastern United States could not be reproduced with reliable success on the other side of the continent. They showed instead that the existing American models of social organisation as well as of ecological and geological knowledge would need to be remade for the specific conditions of different western regions. For Powell and King, ecology, geology, and climate all inevitably supersede national sovereignty as the primary factor determining the organisation and development of the western United States. This bioregional schema is therefore at the same time a transnational geography. Unlike the pointillism of *Hutchings’,* Powell and King see the disparity between national sovereignty and a now continent-spanning national territory not as a symptom of a transition to American colonial rule, but instead as the indefinite feature of an American polity spread beyond its realm of environmental viability.

Powell and King’s common orientation towards a bioregional model of settler-colonialism has gone largely unnoticed. Instead, scholars typically juxtapose a simplified version of Powell’s uniformitarian geology, where the Earth and its organisms evolve at a gradual unerring rate because the forces that act upon it are constant, with an equally reductive interpretation of King’s catastrophist argument that periodic moments of violent transformation like mass extinctions and volcanic eruptions primarily cause geological and biological change (Stegner 1962, 118 and 153; Goetzmann 1972, 563–66; Worster 2001, 313–16; Lundberg 2004, 187–88). That dichotomy traditionally leaves King worse off, with historians having denounced his ideas as ‘plenty of speculation and plenty of pure nonsense’ and ‘not to be taken seriously as science’ (Stegner 1962, 118; Worster 2001, 316). King’s reputation has made a partial comeback in the new millennium, with scientists themselves leading the way. Eldredge (2019, 251) and Aalto (2004, 49) go so far to identify principles in King’s writings that anticipate modern developments in their respective fields of palaeontology and geology. Increasingly, historical reappraisals of King attribute the conventional dismissal of his ideas to residual outrage at his personal life: he eventually abandoned scientific work to embark on a failed mining venture, and, far more scandalously, he married and had five children with the African-American nursemaid Ada Coepland – all while telling her that he was a Black man named James Todd (Wilson 2006, 11–13, 255–56; Butler 2020, 439).

The recent rehabilitation of King warrants a reassessment of the historiographical consensus that his science contradicts Powell’s. On the contrary, King made essentially the same intervention in scientific discourse that Powell did in governmental policy: that local conditions undermine the universality claimed by theoretical models, whether they
be scientific or social. King most clearly explicates this view in ‘Catastrophism and Evolution’, a polemical paper he delivered in 1877 at the Sheffield Scientific School at Yale, then the epicentre of American geological studies and its uniformitarian consensus. Widely read by both contemporaries and later scholars as a straightforward rebuke of uniformitarianism and affirmation of orthodox catastrophism, the paper actually contends that neither of those theories of change in the natural world holds true globally and that they are instead historically and regionally contingent. King states that ‘the rate of subsidence in the east [of North America] . . . looked at broadly may be called uniformitarian’, but insists that the ‘west was distinctly catastrophic in the widest dynamic sense’ (1877, 457). For King that difference carries wide-ranging and implicitly social ramifications. In regions like the eastern United States where the rate of geological change is a uniformitarian constant, King agrees that evolution proceeds as a familiar ‘Malthusian death struggle’ with the ‘survival of those varieties best adapted to surrounding conditions’ (469). But under catastrophism, where those ‘surrounding conditions’ become unsettled and highly volatile, King hypothesises that natural selection would instead favour what he terms ‘plasticity’, or the capacity of a species to undergo ‘rapid morphological change’ and readapt to a suddenly transformed environment (469). ‘Catastrophic change . . . sounded in the ear of every living thing the words “change or die”’ (469). This ‘survival of the plastic’ represents for King ‘a widely different principle from the survival of the fittest’, a maxim that refers as much to a sociological theory as a biological one (469). American philosopher Herbert Spencer coined the phrase to expand Darwinian evolution into a broader explanation for (and justification of) class and especially racial hierarchies, providing a pseudoscientific basis for the intense capitalist exploitation and white supremacist racism of the Gilded Age. Presumably, those Spencerian dogmas and the social phenomena they refer to, having been devised and ‘tested’ in the uniformitarian conditions of the eastern United States, must also be remade for the historically catastrophist American west, where ‘the most yielding and plastic’ species beats the ‘Malthusian conqueror’ to the ‘prize of survival and ascendency’ (King 1877, 469).

That social and political corollary of King’s regionalist critique of uniformitarianism remains largely realised in his own writings on California, the most famous of which was *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada*, where he recounts surveying the interior of the state for the federal government. First serialised in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1871 and then issued as a single work in 1872, enjoying three print runs and a revised edition in 1874, *Mountaineering* exemplifies what Robin Vandome calls the ‘hybridity of scientific and literary culture’ during the Gilded Age (2019, 492). In the work, King describes the catastrophist formation of the eponymous Californian mountain range in a literary style accessible to his non-specialist readership. He writes for example of Yosemite and ‘how immeasurably grander must it have been when the great, living, moving glacier, with slow invisible motion, crowded its huge body over the brink, and launched blue ice-blocks down through the foam of the cataract into that gulf of wild rocks and eddying mist!’ (1872/1963, 147). Later, as if signifying the superiority of this literary-scientific style over existing geologically uninformed writings on the region, King observes that ‘the markings upon the glacier cliff above [James Mason] Hutchings’s house had convinced me that a glacier no less than a thousand feet deep had flowed through the valley, occupying its entire bottom’ (152). Though that fascination with the glacial past flows through
Mountaineering, King only obliquely hints in the final chapter that this catastrophist formation of interior California might influence American settler-colonialism, shaping a quite different society from that in the east of the continent. He predicts that in the ‘vulgar Sierra earth . . . Time shall separate a noble race’, suggesting that the racialised hierarchies that have emerged in other regions might not be upheld in this part of California: there is no assurance that Anglo-American domination can be sustained across a continent-spanning United States. Likewise, he asserts that ‘God, who is also Nature, moulds and changes man’, which again hints at some sort of modification of the socially familiar (292).

King vaguely gestures towards some sort of remaking of existing social theories and practices to suit the catastrophist terrain of interior California. But John Wesley Powell, uniformitarian though he was, codified those same concerns into a systematic, bioregional redesign of American society for the far west. In 1878, Powell submitted to Congress his Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States. Drawing on observations from his earlier survey of the Rocky Mountains for the federal government as well as Smithsonian rainfall data, the Arid Region report begins with its central thesis that ‘the eastern portion of the United States is supplied with abundant rainfall for agricultural purposes . . . but westward the amount of aqueous precipitation diminishes in a general way until at last a region is reached where the climate is so arid that agriculture is not successful without irrigation’ (1879/1962, 11). According to Powell, this arid and semi-arid expanse ‘begins about midway in the Great Plains and extends across the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean’ (11), encompassing what he later calls the ‘true deserts’ in the south and southeast of California (30). These climatic boundaries flout the jurisdictional organisation of the far west, not least by slicing California through the middle with its central and northern portions enjoying ‘rainfall through the seasons’ (15). But the challenge to national sovereignty runs deeper than cartography, for Powell insists that ‘the growth and prosperity of the Arid Region will depend largely on a land system which will comply with the requirements of th[ose] conditions and facts’ (37). Climate, in other words, delimits the possibilities of and in turn supersedes the self-determination of the nation.

Powell’s Arid Region report first challenges the existing Land Ordinance system for westward expansion, which prescribed that newly acquired territories would be consistently divided and subdivided into rectangular tracts of land. Four homesteads of 160 acres made one section, and thirty-six of those 640 acre sections represented one six-by-six mile township. Devised in 1785 by Washington lawmakers, far removed both historically and geographically from the American settlement of the far west, the ordinance was designed to maintain spatial uniformity across an expanded nation rather than to adapt to local conditions. Powell insists that if such a prefabricated system were imposed on arid areas like southern and parts of interior California, then ‘only the divisions having [access to surface] water will be taken [by settlers], and the farmer obtaining title to such a division could practically occupy all the country adjacent by owning the water necessary to its use’ (33). Instead of that rectangular system impervious to the terrain and environment, Powell proposed that ‘divisional surveys should conform to the topography, and be so made as to give the greatest number of water fronts’ (33). He even includes in the report two draft bills for ‘parceling lands into irregular tracts’ that would follow the winding contours of waterways (51).
Just as Powell insisted that the organisation of agricultural land should be ‘governed solely by the conditions under which the water could be distributed’ rather than by the prefabricated chequerboard-pattern of the existing land ordinance system, so too he argued that in the arid west ‘the necessities of the country require the change’ of the ‘long recognized principles of the common law’ (51, 54). He explains that where agriculture relies on irrigation, ‘the right to the water should inhere in the land to be irrigated’ rather than the property that happened to be physically adjacent to the waterway as was the long-established legal precedent (54). Powell reassures his lawmaker audience in Washington that such a divergence from the traditions of Anglo-American jurisprudence and in turn the political identity of the nation only intended to serve its economic interests. ‘The ancient principles of common law applying to the use of natural streams, so wise and equitable in a humid region, would, if applied to the Arid Region, practically prohibit the growth of its most important industries’ (55). But this imperial commitment to the right of the United States to expand into and exploit the resources of putatively unsettled territories does not translate for Powell into a belief that the American nation itself – the shared social practices and customs that constitute the idea of a cohesive political community – actually can sustainably extend across the continent. To articulate this as a response to the pointillist geography of Hutchings’ magazine, ‘you’ the American tourist or settler cannot traverse and inhabit the whole breadth of the national territory without acclimatising and in turn acculturating to the unique climates and environments of different regions.

**California and the Case for an Internal Transnationalism**

In an article broadly premised on how the expansion of the nation threatens its own cohesion, it might seem ironic to call for the purview of transnationalism to widen into the putatively domestic sphere, given that more expansive applications of such key terms can often obfuscate the precise meaning that made them useful and incisive concepts in the first place. There are many ways in which events, processes, and structures can supersede national sovereignty from within by operating not ‘over’ but ‘under the jurisdiction of the nation’ (Dimmock 2009, 146, my emphasis); ‘internal transnationalism’ is by no means a catch-all for every such case. For instance, the underdevelopment and overexploitation of Black and other minority areas, often in inner-city neighbourhoods, has long been understood as an ‘internal colonialism’. To give a different example, Wai Chee Dimmock finds ‘nonsovereign history’ the most suitable label for her reading of Hurricane Katrina as a ‘breach’ in ‘the integrity of the United States as a nation, its ability to be sovereign’ (Dimmock 2009, 146).

Even taking into account the temptation for terminological overreach, the writings of the early US statehood of California show that it is still both conceptually necessary and analytically valuable to understand transnationalism as not just an inter- but an intranational process. It provides a critical framework for delineating how and where American national sovereignty decouples from its new territorial jurisdiction over the far west. Without that internal component to transnationalism, we would instead have to resort to the ideologically-loaded language of the frontier, which would obscure the existence of a plurality of settler-colonial spatial imaginaries. Conversely, a transnational approach to the putatively domestic brings out the contours of distinct, even non-
normative expansionist geographies: the pointillism of Hutchings’ magazine, and the shared bioregionalism underlying the writings of the supposedly scientifically adversarial Powell and King. The path through these texts that consequently comes into view, namely a move away from a nationally integrated American California towards a locally determined Californian America, points in the direction of a larger turn in regional literature.

Over the rest of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth, a wide range of reformist and protest writing broadly indicated that non-sovereign relations and entities had supplanted the nation as the dominant force shaping modern California. For the likes of populist economist Henry George and naturalist novelist Frank Norris, that non-national actor took the form of the railroad corporations, whose monopolisation of Californian land overrode the national ideal of small-scale property ownership by family homesteaders. Meanwhile, ecologically conscious writers such as Mary Hunter Austin and John Muir rooted a Californian identity and sense of place in its natural environments rather than American statehood. Many other regional authors, from the Mexican-American María Amparo Ruiz de Burton to the chauvinistically Anglo-American Jack London, identified race and ethnicity as more important than nationality in the hierarchy of Californian social relations. Internal transnationalism brings this sweeping, large-scale literary and cultural turn away from sovereign dominance into focus. More importantly, it unsettles the colonial claim to territory and shows that Americanness cannot serve as the native baseline against which the ‘foreign’ is defined, for America and California are a transnational pairing in the first place.

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Nathaniel Sikand-Youngs is an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded PhD student in American Studies at the University of Nottingham. His thesis surveys literary representations of the Californian landscape from the Gold Rush through to the Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915. He has previously published in the European Journal of American Culture and the Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies and has presented at conferences organised by the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment and the Netherlands American Studies Association.

ORCID

Nathaniel Sikand-Youngs http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2416-5144
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