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Paradise or Wilderness? Conflicting Perceptions of American Geography in Early Colonial Times

Abstract

This article is primarily concerned with the early colonial reaction to American geography, particularly that of early trans-Atlantic English explorers and the first colonists of Virginia and New England. On the one hand, American geography was mythologized as a utopia in terms of the myth of the classical Golden Age and Arcadian pastoral *otium* (carefree life). It was also idealized as an earthly paradise, concerning the Christian myth of the Garden of Eden. Yet, on the other hand, it was described in dystopian terms as "a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men" (Bradford 62), with hardly bearable climatic conditions. Therefore, early colonists' ambivalent or, more aptly, conflicting perceptions of American geography as such, which became a recurrent discourse in their writings, will be discussed in the article based on primary sources (original spellings and archaic usages of English have been retained as they appear in the sources).

Keywords: American geography, colonial writings, Virginia, New England

Cennet mi, Yaban mı? Erken Sömürge Döneminde Amerikan Coğrafyasına İlişkin Çelişkili Algılar

Öz

Bu makalenin başlıca konusu, erken sömürgecilik döneminde, gerek Atlantik ötesi İngiliz kâşiflerin gerek Virginia ve New England'a yerleşen sömürgecilerin Amerikan coğrafyasına ilişkin yaklaşımlarıdır. Amerikan coğrafyası, bir yandan, mitolojik altın çağa özgü ve düşsel bir pastoral yaşamı içeren ütopya olarak algılanmış ve Hristiyan inancı bağlamında Cennet Bahçesi kavramı ile ilişkilendirilerek yeryüzü cenneti olarak betimlenmiştir. Öte yandan, aynı coğrafya, dayanılmaz iklim şartları ile "yaban hayvanlar ve vahşi insanlarla dolu korkunç ve ıssız boş bir arazi" (Bradford 62) olarak distopya biçiminde de anlatılmıştır. Makalede, erken dönem sömürgecilerin, Amerikan coğrafyasına ilişkin anlatımlarında yer alan bu çelişkili, daha doğrusu zıtlık içeren, ifadeler, birincil kaynaklara dayanılarak irdelenecektir. Metindeki alıntılar kaynak materyalde yer aldığı şekliyle korunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Amerikan coğrafyası, kolonyal anlatılar, Virginia, New England

Introduction

By way of introduction, one may recall that historically, initial European trans-Atlantic explorations, undertaken in early modern times, were primarily motivated by a predominant desire to discover a safe and feasible westward passage to reach the lucrative markets of India and the Far East. Yet, contrary to expectations, these explorations ended up with the so-called “discovery” of a new continent, a vast *terra incognita*, evidently unknown and previously unimagined by the European mind, and, hence, was duly called “America.” It was, among others, the geography of this new continent with its diverse and somewhat unusual anthropic, climatic, and economic aspects that impressed and intrigued every explorer from Columbus onwards, including the early English colonists from Sir Walter Raleigh and John Smith to the New England Puritans. In their accounts, descriptions, and imaginings, this geography was presented through ambivalent or, more aptly, conflicting perceptions. Indeed, on the one hand, it was presented in terms of the myth of the classical golden age and Arcadian pastoral *otium* (carefree life) and was also idealized as an earthly paradise with reference to the Christian myth of the Garden of Eden. Yet, on the other hand, it was described in dystopian terms as “a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men” with hardly bearable climatic conditions (Bradford 62). The early English colonists’ idealization and romanticization of colonial American geography were part of their colonization policy. As will be further argued below, their basic aim was to motivate and encourage, especially the rural and artisan population in England, to emigrate to Virginia or New England for colonial settlement.

This article attempts to demonstrate, based on early English colonial writings, how the geography of early colonial America was initially perceived, observed, and depicted in both fact and fiction. The article is also an effort to be concerned with cultural geography that, I would emphasize, cuts across the early colonial representations and imaginings as regards the American natural and human geography of Virginia and New England. Indeed, it was a vision blurred, or put more plainly, dichotomic. This dual vision was absent at the outset from the writings of early European and English explorers and colonists. Only after pioneering colonial settlements got underway did colonists come to experience concretely and painfully rather than romantically the natural and human conditions of their new geographical environment. They faced an alien geography, which they regarded “as a force to be contended with [and] to be adapted to” (86), to borrow David Adjaye’s words used in the context of a totally different subject.¹

The American Geography Mythologized as a Terrestrial Paradise

Originally, the early English explorers’ idealization of the Virginia and New England geography was a re-expression of a much broader vision of the American continent, or, more commonly, the New World that had obsessed the Renaissance European mind ever since Columbus and thereafter. Indeed, through their extensive descriptions of the natives, climate, and geography of the New World, Columbus and his contemporary explorers had aroused “in the mind of Renaissance Europe a popular and romanticized vision of America, which . . . essentially amalgamated the Christian myth of the Terrestrial Paradise and the classical [or Hesiodic] myth of the Golden Age” (Umunç 147). In other words, the anthropic, climatic, and geographical reality of the New World was often overshadowed by their fantastic or mythical re-imaginings. For instance, in his letter, dated 18 October 1498, and concerning his third trans-Atlantic expedition to the Indies, Columbus reported to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain his observations and impressions of the land with a sense of extreme idealization as follows:

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When I made to the island of Trinidad . . . I found the temperature there and in the land of Gracia very mild, the ground and the trees being very green and as beautiful as the orchards of Valencia in April. The people there are of very handsome build and whiter than any others I have seen in the Indies . . . I do not find and have never found any Latin or Greek work which definitely locates the Terrestrial Paradise in this world, nor have I seen securely placed on any world map on the basis of proof . . . But I am completely persuaded in my own mind that the Terrestrial Paradise is in the place I have described. (286-87)

Given such idealized and economically enticing descriptions, the initial aim of the Columbian explorations, which was the discovery of a new trade route to India and the Far East, was soon replaced by an increasingly strong desire in Europe for the conquest and colonization of the New World.

It was indeed this new aim for conquest and colonization that also inspired and motivated Tudor and Elizabethan English explorers. Various colonizing projects were undertaken and put into effect by them. For the success of their projects, their main geographical focus was the eastern shores of North America, especially what was to be called "Virginia." Accordingly, it was Elizabeth I's favourite courtier, Sir Walter Raleigh, who was liberally authorized by a royal Charter (letters patent), dated 25 March 1584, for the exploration and colonization of this geography. Thereupon, he generously sponsored five trans-Atlantic expeditions from 1584 to 1590 for the fulfillment of this mission. The expeditions were undertaken in different years by several captains, whom he had personally hired and commissioned, and whose names were Philip Amadas, Arthur Barlowe, Ralph Lane, Sir Richard Grenville ("Greeneuill"), and John White. It is in the initial reports and accounts, written by these captains and submitted to Raleigh, about Virginia's fauna, flora, landscape, natives, and natural resources that one witnesses a recurrent discourse of mythologized and idealized imaginings concerning the new geography. For instance, in the anonymous report on the first expedition in 1584 to Virginia, written by Captain Arthur Barlowe,² the preliminary impressions about the land are expressed in a florid discourse that metaphorically recalls a popular Renaissance poetical trope, which is the garden of delights: The second of July, we found shole water, wher we smelt so sweet and so strong a smel, as if we had bene in the midst of some delicate garden abounding with all kinde of odoriferous flowers, by which we were assured, that the land could not be farre distant. (Hakluyt 3: 246). This Edenic imagining of the geography is further elaborated in the same report when the natives of the land are compared to the people of the Hesiodic Golden Age for their civility and peaceful way of life:³

We were entertained with all loue and kindnesse, and with as much bountie (after their maner) as they could possible deuise. We found the people most gentle, louing, and faithfull, void of all guile and treason, and such as liue after the maner of the golden age. The people only care howe to defend themselues from the cold in their short winter, and to feed themselues with such meat as the soil affoordeth. (Hakluyt 3: 249)

Similarly, Ralph Lane, who, as a member of Raleigh's exploration and colonization team, took part in the second Virginia expedition undertaken in 1585 by Sir Richard Grenville, described Virginia

as a land of plenty in his letter⁴ of 3 September 1585 to Richard Hakluyt.⁵ In his description, Lane elaborated on the exotic fertility and inexhaustible economic resources of the land. His manner of description recalls a mystifying evocation of the traditionally imagined Terrestrial Paradise: “We haue discovered the maine to be the goodliest soyle vnder the cope of heauen, so abounding with sweete trees, that bring such sundry rich and pleasant gummes, grapes of such greatnesse, yet wilde . . . so many sorts of Apothecarie drugs, such seuerall kindes of flaxe, & one kind like silke (Hakluyt 3: 254). Moreover, in his further geographical imagining of Virginia, Lane reiterated the paradisiacal image of Virginia as follows: “It [Virginia] is the goodliest and most pleasing Territorie of the World . . . and the climate is so wholesome” (Hakluyt 3: 254). Clearly, for Raleigh’s exploration and colonizing team in the 1580s, Virginia was not considered or visualized as an inhospitable wilderness but, on the contrary, as “[the] paradise of the world” (Hakluyt 3: 265).

A constant paradisiacal emphasis, as such, put on the representation of Virginia geography, continued to be reiterated in the pamphlets and narratives of the next generation of English explorers and colonists after Raleigh, that increasingly began to grow in number. Especially, during the intensive and enthusiastic process of colonization in the early decades of the seventeenth century, not only the colonists in Virginia but also those in New England again and again resorted in their descriptions of the new geography to traditional tropes of idealization and mythologization. For instance, just as the anonymous author of the pamphlet *Nova Britannia*, published in 1609, called Virginia “this earthly Paradise” (8), similarly Thomas Morton, the founder of the Merrymount colony in Massachusetts in 1622,⁶ was so impressed by the rich and varied geography of New England that, as he put it, it all “made the Land to mee seeme paradise, for in mine eie, ‘twas Natures Master-peece” (42). He further elaborated this Edenic vision by attributing to New England’s geography a new Biblical identity and calling it “New English Canaan or New Canaan” (10).⁷ For him, New England was a land, flowing “with Milke and Hony” (63), promised for colonization and settlement to “my Countrymen” (42), that is, the people of England, whom he called, with a Biblical allusion, “the Abrams and Lots of our times” (62-63). Accordingly, in his account, he presented New England as metaphorically the New Canaan of the colonizing English Abrams and Lots, rich in its innumerable species of flora, fauna, and inexhaustible natural resources (41-65): “A Country whose indowments are by learned men allowed to stand in a paralell with the Israelites Canaan, which none will deny to be a land farre more excellent than Old England in her proper nature” (42). Like Morton, also John Winthrop, one of the founding leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630, was so impressed at first sight by the geography of New England that, in a letter dated 29 November 1630 and sent to his wife back in England, he wrote: “My dear wife, we are here in a paradise. Though we have not beef and mutton, &c. yet (God be praised) we want them not; our Indian corn answers for all. Yet here is fowl and fish in great plenty” (1: 379). It was also with a similar sense of idealization that the adventurer and colonist John Smith described Massachusetts as “the Paradise” of New England (15-17).

Clearly, the primary aim of all these and various other similar extensive mythologizations and paradisiacal idealizations of the colonial geography⁸ was to publicize and launch a process of colonization and settlement. In this context, the people in England were encouraged to emigrate to the newly established colonies or establish their colonies. The public mood in Stuart England

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in the 1620s and 1630s was favourable for the success of this colonial process. In fact, during the early Stuart era, England was embroiled in increasingly paralyzing political and religious conflicts, which ultimately led to the devastating Civil War between the Royalists and the Parliamentarians (Morrill 286-324). Consequently, due to the Civil War's collateral social and political effects and to the harsh economic conditions in the country, more and more English people looked forward to a new life of prosperity, peace, security, and freedom in colonial America. In this regard, for instance, Beauchamp Plantagenet, the founder of the New Albion colony in North Virginia in 1648,⁹ stated that he had left England in order "to escape the Civil War, which was raging in England, and to set up a new plantation in the West" (4). Moreover, for the success of his colonization enterprise, he also pointed out that he had taken with him 128 settlers, including servants, farmers, and craftsmen, as a workforce for his colony. As the idea of a new and prosperous life in America became increasingly a public obsession in politically unstable early Stuart England, especially the underprivileged and rural population ("Morton's Abrams and Lots"), along with adventurers and fortune seekers,¹⁰ were extremely motivated to settle in the emerging new colonies. Their motivation was further fuelled through what one would call intensive geographical romanticization and economic propaganda that exhorted and encouraged them to colonization. Consequently, throughout the seventeenth century and thereafter, the number of colonies and colonial settlers increased enormously, leading to the rise of the original thirteen colonial states before the Revolution (Norton et al., especially 33-67).

American Geography Viewed as a Wilderness

However, contrary to the recurrent paradisiacal vision of colonial American geography and also despite widespread propaganda for economic and commercial benefits to be gained, one can also witness a growing number of plainly factual and somewhat negative geographical descriptions in the writings of early colonial settlers. Such descriptions were largely informed by new colonists' own experiences and actual observations of the colonial geography that they encountered. In this regard, for example, the anonymous author of the pamphlet *New-Englands Plantation*, who called himself "a Preacher of Truth" (5), apologetically emphasized the factuality and objectivity of his observations and descriptions:

I haue beene carefull to report nothing of *New-England* but what I haue partly seene with mine owne Eyes, and partly heard and enquired from the Mouthes of verie honest and religious persons, who by liuing in the Countrey a good space of time haue had experience and knowledge of the state thereof, and whose testimonies I doe beleeeue as my selfe. (5)

The new geography that the early colonists faced, contrary to the familiar homeland they had left behind, presented a wide range of physical, climatic, cultural, social, economic, and political uncertainties for their environmental adaptation and survival. Essentially, through various descriptive pamphlets and narratives embodying propaganda and publicity for colonization, the colonists had been highly motivated by dreams and expectations of enormous material gains and great prosperity in this new environment and geography. However, in most cases, their dreams were shattered upon their encounter with this geography, which clearly subverted their harboured paradisiacal vision and had a traumatic impact on them. Indeed, as quoted above, Bradford's reaction to the climatic and natural conditions of the geography of New England plainly summarizes the psychic trauma that he, together with his fellow Plymouth colonizers, felt at the outset before settlement:

. . . it was winter, and they that know the winters of that country know them to be sharp and violent, and subject to cruel and fierce storms, dangerous to travel to known places, much more to search an unknown coast. Besides, what could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men . . . The whole country, full of woods and thickets, represented a wild and savage hue. (62)

Virginia, contrary to its recurrently publicized Edenic representation in early explorers' accounts, came to be regarded by the new settlers that began to increase from the 1610s onwards, as "[a] strange and heatenous . . . country" (*For the Colony in Virginea* 37). In a more explicit manner, for instance, Plantagenet painted a somewhat dystopian picture of Virginia, whose geography he said he "disliked" (4) because it was full of "Saltmarches and Creeks, where thrice worse . . . for agues and diseases, brackish water to drink and use; and a flat Country, and standing waters in woods bred a double corrupt air, so the elements corrupted no wonder as the old *Virginians* affirm, the sickness there the first thirty years to have killed 100,000 men (5).¹¹ However, by contrast, he depicted the geography of North Virginia for the purposes of colonist propaganda in an Edenic and idealized discourse. For publicity and settlement, he extolled its climatic and economic features by presenting it as a land of "excellent temper, and pure aire, fertility of soile, of hils that sheltered off the North-west windes, and blasts, vallies of grapes, rich mines, and millions of Elkes, Stags, Deer, Turkeys, Fowl, Fish, Cotten, rare fruits, Timber, and fair plains, and clear fields (6). For Thomas Dudley, on the other hand, who was another leading founder of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, New England's geography was inhospitable because of its frost and "sharp winter" (5-6).¹² Moreover, it was infested by mosquitoes (*New-Englands Plantation* 11) and deadly snakes that kill a person "within a quarter of an hour" (*New-Englands Plantation* 12). In another anonymous pamphlet, *A Perfect Description of Virginia*, its author highlighted the miseries of life in New England and pitied the wretched plight of the colonists for not having originally settled in warm southern Virginia:

But for matter of any great hopes but Fishing, there is not much in that Land [i.e. New England]. . . there is much Cold, Frost and Snow, and their Land so barren, except a Herring be put into the hole that you set the Corne or Maize in, it will not come up; and it was great pittie, all those people being now about twenty Thousand, did not seate themselves at first to the *South of Virginia*, in a warme and rich Country. (12)¹³

As more and more settlers arrived in early colonial America, the representation of colonial American geography came to be based on actual personal experiences that, whether favourable or adverse, were expressed in a vast range of narrative variety and publicity. The fundamental issue that cut across these narratives was the colonization of this geography, and the policies adapted for this purpose.

The American Geography Appropriated and Colonized

Whether paradisiacal or inhospitable, the geography of colonial America was commercially and economically perceived by early explorers and colonists as a vacant land with untapped and inexhaustible natural resources. Therefore, they believed that this vacant land had to be fully appropriated and exploited. For Bradford and his fellow Puritan colonists, for example, in their search for a new homeland to settle and establish their own state, the New World seemed to offer

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the most suitable and perfect opportunity (Bradford 25-27). Consequently, they decided to remove to “those vast and unpeopled countries of America, which are fruitful and fit for habitation, being devoid of all civil inhabitants” (Bradford 25). In fact, Bradford’s reference to American geography as “vast and unpeopled” was a reiteration of the colonization aim and policy that both Elizabeth I and James I had stipulated in their charters issued to Raleigh and the Virginia Company respectively. For instance, in Charter to Sir Walter Raleigh, it was clearly stated that Raleigh was fully authorized to “discover, search, finde out, and view such remote, heathen and barbarous lands, countries, and territories, not actually possessed of any Christian Prince, nor inhabited by Christian People, . . . and the same to haue, horde, occupie and enjoy” (Charter).

Virginia at the time was unowned by any Christian or European power and, hence, uninhabited, despite its indigenous and “heathen” natives. Therefore, politically and legally it was clearly admitted that the colonization (“to haue . . . and occupie”) of this geography was fully justifiable. Moreover, following the acquisition of Virginia on this principle of justification, Raleigh was also charged with a political mission “there to build and fortifie . . . the statutes or acte of Parliament” (Charter). Thus, he was required to prepare the administrative, judicial, and social conditions and infra-structure fundamentally necessary for the settlement and colonization of the land (Charter). Obviously, the fulfilment of this mission not only signifies the extension of the Elizabethan political power to the New World but also implicitly gestures to the dawning of what is today holistically termed “British imperialism.”

It was with The First Virginia Charter, granted by James I, that a more comprehensive and ideologically motivated policy for colonization was introduced and detailed out. The First Virginia Charter, issued on 10 April 1606, contained a series of legal and colonizing privileges for the Virginia Company and other associate entrepreneurs.¹⁴ The privileges were further extended to “sundry Knights, Gentlemen, Merchants, and other Adventurers, of our Cities of Bristol and Exeter, and of our Town of Plimouth, and of other Places” (First Virginia Charter). Yet, in establishing their own colonies, these other non-Londoner entrepreneurs were required to “join themselves unto that Colony” [i.e. the Virginia colony] and that their colonies were to be subsidiary colonies, functioning under the jurisdiction of the Virginia colony itself (First Virginia Charter). The Virginia Company, as the main joint venture, was therefore put in primary charge to undertake and manage the colonization of “VIRGINIA, and other parts and Territories in America, [...] situate, lying, and being all along the Sea Coasts” (First Virginia Charter). Geographically this meant the appropriation and colonial occupation of the native territory along the Atlantic seaboard, stretching from the shores of what is today South Carolina all the way to New England. As in Charter to Sir Walter Raleigh, so in The First Virginia Charter the basic principle was that the geography designated as such for settlement and colonization was not to have been “actually possessed by any Christian Prince or People” (First Virginia Charter). It was apparently with this principle in mind that, for instance, Bradford and other Puritan colonists in New England considered a land to be “devoid of all civil inhabitants” [i.e. Christians] and “unpeopled” (25). As for the natives, the Puritan colonists hardly thought of them to be human beings but more truly “only savage and brutish men . . . little otherwise than the wild beast of the same” (Bradford 25).

In addition to the primary aim of his colonization policy “to make Habitation, Plantation, and to deduce a colony of sundry of our People” (First Virginia Charter), James I also stipulated an ideological aim, which was the conversion of the natives to Christianity. Accordingly, the colonists were required to fulfil this mission of evangelization by “propagating of Christian Religion to such People, as yet live in Darkness and miserable Ignorance of the true Knowledge and Worship of God, and . . . in time [bringing] the Infidels and Savages, living in those parts, to human Civility, and to a settled and quiet Government” (First Charter). Although no explicit mention of a mandate was made in Charter to Sir Walter Raleigh about the conversion of the natives, Thomas Harriot (“Thomas Heriot”),¹⁵ a member of Raleigh’s Virginia colonization team, had the conviction that the natives could be converted to Christianity and civilized (Norton et al. 30). It was with the Stuart colonists of Virginia that, by James I’s mandate in The First Virginia Charter, a policy of evangelization was put into effect to bring “the Infidels and Savages . . . to human Civility.” Indeed, as pointed out by Norton et al., the colonists “believed unwaveringly in the superiority of their civilization . . . They expected native peoples to adopt English customs and to convert to Christianity. They showed little respect for traditional Indian ways of life” (44). This solipsistic and culturally colonizing attitude was an underlying fact of the early colonization process. Accordingly, besides the fundamental colonial policy for territorial appropriation and dominance, evangelization became a political strategy to create a colonial Christian geography and, thereby, disrupt and transform the native self’s socio-cultural identity. In this regard, The First Virginia Charter may be interpreted as a deliberately imperialistic declaration for the subjection of the colonial American natives to the territorial, political, cultural, and religious hegemony of the early colonists.

Moreover, James I’s mandate for the conversion of the natives may also be interpreted as a significant argument for the justification of early American colonization. Indeed, as John McLeod states, as a policy and practice, colonization essentially relies on “the existence of a set of beliefs that are held to justify the possession and continuing occupation of other peoples’ lands. These beliefs are encoded into the language which the colonisers speak and to which the colonised people are subjected” (37). Indeed, in their initial encounter with the natives, the colonists were increasingly motivated to civilize them, so to speak, through evangelization and cultural transformation. Although on the one hand, they continued to display their racist, solipsistic, and Othering attitude towards the natives, on the other, they increasingly set about to evangelize and assimilate them. For instance, in the anonymous pamphlet *Nova Britannia*, the evangelical dimension of the colonization policy for Virginia was explicitly stressed as “to aduance the kingdome of God, by reducing sauage people from their blind superstition to the light of Religion” (12). Therefore, the early colonists were keen to emphasize recurrently the justification of their colonization policy not only in terms of economic benefits for the natives but also in terms of a civilizing project through evangelization:

And as for supplanting the sauages, we haue no such intent: Our intrusion into their possessions shall tend to their great good, and no way to their hurt . . . Wee propose to proclaime and make it knowne to them all by some publike interpretation that our coming thither [i.e. Virginia and else where] is to plant our selues in their countrie: yet not to supplant and roote them out, but to bring them from their base condition to a farre better: First, in regard of God the Creator, and of Jesus Christ their Redeemer, if they will beleeeue in him. And secondly, in respect of earthly blessings, whereof they haue now no comfortable vse, but in beastly brutish manner, with promise to defend them against all publike and priuate enemies. (*Nova Britannia* 13)

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The early colonists firmly believed that their civilizing project for the natives was indispensable for the enduring success of their colonization of American geography. Along with evangelization, the civilizing project also aimed at a cultural transformation of the native self. In this regard, such a transformation was considered to be a vitally important mission, which was to be achieved effectively for the process of colonization. For instance, the following excerpt from *The New Life of Virginia* is a relevant example of the methodology to be used in the process:

Take their [viz. Indians'] children and traine them up with gentlenesse, teach them our English tongue, and the principles of religion; winne the elder sort by wisdome and discretion, make them equal with your English in case of protection, wealth and habitation, doing justice on such as shall doe them wrong. Weapons of warre are needfull, I grant, but for defence only, and not in this case . . . You must haue patience and humanitie to manage their crooked nature to your form of ciuilitie . . . If by way of peace and gentlenesse, then shall you alwaies range them in love to your words, and in peace with your English people; and by proceeding in that way, shall open the springs of earthly benefits to them both, and of safetie to your selves. (18-19)

The sociological, cultural, and political significance of the methodological proposition made in this excerpt is a further reiteration of the colonization policy that prioritized the establishment of colonists' solipsistic supremacy and, consequently, the ultimate elimination of the indigenous native identity and culture. So, when one reads across early colonial American writings, it becomes clear that the colonists increasingly followed a colonization policy, which, asserted to be a civilizing project, was motivated by their own internalized hegemonic self. Consequently, their appropriation and possession of American geography for colonization also came to embody their political and cultural imperialism, in accordance with which they believed the natives of this geography were also to be *civilized* and thereby hegemonized.

Moreover, from an economic and ecological perspective, all the early colonists shared the common conviction that American geography offered an opportunity to amass enormous wealth and build a new life. They firmly believed that this new life would be completely free from economic deprivation, political oppression, ideological conflicts, wars, and destruction that, in their view, characterized England in particular and Europe in general. Therefore, in this new geography, they were primarily preoccupied, despite their social, cultural, political, ideological, and religious differences, with the accomplishment of their own economic and commercial objectives for the exploitation of the land's resources. Conceptually, in their vision of the land in utilitarian terms, as such, they shared the traditional conviction about the uses of the natural environment. As Keith Thomas points out (17-20), this utilitarian idea concerning nature is fundamentally derived from a Biblical axiom, justifying man's extensive exploitation of natural resources:

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of ther earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your handa re they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat to you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. (Genesis 9. 1-3)

What Thomas calls “[this] Old Testament charter” was commonly accepted in Tudor and Stuart England as a divine approval that “the world had been created for man’s sake and that other species were meant to be subordinate to his wishes and needs” (17). Accordingly, one may confidently state that this anthropocentric perception of nature was a significant and universally shared fact in the social and economic culture of the time and constituted the essence of all early colonial descriptions of the American geography.

Conclusion

What has been discussed so far within the context of early colonial texts is an analytical demonstration of early colonists’ encounters with the geography of colonial America and their conflicting perceptions of it and its natives. In this regard, the early colonial texts are most valuable and extremely informative in providing the early colonists’ dialectical relationship with their new environment and newly-appropriated homeland. The discourse used and maintained by them in their books, pamphlets, letters, journals, and memoirs provides a full sense of their encounter with American geography and the natives of this geography. While idealizing the new geography as a paradisiacal land of plenty for appropriation and colonization, they also regarded it as an inhospitable wilderness, which they firmly believed they had to convert into a habitable and civilized human environment. So, they regarded it as their natural right to own and fully exploit this wilderness. Indeed, as Thomas points out, “when seventeenth-century Englishmen moved to Massachusetts, part of their case for occupying Indian territory would be that those who did not themselves subdue and cultivate the land had no right to prevent others from doing so” (15). In other words, for the early colonists, the use and cultivation of the land, which they believed had been neglected by the natives themselves, was of primary importance for the creation of a civilized life they anticipated and dreamed about in the vast wilderness of American geography. Yet, though admittedly anachronistic, one would also point out that, ironically, in subduing, clearing, settling, and fully utilizing this geography, they had no evident awareness of environmental conservation and ecological sensitivity. However, one may suggest in passing that such an awareness concerning American geography was to rise and to be demonstrated much later in American frontier fiction. For instance, among others, James Fenimore Cooper’s “Leatherstocking” novels, especially in *The Pioneers*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Prairie*, *The Pathfinder*, and *The Deerslayer* in the early nineteenth century, may be recalled for illustration.

Notes

- ¹ The subject Adjaye is concerned with in his article is the relationship between geography and architecture in terms of geography’s impact on architectural design.
- ² See Hakluyt (3: 246-51) for a full text of the report, entitled “The first voyage made to the coasts of *America*, with two barks, wherein were Captaines M[aster] Philip Amadas, and M[aster] Arthur Barlowe, who discovered part of the Countrey now called *Virginia*, Anno 1584.” Although at the beginning of the report it is stated that the report was “written by one of the said Captaines [i.e. Captain Philip Amadas and Arthur Barlowe], and sent to Sir Walter Raleigh [sic]” (Hakluyt 3: 246), the reference “my selfe” in the expression “Captaine Philip Amadas, my selfe and others” further below in the report (Hakluyt 3: 247) is an obvious indication of Barlowe himself.
- ³ See Hesiod’s *Works and Days* (11 [Greek text lines: 109-20]) for his myth of the Golden Age.
- ⁴ See Hakluyt (3: 254-55) for a partial text of the letter, entitled “An extract of Master Ralph Lanes letter to M[aster] *Richard Hakluyt* Esquire.”

Paradise or Wilderness?

- ⁵ At the time Hakluyt was an eminent geographer in Elizabethan England and had much popularity for his extensive and widely-read compilation, in three volumes, of Elizabethan trans-Atlantic and other overseas exploration narratives.
- ⁶ See Morton's detailed account (1-128) of the establishment of the colony, and also his economic and political conflicts with the Plymouth colony administration.
- ⁷ For Canaan in the Bible as the promised land for the Jews migrating from Mesopotamia into Judea (modern Israel and Palestine), see *The Holy Bible*, Gen. 10.19, 11.31, and 12. 1-7.
- ⁸ Among further examples of a paradisiacal idealization of colonial American geography, see *A True Declaration of the Estate of the Colony in Virginia* (12-13, 22 and 25); *New-Englands Plantation, or, A Short and True Description of the Commodities and Discommodities of that Countrey* (7-11); *A Perfect Description of Virginia* (10); Shrigley 3-5; Smith, *The Generall Historie* (25-28 on Virginia, and 208-209 and 215 on New England); W[illiams] 11-13, 15-16 and 50-51, who also claimed that Virginia had "an affinity with Eden . . . an absolute perfection above all but Paradize" (50).
- ⁹ See his pamphlet (4-7) for an account of his efforts to establish the New Albion colony.
- ¹⁰ For instance, the Royalist colonel Henry Norwood points out in his pamphlet that, together with two comrades Major Francis Morrison and Major Richard Fox, he came to Virginia in August 1649 "to seek our fortunes" (3).
- ¹¹ Also see his further account and elaboration of natural resources of his New Albion colony (20).
- ¹² Also see *New-Englands Plantation* 11.
- ¹³ See Clayton 5-8, and Hammond 7-8 and 13, for their adverse colonial descriptions.
- ¹⁴ See *The First Virginia Charter* for the names of the Virginia entrepreneurs and some members of the Virginia Company.
- ¹⁵ This original spelling of Harriot's name appears in the title of his report on Virginia: "*A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia: of the Commodities There Found, and to be Raised, aswell (sic) Merchantable as Others: Written by Thomas Heriot [sic].*" The report, dated February, 1587, was submitted to Raleigh. For a full text of the report, see Hakluyt 3: 266-280.

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