

*On Utopus' uterus: The colonisation of the body and the birth of
patriarchal utopia in Thomas More's Utopia*

Almudena Machado Jiménez

University of Jaén
amachado@ujaen.es

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Abstract: Following European exploration of the Atlantic, origin myths could now be projected onto a possible future and 'undiscovered' lands. Often the island proved the most suitable design for these projections to ensure the 'perfection' of the community and avoidance of corruptive external influences. These novel conceptualisations envisaged new social constructs to explain human nature, however, they continued to be overtly patriarchal. Gender essentialism and colonisation of the female body was an integral part of reproducing traditional utopian imaginings. Thomas More's *Utopia* exemplifies this archetypal gendered conceptualisation of the ideal island society where female education serves to reinforce patriarchal structures and women are essentialised in terms of their fertility. This paper addresses the relationship between the geography of Utopia and the insularity and confinement of women as dominated 'matrixial entities' which is further reinforced by utopian cartography. In this context, I assert that the process of colonisation and islanding unsettles the immutability of these patriarchal constructs and exposes the dystopian origins of Utopia.

Keywords: patriarchy; utopia; colonisation; Thomas More; insularity

Introduction: Patrogenesis and the appropriation of the *khôra*

Beyond being a literary device, utopia is an impulse that moulds our reality (Bloch, 1986). Sargisson agrees, asserting that said impulse is "grounded in our capacity to fantasize beyond our experience, and in our ability to rearrange the world around us" (1996, p. 1). Therefore, the utopian imagination goes beyond mere examination and seeks to transform the world in a way the individual understands. However, the predominant and most unfluctuating form of utopianism that has persisted is the patriarchal utopia; distinguished by its desire for perfection and immutability. The mechanism of patriarchal utopia to transform reality is based on the fallacy of dependent individuality (Hernando, 2018),

whereby the fantasy represented in origin myths serves to explain the world under parameters that make the individual's existence in the universe bearable and self-governing. In order to sustain this belief system, women's relational bonds are exploited to guarantee men's sense of belonging to the community, despite rejecting their dependence on women. Hence, women's relational roles have been concealed under certain mythical constructs to represent female identity as deprived of any form of individuality and not to compromise the fallacy of the individual's discourse (ibid., p. 126).

Origin myths, particularly in the classic Western tradition, conceive the world and human nature subject to patriarchal constraints. Patrogenesis, for instance, is a recurrent mechanism in patriarchal utopias to understand the world through patriliney and deny any maternal power. These myths usually portray male pregnancy either physically, e.g. Athena's birth, or mentally, as in the case of the Abrahamic God (Aristarkhova, 2012). However, patriarchal utopias actually need female corporeality to embody such a fantasy and reproduce, both in biological terms and in a relational sense, a substantial image of the world. Such mythical patriarchal constructs created to explain human nature permeate and reify patriarchal social mores at their time of writing and for future generations of readers.

The planning of a patriarchal utopia as a delimited and organised space supports attempts to structure nature according to individual will in order to control it. It also seeks to attain perfection over the dynamism of nature's cycle of life. In one of the earliest utopian texts, Plato's *Timeaus*, he uses the term *khôra*¹ to refer to the terrain onto which ideas are projected. It has also been interpreted as referring to the matrix, space or interval where events occur (see Park, 2014; Derrida, 1995). Plato refers to the *khôra* as the maternal, "the nurse of all Becoming" (Plato, c. 360 B.C./1925, 49a). The word 'matrix' shares its root with 'matter' and 'mother' and as such 'matrixial entities' are generative spaces characterised by a paradoxical position between productivity and receptivity (Aristarkhova, 2012, p. 11). Specifically, Aristarkhova defines the 'matrix' as hospitable, which makes it possible to engender whatever is put in place: "it is a term that indicates how we imagine what forms are and/or come to be" (ibid., p. 16). Throughout this paper the term 'matrixial entity' is used to describe the space upon which utopia is projected. There is a link therefore, between the land and the 'mother' as both share a gestative power that could signal "an archaic, originary 'feminine' that may be reclaimable for feminism or for women, or an alternate, anti-hegemonic conception of 'woman'" (Bianchi, 2014, p. 106). In order to avoid any potential transgression of the utopian uniformity of patriarchal womanhood, Wright (2004) and Bianchi (2014) agree that Plato erases any trace of femininity by making *khôra* as invisible and passive as possible.

While Plato opts to erase family relationships in his *Republic*, More imbues Utopia with the patriarchal family. It is my assertion that both means of planning utopia ultimately rely on biological essentialism that justifies female subservience and women's codification as 'breeders' in a patriarchal utopia. Further, the education systems in these fictional utopias serve to reinforce the patriarchal hegemony. Specifically, the city-state of Plato's *Republic*, Kallipolis, provides genderless education to its citizens, but it is highly censored and transfigured so that it satisfies the philosopher-king's ideal of humanity. The fortified Kallipolis promises the preservation of this utopian project and the successful conquest of the woman/land, but its non-insular geographical space could

endanger its stability. Alternatively, the islandness of Utopia offers More the opportunity to physically separate his perfect society from the rest of humanity and thereby establish and sustain his patriarchal society.

Correcting nature's defect: Thomas More on female education

With the advent of Atlantic exploration, utopianism influenced a novel approach to geopolitics. Europeans executed utopian projects in remote lands overseas where;

[...] The mythical and the real became entwined and nurtured each other to give shape to the undying hope that new and better worlds existed, ideal places that were actually being marked both on fantastic and on accurate maps. (Reis, 2006, p. 33)

And yet, these utopian exercises were inevitably accompanied by the dystopian horrors of the aboriginal peoples already living in these invaded spaces. The brutality of colonisation for the sake of utopia would entail the eradication of indigenous voices both within the narratives and within the community (e.g. see Adhikari, 2017, on the genocide of the Aboriginal Canary Islanders). Yet, Renaissance utopian ideas of humanist thinking praised Classical scholarship and human individuality, but also revisited the tenets of women as patriarchal utopia's 'matrixial entity'. Thomas More was perhaps the most important humanist in England, particularly liberal in his views regarding education. In several letters, More insisted on providing women with the same knowledge as men, and he actively instilled his daughters with Classical education in his household (Ross, 2009). While Ross considers whether More advances a proto-feminist view on female education, this paper considers the patriarchal imagery employed to depict such intellectual growth as utopian. More reiterates the importance of women learning "the principles of holy living" (More, *To Candide*, p. 129) to invigorate and enable them to maintain interesting conversations with men. However, there is no reciprocity in the communication. Wives are not allowed to become "reproachful sorrower[s]", and they are expected to bring joy to their husband "if anxious grief depresses [them]" (ibid., p. 130).

Women's matrixial entity provides the spatiality for utopia, although only after undergoing a *reformation* through education that delimits their fluid and ambiguous identity under the utopian vision of the individual:

The female is shaped according not merely to the husband's "tastes" but in fact according to his way of viewing the world, his principles, his way of behaving, [...] The man in question selects as his wife a girl who is, from his perspective, virtually unformed ("rudem") material and therefore able to be shaped by him into a form expressing his desire, that is to say, educated by him into the likeness of his ideal *mulier economica*. (Cousins, 2009, p. 82)

Thus, education is seen as a double-edged sword. It provides women with the same knowledge as men have, which Ross argues is "a subversive strategy for making the unusual seem acceptable and even praiseworthy" (2009, p. 7). Conversely, Aughterson maintains that this is a modern myth, inasmuch as the humanist mode of education only

intensified the existing gender split between public and private spaces: “the potentially radical agenda of educational humanism is appropriated to the conventional model of femininity” (1995, p. 162). The potential for female individuality is inhibited because women lack the power of social promotion and mobility outside the household, becoming ornamental, an extension of the man’s patrimony (Ross, 2009, pp. 51–52). As Capp (2003, p. 17) concludes, this patriarchal arrangement eventually forces female intellectuals to internalise their own inferiority despite the education received.

The reformation of female identity through education finds a comparison in the cultivation of land; both entities in need of correction of their natural flaws:

If it be true that the soil of woman’s brain be bad, and apter to bear bracken than corn, by which saying many keep women from study, I think, on the contrary, that a woman’s wit is on that account all the more diligently to be cultivated, *that nature’s defect may be redressed by industry.* (More, “Letter”, p. 199; italics added)

Being the soil where the seeds of patriarchal thinking are planted, women become the space where utopian ideals are inseminated and germinated. The parallelism between the land and the body is rendered by a common colonisation process. Nature is conquered and reimagined under new parameters. This colonisation of the female entity occurs in two stages: the demonisation of her nature and a purification process, in which her identity is reformed. It is at this stage of the colonisation that the oppressor’s ideology is instilled in her to ensure the colonisation of the mind, so that the colonised eventually “see the world and themselves in the same way as the colonisers do” (Nyström, 2018, p. 32). The colonisation of matrixial entities results in what Sargent refers to as flawed utopia, “because we are all flawed, utopia must be designed to allow us to correct those flaws, but that process itself produces a flawed utopia” (Sargent, 2003, p. 225).

Utopia’s insularity and the geopolitics of patriarchal utopia

More’s *Utopia* (1516) served as a narrative experiment to display his personal utopian vision and laicise eternity (Suvin, 2003, p. 190). This vision has provided inspiration for later utopian societies and the fictional map of *Utopia* has since been used as a blueprint to build new realities (e.g. see Kinane, 2016). And, although it is revolutionary in many aspects, it is clear that the conceptualisation of the utopian woman was subjugated to gendered hierarchical relations within the family and the city. Such interdependence between these patriarchal structures recalls Grosz’s notion of the social constitution of the body; the family influences the social geography of the city, while the elements of the city simultaneously shape our subjectivity and that of others, organizing our power relations and the distribution of public and private spaces (1998, pp. 47–48). It has been argued that More’s ideal community was based on values from Christian morality and the structure of a happy patriarchal family (Bammer, 1991, p. 18; Ferns, 1999, p. 54; Serras, 2002; Theis, 2009, p. 2), characterised by the *patria potestas* (power of a father) and female modesty and muteness in the narrative.²

Utopia is imagined as a remote island in the South, as stated by Hythlodæus, the principal protagonist. The etymology of Hythlodæus is ambiguous and open to opposite interpretations. While *hythlos* clearly means “nonsense”, *daios* can refer to “cunning, expert” or “destructive, damaging” (Wilson, 1992, p. 33). Thus, the protagonist’s account may be interpreted as mere nonsense, or, on the contrary, as a logical possibility of sociability. As his name suggests, the narrative of Utopia is delivered with irony and wit in many aspects, while also including several inconsistencies in its discourse. Nonetheless, for More, “Utopia is serious political theory, not just an imaginative and satiric treatment of the human condition” (Grace, 2009, p. 179), so he certainly used this imaginary land as a space for moral and social criticism.

By feminising the land, this utopian fantasy casts the world as “spatially spread for male exploration, then reassembled and deployed in the interests of massive imperial power” (McClintock, 1995, p. 23). Therefore, the land on which Utopia is founded epitomises the ideal utopian woman as *khôra*, or matrixial entity, and the colonisation of ‘new’ land allegorically represents the violation of female nature by industry. In this context, Burwell postulates that the allusion of woman as nature rests on the duality of motherhood and victimhood (1997, p. 77). This occurs at two geographic levels in Utopia: firstly the transformation of Abraxa into an island through the digging of a channel is representative of an act of violence, while the emphasis of tending to productive gardens is close to the generative qualities of motherhood.

The lands unto which utopia is projected are often regarded as ‘empty’ even if there is a pre-existing population, “as the original occupants are lacking the rights to the land for one reason or another (they are not organised into nation states, they are not Christians, they are not farmers)” (Nyström, 2018, p. 38).

On both sides of the equator, it is true, extending almost as far as the space covered by the orbit of the sun there lie vast empty wastelands, scorched with perpetual heat. The whole region is barren and ugly, rugged and uncultivated, inhabited by wild beasts and serpents and by people who are no less wild than the beasts and no less dangerous. (More, *Utopia*, p. 13)

This description of the land as virgin echoes the patriarchal representation of the Virgin Mother; a representation that requires passivity and threatens regression while seemingly invites sexual assertion and awaits impregnation (Ferns, 1999, p. 45). Similarly, McClintock agrees that the gendered dispossession of the virgin body transforms it into an empty space “void of sexual agency, passively awaiting the thrusting, male insemination of history, language and reason” (1995, p. 30). Moreover, representing the land as virgin land justifies the “White Man’s Burden” master plot, also referred to as “Development/Industrial Production”, because the intrusion of industry/man into nature is depicted as a “noble cause” to improve the life of its inhabitants (Nyström, 2018, p. 39). This idea recalls the Pygmalion trope of perfecting female nature: “The idea where ‘raw materials’ are transformed into ‘finished products’ is the linear production apparatus of modern industrial production” (ibid., p. 38). In the time after the violent conquest, the resulting state is formed by “glorious, powerful and naturalised institutions” (ibid., p. 40), creating homogeneity within the State.

More's utopian land presents a similar shift from the woman/mother to the virgin/mother under emerging patriarchal institutions. Initially known as Abraxa, the continental land was invaded by Utopus, who separated the southernmost part by digging a channel to make an island, now known as Utopia. This was done to ensure Utopia's possession and prevent corruption by its previous inhabitants:

But Utopus, who conquered the island and named it after himself (for before that time it had been called Abraxa) and *who brought its crude and rustic mob to a level of culture and humanity beyond almost all other mortals*, after he won the victory at his first assault, had a channel cut fifteen miles wide at the point where the land adjoined the continent, and thus caused the sea to flow all around the land. (More, *Utopia*, p. 53; italics added)

The possession of Utopia is the triumph of man's industry over nature, and the imposition of individual utopian values on the terrain. This strategy gives total control to King Utopus, whose decision to change the geographical space and the name of the land casts him as an almost god-like character. The origin of the word Abraxa alludes to the Gnostic divine entity "abraxas" or "abrasax", whose most relevant quality is its magical and dynamic nature. Abraxas is the deity of good and evil, of life and death (Ziolkowski, 2007).³ Abraxa is demonized along with its inhabitants; therefore, the reformation process is justified as utterly necessary.

Abraxa dies and, in Bammer's words, "King Utopus symbolically births his own utopia by cutting off the umbilical cord that had joined it to the mainland" (1991, p. 13). A new virgin land is born, but only after Utopus baptises it Utopia. McClintock remarks that the naming of the land entails a retrospective surrogate birthing ritual, for the land was already in existence and peopled (1995, p. 29). The baptism of the island as Utopia recalls the Roman tradition of *patria potestas*, naming daughters after their fathers to show the symbolic property and lineage of fatherhood. Serras agrees with this idea in stating that:

Utopian women are once again defined according to the roles men attributed them throughout their lives [...] that is, they get no identity of their own during the different stages of their lives, always depending on their fathers' and especially on their husbands' status (2002, p. 327).

This female subordination through *patria potestas* is described throughout many passages of *Utopia*, depicting husbands as the lawful head of the family (pp. 64–65), or as the intermediary between the temple and their wives and children during the festival: "before they go to the temple, both wives and children fall on their knees before their husbands and parents, and confess everything in which they have either erred or failed in their duty, and beg pardon for it" (More, *Utopia*, p. 83).

The continent, (re)born as an insular geographical setting, symbolises the patrogenesis and oblivion of the mother in patriarchal utopia; celebrating the symbolic power of the individual while concealing any relational bond. There is no form of interdependence between the land and the individual; Utopia loses its agency and becomes the creation and possession of the self-proclaimed King Utopus. The geographical change also imposes a form of conceptual insularity on the people that live there; for contamination from the outside corrupted world is scarcely possible. The architecture of the land shares

the pattern of other classic patriarchal utopias, as in Andreae's (1619) *Christianopolis* or Bacon's (1626) *New Atlantis*. In order to reinforce the insular boundaries of Utopia, the narrative repeatedly describes the building of fortifications to secure the perimeter of the nation-state and ensure purity, stability and containment:

The channel is known only to the natives; so that if any stranger should enter into the bay without one of their pilots he would run great danger of shipwreck [...] On the other side of the island there are likewise many harbours; and *the coast is so fortified*, both by nature and art, that a small number of men can hinder the descent of a great army.

[...]

The inhabitants have fortified the fountain-head of this river, which springs a little without the towns; that so, if they should happen to be besieged, the enemy might not be able to stop or divert the course of the water, nor poison it.

[...]

The town is compassed with a high and thick wall, in which there are many towers and forts; there is also a broad and deep dry ditch, set thick with thorns, cast round three sides of the town. (More, *Utopia*, pp. 32–35; italics added)

Amaurot, the capital city of Utopia, is “designed to produce an economy of visibility that guarantees the virtue of the Utopian citizens through the presence of a surveillant gaze” (Burwell, 1997, p. 57), almost a precursor to Bentham's panopticon. Burwell highlights how any attempt to disrupt such harmony is neutralised successfully, supporting the “politics of imperialism, exploitation and genocide” provided by insularity (ibid.). Therefore, insularity is a key aspect of Utopia to maintain internal social mores and reduce the influence of external corrupting forces. The necessity of such fortifications raises questions of the sustainability of Utopia's social structures.

The vision of the island as the most strategic spatial form to create an ideal community is loaded with symbolic value. Like God, Utopus takes water and places it around immobile dry earth. The earth, traditionally referred to as a feminine symbol due to its generative and nurturing power (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1986; Cirlot, 1992; Jakubczak, 2001; Ráez, 2015), is now an immobile piece of land that emerges anew after its baptism. Despite water being conceived as feminine because of its fluidity and dynamism, the seas and oceans have also been linked with the primordial waters and imagined as a masculine godlike entity (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1986; Cirlot, 1992, Ráez, 2005) who controls the subconscious, as can be seen in Neptune or Poseidon. Specifically, during the Atlantic discoveries, the sea was considered the utopian passage (Reis, 2006, p. 44). Nevertheless, this utopian geography is highly sexualised, as the island “is literally mapped in male body fluids [...], held captive under the technology of imperial form” (McClintock, 1995, pp. 3–4). The resulting island is then imagined as the ideal locality in which to found a utopia:

La isla es un mundo reducido, una imagen del cosmos completa y perfecta, porque presenta un valor sacro concentrado. La noción se une por ahí a la de templo y de santuario. La isla es simbólicamente un lugar de elección, de ciencia y de paz, en medio de la ignorancia y la agitación del mundo profano.
[The island is a limited world, a complete and perfect image of the cosmos,

because it has a concentrated sacred value. This idea is connected to that of temple and sanctuary. The island is symbolically a place of choice, of science and of peace, in the midst of ignorance and the turmoil of the profane world.] (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1986, p. 596; translation is mine)

The emphasis on taking the southern part of the continent Abraxa as the island of Utopia implies that the only part to properly fulfil the utopian vision is the lower part, the womb, inasmuch as its fertility makes it possible to reproduce patriarchal civilisation. This dismembering of the island from the rest of the continent allows a more feasible re-education without the possibility of it being reached by contaminated ideas dissenting from those of the ruler. Examining Holbein's drawings, Shell interprets the mapping of Utopia as a human brain and the ship the jaw of the skull:

Utopia is depicted as a head joined at the neck to a continental body by an isthmus (neck)—or separated from it by a canal [...] The human skull, so considered, is both the 'coastline' of an insular nation-state and the 'shell' of an individual human brain. (2014, p. 101)

The resemblance to a human brain allegorises Utopia as a geographic projection of Utopus' imaginings. However, if these maps are contrasted with other classic interpretations of Utopia (Figure 1–Figure 4) and the spatial organisation of the state, the island certainly alludes to the female sexual organ. The entrance to Utopia through the harbour is situated to the south in most illustrations. However, all the maps show the estuary flanked by a fortress. Only Holbein's illustrations resemble a human brain, and yet his map draws the gates of Utopia in the southern part of the island, where a church guards the coastline (Figure 2). The location of the island itself in the south and its passage at its most southern point suggest a parallelism with female corporeality and the woman's womb. The estuary that joins the waters within Utopia and the waters of the ocean are controlled and patrolled (by men), just as sexuality is regulated for utopian women.

The interpretation of the map of Utopia as a moon, "Its figure is not unlike a crescent" (More, *Utopia*, p. 32), reinforces the island's association with the female womb, insofar as the mythological dimension of the Moon is closely related to feminine goddesses and powers, but also with the notion of passivity. Holbein's 1516 map (Figure 1) hints at a crescent shape, but in Gueudeville's illustrations (Figure 4), the crescent shape resulting from Utopus' industry is evident. With Amaurot, the capital city, at the centre of the island/uterus and connected to the entryway/vagina by the meandering river Anyder, the colonisation process of the nation-state simulates the insemination of the geographic body by the philosopher king's idea, whereby it perpetuates the female body as a passive form.

As Spivak (1994, p. 88) explains, the creation of a map makes it possible to imagine an alternative geopolitical history that sustains particular, in this case patriarchal, prejudices. The truth holds according to the rulers of the land, and judgment of what is good and what is evil is no longer ambiguous, for the dictates of nature are defined by new established parameters. Utopus utilises the same techniques as the creators of religious utopias. As the Judaeo-Christian tradition made use of intellectual pregnancy to explain the world under parameters that legitimise patriarchal continuity (Gen. 1: 9), the act of naming the land Utopia enables Utopus not only to colonize the land but also to conceptualise a new reality where he is the creator. Utopus, like gods in religious utopias, takes what already

existed and re-creates it according to his will. And yet, in tracing its history back to the original act of rupture and violence, Utopus' nation is condemned to "the temporal paradox of utopia, which is that it both is, and *cannot be*, isolated from the contamination of the past" (Attewell, 2014, p. 49). This violent transition eventually exposes the dystopian origins of society, demystifying the immutability of the state and offering a glimpse of the potential dissidence among its citizens. Thus, the social and spatial insularity of Utopia, as well as certain misogynistic practices (Sargent, 1973, p. 304), turns this utopia into a dystopia (Serras, 2002).



Figure 1. Ambrosius Holbein's map of *Insulae Utopiae Figura*, for the first edition of Thomas More's *Utopia*, 1516.



Figure 2. Ambrosius Holbein's map of *Utopiae Insulae Tabula* with Hythlodæus pointing at the land, for the second edition of Thomas More's *Utopia*, 1518.



Figure 3. Abraham Ortelius' map of Thomas More's *Utopia*, ca. 1595.

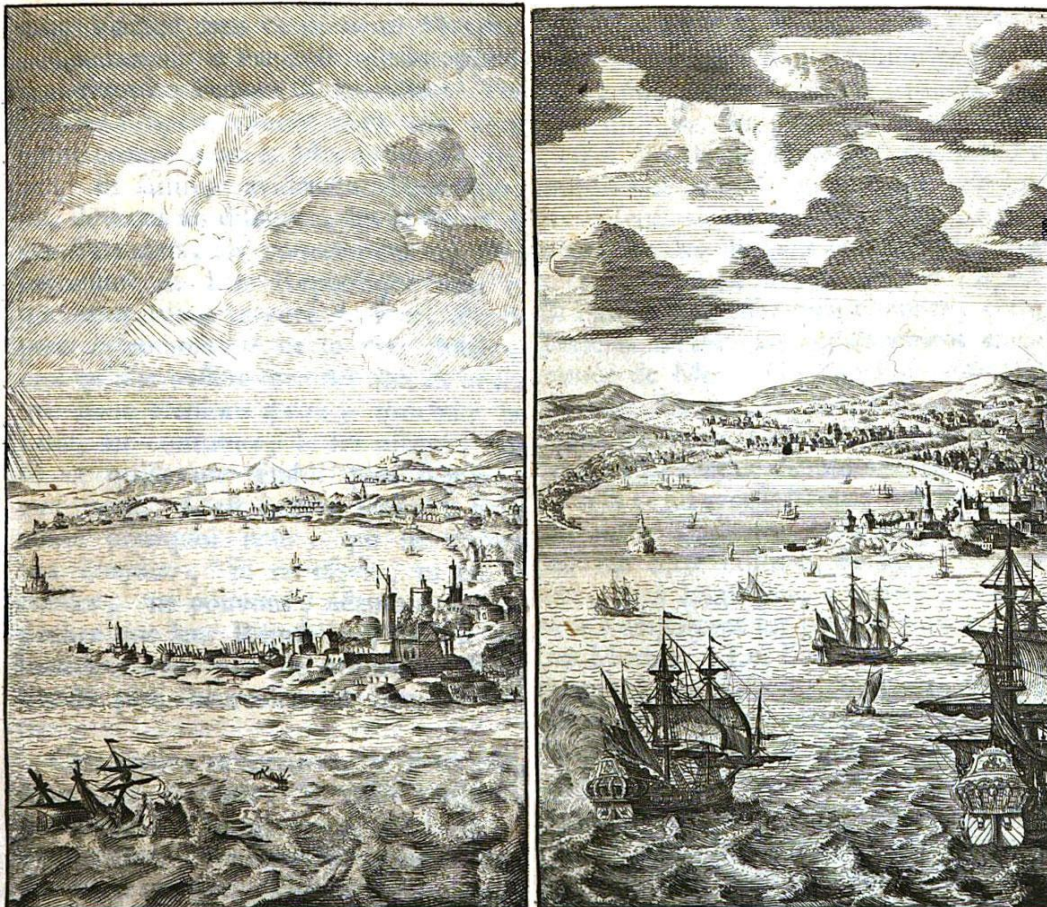


Figure 4. Nicolas Gueudeville's illustrations for Thomas More's *Idée d'une république hereuse: ou L'Utopie de Thomas Morus*, 1730.

Historically men have a greater level of mobility than women and such differences entailed a specialisation of labour that required normative heterosexuality to grant men such individuality while women were relegated to the relational identity, where they come up against the absolute impossibility of conceiving themselves outside of these relationships (Hernando, 2018, p. 77). The individuality of the explorers of Utopia reached its height during the Renaissance inasmuch as they were able to travel overseas. Meanwhile, women remained companions of men, looking after their relational bonds on Earth. As Pohl asserts, “classical utopias [...] either excluded women completely (Robinsonades) or functionalized women as producers of future citizens and providers of sexual pleasure” (2007, p. 127). This often meant that the house/home was the sphere of women and isolating female identity inside the house ensures that this space is a “microcosmic utopia, a private ‘good place’ distinct from the outer social world” (Cousins, 2009, p. 90). Further, the physical limitations of women in the home rather than being mobile individuals means that women become islands within an island. As Attewell suggests, “not only islands are insular in the more colloquial sense of seeming narrow, cut off, and isolated. [...] islands become ‘islands’ [...] only through a never-ending process of filtering, purging, and excising” (2014, p. 49).

This underpins the narrative of patriarchal utopias that women cannot be explorers of the land, but rather *the land itself*. This form of spatiality is muted not only due to the lack of a narrative agent but also in the negation of space itself. Utopia (“no-place”), Anyder (“no-river”), and Achora (“no-place”), for example, are landmarks whose existence is terminologically non-existent. Similarly, the name Amaurot alludes to an unknown and dark place. The ironical negation of these places also denies female spatiality within the land and consequently, women’s utopian agency. The agency that they may gain by means of education does not include free mobility as one of its advantages. Consequently, women’s capacity to discover, assimilate and learn about the world around them is narrower and limited, which hinders their ability to attain the individuality promised to men and sentences them to geographic and intellectual insularity. Alterity, either bodily or ideological, is overlooked, silenced and rectified, being *represented* on behalf of social stability and resulting in “a perfect world for men having as companions silent and industrious feminine ghosts” (Serras, 2002, p. 330).

Female perfection in insular gardens

Sargent (2010) and Rieder (2008) agree that up to the 20th century, utopianism was widely used as a tool to support colonialism and vice versa; that colonialism opened up new horizons for imagining new utopias, masking the original inhabitants’ displacement, enslavement and slaughter with dreams. Once the isolation and alienation stage is reached, there is a process of re-education, whereby the land/woman is transformed to comply with Utopia’s patriarchal standards. Interestingly, the translation in Herder’s edition of More’s *Utopia* makes manifest this correlation between the utopian model of education and insularity: “The minds of the Utopians, when *fenced* with a love for learning, are very ingenious in discovering all such arts as are necessary to carry it to *perfection*” (More, *Utopia*, p. 60; italics added).⁴ The colonisation of the land makes it necessary to insert women as a relational figure, as the explorers/creators of utopia “have taken the socio-economic functions of women as mothers for granted” (Theis, 2009, p.

2). However, by organising the state of Utopia following the trope of the family, More presents this gender hierarchy “as natural and inevitable, rather than as historically constructed and therefore subject to change” (McClintock, 1995, p. 45). This trope is illustrative of More’s contemporary society, where patriarchy was so ingrained that, as Capp notes, led people to view gender hierarchy as a universal principle of nature: “female subordination was something imbibed from infancy, not a concept to be scrutinized” (2003, p. 9) and motherhood seen as the *raison d’être* of the female corpus.

This form of femininity is directly related to fertility and (re)production. In *Utopia* the garden, nature tamed by industry, represents the site of fertility. The garden as a metaphor for Woman echoes Grosz’s interpretation of the city as a projection of bodies: “Bodies are conceived in naturalistic terms, producing the city, the cause and motivation for their design and construction” (1994, p. 44). As such, the insularity of the garden within the domestic space in the back part of the house reaffirms Pohl’s (2007) conception of women as merely fruitful and beautiful in classical utopia:

They cultivate their gardens with great care, so that they have both vines, fruits, herbs, and flowers in them; and *all is so well ordered and so finely kept that I never saw gardens anywhere that were both so fruitful and so beautiful as theirs*. And this humour of ordering their gardens so well is not only kept up by the pleasure they find in it, but also by an emulation between the inhabitants of the several streets, who vie with each other. And there is, indeed, nothing belonging to the whole town that is both more useful and more pleasant. So that he who founded the town seems to have taken care of nothing more than of their gardens; for they say the whole scheme of the town was designed at first by Utopus, but he left all that belonged to the ornament and improvement of it to be added by those that should come after him, that being too much for one man to bring to perfection (More, *Utopia*, p. 36; italics added).

The material abundance of the island simulates the richness of Utopia’s education, but since these sources of power and knowledge are dependent and administered by (male) industry, any attempt by women to achieve individuality is revealed as illusory. The strategic ordering of elements in the garden and the island reflects the biopolitics of Utopia, which follows a calculated organisation of the state as a macro-patriarchal family structure to ensure the economic welfare of all inhabitants:

Inhabitants are sent, by turns, from the cities to dwell in them; no country family has fewer than forty men and women in it, besides two slaves. There is a master and a mistress set over every family, and over thirty families there is a magistrate (More, *Utopia*, p. 33).

The harmony of the garden at the domestic level and the island at the national level is achieved by a meticulous assembling of bodies and, particularly, the *reformation* of the female entity, one that, despite being offered a taste of the perks of (male) individuality, is deceived, for they are the ones responsible for maintaining the relational identity of the members of the island. However, women will only be highly regarded once their natural imperfection is corrected by patriarchal indoctrination:

Husbands have power to correct their wives and parents to chastise their children, unless the fault is so great that a public punishment is thought necessary for striking terror into others (More, *Utopia*, p. 64).

These public punishments, and all public affairs in general, are regulated by paternal figures, for magistrates “affect rather to be called fathers, and, by being really so, they well deserve the name” (More, *Utopia*, p. 65). Power is associated with patriarchy, and vice versa; only by being patriarchal (a father) is one worthy of wielding power. All the different strategies used to *recreate* the utopian woman eventually entail the banishment of “all conflict and transgression by absorbing the will of the individual into the good of the collective” (Burwell, 1997, p. 59).

Women in *Utopia* are the *khôra*, or matrixial entities, of the patriarchal dream of King Utopus. While they are constantly trained to gain individuality, they are confined to the domestic space as reproducers of an individual’s legacy and can only achieve ersatz individuality by having a public role as priestesses once they are no longer productive, i.e. they are widows and sterile: “keeping them in the periphery of humanistic civic principles goals constitutes a denial of their participation in the commonwealth as citizens” (Serras, 2002, p. 328). They can never surpass the limits of their insular character, their decaying desexualised body acts as the geographical limit to their own potential individuality. Femininity is understood as fenced spatiality, romanticised by the discourse of virtue. Like the island, the utopian woman is paralysed and static. Like the garden, her body is tamed and trained to be correctly beautiful and productive. As Ferns observes,

[...] the emphasis of the Renaissance utopian narrative is on stasis rather than process, security rather than change. And while the nature of that security may be seen as distinctively maternal, it is in each case sustained by the imposition of an explicitly patriarchal order (1999, p. 64).

Conclusions: Femininity as fenced spatiality

This study outlines the correlations between colonial geopolitics and patriarchal biopolitics in More’s *Utopia*. It can be argued that Utopia is a patriarchal society where women are essentialized to ‘matrixial entities’, or spaces of (re)production. The creation of Utopia is framed by male individualism and female relationality. Like the land of Utopia, and particularly the gardens, utopian women are contained; fenced in and around the home. Education, while seemingly progressive, only serves to reify patriarchal social relations that see women in terms of their relationships with men and as inherently needing improvement.

Utopian cartography presents and reproduces the patriarchal imagery of male exploration of the female matrixial entity that has been given a name, ergo birth, by King Utopus, and by extension, Thomas More. The geographic island forcibly accommodates and reinforces the socio-political principles of patriarchal Utopia, and in so doing, allegorises a reformation of women that grants them deceptive progress towards individualism while

binding them to domesticity. If there is room for improvement for women within utopian imaginaries, the modern reader may not find it in the gardens of Utopia.

Endnotes:

1. Plato ultimately opts for the word *khora*, though *hupedochē* and *ekmageion* are also used.
2. Kumar remarks how influential the life of Christ and the communal order of the early church were for sixteenth and seventeenth utopias (1991, p. 64). This inspiration can be seen not only in More's writing but also in later Renaissance utopias like Campanella's *The City of the Sun* (1602), Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1626), and more evidently, Andreae's *Christianopolis* (1619). These utopian manifestos also maintain a gender hierarchy based on patriliney, as well as the state of social happiness, by erasing overt non-conformism. Manuel & Manuel refer to them as Pansophist utopias, as their imagery envisioned the possibility of attaining human salvation by joining "the two spiritual corps, the scientists and the ministers of religion, into a single body" (1979, p. 206).
3. Abraxas is the supreme deity of the Gnostic sects. The Greek letters of the name Abraxas make the number 365, which refers to the 365 days of the year, but also to the 365 gods it had under its command (Melton, 2001, p. 5). Collins (2008) describes it as a magical demon and Cline adds that "Abraxas was not accepted within normative Judaism or Christianity, therefore his invocation would fall under the category of idolatry, the worship of false gods" (2011, p. 150). The beheading of the land of Abraxa in *Utopia* also could signify a process of purification in which pagan or false gods are defeated.
4. The original quotation is "Utopiensium itaque exercitata litteris ingenia mire ualent ad inuentiones artium, quae faciant aliquid ad commodae uitae compendia." The word *exercitata* is the participle of the verb *exercito*, a variant form of *exerceo*, which means "make strong, keep at work, exercise, train", but can also be used in a metaphorical sense to say "cultivate", "exploit" and "harass" (Simpson, 2000, pp. 226–227). This ambiguity has resulted in variations in its translation. While there are editions like Logan & Adams' that opt for *stimulated* (2002, p. 76) or *trained* as in Turner's (1965, p. 101), other editions (Armes, 1912; Cotterill, 1936; Bruce, 1999) make use of the term *inured*, which has negative connotations associated with pain: "The wits therefore of the Utopians, inured and exercised in learning, be marvellous quick in the invention of feats helping anything to the advantage and wealth of life." (Bruce, 1999, p. 87). In any event, we can see from the original quotation how education is a prerequisite for moulding and cultivating the minds of utopians to the desired state of excellence.

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Almudena Machado Jiménez is a PhD student at the University of Jaén, where she works as a lecturer at the Department of English Philology. Her research interests are gender studies, postcolonialism and utopian/dystopian studies, particularly the notion of normative womanhood in contemporary patriarchal utopia written by women authors.