Decolonising utopia

Eve Darian-Smith

Afterword

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To date, modernist thinking has dominated the interdisciplinary field of intellectual inquiry engaged with utopia and utopianism. In this article, I argue that in order to fully engage with the possibility of different utopias emerging in the early decades of the 21st century, we have to be prepared to decolonise the premise on which utopian imaginings are conventionally based. Drawing on the Northern Territory Intervention as the latest iteration of ongoing utopian aspirations by white Australians on behalf of indigenous peoples, I call for the pluralising and indigenising of utopian imaginaries. This entails, I go on to suggest, the recognition that non-Western constructions of what can be imagined as a better future are valid and legitimate. Moreover, in some instances these alternatives may even provide us with some instructive visions of our collective futures.

Keywords: human rights, utopia, dystopia, indigeneity, Northern Territory Intervention, colonialism

Introduction

In the 1920s, German settlers named a region in the remote red landscape of Australia, north-east of Alice Springs, 'Utopia'. The Central Desert region of Utopia covers about 3,500 square kilometres and is home to approximately 1,000 Australian Aboriginal peoples from the two language groups of Alyawarr and Anmatyerre. The region became a cattle station in 1928 and then, upon its demise, was sold to the Aboriginal Land Fund in 1976. A few years later, land claims were settled to Aboriginal clans who occupied the area. John Pilger, a renowned Australian journalist, writes: 'The first Europeans who came here, perhaps demented by the heat, imagined a white utopia that was not theirs to imagine; for this is a sacred place, the homeland of the oldest, most continuous, human presence on earth' (Pilger 2016).

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Today, Utopia is a region of extreme impoverishment and deprivation for its indigenous communities, subject to the ongoing racist policies of Australia's Northern Territory Intervention begun in 2007 (Amnesty International 2011; *Sydney Morning Herald* 2008). In 2013, Pilger filmed a searing documentary about Utopia in which he discussed the extraordinary resilience and courage of Aboriginal peoples subjected to centuries of white persecution, including genocide (Pilger 2013). As Pilger relates, upon receiving land grants in the late 1970s, the small Aboriginal communities in Utopia slowly began to exert self-determination and rebuild a sense of community centred on their relations with land. However, it was precisely their success in showing that they could live in ways unimaginable to white Australians that was part of the 'problem'. Their demonstration of independence from government welfare and paternalistic management could not be tolerated by white Australian society. As Pilger goes on to say:

> The remote homelands are seen as an ideological threat, for they express a communalism at odds with the neo-conservatism that rules Australia and demands 'assimilation'. It is as if the enduring existence of a people who have survived and resisted more than two colonial centuries of massacre and theft remains a spectre on white Australia: a reminder of whose land this really is. [Pilger 2016]

In this article I reflect on the layered utopic imaginings projected over the past two centuries onto Utopia and, more generally, the wide expansive lands of the northern part of Australia. These utopian imaginings have changed over time, reflecting successive colonial and postcolonial aspirations for the indigenous peoples who occupy the land and have historically been rendered invisible, visible and, more recently, invisible again under what is called the Northern Territory Intervention. I suggest that the Intervention, and its stated mission to protect the human rights of Aboriginal children, is the latest iteration of utopic imaginings by white Australians on behalf of indigenous peoples. While this latest utopic vision is unique in that it relies heavily on the rhetoric of human rights, it is also historically connected to, and in many ways is an extension of, the now discredited utopias of settler colonialism and native assimilation.

Discussion of the cultural politics of ongoing postcolonial discrimination by white Australians towards indigenous peoples provides a backdrop to my argument that the concept of 'utopia' requires decolonising. In my view, the shifting fortunes of the indigenous region of Utopia — a place fraught with the dystopic violence and pain of Europeans' dreams for themselves and their projected desires on others — highlights the intrinsic limitations of 'utopia' as a modernist concept in the public imaginary.

Utopia and modernity

In this article, I do not want to get caught up in debates about whether all cultures or societies — Western and non-Western — have utopian imaginations and aspirations for a better or good life (Rüsen, Fehr and Rieger 2005). It is probably safe to say that everyone and every community at some point dreams of something better. But what constitutes 'better' is culturally subjective and contingent, and so the epistemological and ontological frameworks through which one knows reality and dreams of another is important. To date, modernist thinking has dominated the interdisciplinary field of intellectual inquiry engaged with utopia and utopianism. It is my argument that in order to fully engage with the possibility of different utopias emerging in the early decades of the 21st century, we have to be prepared to decolonise the premise on which utopian imaginings are conventionally based.

Utopianism — in all its various forms and temporal and spatial configurations — is grounded within the history of modernity and more specifically the concept of progress. However, progress in this context is often seen as a nostalgic return to an idealised simpler or kinder past. William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890) encapsulates this complex temporal tension of imagining a transformed society that is built upon romanticised elements of the past (see Holzman 1984). In the Western literary and political traditions that build upon Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), utopianism encapsulates aspirations for change and reform. With the rise of capitalism in the 16th century, 'the advance of the bourgeois order ... was the advance of humanity as a whole, breaking the chain of the past and entering upon a new freedom in which all could share' (Morton 1990, 81). Utopias, built upon linear ideologies of advancement, are typically planned and idealised communities that are deeply embedded with an aesthetics of progress towards building a better world, be these intentional communities or imagined communities expressed through fiction and political theorising. As Krishan Kumar writes in his book *Utopianism*:

> Utopia confronts reality not with a measured assessment of the possibilities of change but with a demand for change. This is the way the world should be. It refuses to accept current definitions of the possible because it knows these to be part of the reality that it seeks to change. [Kumar 1991, 107]

Very briefly, modernity refers to the emergence of European ideas in the post-medieval period that were then circulated through colonial expansion and mercantile ventures around the world. Modernity, connected as it is to science, capitalism, industrialisation and nationalism, maintains the basic premise that humans are able to 'improve' their lot in life. It is a way of thinking that is deeply indebted to ideas of progress and transformation, in turn reflecting a linear cause-and-effect mindset that can be applied to an understanding of the world. Over centuries, the concept

of modernity has been adopted and adapted and reshaped in non-uniform ways, impacting cultures, institutions and politics (Berman 2010). Modernity takes on many different forms in different cultural contexts (Appadurai 1996). That being said, in all its variations, modernity and modernist thinking underscore aspirations for progress, development and reform. On this front, the concept of utopia shares with the concept of human rights an ethics of progress. Within an international human rights regime, this invariably positions the West as morally superior in it coming to the rescue of less enlightened non-Western 'victims' (Darian-Smith 2013, 244–49).

Modernity, as the dominant epistemological perspective across Western and non-Western societies, has deeply racialised implications, linked as it is to colonialism, capitalism and slavery (Thomas 1994). As argued by Ramón Grosfoguel, the spread of modernity around the world was a crucial:

> epistemic strategy ... for Western global designs ... European/Euro-American colonial expansion and domination was able to construct a hierarchy of superior and inferior knowledge, and, thus, of superior and inferior people around the world. We went from the sixteenth century characterization of 'people without writing' to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries characterization of 'people without history', to the twentieth-century characterization of 'people without development' and more recently, to the early twenty-first century characterization of 'people without democracy'. We went from the 16th century 'rights of people' (Sepulveda versus de las Casas debate in the school of Salamanca in the mid-sixteenth century), to the 18th century 'rights of man' (Enlightenment philosophers), and to the late 20th century 'human rights'. All of these are part of global designs articulated to the simultaneous production and reproduction of an international division of labour into core/periphery that overlaps with the global racial/ethnic hierarchy of Europeans/non-Europeans. [Grosfoguel 2011, 23]

While modernity has an extraordinary spatial and temporal reach, it does not reflect all ways of knowing, being and experiencing the world. In recent decades, scholars in the humanities and social sciences have provided decolonial and postcolonial critiques of the modernist worldview. Drawing on the ground-breaking work of Edward Said, these critical scholars highlight peasant, indigenous and other non-modern modes of thinking and knowing. Importantly, these alternative epistemological frameworks suggest ways of relating to each other that were often intentionally eviscerated from the modernist paradigm, largely under policies and practices of colonialism (see Santos 2014; Mignolo 2011; Seth 2013; Chakrabarty 2000; Grosfoguel 2011). But, as critical scholars have shown, colonialism was never able to fully eradicate 'other' knowledge systems. Over time, other knowledge systems often, in turn, influenced or shaped modernist worldviews. In the context of the remote northern deserts of South Australia (in a landscape not very different from

that of Utopia in the Northern Territory), the historian Samia Khatun writes about the complex interweaving of European and indigenous epistemologies. She stresses the perseverance of traditional knowledge, despite colonial attempts to eradicate and empty the land of its native peoples (Khatun 2015).

Given that our current times are infused with problems and concerns not even imaginable 30 years ago, utopian thinking about how to 'better' our futures may well require us to detach our creative capacities from their modernist groundings and to embrace other ways of thinking that blur modernist binaries that we take for granted, such as private/public, human/non-human, man/nature, woman/man, religion/ secularism and so on. As the slogan of the World Social Forum states, 'Another World Is Possible'. Taking this slogan seriously suggests that there may well exist or emerge a whole range of utopian thinking currently beyond our modernist imaginings. I am anxious that we make space in the Euro-American academy for these modes of creative thought and actively encourage innovative utopian thinking from which we may all learn. On this point, the words of Frederic Jameson come to mind when he talks about utopia as a method and process that can contribute to the 'reawakening of the imagination of possible and alternate futures' (Jameson 2010, 42).

Utopia and dystopia in the Northern Territory

I identify three distinct, yet historically related, utopian imaginings of remote Australia. The first is that of the settler colonialists who 'conquered' the land and imagined building a better future for themselves in the desert landscape. The second utopia is that of a white and culturally homogenous society obtained through aggressive assimilation of indigenous peoples. The third and current utopian imagining is, in part, represented by the Northern Territory Intervention, in which the Australian government imagines itself as providing a better existence for native peoples by ostensibly protecting and defending their human rights.

Unfortunately, all three utopias have in practice degenerated into dystopia, as aspirations for a better life have not been fulfilled (Gordin, Tilley and Prakash 2010).[1] The German settlers who first established the vast cattle ranch 'Utopia' in 1928 eventually had to sell up and leave; dreams of a white Australian society have been shattered and policies of assimilation, which included genocide and the taking of Aboriginal children from their families, have been revealed to be a totally despicable episode in recent Australian history; and the Northern Territory Intervention has

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1   Interestingly, the first known use of the word 'dystopia' occurred in the context of another episode of
     British colonialism when, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, John Stuart Mill in a speech in the
     House of Commons in 1868 criticised the government's Irish land policy (Mill 1988).

been called by the United Nations and other international organisations a racist and anachronistic military response to impoverished indigenous communities and one that should be immediately disbanded.

Much has been written about Australia's policies of colonialism, assimilation and the Stolen Generations and I will not repeat those narratives here (Austin-Broos 2011; Moreton-Robinson 2008; Williams 2012). My attention centres on the Northern Territory Intervention and its rhetoric of human rights as a justification for its supposedly utopic aspirations to provide a better life for native peoples. In 2007, the Australian federal government declared the need to enact emergency measures to address claims of sexual abuse and neglect of Aboriginal children. Without consulting with indigenous communities, the government quickly sent the army into the remote Northern Territory.[2] As a result of the emergency action, 73 Aboriginal communities and town camps, including the region known as Utopia, were targeted for a range of changes to welfare services, land tenure, and other civil and political rights. Apart from outlawing the use of alcohol, Aboriginal people's welfare cheques were partially quarantined and their income managed, mandatory medical checks were performed on children to ascertain abuse, and native land holdings were initially confiscated under five-year leases, which evolved into 40-to-90-year leaseholds by the federal government in return for essential services (Bray et al 2012; Bielefeld 2014/15).[3] This land confiscation violated the terms of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth), which, while grossly inadequate, was introduced to give indigenous Australians greater claims to land rights (Sutton 2009). In addition, under the Intervention, legal actions against indigenous peoples were exempted from considering customary law and cultural practices, and native peoples lost their right to manage access permits for non-Aborigines to enter their local communities. The net result is that all sense of dignity and self-determination, including control over traditional lands, has been taken away from these remote indigenous groups (see Collingwood-Whittick 2012).

In 2007, the Intervention received bipartisan political backing, as well as the support of a few indigenous leaders. But, over the years, it has been widely and openly criticised by many indigenous elders and community leaders, civil society organisations and NGOs, the United Nations, and a broad sector of Australia's public who view it as failing to meet the real needs of Aboriginal communities. In the eight years since its implementation, there is no evidence or reporting of any person being prosecuted

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2   The Northern Territory population is approximately 220,000, with more than 35 per cent of the population made up of indigenous communities who technically own half the land mass of the territory.

3   Similar strategies have been used by the Canadian government against First Nations, in what Shiri Pasternak has called 'colonial forms of fiscal warfare' implemented through 'an army of accountants' (Pasternak 2015).

for child sexual abuse, which was the original justification for its implementation (Pazzano 2012). In 2012, new policies were introduced to further extend government powers over native communities under the *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012* (Cth). This extension incited Malcolm Fraser, the former Prime Minister of Australia, to declare the legislation 100 years out of date and fundamentally 'racist' and 'paternalistic'. Despite widespread protests by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leaders, Concerned Citizens of Australia and Amnesty International, the Intervention has been extended until 2022.

According to Val Michele Harris, a tireless campaigner against the Northern Territory Intervention and founder of 'concerned Australians' (*New Matilda* 2015), the Australian government took over the management of the Northern Territory as a deliberate strategy of occupation:

> Early inklings of change occurred in 2004 with the management of grants being transferred from communities to government's newly established Indigenous Coordination Centres. More ominous were the Amendments of 2006 to the Aboriginal Land Rights Act and the memoranda of agreements that followed. Government had made it clear that it wished to re-engage itself directly in the control of community land through leasing options, as well as to open up Aboriginal land for development and mining purposes.

> The plan was to empty the homelands. This has not changed. However, it was recognised that achieving this would be politically fraught — it would need to be accomplished in a manner that would not off-side mainstream Australia. Removing Aboriginal people from their land and taking control over their communities would need to be presented in a way that Australians would believe to be to Aboriginal advantage, whatever the tactics.

> So began the campaign to discredit the people and to stigmatise Aboriginal men of the Northern Territory publicly. It would be the Minister himself who would take centre stage. It seemed that all Aboriginal men were engaged in paedophilia. The Minister readily gave television and radio interviews, declaring that he knew there were paedophile rings in every Aboriginal community. Viewers were asked during their evening news broadcasts how they felt about Aboriginal children going to bed at night knowing they were not safe ... This was a government Minister engaging in a sensationalist campaign aimed at demoralising Aboriginal men, and was probably the lowest point in any government behaviour ever seen in Australia's political history. When challenged by the NT Chief Minister to name the people involved, the situation deteriorated further. [Harris 2013, 1]

Experiencing the Intervention firsthand, Ali Cobby Eckermann, an acclaimed Aboriginal poet, helps give a sense of the conditions under which indigenous communities suffered and continue to suffer:

> The whirlpool of public servants continued to crawl across the NT. Without consultation, or the use of local language interpreters, many incidents occurred. A toilet block was built on a sacred site. In some communities the administration offices were totally enclosed in barbed wire. Public servants could drink on communities, within view of residents. A police station was built at Titjkala as promised, but was never staffed. Depression among Aboriginal people escalated, and fatalities suggest the suicide rate has tripled. [Eckermann 2015]

She goes on to say that she thinks Australia will never recover:

> With the implementation of The Intervention I personally felt the betrayal of Australia; the moment when 'good' people allowed their neighbors to be treated in a manner they would not tolerate in any form ... This was the moment that any sense of equality and respect, garnered over the previous long years by our grandparents and parents, was abandoned by Australia's majority. [Eckermann 2015]

A great deal more can be said about the Intervention — its horrors, its failings, its robbing of indigenous communities of their integrity, cultural identity, and land rights as mining companies move in to dig up minerals and uranium waste is dumped (Altman 2010; Korff 2015). Employment is almost non-existent in the controlled communities and despair is widely evident. There is no foreseeable end in sight to this vast expanse of human misery.

Analysing the Northern Territory Intervention

How are we to understand the formation and continuing implementation of the Northern Territory Intervention, which is to be kept in place until 2022? Certainly, the Intervention can and should be interpreted as part of a continuing colonial history of land grabbing and land management of native peoples (Goodhall 2008; Povinelli 2011; Ford and Rowse 2013). However, what marks this latest phase of white Australian utopianism is the explicit use of human rights as a justification for the government's intervention on behalf of so-deemed abused children.

The work of Samuel Moyn, and specifically his book *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*, is helpful in thinking about the discourse of human rights being put to both good and bad uses in world affairs since the 1970s. Moyn argues that there is a mainstream belief that human rights represent a moral consensus about how to better the world — hence the reference to human rights as a utopian vision of world order. But, as he powerfully demonstrates, no such global consensus exists precisely because human rights, as implemented on the ground, are highly subjective and contingent principles of social organisation. As a utopian vision, human rights, which

ostensibly protect the powerless, have been increasingly used by the powerful and may work against the very communities that they are meant to defend (Moyn 2010, 227) (see further Ben Golder in this issue).

In the context of the Northern Territory Intervention, this evocation of human rights by the Australian government appears to have been an effective mechanism to win over, at least initially, widespread support for a military-styled humanitarian intervention. So, in adapting Moyn's argument to Australia and internal strategies of invasion, it may not be coincidental that the Intervention echoes George W Bush's use of human rights as a logistical strategy to justify the US invasion of Iraq. The defence of human rights justifies a particular — and often ritualised — response from democratic governments that are keen to be seen to be doing the 'right' thing on behalf of their citizens (Chimni 2015). That ensuing state actions may, over time, be revealed as unjustifiable (as was the case in the US invasion of Iraq and the Australian Intervention in the Northern Territory) creates a constant tension between the general logics of human rights as a utopic ideal to be defended, and the strategic use of human rights discourse for particular political means. How to get beyond this tension between the feigned apolitical morality of human rights and the use of human rights for reasons of political expediency may well be impossible.

Samuel Moyn offers a tenuous path forward by calling for the de-politicisation of human rights. As Moyn compellingly argues, it is precisely because human rights were born of 'the yearning to transcend politics' that human rights are now widely assumed to be politically neutral, which over the past decades has proven to be patently incorrect (Moyn 2010, 227). Moyn reminds us that 'human rights cannot be a general slogan or worldview or ideal … [human rights] cannot be all things to all people' (Moyn 2010, 227). And, as the articles in this special issue attest, alternative utopian imaginings that speak to specific political and social contexts are essential if human rights discourse is going to retain traction and relevancy in the coming decades of the 21st century (see Barnita Bagchi, Eliza Garnsey, Margaret Davies and Rachel Hughes in this issue).

Certainly, in analysing the Northern Territory Intervention, it is important to note the abuse of human rights as an abstract universal justification for enduring domestic policies and practices of colonialism and racism. It is, in other words, essential to acknowledge and engage with the politics of human rights in specific contexts, as Moyn calls upon us to do. However, I think that there is another element to understanding the ongoing Northern Territory Intervention in places such as Utopia that links back to the words of John Pilger with which this article began. He writes that the '[t]he remote homelands are seen as an ideological threat, for they express a communalism at odds with the neo-conservatism that rules Australia and demands

"assimilation"' (Pilger 2016). To put this another way, in recent decades some indigenous homelands have been making slow and modest improvements with respect to the quality of life for their inhabitants (see Amnesty International 2011; Ford and Rowse 2013). They have largely done this by retreating from the oversight of state and federal agencies, and putting into practice their own principles of self-determination as decided by local homeland communities. But this 'improvement' is very different from the ways white Australians determine and judge one's quality of life. So, what has emerged is an indigenous vision of an indigenous future that is irreconcilable with how white Australians imagine the future of native peoples should be.

Why is an indigenous vision of an indigenous future problematic to non-indigenous white Australians? In what way could the very poorest of indigenous communities living in the remotest of homelands pose an 'ideological threat', as John Pilger argues? The key to understanding this claim lies in what has been called the politics of recognition. For some indigenous peoples, what is desired is not to be 'recognised' and brought within a liberal modernist paradigm in which 'recognition' of their land and cultural rights is granted to them by seemingly benevolent governments (Simpson 2014; Coulthard 2014). For these communities, the objective is to refuse liberal recognition and reclaim their ability for self-governance through the returning of lands, places, resources, histories, laws, languages, memories, legacies and knowledge that were taken away from them in the first place. For these indigenous communities, there is nothing to be held in common with former colonisers and there is no desire to participate in an imposed ideal of what a better life for them would be. In other words, their historical loss is not a loss to be recognised, defended and 'restored' by liberal states through the international law of human rights, but a particular loss implemented on them through policies of racism and genocide which structurally endure into the 21st century (Simpson 2014; Coulthard 2014; Moreton-Robinson 2015). The indigenous scholar Robert Williams neatly sums up this position when he says:

> I really wanted to focus people on the challenge that tribes in this country [the United States], as well as indigenous peoples around the world, are confronting Western civilization with. And that's the challenge of them saying, we don't want to go your way. You know, we want to maintain our culture. We want a land base. We want a right to govern ourselves. And everybody who steps onto that land base, [must do so] according to our ways, according to our traditions, according to our law. And that's something that the West has never accepted. [Williams 2014]

In the first instance, the Australian government cannot accept the rejection by indigenous peoples of its politics of recognition, since to do so means rejecting

modernity as understood within mainstream Australia. Moreover, the rejection by indigenous peoples of liberal reformist agendas and policies of paternalism demands that the government engage with appropriate forms of compensation for practices of colonial dispossession beyond the empty promises of recognising indigenous human rights. Yet, Williams suggests that what is at stake is much more than material and economic reparation. More profoundly, he argues that for Western societies to acknowledge indigenous peoples as having their own laws and forms of governance — and so having the capacity to dream their own alternative utopian futures — undermines an organising logic of power that has been in play since antiquity (Williams 2014). This organising logic has posited civilised, lawful, productive Europeans against uncivilised, lawless, lazy 'savages' for centuries, justifying past moments of imperialism and colonialism and enduring practices of neo-colonialism into the 21st century. This organising logic created, as Ramón Grosfoguel earlier reminded us, 'a global racial/ethnic hierarchy of Europeans/non-Europeans' that cannot be disentangled from the spread around the world of Western ideology wrapped up in discourses of rationality, progress and, more recently, human rights (Grosfoguel 2011, 23).

Concluding comments

It is essential not to talk about indigenous peoples in Australia or anywhere else as a monolithic category. That being said, indigenous peoples globally are, to varying degrees, wary of what is presented to them as an apolitical human rights discourse that may or may not work in their best interests. For this reason, some native peoples are not interested in 'massaging' the concept of human rights to take on board localised political and social contexts and even perhaps indigenous concepts of dignity or justice. Rather, for some indigenous groups, it is about rejecting the concept of human rights and its utopic modernist logics of progress and reform altogether.

The argument of this article, as reflected in its title, calls for the decolonising of utopia. But, more accurately, the argument is for the indigenising of utopia according to the terms and imaginings of what specific indigenous communities envisage their future to be. For some, this may be a return to more traditional customs and practices to the extent that may be possible. For others, it may involve adapting a modernist framework and idea of 'progress' to reflect more accurately indigenous worldviews. In Australia, this can be seen in the activism around recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the Constitution, a movement that is widely supported by the Australian Human Rights Commission (Australian Human Rights Commission nd). Across the range of responses, indigenous communities underscore that there exist — recognised or not — plural and contingent understandings of utopian possibility. What is important is that some indigenous utopias may be unmoored from Western

epistemological frameworks and modernist binaries such as private/public, human/ non-human, man/nature, legal/illegal, religion/secularism, civilised/uncivilised, object/subject and so on. These utopian visions may conflict with and contradict Western utopian imaginings, which anthropologist Mark Goodale argues is essential if we are to develop a more nuanced 'idea of human rights [that] emerges from radically different forms of knowledge' (Goodale 2009, 132).

Indigenous utopias do not seek a better future on behalf of a wider 'society', as modern European utopianism has historically sought to do. Moreover, indigenous utopias do not assume singular ethical or moral visions that are applicable to everyone. In this way, indigenous utopias are aligned with what legal theorist Davina Cooper has called 'everyday utopias' in which peoples' dreams about living differently bring to life new social practices that critique taken-for-granted assumptions about how one should think, experience and behave (Cooper 2014). While Cooper does not engage with non-Western utopias, she does point to spaces of possibility and transformation that exist in all societies. Her work evokes what philosopher Wayne Hudson has called a 'decentered utopianism' that accommodates imagining a future 'beyond what is currently feasible' or even imaginable within the modernist paradigm (Hudson 2003, 3). This element of utopian possibility — of hope — should not be discounted, even in the poorest Aboriginal communities of remote Australia. As humanity faces the emerging challenges of the 21st century, many of which we cannot yet imagine, indigenous utopias that have been aggressively and systemically silenced may in fact provide us with some instructive alternative visions of our collective futures. ●

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