2.   Finding hope in hopeless times
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1.   INTRODUCTION

Each of the chapters in this volume attests to the importance of hope in contemporary society. Hope – and utopia – are essential for society (and its inhabitants) to function and for tyranny to be resisted (see, in particular, Chapters 3 and 5 of this volume). Yet, at the same time, utopia – and the articulation of hope – finds itself challenged by contemporary contexts and events (see, in particular, Part II, this volume).

Despite its earlier popularity, particularly in the late nineteenth century, for many contemporary scholars utopia is considered either an impossibly naïve idea or an inherently dangerous one. Explicit engagement with utopianism is often side-lined from mainstream social enquiry on account of being either unrealistic, unscientific, or both. This is exacerbated by a contemporary context of knowledge production which typically divorces 'fact from value' (Geoghegan, 2007, p. 70). This is particularly evident in the field of criminal justice theory, policy, and practice, which provides a focus of analysis in this chapter.

The suspicion of utopianism stems from a particular interpretation of utopia as a goal and divisions between utopianism and realism, and utopia and science can be traced to the development of sociology from the nineteenth century onwards. More recently, attempts have been made to salvage utopia within social and political theory by interpreting utopia not as a goal, but as a process through which to critique contemporary society.

Within this context, I draw extensively on the work of Ruth Levitas to argue that, despite the apparent decline of explicit utopianism in late modernity, we can still find expressions of desire and the potential for hope. However, the issue becomes how we can translate expressions of desire into a meaningful transformative politics – what Marta Soniewicka (Chapter 6) terms 'radical hope' – in a climate that actively discourages holistic social dreaming. I follow Levitas (2013) in arguing for the development of a utopian method as a means of translating abstract expressions of desire into an imagined institutional form, contending that this method not only renders explicit holistic visions of

the good society implicit within articulations of desire – however fleeting – but, crucially, presents a means of finding hope in a seemingly hopeless world.

I base this argument on an analysis of the shifts in understandings of utopia throughout the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries and the implications of these for understanding the role and function of utopia in contemporary society. I explore the context of criminal justice theory, policy, and practice to demonstrate how current approaches to knowledge production side-line more imaginative holistic responses to social problems. After detailing various attempts to reinvigorate utopia by critical theory, postmodernism and the move to 'realistic utopias', I demonstrate through its tentative application to a specific criminal justice policy concerning knife crime, how the method of utopia devised by Levitas presents a more promising route for translating abstract expressions of desire into concrete hope in the context of late modernity.

2.   EXPLORING CRIMINAL JUSTICE THEORY, POLICY, AND PRACTICE

The selection of criminal justice theory, policy, and practice as an example through which to explore the potential of utopia as method stems from the emergence of criminology from two distinct traditions: positivistic social science and the philosophy of punishment. These are represented by two distinct strands of criminological enquiry: empirical social science and normative theorising, which reflect a broader schism between fact and value that features throughout this chapter and upon which the argument for developing a utopian method is premised. As such, this focus is intended both to highlight the obstacles to holistic thinking and radical social transformation within the production of knowledge, and present an example of how utopia might be employed as a method to translate abstract expressions of desire within existing theories, policies, or practices into holistic visions of the good society. It is to an exploration of this broader context and the apparent decline of utopia that the following section turns.

3.   ARE WE FACING THE DEATH OF UTOPIA?

Utopia gained particular popularity in the late nineteenth century as a form of social commentary concerned with presenting holistic outlines of the good society (Levitas, 2013, Chapter 4). However, explicit commitment to utopianism has since waned and utopia has fallen (at least in some circles) into disrepute such that the term is now often invoked as an insult. Frequently associated with idealism, at best utopia is seen as unbearably naïve, a distraction from real-world issues and politics; at worst inherently dangerous, necessarily authoritarian and to be avoided at all costs. Informing such criticisms, in part,

is awareness of the enduring legacy of failed attempts to realise meaningful social change throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and the horrors resulting from attempts to impose specific visions of the good society found, for example, in Nazism or Stalinism. Such examples demonstrate a danger that Marta Soniewicka describes (see Chapter 6), whereby utopia is translated into ideology in order to legitimise the exercise of power of one group over another. Within this context, moreover, the holistic visions of ideal societies typical of nineteenth-century utopianism have been resisted, if not actively suppressed (see also, Van Klink, Chapter 3, this volume).

This has been particularly evident in the production of knowledge itself. As Levitas (2013) demonstrates, throughout the twentieth century, discussions of utopia have been increasingly marginalised from mainstream social and political theory and practice, with utopianism often seen to be in tension with both realism and scientific approaches to social enquiry and social reform.

Utopia has been criticised for its lack of realism in terms of realising a radically different society. This reflects a perceived lack of clarity regarding the processes by which holistic visions of seemingly desirable societies can be realised in practice, or fear they can only be achieved through violent imposition at which point they cease to be desirable. As Levitas notes, this is a tension that 'occurs in relation to both abstract theory and practical politics' (2013, p. 132) and, in terms of the latter, 'is expressed in the opposition between pragmatism and utopia' (ibid.). This is the position of Karl Popper. For Popper, utopias are inherently totalising, necessarily seeking the imposition of a particular and subjective ideal society and the elimination of dissenting views in order to do so. Rejecting holistic visions of the good society as a means of social transformation, Popper advocates a focus on tangible, small-scale social problems and the development of specific, targeted solutions or piecemeal reforms in the here and now (Popper, 1986; see also Van Klink, Chapter 3, this volume). This both reflects and reinforces a climate in which the radical, holistic reimagining of the social order associated with utopia has been suppressed in favour of an approach to social and political theory and practice that 'prioritises short-term fixes for problems within the current system' (Levitas, 2013, p. 132), while 'questions of the viability or justice of that system itself, and certainly radical alternatives, are placed outside legitimate political debate' (ibid.).

Related to, but distinct from, the tension between utopia and realism is a further opposition drawn between utopia and science as approaches to social reform, which has further contributed to the suppression of utopia within social and political sciences. This opposition reflects a separation of description and imagination, fact and value, 'is and ought' (Levitas, 2013, p. 65) that has been reinforced by the historical development of sociology. It originates in a particular view of science as rational, dispassionate, value-neutral empirical enquiry from which an evidence-based (and hence realistic) approach to social

reform is developed. This is an approach concerned with the establishment of 'facts' to which the inherent normativity in the holistic reimagining of the good society typically associated with utopia is considered antithetical (ibid., pp. 88–89). This presumed superiority of scientific methods of knowledge production acts 'as a brake on utopian thinking' (ibid., p. 127), thereby suppressing the articulation of holistic visions of the good society as legitimate forms of knowledge, much less vehicles for realising meaningful social change.

None of this is to discount the fact that technological or scientific utopias exist in terms of holistic visions of the good society which foreground scientific or technical solutions to contemporary social problems (see Kumar, 2003, and Part III, this volume). Rather, the tension between science and utopia outlined relates to the method employed as a basis of social reform. It fundamentally challenges the idea that constructing *any* holistic vision of the good society – irrespective of the specific nature of the solutions to social problems imagined – can lead to an effective or logical route to social reform since it is divorced from rational, evidenced, positivistic scientific research. Such scientific research, in turn, can only bring about change in an incremental, piecemeal fashion, as new evidence is collected and new reforms suggested.

4.   THE SUPPRESSION OF UTOPIA

These tensions between utopia and realism and science, as well as the contemporary broader view of utopia as naïve or necessarily authoritarian, can be attributed, in part, to both a particular understanding of utopia as a blueprint or goal and the historical development of sociology. However, the suppression of utopia is also exacerbated by the contemporary climate of knowledge production, especially within the social and political sciences. The following sections explore these issues, before providing an example of how the climate of knowledge production has shaped analyses of social problems in relation to criminal justice theory and practice.

4.1   The Problem of Definition

Since its inception, utopia has been a contested concept (Levitas, 1990). Criticisms regarding the tensions between utopia and either realism or science arguably rely on a particular definition of utopia that identifies it not only as a holistic vision of a good or better society, but as a blueprint or goal for social reform. However, this is not the only interpretation of utopia.

In her detailed exposition of the various ways in which utopia has been conceptualised, Levitas (1990) constructs a typology of definitions according to which utopia is typically understood in terms of either content, form, or function. Unifying diverse uses of the term, she provides a broad definition

of utopia as 'the expression of the desire for a better way of being' (ibid., p. 8). This definition both 'allows for this desire to be realistic or unrealistic. It allows for the form, function and content to change over time' (ibid.). It also 'allows Utopia to be fragmentary, partial, elusive, episodic' (Levitas, 2007, p. 54), rather than necessarily a holistic outline of society.

Levitas (1990) also identifies three functions such expressions of desire may perform: compensation, critique, or catalyst for social change. As compensation, utopias can provide consolation for the failings of the existing social order, although, in doing so, they typically act conservatively to preserve rather than transform the social order. As critique, utopias offer critical reflection on contemporary society and its practices, opening horizons for imagining the world differently, while, as a catalyst for social change, they translate such critique into transformative action.

By exposing the various ways in which utopia can be defined, as well as the different functions it may have, Levitas fundamentally challenges the assumption that all utopias are necessarily goals to be achieved or (perhaps more dangerous) blueprints to be imposed. This is not to say that such visions of utopias do not exist, but simply to decouple the automatic identification of utopia with a blueprint and, by extension, authoritarianism. The assumption of utopia as a goal, however, and its rejection in favour of 'scientific' approaches to social reform must also be situated in the development of sociology as a distinct field of study concerned with the analysis of society and social problems, as will now be explored.

4.2   Sociology and Utopia

Levitas details how the development of utopianism and its contemporary fate is necessarily intertwined with that of the discipline of sociology, demonstrating various overlaps and intersections between classical works of sociology and nineteenth-century literary utopias (2013, Chapter 4). She highlights how, in the nineteenth century, 'the origins of sociology, socialism and utopia were intertwined' (ibid., p. 67) and it was common for those interested in both exploring the current condition of society and its future possibilities to move between non-fictional sociological analyses and fictional utopias as a means of doing so (ibid., p. 72). H.G. Wells, in particular, typifies this relationship. Perhaps best recognised today as the author of such literary fictions as *The Time Machine*, *The War of the Worlds* and *A Modern Utopia*, Wells also saw himself as a sociologist (ibid., p. 86).

As a sociologist, Wells critiqued the trend for social enquiry, most notably sociology, to emulate the natural sciences in its endeavour to produce empirical, value-neutral positivist enquiry. He viewed social research as necessarily value-laden, arguing that, '[t]here is no such thing in sociology as dispas-

sionately considering what *is*, without considering what is *intended to be*' (1914, p. 203) and claimed that 'the creation of Utopias – and their exhaustive criticism – is the proper and distinctive method of sociology' (ibid., p. 204).

The tendency of social enquiry to emulate the natural sciences nevertheless increased towards the end of the nineteenth century and continued throughout the twentieth century, resulting in a schism between science and utopia and the subsequent suppression of utopianism within social and political research. Vincent Geoghegan describes this turn towards positivism within social science at the end of the nineteenth century as resulting in 'a broader separation of fact from value' (2007, p. 70), as normative theorising or approaches to social enquiry that foregrounded values were separated from empirical social science that foregrounded facts.

The development of sociology from the late nineteenth century further cemented this separation of science and utopia, in the UK at least. The first Chair of Sociology was awarded to Leonard Hobhouse, an avowed positivist who advanced '[a] scientific sociology [that] can grasp social reality through reformulating existing theoretical ideas on the basis of improved empirical knowledge' (Scott, 2016, p. 353), and this approach subsequently came to dominate the intellectual agenda of sociology in the first half of the twentieth century (Levitas, 2013, pp. 88–89). By establishing this view of 'proper' sociological enquiry as scientific, empirical, and evidence-driven, utopia was further marginalised from the field of legitimate social enquiry, a trend that continues within the contemporary climate of knowledge production.

4.3 Contemporary Knowledge Production

The legacy of this distinction between fact and value within sociology, in particular, is also reflected more generally and continues to shape how knowledge is produced. It is particularly evident when reflecting on the barriers that have been constructed between disciplines, not least those between social sciences and normative political theory.

Within social sciences, positivistic 'science' and 'abstracted empiricism' (Young, 2011) remain lauded as not only superior forms of social enquiry but the only viable approach to social reform. This is reflected in an emphasis on devising piecemeal reforms, concerned with tinkering at the edges of existing society rather than the imagining of radical alternatives. A similar trajectory is noted in relation to law, and specifically the contemporary development of legislation and regulation by Carinne Elion-Valter in Chapter 4 of this volume, reflected by an increasing emphasis on responding to small-scale problems at the expense of exploring more imaginative, hopeful visions of society (see also Van Klink, Chapter 3). As a result of this emphasis on abstract empiricism and piecemeal reforms, social science concentrates on the production of

facts, but does so at the expense of engaging with fundamentally normative, evaluative questions about the type of society we want to live in. Meanwhile, such questions are typically assigned to the realm of normative political theory. However, if contemporary social science stands accused of focusing on the production of facts or, as Levitas puts it, 'description and explanation' (2013, p. 93) with a view to producing practical reforms within existing social arrangements, normative political theory arguably suffers the opposite fate, focusing on abstract, normative ideals without considering their specific institutional arrangements within contemporary empirical reality (Levitas, 2008, p. 55).

This is evident, for example, in the work of John Rawls (1971), whose *Theory of Justice* has been viewed as an attempt to 'return to the grand tradition of political theory' (Geoghegan, 2007, p. 72) by reconnecting an abstract concept of justice to an account of the institutional arrangements necessary for realising it in practice. However, Geoghegan notes, even in this account, the vision of the good society remains abstract, unable to recognise the 'particularism' of lived reality (ibid., p. 73). For example, Rawls leaves unspecified how his model of redistributive justice should be implemented in terms of actual policies and institutions, including the specific, fine-grain, practical institutional mechanisms through which goods would be collected and redistributed, how frequently and by whom. This is because such issues require empirical knowledge and understanding of the social world to ascertain what is both possible and desirable in a real-world context. The holistic outlines of the good society provided in the conventional literary utopias of the nineteenth century often focus on just such institutional specificity, with a detailed account of the practical organisation of society, including such issues as the division of labour, leisure, law, housing and education. Similarly, as Danielle Chevalier and Yannis Tzaninis also highlight in Chapter 12 of this volume, *topos* or place, as an essential component of the term *utopia*, also implies a particular, spatial content embedded within a social, historical, cultural context. Yet it is these particularities that are typically missing from abstract political theory.

With the disciplinary separation that hinders the translation of normative principles into practical application, so too do the prospects for radical social transformation diminish. This is by no means universal or absolute, and, as discussed later in this chapter, there have been notable efforts to counter this trend. However, as has been demonstrated in this section, it is a trend that has been predicated on longstanding differences in the conceptualisation of both the project of social enquiry and the approach to social reform this division engenders. It is also a trend often bolstered by institutional pressures and funding issues influencing contemporary research agendas to determine what types of knowledge count as 'knowledge' in the first place. Where research funding is subject to state oversight, moreover, it is likely that those types of

research that reinforce rather than radically challenge the existing social order are supported, as demonstrated by the case of criminology and criminal justice theory, policy, and practice in the following section.

4.4   Criminal Justice Theory, Policy, and Practice: A Case Study

The separation of fact and value is particularly evident in contemporary criminology and criminal justice theory, policy, and practice. For example, Paddy Hillyard and colleagues, (2004) have highlighted the role of government funding in shaping the agenda for particular forms of criminological research in the UK, while Lucia Zedner (2011) has lamented the separation of theorising crime and criminalisation from the development of criminal justice policy and practice, viewing each as inadequate and problematic without the other.

In particular, Zedner highlights the way in which normative theorising about crime and justice are consigned largely to the realms of legal philosophy and criminal law while the politics and practices of the administration of justice are left to criminology, impoverishing each discipline and constructing 'too rigid a boundary between the two' (2011, p. 279). She argues, on the one hand, that without criminological input, legal philosophy risks producing 'a largely artificial account of crime' (ibid., p. 278) which absents institutional specificity and lacks 'a fully grounded, empirically rigorous, and socially rich understanding of the ways in which crime is actually policed and prosecuted' (ibid.). On the other hand, she warns against the 'brand of professional pessimism that inhibits creative thinking about crime' (ibid., p. 272) to which she claims criminology has become hostage. Zedner argues that if criminology is to avoid becoming 'a mere adjunct to policy making' (ibid., p. 272) it must re-engage with normative theorising about crime and criminalisation.

Part of the particular challenges facing contemporary criminology in terms of engaging with bigger, normative questions or transformative change beyond piecemeal reforms stems from its proximity to state power. Criminology has its objects of study – crime and criminal justice – defined by the state. As such, its understandings and analyses of crime are intimately bound up with the existing social order and the interests of the state, as too are the proposed approaches to addressing crime and realising criminal justice. While 'critical criminologists' (a collective term used broadly to describe those criminologists who challenge state definitions of crime) draw attention to the problematic definition of crime and the assumption of this as their primary object of study, instead offering alternative bases upon which to ground their analyses, 'mainstream' criminologists who accept the definition of crime as defined by the state are more likely to receive state support and funding (see Walters, [2007] 2011). This therefore results in a promotion of particular types of knowledge, in this case positivist approaches to crime that focus on developing a 'what

works', piecemeal approach to criminal justice policy and act as an adjunct to state power.

However, these difficulties can be overstated, and Zedner (2011) points to the ongoing role of such critical criminologists, often protected by tenured university positions, to criticise governments, policies, and practices, and resist dominant approaches to crime theorisation and control. She also singles out penal theory as a notable exception to the trend of disciplinary divisions between empiricism and normativity. As such, it is important to recognise that, despite a climate that encourages a separation of fact and value, these divisions are neither absolute nor inevitable. Accordingly, it can be argued that despite a climate that may appear hostile to utopianism, the decline or death of utopia is overstated. Reflecting this, the following section explores examples suggesting that, while it may have changed, utopianism remains alive and well in late modernity.

5. RECLAIMING UTOPIA IN ANTI-UTOPIAN TIMES

Despite the criticisms made of utopia, both in terms of its realism, scientificity and the potential for totalitarianism, there is a counter-narrative of utopia's development since the nineteenth century. This story shows not the inevitable decline of utopia, but its transmogrification as a tool of social enquiry to avoid the dangers or pitfalls associated with the understanding of utopia as a goal. This is evident, in particular, in the developments of critical theory, postmodernism and, most recently, discussions around 'realistic utopias' explored below.

5.1 Critical Theory

A notable attempt to transcend the distinction between fact and value plaguing social enquiry emerged with critical theory. Rejecting this distinction, or, as he describes it, the polarisation between theory and empiricism, Max Horkheimer ([1972] 2002) introduced critical theory as a response to traditional theory's claims to an objective, value-neutral account of facts, which he rejected. He argued that the production of theory – and indeed of knowledge itself, as well as individual subjectivity – is necessarily shaped by the material conditions of reality and the context of its production. He also criticised the ways which such 'detached knowledge' (ibid., p. 196) and those who produce it, inasmuch as they are products of specific social conditions, necessarily reinforce those conditions.

Critical theory seeks to transcend the separation of theory and empiricism via a dialectical process of self-interpretation exploring the contradictions in

the lived experiences of humans living within the social order. For example, Horkheimer argues people experience 'the economic categories of work, value and productivity' ([1972] 2002, p. 208) as both legitimate and inevitable within the existing social order, yet also reject them and desire something different. In this way, he claims, 'the critical acceptance of the categories which rule social life contains simultaneously their condemnation' (ibid.) and it is in these contradictions in the lived experiences of individuals that the impulse for social transformation can be found.

While Levitas (2013, p. 99) suggests there are very few contemporary sociologists who would not consider themselves to be engaged in the kind of critical theory described by Horkheimer, she also recognises the 'strong utopian currents' (ibid., p. 98) it contains. This is evidenced not least by critical theory's explicit commitment to social reform, explicitly envisaged as the radical, holistic reconstruction of society to overthrow the established social order and its dominant paradigms of knowledge and piecemeal approach to reform (Horkheimer, [1972] 2002, pp. 218–19).

However, the relationship between critical theory and utopia has often been 'uneasy' (Cooke, 2004, p. 413). In its commitment to radical social transformation, critical theory is also committed to realistic visions of the good society, embedded in the existing social order, reflecting the view that all knowledge is socially produced. At the same time, the identification of lived experience as the impetus of social change results in a refusal to be drawn on the institutional specificity of the imagined alternative since change can only be effected when knowing agents, aware of the contradictions of their existence, bring about a new social order as part of a collective struggle. The specific institutional content of this new order is necessarily shaped by the material conditions, experiences and desires animating this struggle in a particular time and place. Critical theory therefore 'eschew[s] substantive ideas of the "good society"' (ibid., p. 415) in favour of a view of utopia as a process facilitating the 'apprehending another way of being, one that can just be glimpsed from within the dominant social totality, and which forms a necessary condition for collective emancipatory politics' (Garforth, 2009, p. 7).

Following the emergence of critical theory, conceptualisations of utopia as a process have gained wider resonance in late modernity, as reflected in Abensour's (1973) account of utopia as 'the education of desire' (cited in Thompson, 1976, p. 97). This account views the role of utopia as being 'to open a way to aspiration, to "teach desire to desire, to desire better, to desire more, and above all to desire in a different way"' (ibid.). Here, utopia is presented not as a goal to be achieved, but in terms of its affective nature, a process of imagining, such that 'what is most important about utopia is less what is imagined than the act of imagination itself, a process which disrupts the closure of the present' (Levitas, 2000, p. 39). The shift from understanding

utopia as a goal to viewing it as a process in critical theory, therefore, mirrors a broader shift in the theorisation of utopia since the nineteenth century, also found in feminism and, most recently, postmodernism (Levitas, 2000, p. 38).

5.2   Postmodernism

The construction of holistic visions of the good society and grand narratives typically associated with utopianism as a modernist project of the late nineteenth century is rejected following the postmodern turn, while postmodernism's emphasis on '[t]he "deconstruction of the subject" undermined the possibility of discussing interests beyond the self-defined identity and identification of individuals' (Levitas, 2013, p. 97). Consequently, the idea of utopia in terms of what Lisa Garforth terms 'agential subjectivity', or 'that which can cause an individual, a movement, a society to act in the name of some concrete end or good – to create the better or different society' (2009, p. 11) – such as that found in critical theory – is also undercut. As a result, both Garforth (2009) and Levitas (2000) respectively highlight within postmodernism a reconfiguration of the concept of utopia as a site of resistive practice, with a particular focus on the body as a site of resistance to the established social order. Both also link this to a conceptualisation of utopia as an expression of desire, without a means of translation to hope.

The concept of hope is explored further in this volume by both Carinne Elion-Valter (Chapter 4) and Marta Soniewicka (Chapter 6), among others. However, the distinction between desire and hope drawn by Levitas (2000) and utilised by Garforth (2009) is drawn from Ernst Bloch's distinction between 'abstract' and 'concrete' utopia. For Bloch ([1959] 1986), glimpses of utopia can be found in various aspects of culture, from hallucinations and daydreams, to architecture, medicine, religion and fairy tales as well as conventional literary utopias and the holistic visions of the good society described in detail more typically viewed as social or political utopias (Geoghegan, 1996, p. 5; Garforth, 2009, pp. 8–9). However, so long as such glimpses remain disconnected from a transformative politics, they present purely 'abstract utopias', expressions of desire for a better way of being (following Levitas's broad definition of utopia), but disconnected from the hope that a better way of being can be achieved in practice. It is only through the translation of such expressions of desire into a concrete transformative politics that such expressions of desire find translation into hope, or 'concrete utopia'. For Levitas, therefore, the distinction between desire and hope rests on the ability for expressions of desire for a better way of being to be translated into meaningful social transformation. The problem with the postmodern reconfiguration of utopia constitutes, as she puts it, 'a retreat from hope, at least social hope, to desire' (Levitas, 2013, p. 105).

This retreat from hope to desire is common to both critical theory and post-modern treatments of utopia in late modernity and the shift from conceptualisations of utopia as a goal to a process. As will be demonstrated, it also poses a challenge for translating desire to hope, and effecting meaningful social change in contemporary society.

5.3 The Problem of Hope

In disrupting the closure of the present in order to foster the education of desire, the conceptualisation of utopia as process itself resists commitment and closure (Levitas, 2000, p. 40). This risks reducing the critical function of utopia to solely that of critique, forsaking its role as a catalyst of social change and denying a meaningful translation of expressions of desire to a transformative politics. At worst, it resigns utopia to the role of 'compensatory fantasy' (Levitas, 2013, p. 125).

While not denying the importance of process in offering spaces of resistance to contemporary society, Levitas nevertheless sees the conceptualisation of utopia as an open-ended process as 'political evasion' (2003, p. 142). She argues for the return of closure to utopian theorising in late modernity in order to translate expressions of desire into concrete hope through which meaningful social transformation can be achieved. As indicated below, this is a position which has found support in recent calls for the development of 'realistic utopias' (see Levitas, 2013, Chapter 7).

5.4 Realistic Utopias

Erik Olin Wright (2010) advances an 'emancipatory social science' based on 'envisioning real utopias'. A key proponent of the calls for 'realistic utopias', Wright's project is animated by the same impulse as previous efforts to reconfigure utopia as a tool of social enquiry: to transcend the separation of fact from value that has plagued the contemporary production of knowledge about the social world, and to resist the tendency towards piecemeal social reform. Specifically, he seeks to reconnect 'the enunciation of abstract principles' (Wright, 2010, p. 21) with a practical consideration of their empirical institutional implications.

However, like the earlier contributions of critical theory, Wright resists engagement with the type of holistic outlining of society historically associated with utopia, thereby limiting the institutional specificity of his own utopianism. While the target of his realistic utopianism is specific practices and institutions found in contemporary society as sites of potential transformation, as Levitas (2013, p. 145) points out, his approach leaves unaddressed the issue of how to connect such specific institutional transformations to

a broader emancipatory politics. At worst, a consequence of this absence is a return to piecemeal reforms that operate to preserve (and legitimate) rather than radically transform the existing social order, as I have argued in relation to the development of Wright's 'real utopias' in the field of penal abolitionism (Copson, 2016).

The problem with existing efforts to reinvigorate utopianism in late modernity, from critical theory to 'realistic utopias', is an inability to translate abstract expressions of desire for a better way of being into a concrete transformative politics. Stemming from a resistance to the development of holistic visions of the good society as risking authoritarianism that emerged with failed attempts to construct radically different societies in the twentieth century, it is facilitated by the schisms between realism and science, and fact and value that have shaped the production of knowledge. Through its open-endedness and lack of institutional specificity, this approach to utopia also risks consigning utopia to the functions of solely compensation or, at best, critique of the social order without offering a means of translating this critique into meaningful change. In order to avoid this fate and, with it, the prospect that the existing social order becomes viewed as the only or best of all possible worlds, Levitas (2013) maintains that we need to find ways of reintroducing closure to utopia, and thereby translate abstract expressions of desire into concrete articulations of hope. She argues for a shift in understanding of utopia, from goal to method, in order to reinvigorate the types of institutional specificity necessary for preserving utopia's function as a catalyst for social change, while avoiding the dangers of authoritarianism associated with holistic, speculative visions of the good society. The remainder of this chapter explores this method in more detail, before reflecting on how it might be applied to a specific example of a criminal justice policy as a means of translating desire into hope.

6.   FINDING HOPE IN HOPELESS TIMES

The definition of utopia as 'the expression of the desire for a better way of being' allows for a broad interpretation of utopia, such that, rather than the decline of utopia in late modernity, we find it continues to survive and even thrive, albeit in new and different ways. However, this definition also risks being so broad as to include potentially everything and does not solve the problem of translating those expressions of desire into representations of concrete hope. Therefore, while this definition may be analytically useful in terms of accommodating various and diverse approaches to utopia, it is equally problematic in terms of aiding the identification and subsequent analyses of substantive holistic visions of the good society commonly associated with social or political utopias – and recognised by Levitas as reflecting the forms of closure necessary for animating social transformation. Levitas (2013)

therefore introduces the idea of 'utopia as method' as a means of addressing this problem.

6.1 The Utopian Method

Devised as a means of transcending the divide between abstract normative political theory and empirical social science, as well as establishing utopia as a legitimate method of social enquiry, utopia as method is presented as offering a means of translating the abstract and partial articulations of desire found in various forms of social and cultural expression, including but not limited to, social and political theories, policies, and practices, into the concrete holistic visions of the good society conventionally associated with social and political utopianism but currently suppressed. The underpinning idea is that this approach can be applied to any and all expressions of desire, though different starting points may yield more or less particular detail and may require bigger or smaller imaginative leaps. This is because such analyses are, necessarily and deliberately, speculative, involving 'a mixture of evidence, deduction, and imagination, representing as a whole something of which only fragments are actually available' (Levitas, 2007, p. 61).

Comprising three aspects, *archaeology*, *architecture* and *ontology*, this method provides a means of rendering explicit the implicit holistic visions of the good society underpinning the often partial and fragmented expressions of desire for a better way of being we find within contemporary culture. While the *archaeological* aspect of this method seeks to unearth the normative assumptions animating these expressions of desire, the *architectural* mode considers the practical, institutional frameworks they imply. Meanwhile, the *ontological* dimension reflects upon human nature and the type of selves this good society implies humans are, or would necessitate we become. By considering these various aspects, the aim of this method is to render explicit the possibly competing or contrasting visions of the good society underlying different theories, policies, or practices. This, in turn, allows reflection on both the desirability and practicability of realising these societies, as well as facilitating the type of civic discussion reflected in Jürgen Habermas's idea of 'deliberative democracy', by connecting apparently abstract policies concerning niche areas of social life, to wider discussions concerning the type of society we want to live in, and how this might be realised.

6.2 Applying the Utopian Method to Knife Crime Policy

Given its proximity to state power coupled with the pronounced divisions between fact and value within criminal justice theory, policy, and practice

previously noted, this is also an area particularly apt for exploration using the utopian method, in order to ascertain its potential as a method of social enquiry.

To take an example from the UK, various policies aimed at tackling knife crime in the twenty-first century reveal the problems inherent in the contemporary approach to tackling social problems and, specifically, the separation between fact and value described. Approaches to tackling knife crime have ranged from measures such as knife amnesties, stop and search policies, increased prison sentences, education and awareness programmes (Eades et al., 2007) to, more recently, a 'public health' approach (Mayor of London, 2017; see also, Copson, 2021). Such criminal justice policies, of which knife crime is but one example, typically divorce problems of knife crime from their location in broader social and political contexts, identifying them as discrete problems in need of targeted reform, rather than connecting them to a broader transformative politics. Based on the 'what works', empirically driven approach that currently dominates criminal justice policymaking that was highlighted previously, they largely absent engagement with bolder normative questions about the contemporary organisation of society, and holistic thinking about both causes and responses to crime, thereby abstracting crime from its context in a wider social order. Even where a broader, interdisciplinary approach is suggested, such as via a 'public health' approach that shifts away from purely criminal justice interventions, focusing instead on 'addressing underlying vulnerabilities reducing risk factors, and strengthening protective factors' (Mayor of London, 2017, p. 44), the primary 'problem' to be solved remains knife crime, with fundamental, normative questions about the organisation of society unexplored.

Every policy approach mentioned above – from increased prison sentences to a public health approach to knife crime – arguably presents an expression of desire for a better society – specifically one in which knife crime is reduced, if not eliminated entirely. The question becomes, however, if each of these approaches is variously committed, at its most stripped back, to establishing a society without knife crime, are they all ultimately committed to the same project of change? Whilst space precludes a detailed analysis of different approaches to knife crime using the utopian method, sketching its application to one such approach – the public health approach to tackling knife crime – can, at least, begin to shed light on the application of the utopian method as a method of social enquiry.

6.3   Archaeology

Taking first the application of the utopian method in archaeological mode, a particular set of normative assumptions regarding the role and function of the state underpinning the public health approach to knife crime policy is

revealed. As I have discussed elsewhere (Copson, 2021, pp. 334–35), this approach echoes similar approaches that have been adopted in relation to other perceived social problems, such as sex work and drug use, in its view of knife crime as predominantly a health problem, not a criminal justice one. These approaches typically involve 'bringing together partner agencies to provide a comprehensive package of support around health, education, housing and employment' (Mayor of London, 2017, p. 43). They imply an understanding of crime as a reflection of social conditions rather than individual pathology and a vision of a much bigger, welfarist state, which exists to support individuals and intervene in their lives where necessary. This stands in contrast to more conventional law and order policies advocating, for example, tougher prison sentences which, alternatively, imply a vision of crime as a result of individual choice and the state as primarily serving to enforce social order and protect individual liberty.

6.4   Ontology

Even through this limited analysis of the archaeological aspects of a public health approach to knife crime, one can begin to see the ontological assumptions informing it. Specifically, underpinning this approach is arguably an awareness of the ways in which individual actions, such as participation in knife crime, are situated in and may be expressions of broader social arrangements. These, in turn, may shape the choices available to individuals and the reasons for participating in knife crime. Rather than viewing such participation as a wanton, free choice (as might be implied by the law and order approach suggested by a policy of tougher prison sentences), the emphasis is on expanding the options and resources available to individuals, reflecting a view of human behaviour as fundamentally shaped by and reflective of the structure and organisation of society itself.

6.5   Architecture

Together, these assumptions around archaeology and ontology feed into institutional implications or *architecture* of the good society that can be speculated as arising from this public health policy for tackling knife crime. By implying an account of knife crime that locates its causes within the broader social arrangements of society and assuming the role of the state as being to support its citizens, a public health approach potentially implies a reimagining of the contemporary architecture of society. By fundamentally relating issues of crime and justice (specifically knife crime) to other areas, such as housing, employment, and health, it raises implicit questions about a range of social

institutions and suggests a need for these to be reconfigured in order to achieve the good (understood as 'knife-crime-free') society.

While a fuller account would involve a more detailed reconstruction of institutional frameworks and policies to pull out a detailed and holistic vision of society, this, admittedly brief, analysis is intended simply to indicate how the utopian method might begin to be applied, in order to render explicit the imaginary reconstitutions of society implied by various expressions of desire for a better way of being. A fuller account would also require a much more detailed comprehensive delving into the historical development of criminal jurisprudence and penology, as well as situating these debates in their appropriate historical, cultural and policy contexts.

Furthermore, with any fragment or expression of desire, there will be, undoubtedly, many ways of reading the implicit notion of the good society underlying it, dependent on the particular notions emphasised and the particular texts or resources analysed, as well as the normative positions and interests of the reader. Indeed, this reflects the explicitly speculative nature of utopia as method. As such, rather than presenting an exhaustive or unequivocal account, the analysis presented here may be considered but one possible interpretation of the implicit good society underlying a particular knife crime policy. The aim of doing so, however, is to demonstrate how, even amidst the apparent retreat to desire in late modernity, abstract fragments of desire can be translated into concrete visions of hope through the development of the method of utopia devised by Levitas.

7. CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued for the importance of translating expressions of desire into transformative politics in the context of late modernity, presenting the utopian method devised by Ruth Levitas as a means of doing so. It has situated a decline in holistic social planning and retreat from hope to desire in the context of the development of social enquiry since the nineteenth century and, particularly, the separation of fact from value bolstered by the contemporary climate of knowledge production, drawing on the example of criminology and criminal justice theory, policy, and practice in particular, to highlight this phenomenon and the challenges it poses for understanding and responding to social problems. While the apparent decline of utopia in the twentieth century has been overstated, as evidenced by the transmogrification of utopia from goal to process seen in critical theory and postmodernism, as well as the burgeoning interest in 'real utopias', such efforts to salvage utopia as a tool of social enquiry have come at the cost of institutional specificity. Without this, the transformative potential of utopia disappears, and utopia retreats to the role of compensation or critique. The method of utopia is thus presented as a means

of reinvigorating utopia as a tool of social enquiry, in order to preserve the function of utopia as a catalyst of transformative change.

The chapter has sought to demonstrate how this method can not only transcend the boundaries between empiricism and normativity that dominate and limit contemporary approaches to social enquiry, but, in a context where explicit utopianism is discouraged, if not suppressed, it can encourage the translation of abstract fragments of desire into concrete articulations of hope through the construction of visions of the good society that can then be subjected to evaluation and discussion.

The aim here is not to recreate utopia as a goal, nor to preserve it as a process, but to develop utopia as a method for interrogating both existing social institutions and practices, and connecting them to broader normative political debates about what type of society we want to live in, starting from where we are now. I have provided a brief example of how this might begin to be done in relation to a criminal justice policy around knife crime. The challenge now is to develop this approach further, to see how it might apply in different contexts, to different expressions of desire, and to tease out the holistic visions of the good society underpinning them – to find concrete hope in the fragments of abstract desire.

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