



# Utopias for the impoverished: The Islamicate in the creation of utopias

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## Abstract

This paper considers impoverishment and its link to the notion of utopia. It proposes that a utopia can only exist in relation to a dystopia, and it considers how 'poverty' is the dystopic outcome in a capitalist quest for the utopia. It then proposes the waqf as a means of addressing impoverishment.

*Your blood asks, how were the wealthy  
and the law interwoven? With what  
sulphurous iron fabric? How did the  
poor keep falling into the tribunals?*

*How did the land become so bitter  
for poor children, harshly  
nourished on stone and grief?  
So it was, and so I leave it written.  
Their lives wrote it on my brow.*

-Pablo Neruda, 'The Judges'

**Keywords:** waqf, utopia, impoverishment, dystopia, endowments

## Introduction

This essay re-invokes the legacy of the *waqf* as an alternate economic arrangement in meeting the needs of the impoverished. It presents as an alternative to existing utopias, as its potential to benefit far outweighs the fake pronouncements of growth, trickle-down benefit and prosperity promised by the neoliberal capitalist class. It is about generating a system that functions on well-being because ultimately any growth in society must first address the well-being of its citizens. Far too long have the impoverished been neglected. Neoliberal economic policies keep being implemented in a cycle of economic failures that affect the impoverished, as was seen after the 2008 financial crisis and most recently during the Covid-19 pandemic. Many states responded to the wealthy and financial sector demands for bailouts at the expense of ordinary citizens so that, ultimately, the consequences of the financial thuggery were borne mostly by the impoverished and the not 'rich.' Furthermore, there have been continuous cuts to social welfare expenditure and trimming of other budgets such as education and health that assist the impoverished. Thus, the impoverished do not have leverage.

For as long as this status quo exists, alleviating the burden of poverty is clearly not a political priority of the state. The issue of poverty and addressing poverty cannot be entrusted to the state alone, perhaps because poverty has extended from and into the realm of impoverishment. There needs to be a re-imagining of the responsibility that we all carry in lifting those who struggle to meet their basic needs. There is a need for the imagining of a utopia for the impoverished beyond those parodied by the capitalist class and elites who dictate state policies and economic direction.

## 2. Global capitalism and poverty

There is something in the possibility of utopian thinking that seems exciting, open-bordered and too rich to pass up. But utopian thinking has within it the potential to be disastrous. One need only consider Collins' (2008) fictional country of Panama, in which a vast majority of the population is controlled by an elite who exploit the weak for their benefit. Or perhaps we can look at Roth's (2011) fictional city in which the existence of factions in a rather harmonious society is marred by the Factionless – a group who do not fit in, who are designated, shunned, relegated to the peripheries and then forced into homelessness and poverty until death claimed them. Or even

yet, the fantastical city described in Lowry's (1993) novel, which seeks to establish the design of the city in a specific way, such that the outside world is to be excluded lest it threaten the designed way of life. These three cities, in addition to their fictionality, have one thing in common: that while the city may be a utopia for some, for others – the impoverished, the weak, the Other – they resemble more of a dystopia.

To illustrate this, imagine an island lost in uncharted jade seas. On this island, everyone receives a wage that reflects their individual productivity. The entrepreneur is left with enough profit to reinvest in their company and remain competitive. Consequently, businesses can provide goods and services of the highest quality at the lowest price. On this island, everyone has access to the markets for jobs, goods and services, and everyone is free to engage in their working and purchasing preferences. Ideally, this would lead to citizens being content. Society would then amount to a great assemblage of minor acts of decision-making in the marketplace, which produce overall positive effects in a balanced engagement between wages, prices and investment. This free and competitive interaction would keep inequalities in check. No one should experience a moral plight where there are individuals who are considerably more impoverished than others, as these individuals have had roughly the same opportunities as everyone else.

On this island, the government does as little as possible, but it will provide basic social assistance to the most vulnerable. The government is kept in check by its citizens as well as a range of groups with political, economic and social interests. The rule of law – there to ensure that contracts are honoured, private property is respected and people are not harmed by the actions of others – is enforced by each individual. Participation in governance occurs through elections, which further serve to confer upon the state some semblance of legitimacy. Through good governance, in co-operation with the free market, the economy grows in a stable fashion (UNDP 2000). This is the ideal utopian premise.

Aspects of the utopian premise are embedded in the politics and policy-making of a great many governments in the present day. However, in developing policy, drafters often, whether implicitly or explicitly, start by assuming that all individuals are 'reasonable persons' or rational individuals who exercise their maximum potential

in their own labour.<sup>1</sup> These individuals are presumed to be capable of striving for success in fairly ‘flat’ social landscapes. In framing this ideal of the human, the utopia begins to lose its poignancy as it becomes one that is based on a ‘refusal to deal with people as they actually are’ (Graeber 2013) and/or with a context that is not flat. This is the contemporary flat earth theory,<sup>2</sup> a world with very few curves, save for market catchment areas and factor endowments.<sup>3</sup>

Whether or not it is a realistic destination for humankind, the utopian ideal therefore exerts a great deal of ideational power. It is located at the helm of many ships of state, coursing through the choppy waters of global capitalism in search of Paradise Island. Those who wield power and subscribe to utopian ideals are ‘allowed’ to evade the concern that manifests from realism. This is because power allows for the creation of facts, much like Robert Owen’s idealist factory communities (Podmore 1906) or the establishing of society by settlers in a supposed *terra nullius* during colonisation.<sup>4</sup> One might even consider the World Bank, which proclaims a poverty-free world to be the ideal and believes it has both the resources and knowledge to achieve this. It is on this proclamation of the achievement of the utopian ideal that the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and economic strategists – coupled with the invigilation of national economies by international banks and credit rating agencies, and the implementation of law-like rights for international capital – made provisions for integrated political projects (Ismi 2004).

These political projects have been centred around the emphasising and airbrushing of global capitalism as a progressive, consensual and positive project that tends towards the achievement of the equilibrium. A salient example of this airbrushing concerns unfree labour. The liberal political economy was constructed on a distinction between slavery as a ‘historic’ phenomenon and free labour as a modern

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1 Or, as they say in economics, the *homo economicus*, or economic man: a human who is consistently rational, and a narrowly self-interested agent who pursues his/her subjectively defined ends optimally.

2 The flat earth theory holds that gravity is an illusion and the earth is in fact disc shaped.

3 Market catchment areas are those areas from which the market attracts the population that uses its goods and services. Factor endowments are the amounts of labour, land, entrepreneurship and capital that an area possesses and can exploit for manufacturing. It may include conducive soils, ideal weather conditions and working populations that can eventually be institutionalised.

4 The claim of *terra nullius* was used to describe territory which has never been subject to the sovereignty of any state, or over which any prior sovereign has expressly or implicitly relinquished sovereignty. The claim of *terra nullius*, when used by a specific power, creates from its definition the fact.

capitalist phenomenon (Weingast 2015). However, the abolishment of slavery from 1711 to 1833 was not the result of capitalist humanitarianism, but the need to have an unlimited supply of free workers needing to sell their labour power (Simons n.d.). Unfree labour is therefore anathema to capitalism due to the constraints it would place on capitalism's efficiency and productivity to maximise outputs. These outputs are based on adaptive individuals who implement their learning skills in order to make maximising rational choices in a Hayekian Use of Knowledge in Society approach (Hayek 1945). However, the expansion of global capitalism has been accompanied by the advent of a form of 'modern-day slavery'. Slavery flourishes, not as the last stronghold of a marginal illicit economy, but as a core constituent of capitalist societies and a product of global migrant labour regimes, contributing to the overall poverty rate. It is as Wynter (in McKittrick 2015: 38) writes:

*[O]ur now immensely large-scale systemic injustices, as extended across the planet, are all themselves as law-likely and co-relatedly indispensable to the institutionalization of our now purely secular and therefore Western and Westernised liberal/neoliberal Man's homo oeconomicus's biocosmogonically chartering origin narrative!*

This becomes apparent when considering the IMF, World Bank and other Western authorities who proposed to deal with global poverty and systemic injustices by putting forward a 'poverty reduction strategy paper'. This encouraged spending on basic social provision and infrastructure, coupled with the continuation of policies drawn from economic Western liberalism (Rosemont 2004). These propositions, however, had a minor impact on global poverty and inequality (Naiman & Watkins 1999). In fact, poverty and inequality have continued to increase (Ismi 2004), while the status of the wealthy has been maintained. Certain cohorts from the super-rich bracket have even gotten wealthier, according to the US Census Bureau, whilst a *Forbes* article published in 2013, and based on reports from prominent institutions, indicated that the 'the rich became permanently richer and the impoverished permanently impoverished from 1987 to 2009.' The three wealthiest billionaires in the United States – Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates and Warren Buffett – have as much wealth as the bottom half of the U.S. population combined. The world's 2 153 billionaires have more wealth than the 4.6 billion people who make up 60 per cent of the planet's population. Crucially, the poverty problem is not the impoverished alone. It is the

rich and the massive amounts of wealth that they have accrued.<sup>5</sup> Power is then exercised by wealthy individuals in order to create their desired utopias while the impoverished and marginalised remain in the peripheries (Acemoglu, Verdier & Robinson 2004). It is in light of this trajectory that this essay will seek to consider the notion of utopias in the age of global capitalism, drawing from the Islamicate to advocate for the possibility and potential to create utopias for those who are excluded and marginalised, in order to alleviate the burdens and helplessness of the impoverished (Hodgson 1974).

### 3. Utopias

The era of Enlightenment that occurred throughout Europe was marked by the rejection of tradition, the prioritisation of individualism, the promotion of notions such as liberalism, freedom and equality, faith in social, scientific and technological progress and human perfectibility. It was further accompanied by a shift from feudalism toward capitalism and the market economy, and marked by an increase in industrialisation, urbanisation and secularisation (Miri 2013). It was, as Giddens describes, a process of globalisation (Tomilson 1999), which occurred during colonialism. The advent of colonialism, accompanied by modernity, sought to establish utopias through the occupation or discovery of *terra nullius*. It was this myth of land belonging to no one that legitimised conquest, invasion, the extermination of indigenous peoples and the plundering of wealth and resources.

Thomas More's idea of the utopia extended the definition of the *terra nullius* to include land that, despite having a population, if not being used, can be claimed by anyone willing to use it. More drew from Vespucci's writings about his exploration

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas More argues that private property is something that opens the door to the problems within society as property corrupts men. More's main point about property was a criticism pertaining to the use and spread of wealth and the excessive lust for property by the bourgeoisie. Soon after *Utopia* was written, London in the year 1522 saw 80.9% of the total wealth in the hands of roughly 5% of the population. Much of London during this time was subdivided into slums and experienced an increase in the number of vagabonds and beggars within the city. King Henry VIII considered this influx of the impoverished to be such a problem that, in 1537, he decided all migrants should either go back to their place of origin or face imprisonment. Several years later, however, there was still an influx of impoverished people into London. For More, the spread and use of property through extravagance and greed among the increasingly wealthy nobility, merchants and other rich gentry was the main issue, and not necessarily the concept of poverty, as it was through the hoarding of property that poverty developed.

of Brazil, in which ‘Utopians’ find a country populated by ‘a people which does not use its soil but keeps it idle and waste’ (Cave 1991). According to More’s logic, those who seek to use the land have the moral right to take it and, in doing so, make it productive for the public good, thus allowing them to build a utopia. It appears that, for More, the end result of developing land for the public good outweighs the moral dilemma of staking a claim to populated land, as the end goal of a utopia justifies the means. It is here that I stake the claim that this disregard for indigenous populations was the undoing of the utopia. Through its destructive and exclusionary mechanisms, it created an Other in the utopia, facilitating the development of a dystopia. Utopias were merged into the dominant policies of economic development, ‘although conquest, colonisation and plunders were never called into question’ (Bagchi 2012: 112). Consequently, colonialism, which fuelled the capitalist world order by providing cheap labour and resources from the colonised territories, was allowed to flourish, prompted by a new way of life – one that is individualistic and exclusionary in nature.

This manifested in the form of institutionalised impoverishment, portrayed by the capitalists as poverty. Through this portrayal, the colonised were made to be dependent on their colonisers/conquerors for their survival (Biko 2004). The contemporary institutionalisation of poverty also enhances the ‘victim–savage–saviour’ (Mutua 2001) narrative in respect of the Other not appearing as fully human. Through this colonial discourse, the narrative orchestrated of the dependency of the periphery on the centre, of the Other who is not fully human and thus is dependent upon their colonisers/conquerors for their survival, is legitimised (Terreblanche 2002).

In a multifaceted world, the many dimensions of poverty have to be considered. As Sen (1983) argues, poverty is not just relative, it is also absolute. Consequently, Sen’s definition extends beyond the realm of the economy to include both material poverty and non-material poverty. A lack of monetary wealth and a lack of knowledge could be included under these definitions. This, therefore, allows for a deeper query into the conceptualisation of justice in relation to impoverishment and challenges the socially fascist state that dominates aspects of society.<sup>6</sup> From this conceptualisation,

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6 De Sousa Santos (2016) states that a socially fascist state may exist in a politically democratic state. In this socially fascist state, one group has veto power over the life-making decisions of another group.

it becomes evident that impoverishment is a consequence of or creation by an occurrence – in this case, a colonialist, capitalist world system.

When I speak of Utopia, like Mannheim, I speak of an ideal – a *mentaliteit* (Mannheim 1936) that wishes to obtain the perfection of society, but not at the involuntary expense of others and not through violent or coercive means. It is not about breaking the bonds of an existing social order. Utopias, as depicted by More, were constructed through colonisation, which was exercised through violence and coercion.

In contemporary times, the development of utopias has become less about the immaterial perfection of society and more of an obsession with obtaining a physical modernity. For instance, let us consider the city of Brasilia, which was designed to reflect the utopian dream. Crafted from glass and steel in design, in the shape of an aeroplane, more thought was put into its external features than its holistic development, as the former was considered to be a means of obtaining the latter (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2007). Straight lines, perfectly drawn, this is how Brasilia was designed. With its sculpted face, its architects wished to orchestrate the thoughts that rest thereto.

It attempted to do this by making the state the caterer ‘of all needs’ in a city where ‘people follow pre-determined routes in their lives just as they follow the city avenues’ (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2007: 45). Yet Brasilia’s downfall lay in its isolation from realities. ‘From the socialist city that it ought to be, Brasilia is transformed into the absolute image of social difference’ (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos: 2007: 45). This can, in part, be attributed to its exclusionary nature and its attempts to conceal social realities instead of addressing them. By concealing and destroying that which did not conform to colonial standards of urban beauty – the brightly coloured, oddly shaped favelas, the impoverished, the homeless, the destitute – Brasilia attempted to scrub away the stains on the pristine uniformity of modernity. Brasilia has thus become ‘a city perfect and complete ... that would never develop from within’ (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos: 2007: 45). It is a haunting of a utopia as though its physical appearance may be utopian in nature (its *oeuvres*, as Lefebvre (2006) would say, are an expression of modernity), the ideal – to eradicate poverty – is absent. As in 16th-century London, the problem is not poverty, but the massive amounts of extravagance in the construction of Brasilia. It is through this waste that the utopia



becomes skewed towards the capitalist's utopia.<sup>7</sup> The priority has been the aesthetics or superficial addressing of 'wounds', while the reality of poverty and the structures, factors and systems that create and contribute to poverty are not addressed. However, there exists the possibility of re-imagining and re-learning from a history and/or design that is not essentially colonial or imperial – from a history of the Other's utopia.

#### 4. The Islamicate and *awqaf*<sup>8</sup>

*'We were taught to take care of our GNP because it would take care of poverty.  
Let us reverse this and take care of poverty because it will take care of the GNP'*

—Dr Mahbubul Haq, 1971, on the Islamic *waqf*

Every writer approaches their subject from a particular point of view. I find that I am no exception to this. I have grown up with two histories told to me, yet I exist in more. On the one hand, there is the South African history recorded and narrated from the Western viewpoint. On the other, as a woman of colour who practices a particular faith, I exist in the awareness of an Islamicate history whose narrative extends beyond that of a particular group. How do I reconcile the two? Perhaps history does not need to be reconciled – it needs only to be used as a tool to reawaken the mind and manners on how to avoid repeating certain mistakes or as a yardstick for development and improvement – for well-being. It is in light of this reasoning that I began to consider the possibility of one of the greatest moments in Islamicate history – the eradication of poverty – and its application to a South African context. Much like Shari'ati seeks to uncover the role that religion can play in his anti-colonialist discourse in liberating the society, I am on a quest to uncover the role that Islamicate values and practices can play in unregulated anti-capitalist discourse and the re-creation of society.

<sup>7</sup> Centred around the economic theory of capitalism, utopian capitalism seeks to construct the image of capitalism as a self-correcting deliverer of endlessly rising standards of living.

<sup>8</sup> I must state from the outset that as a consequence of epistemicide and conflict in the east, a vast majority of writings concerning *awqaf* were destroyed, and those that were not have yet to be uncovered and/or translated. It is for this reason that this section of this essay draws heavily from Dr Hatem Bazian's seminar on *waqf* institutions, as he has come to be one of the leading authorities in the re-discovery of *awqaf* literature.

The decline in poverty as recorded by historians was experienced in the Golden Ages of the Muslim Empire and after its fall (Saifuddin, Kayadibi, Polat, Fidan & Kayadibi 2014) in the Ottoman Sultanate. The cash *waqf* was a feature established during the Ottoman Sultanate and was used as a form of micro-finance without interest charges; later, it was conceived of as a means of finance for educational and social development. Thus, I found myself seeking a common denominator to link the two and their poverty reduction strategies, other than the obvious similarity of *deen*.<sup>9</sup> In a fleeting moment – and after a considerable amount of reading – the word *waqf*, which had appeared in writings on both the Empire and Sultanate, began to intrigue.<sup>10</sup> While endowments are not unfamiliar to any religion, *awqaf*s are forms of endowments whose characteristics are exclusive to the Islamicate. The concept of endowments was expanded and created into a functioning economy of various co-dependants in the Empire.

In the early Islamicate traditions, it was permitted to use the wealth from the treasury to set up institutions of *waqf*. The design of the *waqf* is such that the duty to provide to individuals is removed from the state, much like in the utopian ideal, and contrary to what was put forward in Brasilia. The *awqaf* establish a social welfare society, where social structures exist outside of the state. Significantly, their beneficiaries were not only Muslims because *awqaf* are designed as systems of model social assistance. Therefore, they served society as a whole. In this instance, society engages in a cohesive and cooperative system, as opposed to a social welfare state.<sup>11</sup> Each part of society is a limb that contributes to the overall functioning of the body, as each part of society is dependent on the others to ensure the proper functioning of society as a whole, without the intrusion of the state. Kahf states that donating one's properties as a *waqf* for public use is an economic decision and reformulates the definition of *waqf* as:

*taking certain resources off consumption and simultaneously putting them in the form of productive assets that increase the accumulation of capital in the economy for the purpose of increasing future output of services and incomes.*

9 Deen differs from religion. Deen means that Islamic teachings are not to be applied in the personal life only, but must be implemented in their totality in social, economic, political and all other aspects of human life.

10 *Waqf* (plural *awqaf*) means to designate a particular amount of wealth, property, land and its accrued benefit to the general public.

11 Where the state is the arbiter and source of all resources, therefore society is leveraged and dependant on the state.

Consequently, once property is a gift to God and dedicated as a *waqf*, its purpose is the benefit of mankind in perpetuity. Therefore, the *waqf* is considered as ‘an active instrument for the donative disposition of wealth’ (Khan 2015). Furthermore, the *waqf* historically presented a ‘credible commitment device to give property owners economic security in return for social services’ (Khan: 2015), proving to be an integral tool for providing public goods through local trusts.

Essentially, the *awqaf*'s primary aim is to establish an institution that provides a social safety net, thereby allowing for considerable freedom in engaging in economic activity. Even though the state is a participant in the creation of *waqf*, it is the society that engages in the cooperative relationship. The *awqaf* institutions then employ a large number of individuals who have relations to other parts of the society around them, individuals who are part of other institutions of the *waqf*. This creates an incentive to co-operate for the success and maintenance of the *waqf* institution without state interference (Bazian 2012). This contrasts greatly with the functioning of institutions in the 21st century, where to obtain any social welfare access you have to look to the state or non-profit sectors which are spread thin and often overwhelmed, not always able to provide assistance (Clements 2014; Tanner 2007). Charity, considered from the Western viewpoint, is entrenched in the concept of those with means sparing change to the impoverished. However, from the Islamic perspective, giving is an obligation, because the mass wealth generated throughout society is generally meant to be spent on creating a dynamic flow of productivity. This ensures that every person can have the basic necessities to live a dignified life. If a smile is considered an act of ‘charity’ in Islam, and this can be shared with anyone, institutions that draw from the Islamicate cannot be reduced to transactions of charity models. The work of providing care, support and aid to each other isn't due to pity or the discharging of one's conscience through spare change. Rather, it is actually care. The circulation of wealth via social support mechanisms like the *waqf* can ensure an equilibrium of possession between the rich and the impoverished, so that wealth is not just confined to only the former. The creation of *awqaf* is intended to be permanent. This is because the *waqf* is not merely aimed at immediate relief, but it is intended for future generations as well.

In providing assistance, the *waqf* property is subject to certain conditions. These relate to issues where one desires to hold the principle and give the charity in revenue. Selim Argun (2018, 117) defines a *waqf* as:

*in the presence of witnesses and with the approval of a judge, an alienor endows a revenue-bearing freehold asset along with its usufruct in perpetuity for a confined pious cause and designated beneficiaries by means of stipulated management and regular supervision.*

These conditions were initially laid down by the second caliphate, Umar ibn Khattab, in which he stated that:

*... its principle is not to be sold, nor be given as a gift, nor be included in inheritance. Its revenue is to be spent on the impoverished, those close in kin, to free the enslaved, in the cause of Allah, the guest who is coming. There is no harm for the one who is overseeing it to eat from it, and to feed a friend who is coming upon the property without seeking the benefit from it. (Siddiqui n.d.)*

The Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) had expanded upon the last point and stated that one may partake in the revenue and feed a friend who does not actively seek out its benefits, so long as, in both circumstances, one does not hoard the revenue with the aim of becoming wealthy from it (Siddiqui n.d.). In order to prevent the hoarding of the revenue, Muslim scholars, and the schools of thought that have flourished under them, have forbidden *istibdal*<sup>12</sup> in the development of the *waqf*. Scholars recognised that *istibdal* would violate the formation of the *awqaf*, particularly in cases where *waqf* property would be transferred from public to private property, as once this transfer has occurred, it would be possible to own the private property. In this way, *awqaf* both consider the provision to the impoverished as their first concern and prevent the hoarding of wealth through private property, thereby settling the concerns raised by More concerning the greed and extravagance of the wealthy.

One example of this is the *waqf* set up by Nooridien Zinki, who set up a palace in Damascus for the impoverished to live in and benefit from. When Nooridien saw the palaces with fruit and places to relax for the rich, he set up the same for the impoverished, thereby not only giving them luxury, but simultaneously breaking

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12 The exchange of one property for another.

down the spatial segregation and concepts of materiality within those spaces that existed between the impoverished and the rich (Bazian 2012).

It was only once those who were the recipients of the *waqf* were sufficiently cared for that the aesthetics of the institutions were improved upon. This is illustrated through educational institutions that were developed by the *awqaf*. Once financial aid had been established for poorer students attending a *waqf* school, and the respected individuals responsible for services in the institution were provided with their remuneration, then gardens and infrastructure were designed and developed.

The high rate of participation in the *awqaf* and the large amounts of property donated to establish them ensured that those who sought assistance were always taken care of, but also that systems were in place for the generation of revenue so that these institutions could continuously upgrade and enhance their infrastructure and capacity. As a result, some of the *awqaf* developed to be among the leading institutions of their time (Bazian 2012). It was through this carefully planned process that the utopia has developed both in its ideals and its physical construction, by creating a sustainable mode of development in various sectors and enhancing strategies that assist in poverty alleviation. Although there are weaknesses inherent in the system of the *waqf* management (Saiffudin et al. 2014), an aspect that I have not been able to discuss in this paper, there is sufficient historical evidence to point to the success of the *waqf* in assisting with poverty alleviation. Ultimately, cities are transformed not only by global processes, 'but also in relation to profound transformations in the mode of production, in the relations between the "town and the country," in relations of the class and property' (Lefebvre 2006). Where these relations are sound and, by their nature, seek to benefit through indiscriminate good, transformation is possible.

## 5. Conclusion

Utopias are an ideal – a *mentaliteit* – that wishes to obtain the perfection of society (but not at the involuntary expense of others and not through violent or coercive means) and break the bonds of an existing social order. In contemporary times, the development of utopias has become less about the material perfection of society and more of an obsession with obtaining a physical modernity. Utopias, as depicted by More, were constructed through colonisation, which was exercised through violence and coercion.

For More, the end result of developing land for public good outweighs the moral dilemma of staking a claim to populated land, as the end goal of a utopia justifies the means. It is here that I stake the claim that this disregard for indigenous populations was the undoing of the utopia. Through its destructive and exclusionary mechanisms, it created an Other in the utopia, facilitating the development of a dystopia. Utopias were merged into the dominant policies of economic development, although conquest, colonisation and plunders were never called into question.

While utopias are meant to be for everyone, if we establish a utopia to the exclusion of certain individuals who would eventually become the Other, we risk the creation of a dystopia, at the worst. At best, we destroy the utopia before its conception, resulting in its stillbirth – the body without a life.

In order to avoid this, there exists the possibility of re-imagining and re-learning from a history and/or design that is not colonial – from a history of the Other's utopia. In this regard, the concept of the *waqf* as a utopia for the impoverished was discussed. The success of the *waqf* in poverty alleviation cannot be ignored and is thus a worthwhile investigation for those who have the political will to prioritise the impoverished and the needy.

### About the author

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