

Margaret Killjoy

A Country of Ghosts

1. Critical utopia and anarchism -

- Is anarchism utopian?

Critical utopia - decidedly non-perfectionist, dynamic, non-compatible with end-state model of utopia, society as a work in progress, flexible, undergoes constant evolution (Gilarek (2017) and Seyferth (2018))

- **Parallels between Anarchism and utopia (Gilarek, 2017):**

- strongly political
- aimed to reform (?)
- creation of intentional communities
- interrogation of the present and visualization of improved forms of existence emancipatory impulse
- self-determination and autonomy of groups and individuals

2. Imperial cruelty and destruction (in the name of progress) -

- **Borolian Empire as a rich, technologically advanced civilization, that sees itself as a superior power in the region.**

"I fight this war for His Majesty, above all else, but I also fight it for civilization. I fight for a world where we solve problems with metered justice and law, where men don't skulk about in forests. I fight savagery with savagery". (p.16)

"The Empire offers a lot to the Cerracs. The roads and the trade will come, eventually, but they're going to be laid on a bed of respect and submission". (p.34)

- **Invasion and exploitation of other countries for natural resources -**

"There was a whole page about how the Cerrac mountains were rich with iron and coal, and a second about how it was our duty to bring the fruits of civilization to the few scattered villages and towns in the area" (p.5)

- **Cruelty and complicity/collective obedience -**

"Two days later we razed the village of Sotoris to the ground". (p.32)

"I say it was "we" who razed Sotoris because I consider myself complicit, I say it was "we" because I did nothing to stop them. Because I saw myself as a journalist, impartial. Because I thought honest words alone would raise me up and out of sin". (p.32)

"I stood there, observing, trying to maintain a journalistic detachment, as an unspeakable cruelty was levied upon the people of the Cerrac mountains". (p.33)

3. Hron as Killjoy's vision of future societies -

- **Post-civilization -**

"Anarchism is and always has been anti-civilization, and that civilization and anarchism are completely irreconcilable". (Killjoy, 2010)

"Civilizations are anthropologically understood by their complex social hierarchies and organized, institutional governments. The rejection of complex societal hierarchies and government means, therefore, the rejection of civilization. If an anarchist society were to develop, it would be by definition a non-civilized society". (Killjoy, 2010)

- **Does Killjoy succeed in creating a vision of such a 'post-civilized' society?**

4. Hronopole

- Accord - rules but not rules
- Decision-making - meetings, councils. Voluntary.
- Reputation - "In Hron, you're measured by your reputation... A reputation is built out of deeds. Like everything in Hron, it is flexible, dynamic. And reputation might mean different things to different people". (p.98)
- Crime - "If a crime has been committed, like theft, assault, murder, or rape, we take each instance as its own unique event" (p.109).

Those who commit a crime are expected to show contrition or provide compensation of some sort. More serious and repetitive behaviors are punished by death or expulsion.

- Violence - acceptable as a means for self-defense; reclaiming what was taken by force

"I [the narrator] had a pistol in hand and a mask over my face, and together we were going to kill a lot of people who probably needed to die". (p. 59)

- **Other points of discussion:** Prisons, mutual aid, gift economy, love and relationships, work, ecology

5. Concept of a country

"When it started, I think the idea was that the whole concept of having a name, of needing to name your country, really only mattered in the context of comparing ourselves with other societies". (139)

Country as an abstract, hence the name the city of ghosts.

6. Individualism or Communalism? Or Both? - Hronopole vs Karak

- Karak as a representation of individualist anarchism - selfish, unsafe or even closer to freedom than Hron?

"I feel myself that neither Communism nor Individualism, if it became the sole economic form [of an anarchist society], would realize freedom, which always demands a choice of ways, a plurality of possibilities". (Nettlau, 1914)

"All people are free. When we speak of freedom, we acknowledge that freedom is a relationship between the people of a society". (p.194)

7. War - necessary and inevitable?

"We are fighting for Hron, gods dammit, and they're fighting for little tokens that they keep in their pockets to spend on sex and food" (p.121)

"I [the narrator] had a pistol in hand and a mask over my face, and together we were going to kill a lot of people who probably needed to die". (p. 59)

Literature:

Gilarek, Anna, 2017 'The Challenge of Solidarity in an anarchist utopia: Margaret Killjoy's A country of Ghosts as a utopia of process'

Killjoy, Margaret, 2010 "Anarchism Versus Civilization"

Nettlau, Max, 1914 "Anarchism: Communist or Individualist? Both"

Seyferth, Peter, 2018 "A Glimpse of Hope at the End of the Dystopian Century: The Utopian Dimension of Critical Dystopia"