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Politics of Hope

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Amid the clouds of unpredictable change, there always seems to be a sliver of light – of hope – on the horizon. In promising something new, something better and potential change, hope encourages and engenders faith in the future. The utility of hope has not gone unnoticed in politics. Even though, or perhaps precisely because, the environmental, social and economic insecurity we see in the world today could be better described in terms of hopelessness, politics has intensified its quest for hope. In the process, it has redefined ‘hope’ as a strength to draw on, a counterforce and a means to achieve empowerment.

This special section reflects on the contemporary politics of, in and through hope. It presents some of the discussions on the politics of hope that took place in a seminar at the University of Copenhagen and Copenhagen Business School in November 2017. The politics of hope deals in potential, in anticipated opportunities that give rise to hope, in political and legal visions as well as material and lived realities. Despite the salience of the topic, the interlinkage between politics and the heightened expectations it invests in hope has remained underresearched.

The articles in this section provide multidisciplinary insights on politics that appears and functions through hope. They demonstrate how the dynamics of hope pervade a broad range of phenomena. The contributions by Eva Ottendörfer, Claes Tångh Wrangel, Valeria Guerrieri and David Chandler illustrate, respectively, that processes as diverse as transitional justice, counterterrorism measures, efforts to map energy resources and coming to terms with the Anthropocene all reflect manifestations of a (seemingly) ubiquitous hope. Through

analyses of societal reparation, security rhetoric, cartography and the debate on the meaning of the Anthropocene, the authors illuminate how politics figures in discussions of hope.

Hope on offer

Research in the social sciences has shown a growing interest in hope as an analytical category and a concept of theoretisation (e.g. Crapanzano 2003; Kleist and Jansen 2016; Miyazaki and Swedberg 2017). Hope has been mostly perceived as something that enables the pursuit of a better life and greater equality in the future. Studies have elaborated how hope works as a resource that enables individuals and communities to persist, improve their circumstances and even thrive (e.g. Miyazaki 2004; Kleist and Thorsen 2017).

In her article *Assessing the Role of Hope in Processes of Transitional Justice: Mobilising and Disciplining Victims in Sierra Leone's Truth Commission and Reparations Programme*, **Eva Ottendörfer** draws attention to hopes that were engendered in the efforts to reconcile past violence. Her contribution offers an account of how processes of transitional justice were offered as signs of hope to the victims of the armed conflict in Sierra Leone. **Valeria Guerrieri**, in *The Spatiality of Hope. Mapping Canada's Northwest Energy Frontier*, addresses the mobilisation of hope through cartography. Her analysis focuses on conceptions of opportunities and potentialities in resource development and also examines the ways in which indigenous peoples are invited to participate in the drafting of hopeful resource visions.

Proffering hope as an enabling and empowering force – as something that takes one forward – has been criticised for producing positions that in fact preclude any such movement. Instead of providing opportunities for altering and challenging conditions, hope can work to disable and stagnate (Hage 2009). In our view, hope is one of those capacities that, in Dawney's (2018, 218) words, "sustain our attachments to forms of life that close down rather than open up possibility". What makes this mentality particularly political is how, to a growing extent, this type of hope that enables stagnation is offered selectively. As critical research has pointed out, hope and hopefulness are offered to those to whom the world is unable or unwilling to offer anything else (e.g. Povinelli 2011; Appadurai 2013;

Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen 2018). Ironically, it seems that hope is in the offing for those who have no more than hope to begin with – those affected by poverty, climate change or marginalisation, or possibly all three.

The focus of **Claes Tångh Wrangel's** article *Biopolitics of Hope and Security: Governing the Future through US counterterrorism communications* is the use of hope as a national security measure. Becoming hopeful was cast as a specific policy goal targeting those perceived to be at risk of radicalisation and thus in need of better future horizons. As the author illustrates, the political practice of calling for hope singles out specific groups that are expected to build up their hopefulness. In effect, however, this enables their exclusion.

As we, humankind, have become increasingly aware of the impact we have had on the globe and the ensuing challenges we face, the Anthropocene has come to entail a yearning for hope. In his article *The Death of Hope? Affirmation in the Anthropocene*, **David Chandler** discusses the possibility of having hope at all in the current era when the future horizon has become obscured. As Chandler points out, the belief in the agential power of the human being is still strong; there is hope that humankind will devise solutions. However, in Chandler's estimation, the fundamental insight to be gained in the Anthropocene is that ours is a world without the privilege of hope. In other words, that humankind insists on hoping is tantamount to its refusing to acknowledge the current state of affairs.

Creating visions for the future

The ways in which hope encourages, mobilises or traps hinge on the future horizons it creates. Hope binds present to the future; it entails a promise of reaching an end-point, the 'object' of hope. While the objects of hope naturally vary as the needs, situations and positions of the subjects differ, the hope insinuated in politics constructs particular visions of future prosperity, security and redemption for particular subjects. A politics of hope does not, however, necessarily evoke hopefulness through the use of the word 'hope' itself. The articles in this special section point out the ways in which contemporary politics operates by serving up 'desirable' objects of hope, especially to those who have been victimised,

marginalised and excluded. The power of hope becomes visible in the ways in which subjects are assumed to hope for certain futures.

Guerrieri, Ottendörfer and Täng Wrangler bring forth the selective power of hope. They pinpoint how hope's particular objects are proffered to particular sets of people. Guerrieri draws on an account of resources as objects of hope. As she notes, maps are "hope-infused/hope-infusing" (2019) and as such function as tools for envisioning the future space and time of the Canadian Northwest as a resource region. In particular, the indigenous peoples who inhabit the resource landscape become the targets of participatory mapping initiatives; they have to place their hopes in the focal resources. While conveying the image of being attentive to social and cultural issues, the visions of the future space, that is, the peoples' land, become bound to a neoliberal imperative of development and wealth through resources.

Looking from the perspective of national security, Täng Wrangel demonstrates how having hope and being hopeful are made into explicitly articulated political aims. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the ethnic distinctions highlighted in their aftermath, the Obama administration deliberately turned to use of hope as an alleged common denominator of humankind. As the author illustrates, despite encouraging rhetoric suggesting that a better and more secure future is in store for everyone, the recent political practice of calling for hope singles out specific groups as being in need of building up their hopefulness. In the US counterterrorism rhetoric, reaching the mental state of being hopeful constitutes a desirable future horizon. Those at risk of radicalisation because of their lack of hope, the Muslim population in particular, must become hopeful. For these peoples, what the politics of hope and the embedded vision of the future does "is not to replace the primacy of fear, but to regulate it" (Täng Wrangel, 2019). Paradoxically, as the case of US counterterrorism illustrates, the political aim of creating hopeful subjects may translate into some subjects having to hope for continued insecurity and exclusion.

Providing an overview of the processes of transitional justice that took place in post-war Sierra Leone, Ottendörfer locates the functioning of hope within processes aimed at reconciliation and restoration. The case of Sierra Leone demonstrates that although politics

targets particular people with specific needs for hope, people on no way lack the capacity to envision alternative hopes and futures. Mechanisms of justice seek to unpack the burdens of historical wrong-doings and violence in order to achieve societal equality and democracy. In these processes, justice, in its many forms, is produced as an object of hope. However, as Ottendörfer's analysis points out, the object of hope that prompted the affected people to participate in reparatory processes was not necessarily the noble goal of justice but the more acute and concrete question of (monetary) compensation. The victims' expectation of compensation was strong enough to necessitate changes in how the process was taken forward. The victims ignored or refused the hopes for justice extended to them until there was a promise of material betterment involved.

In sum, the articles discuss the less heartening sides of politics that encourage hope by projecting a particular future. The 'not-yet' (Bloch 1986) that is embedded in hope facilitates the endurance of those who are (seen as being) in need of improving their lot, such as victims of armed conflict, indigenous peoples reclaiming their land and ethnic individuals perceived to be at risk of radicalisation. The logic here is that, with hope, one can endure dispossession today in anticipation of a reward tomorrow. By reaching to the future, a politics of hope is able to maintain the status quo; where it succeeds in instilling hope, it succeeds in endlessly postponing the materialisation of promises. Ultimately, the vision of a brighter future traps those in need in an 'endurance test' of time.

The fluctuating dynamics of hope

The politics of hope operates as a dynamic that simultaneously enables and disciplines; it is at once tangible and elusive. The technologies, practices and processes through which hope operates are always complex, intertwined and even contradictory. The articles in this section probe politics that work by building up hopes while also compromising and muting them. Hope (seemingly) provides opportunities and encourages action even though the (un)intended result may be a harsher constraint, as the articles of Guerrieri, Ottendörfer and Chandler note. Indeed, hope entails elements of control and intervention not only by

determining what is 'permissible' action, but also by inducing passivity and stuntedness, as previous studies have discussed (Hage 2009; Miyazaki 2017).

In the case detailed by Guerrieri, the hope of having ones rights and culture recognised through maps ultimately traps indigenous peoples in the very same constellation of power that they envisioned changing. While the inclusion of indigenous peoples in mapping energy resources enables them to make their land claims visible, the incentives for and format of mapping are driven by energy interests from outside the region. Participation "end[s] up making indigenous peoples 'complicit' of the same act of frontier-making" (p. ?) that they have been critical towards. At the end of the day, the Northwest of Canada is made into an energy frontier that will serve southern needs.

A similar type of dynamic is described by Ottendörfer with regard to the process of transitional justice in post-war Sierra Leone. The hope of moving on from the position of victim only amplified the victimisation of those affected by the armed conflict. Their hope – needed for the reparations programme to function – turned into hopelessness. Although the victims of violence managed to push forward their hope of receiving compensation to the point of modifying the mechanism itself, the outcome of the process was their disillusionment, which lead to social disruption. As the author's analysis shows, the compensation offered was very meager and even then only few of the victims qualified for it. Cruelly, the system that was created ultimately saw victims having to compete as to who had the most severe trauma or injury. This created envy among people, disillusionment in general and disappointment in the mechanisms set up to ensure justice.

Taking the discussion to a more fundamental level by debating the possibility of hope in the Anthropocene, David Chandler criticises the persistent belief in the agential power of man. As he demonstrates, the historical and philosophical perspective of hope as a desire for "alternative possible outcomes" (Chandler, 2019) lives on in the Anthropocene. In this era, which affirms the man-made world, in which unprecedented changes are taking place, the idea of progress and a better world to come is tied to the firm belief that man still has the capacity to act on the world. This view of the Anthropocene is, in Chandler's words, problematic in (at least) two ways. First, it assumes that the Anthropocene is still on the way

when in fact it is already upon us. Second, the hope that comes with the alleged capacity of man to intervene in and alter the circumstances to come is a “part of the problem not part of the solution” (Chandler, 2019). Hope, while allowing us to maintain the illusion that man still has agential power, lures us to orient ourselves to the future instead of the present. It traps us in an illusion of our (human) agency. As Chandler suggests, if we are to affirm that we live in the Anthropocene, we are to affirm that there is “no more need for hope” (2019). Does the fact of the Anthropocene render us devoid of hope?

Indeed, in this era of “un-ness” (Aradau 2014) – uncertainty, unpredictability and unknowability – hope has increasingly become mantra reassuring us that all will be well. Despite the challenges ahead, hopeful visions of a better future make the contemporary world more livable. However, as the abovementioned analyses of politics of hope illustrate, much more than improvement takes place in the name of hope. The cultivation of hope masks (continuing) acts and processes of othering, subjugation and coercion. Hope enables the maintenance of inequality through what is, in essence, a fantasy of the future. This being the case, analyses should focus not only on the bases and reasons for hope and hopefulness but, more critically, on how politics operates by calling for and drawing on the basic human desire for hope. On a more philosophical level, if the Anthropocene cannot admit of a promise of a better future, it becomes even more pertinent to ask why and how politics insists on looking for, encouraging and offering hope.

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