



HOPE

# Ordering hope: Reimagining the future of citizenship

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It seems quaint, almost hopelessly naïve, to reflect on hope in our uncertain times. Narratives and evidence of multiple crises, often overlapping, abound. Climate change endangers the lives and livelihoods of millions of people. Humans and non-humans encounter one another in extraordinary ways. As familiar diseases are fended off, new ones threaten our very existence. Automation disrupts the economies of labour with which we are familiar. Artificial intelligence challenges recognisable forms of human personhood. Unprecedented prosperity coexists with growing inequality. Social polarisation, together with the global rise of right-wing politics, jeopardises the hard-won gains by movements for social justice in recent decades. Just when we thought things couldn't get any worse, the COVID19 pandemic struck, changing our world in ways that few other events in recent memory have. As fear, anxiety, hatred and disappointment loom, it is easy to lose sight of the possibilities offered by hope. And yet, hope remains stubbornly persistent, defying hatred and fear, renewing imaginations of democratic citizenship.

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### *Hope: a relational and institutional understanding*

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Scholarly approaches to studying the politics of hope have challenged social scientists to think beyond the active/ passive dichotomy ([Procupez 2015](#)). Jarett Zigon ([2018](#)) argues that hope signals the motivation for ethical activity in moments of crisis and breakdown. Hope has, thus, been understood as not only about looking forward to a better future or of harking back to a “founding event that makes a certain kind of life possible” ([Badiou 2003](#)) but also a way of persevering through the (present) life into which one has been thrown. Feelings of hope allow people to attempt to live ethically both for themselves and others, within the world in which they find themselves. Such a conception distinguishes my approach from Crapanzano’s ([2003](#)) formulation of hope as “a sort of passive resignation” and from Miyazaki’s ([2004](#)) suggestion that hope is holistically indeterminate and rooted in the uncertainties of the present time. Rather, I follow Bryant and Knight ([2019](#)) in thinking about hope as a key “teleoaffect”, an impetus towards a possibility that is *felt* to be ethical. Hope is cultivated in the here-and-now with an aim to the future. As Back ([2021](#)) eloquently puts it, and I agree, hope “is an attention to the present and the anticipation that something unexpected will happen and emerge from its ruins”.

In operationalising hope, I have been influenced by, and have extended, Stef Jansen’s ([Jansen, 2016](#)) lead on defining hope. In this understanding, hope is, *first and foremost*, a set of dispositions, including the ensemble of knowledge, embodied inclinations, and affective investment that condition practices and in

turn are conditioned by these practices. *Second*, hope is future-oriented in being about potentiality rather than positionality. Such an understanding of hope implies a linear temporal reasoning that is not, however, unilinear or teleological: many potential alternatives are possible rather than just a single one. *Third*, the future-oriented dispositions are positively charged, in that they relate to a degree, however wary or hesitant, of expectant desire. In other words, the outcomes to be desired are positively evaluated, even if not everyone (including the researchers) share them. *Finally*, hope is 'disappointable'. It is possible that what people hoped for does not bear fruition. Uncertainty is integral to any definition of hope but that, of course, does not mean hope is entirely indeterminate and wholly uncertain (as [Miyazaki, 2004](#) would have it).

Challenging interventions that celebrated people evading the state and quietly resisting its imposition (especially Scott 2013; but also Graeber 2007), Jansen's ([2013](#)) interlocutors persuade him to recognise their "hopes for" the state. In the context of war-torn Sarajevo, where his fieldwork was based, he reports frequent claims among people to be embedded in an institutional framework provided by the state which made "normal life" possible. Such hopes for the state pertain to, in Jansen's ([2015:20](#)) words, "the suppressed yearnings, loud clamourings and tireless struggles of people to be incorporated into gridings of improvement, and their investment in becoming, not to put too fine a point to it, part of legible populations." Hope is thus institutional as well as relational.

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## *Hopeful citizenship: A series of conversations*

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I have explored these institutional and relational dynamics of hope together with my co-investigators on the EU-India Platform for the Social Sciences and Humanities supported project titled *Citizenship futures: The politics of hope in India and Europe*, co-conveners of the *York Hope Consortium*, and collaborators on several projects including co-authors on a paper just published in the peer-reviewed journal *Citizenship Studies*. Our explorations suggest that hope offers horizons for people to direct their action even as it remains inherently unattainable.

The horizons offered by hope have contributed to reimagining the future of citizenship. Understandings of citizenship have ranged from a focus on legal status and rights to political participation and belonging. Much of the scholarship on citizenship tends to view it as a normative good, with the potential to challenge inequality. Against this assumption, a growing body of work unveils the colonialist and fundamentally exclusionary character of citizenship, urging scholars to consider more open forms of membership in the political community. Meanwhile, states have continued to exercise their prerogative to provide or deprive citizenship to their populations, sometimes extending this privilege to non-humans. An enduring area of work, which sadly promises to remain relevant, relates to efforts by marginalised people to reshape the hierarchies of power that continue to marginalise them, thereby reimagining social and global order (Roy, forthcoming).

## Horizons

The Citizenship Futures project focuses on hopes harboured by socially excluded people. Co-investigators in London (Simon Parker), Mumbai (Suryakant Waghmore) and Paris (Carole Gayet-Vidau) contend that hope for the future remain central to the political imaginations of socially excluded people. Key to the construction of collective hope is their ability to both navigate the risks posed by social exclusion as well as patiently endeavour for change. Hope does not consist of an individual property. When considering possibilities, people may hope for higher standards of living, increased respect from others in society, better-paying jobs, durable physical infrastructures, government responsiveness to social problems and embeddedness in family and community. Such hope-making is enmeshed in broader social, cultural and economic processes.

Together the project reflects on the politics of such hope-making in three global cities ([Yardimci et al, 2021](#)).

Despite the pandemic intensifying social exclusion across the three cities, civic associations emerged as avenues of hope for them, paving the possibility for “conjunctural insurrections” ([Srivastava and Yardimci, 2020](#)). Such conjunctural insurrections focus attention on “those moments when, regardless of status or substance, subjects constitute themselves as citizens” ([Isin & Nielsen, 2008](#)). Such acts inevitably “involve emotions, feelings, bodies”, inviting an attention to the ways in which these constitute belonging in the political community.

Preliminary insights from the Citizenship Futures project encouraged me to curate a panel at the 2021 York Festival of Ideas titled [Horizons of Hope Part 1](#). Hosted by academic and political journalist Remi Adekoya, panellists included urban geographer Abdou Malik Simone, environmental activist Sabrina Fernandez, author-commentator Ghazala Wahab and research scholar and charity worker Melissa Williams. They each offered insights into the ways in which collective hopes for a better future fomented social change. The presentations highlighted the ways in which the urban poor (Malik), indigenous communities in the Amazon (Fernandez), Muslim women in India (Wahab) and the Windrush generation and their descendants navigated, negotiated and resisted injustice across the world (Williams), urging us all to think about the ways in which hope and action spur each other.

Building on these insights, I organised a follow up panel at the 2021 York Festival of Social Sciences, titled [Horizons of Hope Part 2](#). Melissa Williams hosted a panel that brought together international human rights activist Aobakwe Laone Van Vuuren, student and volunteer Uzma Adil, lawyer and poet Dave Neita, law and business student and former business development manager Manyile Banda, and student researcher Jessica Lucas Vieira Campos. They each reflected on their personal and professional experiences to consider the ways in which hope endures despite social difficulties. This drew on examples that ranged from supporting farmers to improve their incomes (Banda), blood donation campaigns (Adil), young people’s participation in public life (Van Vuuren), navigating disability (Vieira Campos) and institutional racism (Neita).

A third event, organised by the York Centre for Applied Human Rights (CAHR) under their [Arctivism](#) project, focused on the politics of hope in India during the pandemic. In this panel, I was privileged to be [in conversation](#) with former journalist and film-maker Natasha Badhwar, development consultant and youth worker Nida Ansari, and graphic designer and art designer Pooja Dhingra. Each of the panellists explained the way in which artistic expression was enabling Indians to resist the growing onslaught of anger, fear and hatred by generating novel politics of hope.

## *Interdisciplinary perspectives within and beyond academia*

Further conversations in this vein focused on the politics of hope in India at the Jaipur Literature Festival at which Natasha Badhwar [moderated](#) a discussion with public intellectual Harsh Mander and myself. This panel offered the opportunity for me to discuss *Audacious hope: How to save a democracy*, a book under contract with Westland Publishers in which I reflect on the “realistic hope” that spurs protests against that country’s democratic backsliding. Realistic hope refers to an ensemble of future-oriented dispositions that reveal an expectant desire for improved lives while recognising that such a notion is bitterly contested. Indians trying to reclaim their democratic achievements which have been under siege over the last few years evaluate the enormous challenges they face and are under no delusions that their struggles will win easy results.

The rich insights from these conversations encouraged the formation of the interdisciplinary [York Hope Consortium](#) together with York colleagues in English and Comparative Literature (Claire Chambers) and History (Sanjoy Bhattacharya, who subsequently moved to Leeds). The purpose of the consortium was to bring together perspectives on hope offered by different disciplines. The conversations in the consortium were organised along three interrelated themes: (i) History, health, and hope; (ii) Imagining hope; and (iii) Hope and social change. Each of these themes challenged and enriched our understandings of hope.

Convened by health historian Dr Arnab Chakraborty under the leadership of Sanjoy Bhattacharya, then Professor of Global Health History and Head of the World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre on Global Health History, the first set of conversations around history, health and hope enabled a focus on the role of religion in overcoming hopelessness. The [panel](#) on faith-based organisations and COVID19 with academics (Tudor Silva, University of Peradeniya; Sudharma Weerakkody, University of Birmingham; and Suranga Dolamulla, University of York) and practitioners (Vinya Ariyaratne, Sarvodaya Shramadana Sangamaya) drew on Sri Lanka’s experience to explore the ways in which Buddhist religious practices were mobilised to help people grapple with the uncertainties wrought by the pandemic. Similarly, the [panel](#) discussing faith-based organisations in provisioning health brought together practitioners (Benjamin Walker, The Anglican Diocese of Leeds; Mwai Makoka, World Council of Churches; Harvey Kwiyani, Global Connections, UK network for world mission and Sally Smith, World Health Organisation) to reflect on the central role of Christian missions in providing aid to people in ill-health throughout sub-Saharan Africa when colonial and postcolonial states clearly failed in doing so.

The second set of conversations, convened by Claire Chambers, Professor of English and Comparative Literature, on imagining hope offered insights into perspectives from authors and artistes. Novelist Oana Aristide [discussed](#) her recent *Under the Blue* which tells the story of a road trip beneath clear blue skies and a blazing sun whereby a reclusive artist is forced to abandon his home and follow his sisters across a post-pandemic Europe in search of a safe place, thus bringing together themes of pandemic, climate change and hope. Author-academic Tabish Khair [reflected](#) on the diverse understandings of hope (and its lack) among eighteenth century poets in England and northern India (Khair, 2022). Editor-author Susheila Nasta [meditated](#) on the power of critical thinking in imagining new worlds. Author-actor Leena Dhingra [offered](#) her perspectives on the hopes harboured by Indian revolutionaries during the subcontinent’s anti-colonial struggles and the tumultuous Partition that accompanied Independence (Dhingra 2022). Author Annie Zaidi [suggested](#) that hope was multifaceted and complex, allowing it to be appropriated to diverse—often contradictory manipulations (Zaidi, 2022). Columnist and blogger Bina Shah (2022) reminded us of the hopes we pin on “fictional families” as a means of avoiding the harshness of non-fictional facts. Indeed, poet-academic Kaiser Haq [urged](#) to consider hope as provisional rather than absolute (Haq, 2022). In this vein Saleema Nawaz (2022), author of *Songs for the end of the world* which tells of a coronavirus pandemic before the eruption of the COVID19 pandemic, reflects on the perils of writing what came to be called a ‘hopeful pandemic novel’.

Doctoral scholar Melissa Williams convened the third set of conversations about the possibilities of hope in fomenting social change. Joseph Gascoigne, a fellow doctoral scholar, [reflected](#) on the ambivalences of hope in western philosophical traditions, building on his exposition of the concept in Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Gascoigne 2022a; 2022b; and 2022c). Erik Cardona-Gomez, who recently completed his doctoral studies, drew on his expertise in comparative political theory to [remind](#) us of the salience of hope amidst settler-colonialism in Mexico. Sharing his personal experience of whistleblowing, doctoral student Ian Foxley [told](#) us about his confidence in the political system that kept him going despite grave threats to his life. An insightful conversation with charity worker Maureen Grant, lawyer Jacqui McKenzie and activist-researcher Abdul Kalam Azad [exchanged notes](#) on the persistence of hope despite threats of statelessness, as evidenced in recent protests against Britain's Windrush deportations and India's Citizenship Amendment Act. A similarly perceptive discussion between sociologists Suryakant Waghmore, Carole Gayet and Simon Parker- co-investigators on the [EqUIP-funded Citizenship Futures: Politics of hope](#) research project [highlighted](#) the hopes for a redressal of power hierarchies harboured by socially excluded people respectively in Mumbai, Paris and London. Another panel comprising Phil Roberts, Joao Nunes, Ricardo Severo and Gabriela di Guilio in conversation with doctoral student Rodrigo Campos reflected on the dynamic between hope and hate in Brazil. Likewise, sociologist Ozgur Yardimci [reflected](#) on the sources of hope against authoritarianism in Turkey and among the Turkish diaspora in London. Turning this critical lens inwards towards academia, education researchers Remi Joseph-Salisbury and Laura Connelly [discussed](#) their book *Anti-racist scholar activism* with sociologist Alice Nah.

Each of these conversations illuminates different forms of "subaltern citizenship" (Roy, forthcoming). They remind us of the continued exploitation and marginalisation of human beings by other humans and the diverse ways in which such exclusions are resisted, appropriated and negotiated. [Boatca's \(2021\)](#) insistence on deploying a Southern lens to citizenship remains unhappily relevant to understanding the continued ways in which the people of the Global South continue to be marginalised but also challenge their marginalisation. An emerging literature on rural citizenship ([Yarwood, 2017](#)) foregrounds the rural as a space for renewed negotiations and performances of belonging and political participation, compelling us to extend our attention beyond cities, literally and typically associated with the practice of citizenship ([Roy, 2018](#)). Finally, the continued incidence of statelessness has recently attracted scholars who are examining this phenomenon in a nuanced ([Hunter, 2019](#)) and comparative ([Blitz and Lynch, 2012](#)) manner. Such understandings of subaltern citizenship promise to offer refreshing insights into the ensemble of legal status, rights and belonging and participation in our increasingly unequal world ([Milanovic, 2018](#)).

In this vein, a *Be Inspired* [panel](#) on Reinventing citizenship, which I had the privilege of convening, debated the resonances and dissonances of contemporary political practice vis-à-vis the concept of citizenship. The panellists reflected on the changing contours of state-society relations made imperative by such developments as automation (Davalá), climate change (Omkuti) and inequalities in the quality of life experienced in different countries (Kochenov). Automation disrupts the fundamental relation between economic participation and political rights that have provided the foundation for citizenship claims over the last two centuries. Climate change compels the movement of people suffering from environmental degradations across national boundaries, dislocating the claims citizens can make on the states to which they juridically belong. Furthermore, the inequalities between states and the rights they confer on their citizens have rendered citizenship as a form of apartheid that institutionalises disparities in the quality of life available to people living in different national jurisdictions. Their realistic appraisal of the challenges posed to and by citizenship did not, however, leave the panellists hopeless. Universal Basic Income can help address automation's challenges to economic opportunities (Davalá). Transnational climate justice campaigns can help reduce the impact of environmental change on some of the world's most vulnerable people (Omkuti). A global regime that facilitates the migration of people across national borders can

challenge the citizenship-apartheid that blights the lives of the majority of the population of the world (Kochenov). Each of these solutions requires the practice of hope across territorial jurisdictions.

### *Political spaces of hope*

Practicing hope broadens people's horizons. Writing in the shadows of Nazism, the historian [Ernst Bloch \(1995\)](#) makes exactly this point in his epic three-volume study *The Principle of Hope*. "The emotion of hope goes out of itself," he writes, "makes people broad instead of confining them". In a similar vein the geographer [David Harvey \(2000\)](#) urges people to reflect on the "spaces of hope", which is also the title of his book on the same subject. In that work, he urges his readers to develop shared solidarities with those exploited and marginalised by the dominant political economy. The title of Harvey's book mirrors the work of Raymond Williams ([1988](#)), the cultural theorist who wrote a collection of essays titled *Resources of Hope*. In that collection, Williams emphasises the importance of community and culture as repertoires on which people draw for hope in despairing times. Such practices enable hope to be nurtured in local, national and global spaces.

Spaces are conventionally thought to constrain and contain. But political geographers have recently reminded us that spaces also indicate frontiers and horizons. If, as Doreen Massey (2005: 8) proposes, we "recognise space as a product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny", then political space emerges as a contested terrain in which hope is expressed, resisted and negotiated. Drawing on such an understanding, I have earlier offered a conceptualisation of political space as constituted by the dynamic interaction of institutional opportunity structures and social relations of power ([Roy, 2018: 42](#)). This dynamic interaction foregrounds the role of *both* public policy *and* social power in understanding the horizon of possibilities that enables (or inhibits) collective hope for better futures.

A collaborative paper with Vera Schattan Pereira Coelho and Felipe Szabzon explains the manifestation of hope in a local space by directing attention to the ways in which people "feel like citizens" ([Roy et al, 2022](#)). Our interlocutors in the Sapopemba neighbourhood in Sao Paulo compel us to consider the hopes people harbour *for the state* especially when their social exclusion is exacerbated by crises such as the ongoing pandemic. The claims advanced by neighbourhood associations on their local authorities and their collaboration with the participatory councils suggests that states remained central to their feelings of citizenship. Members demanded transparency in data by officials and insisted on policy being based on it. Holding to account a state that was not being able to deliver accordingly, neighbourhood associations sought more, not less, of the state. Such feelings challenge the logics of power that celebrate neoliberal notions of state retrenchment as exemplars of good governance.

My collaborations with sociologists (Burak Gürel and Erdem Yörük) and political scientists (Marcus Ianoni) on the comparative politics of social welfare have taught me a great deal about manifestations of hope in national political spaces. Drawing on political contentions in the so-called "emerging market economies" (Roy et al, 2019), these collaborations direct attention to poor people's claims for social welfare on their respective states, resonating with the scholarship that highlights ongoing reimaginings of the social contract ([Hickey et al, 2015](#)) and negotiations with the infrastructural power of the state (Pradhan et al, 2022). Such claims are manifested through heterogenous strategies ([Roy, 2018](#)) that blend support for the state and its practices (such as elections) with opposition to it (such as contentious politics). These collaborations build on my own explorations of poor people's engagements with India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, one of the world's largest welfare programs ([Roy, 2014](#); Roy, [2019a](#); [Roy, 2021a](#)) as well as broader processes that have sought to institutionalise a politics of dignity ([Roy, 2013](#); Roy, 2015; Roy, 2016; Roy, 2017; [Roy, 2019b](#); [Roy, 2021b](#)) in the country.

Hope's possibilities are also discernible in the global space. Ongoing challenges to the Liberal International Order (LIO) have opened up opportunities for reimagining global development (Roy and Hickey, forthcoming) as well as global governance (Roy, 2022). The growing role of the global South in challenging western dominance of world order (Mawdsley and Banik, forthcoming; Woolcock and Singh, 2023; Roy et al, forthcoming) undermines the Eurocentrism that afflicts much of the scholarship on international affairs. Against narratives of chaos, anarchy and disorder that have accompanied much of the scholarship on these challenges, there is growing evidence of an emerging "Southern multilateralism" (Roy, 2023) which insists on sharing global responsibility with prevailing institutions of the LIO, neither seeking to overthrow it nor to be co-opted within it. In the wake of the pandemic that has exacerbated the collapse of western dominance of global affairs ([Roy, 2020](#)), Southern Multilateralism offers hope for broadening and deepening the participation of countries hitherto marginalized in global governance.

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## Ordering hope

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These collaborative reflections have enabled me to think critically about hope. In addition to its future orientation, the dispositions it inheres, and its positive valuation, such a critical approach leads me to think about hope as a method of redressing power imbalances. Such redressal could be an intentional challenge to those in power. Alternatively, it could be an unintended outcome of political practice. But hope is uncertain: it is sometimes possible that the practices which challenge power imbalances do not in fact lead to their redressal. However, such unsuccessful attempts do not necessarily signal a failure of hope.

Indeed, the interdisciplinary conversations within and beyond academia reported in this paper highlight the ambivalences of hope. The practice of hope sometimes succeeds in redressing power imbalances, but not always. However, rather than conceptualising its inability to redress power imbalances as a failure, might it be more useful to perceive it as examples of what [Nils Gilman \(2015\)](#), following [Jennifer Wenzel \(2009\)](#), calls unfailure- "the paradox that many seemingly failed political and social movements, even though they did not realize their ambitions in their own moment, often live on as prophetic visions, available as an idiom for future generations to articulate their own hopes and dreams." Even when the practice of hope does not immediately redress power imbalances, it contributes to reimagining social and/or global order and a move towards greater equity.

### Practicing hope

What does the practice of hope entail? Hope is, first and foremost, about not giving up. Harboring hope involves struggle; it involves denouncing abuse and acting against injustice. Living in hope means taking the next step despite being confronted by oppression. It means believing that there's a way out of desperate situations, not by giving up or caving in but by fighting on. Hope is not delusional. It is attentive to the difficulties of the present moment but appreciates the possibility that something unexpected could arise from the wreckage of the present. That said, hope does not obsess with the present, but casts an eye on the future, based on an understanding of the past. To be sure, it accepts the reality of grief, loss and uncertainty in the present moment, but anticipates a future goodness that is based on novel alliances and innovative ways of imagining the world. Hope thereby broadens people's horizons, urging them to succeed in their aspirations for a better world.

Hope is about continuing to pursue an objective without quitting. It is about facing up to the odds stacked against you, based on a realistic assessment of those odds. As the Wangan-Jagalingou activist Murrawah



Johnson [put](#) it recently: “We’ve seen the end of the world... and we’ve decided not to accept it”. This way of thinking about hope is refreshingly different from the position taken by several influential intellectuals of the twentieth century. The philosopher [Albert Camus \(2005\)](#) declared that “hope equals resignation”: for him, living in hope was equivalent to surrendering to inertia, fatalism and defeat. However, pessimism of this type is not a luxury that activists like Johnson can afford. Caving into such pessimism would entail giving up the values that they hold dear. Instead, the actions of activists like Johnson remind us that, as the theologian [Mary Grey \(2000\)](#) suggests in *The Outrageous pursuit of hope: Prophetic dreams for the twentieth century*, “hope stretches the limits of what is possible”.

Harbouring hope is no easy task. It involves continuous struggle. As the educator [Paulo Freire \(2014\)](#) reminds us, “the struggle for hope means the denunciation, in no uncertain terms of all abuses...” The continuous condemnation of abuse, he suggests, could result in a virtuous cycle that awakens hope in others, enlivening them to the need to act against abuse and injustice in this world. Such an approach to hope, grounded in action, contrasts with perspectives that hope is merely an illusion that people hold onto when they are distressed: “hope is a rope”, the sociologist [Henri Desroche \(1979\)](#) wrote, alluding to the *shaman* or *fakir* who throws a rope into the air and makes it stay mid-air through magic. But, hope is not a sorcerer’s trick. Far from it, hope arises out of attentiveness to the realities of this world, its injustices and inequalities, and from a conviction that something can be done about it.

For that reason, living in hope means taking the next step. In her much-acclaimed *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*, the feminist [bell hooks \(2003\)](#) suggests that hope is linked with a basic trust in life that motivates the ‘next step’. It is about believing that our families, cultures and societies are important, and for whom it is worth living and dying. Far from being a hindrance to action, as the philosopher Hannah Arendt feared, hope is about confronting oppression. It therefore means believing that, despite the dangers and desperations of a given situation, there’s a way out. The way out is offered not by giving up or caving in but by evaluating the difficulties of the situation and a realistic appraisal of what can be done about it. The ‘next step’ could therefore involve individual acts of sabotage, collective action or other, quieter, forms of resistance.

### **Realist hope**

Hope is realistic. It is not delusional. Hope is not about daydreaming future scenarios without reference to existing, often troublesome, realities. Instead, it is very attentive to the difficulties of the present moment while appreciating the possibility that something unanticipated could arise from its debris. The geographer Les Back made a case for “worldly hope” in a [2019 lecture](#) delivered to the Royal Geographical Society. This emphasis on the worldliness of hope is important because it helps to be wary of hollow promises that are so divorced from reality that they end up fomenting what the cultural theorist Lauren Berlant famously called “cruel optimism”. Instead, people cultivate a realist hope in the here-and-now, based on their evaluations of the difficulties of the present.

Realist hope recognises that moves towards redressal of power hierarchies are incremental and uneven. The equities resulting from redistribution of power have unintentional consequences. The economist [Branko Milanovic \(2018\)](#) shows that even as inequalities *between* nations are reducing, the inequalities *within* them are increasing. Another example comes from India, where the economist [Nitin Bharti \(2018\)](#) notes that while inequalities *between* castes are declining, inequalities *within* castes are on the rise. Realist hope appreciates the small wins and celebrates them, while recognising the struggles that lie ahead.

While taking the present seriously, realist hope is not, however, limited by it. The anthropologist Hirokazu [Miyazaki \(2004\)](#) reminds us about this “temporal incongruity” in his 2004 book *The method of hope*:

*Anthropology, Philosophy and Fijian knowledge*. Such a view of hope takes seriously not only the enormity of the troubles of the present world but also how we landed up here in the first place and what we could do about it. It learns from the successes and failures of the past to reflect on the possibilities offered by the present for the future. Realist hope is not beholden to a naïve sense of linear progress. Neither, however, is it hostage to a blind nihilism. In his marvellous 2009 book *Cruising Utopia*, the sociologist [José Esteban Muñoz](#) describes this strategy as a “backwards glance that enacts a future vision”.

Living in hope recognises that the past is gone, and the assumptions- political, economic and social- that once shaped our world no longer hold. But it, at the same time, also demands that we carefully and sensitively craft novel alliances that could open up new possibilities. Such radical hope, as the philosopher [Jonathan Lear \(2008\)](#) writes, “is directed towards a future goodness that transcends the current ability to understand what it is”. Radical hope is not only a psychological practice. It is also a political position that refuses to accept that defeat is inevitable. Radical hope avoids what the author and critic [James Bradley \(2020\)](#) calls “fixating on collapse”. It calls instead for a granular appreciation of the ways in which people navigate and negotiate crises.

### *Imagining a hopeful order*

It is tempting to conflate hope with utopia, the imagination of a flawless world in which the human condition is perfected. The last two centuries have seen the rise and fall of utopian visions that aimed to radically improve human life through social engineering, economic redistribution and civilising people deemed to be savage. Vital differences within them notwithstanding, fascism, socialism and liberalism all shared this obsession with perfecting humanity. With the collapse of such utopias by the end of the twentieth century, reflecting on hope has never been more urgent. The incremental changes envisioned by hope are fundamentally different from the revolutionary transformations heralded by utopias. Indeed, hope is born when utopias die.

Realist hope is attentive to the possibility that our lives will be marked by uncertainty and chaos. It enables us to recognise that any certitudes that might have once ordered social life are crumbling. However, even as the collapse of such certitudes might augment anxieties about anarchy, it also offers opportunities for reimagining order. Realist hope allows us to salvage what we can from the remains of the past and join them with new ideas and materials to build an alternate world. Far from perfect, this alternate world signals a horizon which, while it is unattainable, guides theory and practice.

Practitioners of realist hope envisage the redressal of power imbalances in favour of the oppressed. Utopian delusions past, present and future do not obsess them. Rather than perfecting humanity, realist hope accepts the imperfections of human nature. It celebrates small wins towards challenging power hierarchies, braces for the inevitable backlash from those who lose from these wins and remains unwavering in its struggle to disrupt the status quo. The hopeful order to emerge through this struggle promises to nurture the equitable balance of power imagined by the practitioners of realist hope. The realisation of that promise requires and facilitates broadening and deepening the practice of hope.

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