

HOPE'S GLOBAL SYSTEMIC PARADOX

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“Paradoxically, hope is on intimate terms with despair. It asks for more than life promises. It is poised for disappointment” (Mattingly, 2010, 3, cited in Throop, 2012, 175)

Hope is an increasingly relevant concept in anthropology, not least since the 2008 financial crises initiated rapid socio-economic changes in the Western heartlands of the global system, where much of the discipline's higher-ranked output comes from.

As a topic, hope emerged in phenomenological anthropology. It has been widely discussed in works on morality since the 2000s. There, the debate has meanwhile overcome static understandings of hope “as either passive or active, or as the hope for a better future”. Instead, the anthropology of morality now understands hope as an ambivalent component of human subjectivity-making (Zigon, 2009, 254). Hope is, as emphasized in the opening quote, always paradoxical. For it points beyond what is achievable and is, not uncommonly, informed by past, present, and future experiences and expectations of social and economic oppression (Throop, 2012; Zigon, 2009). In sum, and irrespective of the circumstances, this understanding of human subjects' hoping essentially acknowledges impossibilities as much as possibilities.

So far, so good. However, as indicated above, because of rapid changes in the global system since the late 2000s, hope is now also of interest to anthropologists more chiefly concerned with the making and unmaking of political economies. Several contributions to a recent special section in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, for example, consider hope a core aspect of the research and analysis on “Speculation: Futures and Capitalism in India” (see Bear et al., 2015). Hope, conceived this way, is one of many possible tropes for anthropologists to capture the changes emerging from a “new political economy” (Appadurai, 2015, 484). If it is put on par with “dreamwork”, “speculation”, or “anticipation”, “hope” is nevertheless yet one more future-oriented trope *per se*, which means that the concern for how humans think about and relate to temporality is fairly narrow, as the definition suggests. Furthermore, an economic anthropol-

ogy that regards hope mainly as an orientation towards the future may miss out on hope's inherent ambivalences and paradoxes – qualities that are central in recent phenomenological anthropologies. The following moves these ambivalences and paradoxes to the centre of a systematic anthropology that seeks to critically engage the relevance of hope in past, present, and future global political economies.

Ambivalent Crises and Global Systemic Centralization/Peripheralization

Capitalism and its discontents have been high on public and academic agendas since a so-called crisis hit the global system in the late 2000s. The qualifier “so-called” is important here because the often-invoked state of all-out “crisis” does not correspond with the events on the ground since the late 2000s. As inequality proliferates the numbers of millionaires and billionaires is growing exponentially (importantly, in national economies with single-digit inflation percentages) as is the number of households that have their properties “repossessed” by lenders. Thus, depending on a given individual's position on these growth curves, the lives of others may appear to them as shaken by crisis and hardship *or* as boosted by burgeoning prosperity. Such positioning, then, should have considerable impact on the way a given individual or household frames their hopes, and I shall elaborate on what this means for anthropology's analyses of hope below.

Before I reflect on observations from fieldwork in the Republic of Ireland in the summer of 2010 it is important to consider how changing socio-economic stratification impacts on social units beyond the individual or household scale. As regards the global system, social scientists and historians have been debating changes in geopolitical and socio-economic stratification for some decades now. This is important to emphasize as the above declarations of a “new political economy” (Appadurai, 2015, 484) revive foregone conceptions of globalization that drove mainstream anthropology into a somewhat teleological and tautological analysis of supposedly new socio-economic phenomena in the 1990s, when the very same phenomena – the mobility of capital investments and the flexibility of manufacturing locations, for example – had existed for decades and even centuries (see Neveling, 2015b; Neveling, 2014). Instead, more sound analyses in the social sciences debated a global systemic re-orientation, with the lion's share of global production and trade volumes moving from East Asia towards the

West around 1800 (Pomeranz, 2000) and back towards East Asia in the 2000s (Arrighi, 2002 [1994]; Frank, 1998; Piketty, 2014).

Such a reverse movement in the sharing of global trade obviously reshuffles the positioning of national economies. The rise of the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russian Federation, India, PR China, and South Africa) and the increasing relevance of the Group of the 20 highest-output national economies (as opposed to the earlier relevance of a Group of 8 such nations) are some of the many outcomes of this process, in which some national economies move from peripheral to semi-peripheral or from semi-peripheral to core positions, while others move in the opposite direction. Structural adjustment policies in the aftermath of the sovereign debt crises emerging since 2008, for example, increasingly question the semi-peripheral position of several European Union national economies, such as Greece, Spain, Portugal, and the Republic of Ireland.

Thus, as for individuals and households, crisis may be the reality for these nation-states while the BRICS nations are in a period of systemic rise and, possibly, a consolidation thereof. This obviously does not mean that the hopes of all individuals and households in a given national economy are evenly affected by its global systems trajectory – a national economy undergoing rapid peripheralization may have a considerable number of individuals and households gaining. Wider socio-economic circumstances, such as a national economy's past, present, and future positioning and trajectory in the global system, will, nevertheless, have an impact on how individuals and households frame their hopes.

One national economy on the decline in Europe is that of the Republic of Ireland, and I now assess selected instances of hope that I encountered there during a period of two months' field research in the summer of 2010.

The Decline of Miraculous Factories in the Republic of Ireland

The late summer of 2010 was when the near-default of the Irish state wiped the slate clean of what for many years had been labelled the "Celtic Tiger". Whereas upward and downward movements of stocks are framed as bull markets and bear markets, there exists an animal metaphor only for instances of national ascendance in the global system. In the Irish case, the Celtic Tiger stands for the seemingly miraculous rise of a peripheral, impoverished European

nation to become an economic powerhouse, which saw Dublin coming in third on the Forbes journal's ranking of "Europe's Best-Paid Cities" as late as 2009.¹ I had moved to Dublin with my partner and our six-month-old daughter to research an important aspect of that "tiger" – the establishment of export processing zones (EPZs) in the Republic of Ireland. This was part of a larger research project on the global spread from an initial EPZ (more recently labelled special economic zones, SEZs) in 1947, emerging rather coincidentally in the US-dependency Puerto Rico, to around 3,500 EPZs with more than 70 million workers in more than 130 nations in the late 2000s (Neveling, 2015a).

The Republic of Ireland was of interest in this study for three reasons. First, the establishment of an EPZ by the Shannon Free Airport Development Corporation (SFADCo) in 1959 is often seen as the cradle of the Irish economic boom. Leading Irish corporations such as Ryanair were founded in the Shannon zone and careers of Irish businesspeople with global influence, such as the Ryanair owner Tony Ryan and the current CEO Michael O'Leary, had started there. Second, SFADCo and the Shannon Free Trade Zone (free trade zone is one of many different labels used by nation-states for the EPZ model of export-oriented industrialisation) had been highly influential in the global spread of the EPZ development model – hosting UN-funded training workshops and fellowships for development officials from dozens of nations in the Global South since the early 1970s (Neveling, 2015a). Until today, this model is largely based on a given nation-state hoping to generate substantial employment and flows of foreign direct investment by way of offering a fairly standardised set of investment incentives (tax and customs holidays, state-funded infrastructure for industries, and advertisement campaigns praising well-educated and low-waged female workers as highly suitable and docile employees) to multinational enterprise ventures in light-manufacturing industries and industrial and financial services. Third, and simplified for the sake of brevity, SFADCo self-promotion had over decades masked how this model had been acquired during survey missions to Puerto Rico and training from US consultancy firm Arthur D. Little in the 1950s, and had instead created an impression that SFADCo staff had made Shannon Airport the cradle of the EPZs worldwide. Therefore, the Shannon

¹ See: <http://www.forbes.com/2009/08/21/europe-best-paid-lifestyle-real-estate-cities-economy.html>, last visited January 6, 2016.

zone is commonly listed as the world's first (modern) EPZ in academic publications as well as UN and World Bank publications (e.g. Farole, 2011; United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations and International Labour Organisation, 1988).

Hope for ascendance in the global system, in other words, looms large when nation-states set up EPZs, and many aspects of such hope were evident during a three-day training workshop in Dublin, convened by the World Free Zones Convention (WFZC), which I attended as part of my research. Development officials and employees of national and local EPZ-agencies had travelled to Dublin from Bahrain, Bulgaria, Brazil, Mexico, Jordan, South Africa and elsewhere to attend the WFZC workshop. The promise was that a team of five Irish consultants with decades of experience in setting up EPZs would teach them how to manage EPZs and how to maintain the zones' life-cycles, moving across industrial sectors and export markets to counter the runaway character of investments in the zones with a constant influx of fresh investors.

Elsewhere, I have compared the hopes for large-scale employment and blossoming industrial areas that EPZs have generated across the globe since they entered the portfolio of development economics, UN and World Bank survey missions, and modernisation theory more generally, with the hopes for the coming of global infrastructure such as air-landing strips, ports, and modern factories driving Melanesian cargo-cult movements around the time of the Second World War (Neveling, 2014). The fact that the 2010 WFZC workshop in Dublin discussed how to maintain an established infrastructure and not how to establish one underlines that hopes are not only expressed at global and national scales, but that hopes at these scales are informed by reflections on national and global histories. Hopes, then, are inextricable from the past, the present, and the future in an individual's lifeworld as much as in the highly institutionalised setting of consultancy for economic development with its guise of rationality based on quantifying past experiences.

Another quality of hope, its confrontational potential, came to the fore on the workshop's third day, when the participants were given a tour to see the wonders of Irish industrial development policies. Our initial stop related to hopes of the present and for a better future. The Irish Development Authority's recent flagship industrial

zone, the Grange Castle Corkagh Park in South Dublin County, in 2010 housed the European headquarters of Microsoft Inc., a Delice de France branch of the global bakery chain Arzyta (supplying the wider Dublin region with tasteless and overpriced baguettes), and a high-profile manufacturing establishment for biopharmaceuticals. Following a presentation on the planning of the Grange Castle Park and its potential for generating a badly needed economic upturn in the region, participants eagerly queued for copies of the high-gloss Grange Castle Masterplan and then boarded the tour bus now travelling to the University of Limerick's Science Park.

On our way there we passed a larger area with recently built housing, ranging from blocks of flats to terraced and detached houses, all with freshly asphalted highway connections for commuters to Dublin. To my own surprise as much as that of the Bahraini officials sitting next to me on the bus, the Irish EPZ consultant guiding the tour via the internal microphone-loudspeaker system explicitly drew our attention to these endless rows of new buildings. These, he said, were a warning sign for the pitfalls of badly planned and unregulated rapid economic developments. The Irish, he said, had been too greedy. Over decades, they had demanded ever-higher wages, forgetting how they came from the poorhouse of Europe. Different governments had supported wage increases and thereby shattered the foundations of the Irish boom, which had been low wages attracting foreign investments in basic manufacturing, and which had offered large-scale employment. Once the downturn in manufacturing had begun, the government had kept economic growth alive by subsidising mortgages, and now the Irish middle-class lived in negative equity – with mortgages on housing that was now valued far below the purchasing price, meaning that a household's debts were higher than their securities in many cases. This mass-phenomenon of shattered hopes, however, was a wellspring of hope to the consultant. For now, the wages were coming crashing down. And his ultimate hope was that the current decline by forty per cent from the previous year would continue so that investors would come flocking in and a new generation of workers could fill EPZs across the Republic of Ireland, much like the one we had just visited in the Grange Castle Park.

Conclusions: Hope as Paradox and Conflict

Obviously, the scope of the above elaborations is limited to sketching some analytical categories for an anthropological political economy approach to hope. First and foremost, the being of hope, as a universal of human being, turns out to match the qualities of classical anthropological trickster beings. For hope may carry humans from dawn (as in the quote, "It's dawn", invoked by Zigon, 2009) to dusk and keep them sane. However, there is no guarantee for an individual, a household, or a nation-state that anything has changed about a potentially miserable trajectory in the global system when night falls on a day spent hoping. In fact, everything may be worse at the next dawn than it was at dusk. Assuming that humans are capable of learning, in modes of unreflective and reflective being alike, tomorrow's hope may differ substantially from today's.

Secondly, and taking the opening elaborations on hope's political economy dimension one step further, it is now safe to say that while hope is a necessary component of social life it is not solely pointed towards the future. Instead, hope's intersubjective qualities have much to do with the way humans assess past experiences and they may, in fact, pit one subject against another – or against an institution.

Thirdly, and for now finally, the existence of conflicting – possibly confrontational – hopes in any field of research is more than likely. For hopes are related to experiences and understandings of how to achieve prosperity and how to overcome inequality. Constellations created by the intricacies of ascent and decline in the global capitalist system, as were evident in the Irish crisis in summer 2010, may even drive apart the hopes of subjects and/or institutions with otherwise seemingly common causes. Hopes for national development and economic progress, for example, may rest on the impoverishment of larger segments of a given nation's population, so that low wages for workers may again attract capital.

The analytical dimensions for an anthropological political economy of hope that I have developed above – trickster being/paradoxes, temporality, and confrontation – are central to the world historical and reflective potentialities and qualities of hope. Hope as a universal aspect of human being informs not only individuals but also larger associations – institutions of whatever epoch and scale, kinship groups as much as present-day nation-states or imperial formations. No matter whether hope is an issue of

anthropological research in the Global South or elsewhere, and no matter whether such research comes at a time of crisis or at a time of prosperity, hopes are always reflections of times past and of the trajectories that humans and the associations they form envision as particularly pertinent for their being in the world. Therefore, one person's hope may well be another person's worst nightmare – surely, hope is as much a reason for confrontation as for staying sane. What is more, hope *per se* may be as much an inspiration for stasis, even for reaction, as it may be an inspiration for progress.

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