Articles

Working Hope: Around Labour and Value in a Humanitarian Context

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Abstract: This paper discusses a reading of hope as it ties to action that can be useful to analyze social phenomena. Whereas hope is often described according to its future-oriented temporal outlook, as either a cognitive stance, a feeling or mood, and often refers to utopian modes of thinking, it is more rarely considered as a particular instantiation shaping social dynamics. Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork in a post-disaster humanitarian reconstruction site, this paper explores how tying the notion of hope to that of value may enrich our appreciation of hope as a category relevant to agency.

Keywords: Hope, value, practice, labour, humanitarianism, reconstruction

Résumé : Cet article s'intéresse à une lecture de l'espoir dans la mesure où celui-ci se rattache à une action qui peut s'avérer utile pour analyser des phénomènes sociaux. Alors qu'on décrit souvent l'espoir en termes de projection temporelle vers l'avenir, soit comme une position cognitive, un sentiment ou une humeur, et qu'on y réfère souvent comme à des modes de pensée utopiques, il est plus rare qu'on le considère comme une instanciation particulière donnant forme à des dynamiques sociales. À partir de travail de terrain ethnographique dans un site de reconstruction humanitaire après un désastre, cet article explore comment le rattachement de la notion d'espoir à celle de valeur enrichit notre appréciation de l'espoir comme une catégorie pertinente à l'actance.

Mots-clés : Espoir, valeurs, pratique, travail, humanitarisme, reconstruction

The question of hope has received renewed attention lately (Harvey 2000, Zournazi 2002), and perhaps this is indicative of how social scientists seek to establish new pathways of engagement. For some this may appear naïve, akin to utopian wishful thinking. However, the purpose of this article is neither to establish an emancipatory narrative nor to provide a novel theory on the subject. My objectives are more circumscribed, as I explore how a grammar of hope can be pertinent to the anthropological analysis of humanitarian action.

For some time now, scholars including anthropologists working on humanitarianism have been unpacking the altruistic underpinnings of this transnational endeavour and in this article I do not suggest that altruism is the dominant trope of the humanitarian system. Indeed, there are numerous books and commentaries that expose the extent to which the humanitarian industry remains ancillary to geostrategic interests (Duffield 2001, Terry 2002), and has been challenged by military involvement in its traditional spaces (Barnett and Weiss 2008, Fassin and Pandolfi 2010). Looking at humanitarian action as a transnational assemblage, one cannot but concur with the sobering accounts of humanitarianism's shortcomings (Harrell-Bond 2002, Razack 2007, Rieff 2002). And many works share in common a suspicious stance when the notion of the gift is used to frame the discourses and practices of humanitarian action (Silk 2004, Stirrat and Henkel 1997).

Nevertheless, in both its religious and secular forms, humanitarianism refers to a moral order that instructs people to assist those in need. The contour that I seek to tease out of an immensely rich literature is one that still permeates the dominant representation of humanitarian action: a shared understanding that what we recognize as humanitarianism expresses a moral value, whether in the form of Christian *caritas*, Islamist *zakat*, Buddhist *dān* or secular humanistic universalism. While each tradition holds its own cultural specificities, ramifying into

unique ethnographic contexts (Bornstein and Redfield 2011), for the purposes of my argument, we can assume that a humanitarian gesture is a moral gesture aiming to alleviate the suffering of others. This general vision of humanitarianism was certainly present in Lamaria where I conducted fieldwork. What strikes me, however, is that few works directly engage with the notion of hope, which along with that of the gift, inform the moral grammars of compassion that humanitarianism may embody.

My research concerned the establishment of a humanitarian intervention after two earthquakes shook El Salvador in January and February 2001, in a municipality called Lamaria.[1] From February 2001 to June 2002, I followed the trajectory of 50 families from emergency to reconstruction as they encountered a series of initiatives, which required different forms of physical, emotional and symbolic investments on their part. If hope was not the dominant trope through which I was conducting my conversations, it was nonetheless a recurring theme, one I did not pursue analytically until now.

Whereas hope has been analyzed primarily in terms of the temporal features of a cognitive stance, I seek a more action-oriented interpretation. Hope is an important mover of social action, often giving it meaning and sustaining it, which in no way guarantees the accomplishment of desired outcomes. But what is the role of hope in action? Does it have any specific features or dynamics? I ask these questions yet I do not think that hope incarnates in one way, nor do I seek to catalog a series of hopeful postures adopting a universalizing voice. Hope does not necessarily exist everywhere and my comments intimate a particular instance of fieldwork and thus the lived experience of a specific group of people in unique circumstances. More explicitly, I show how hope, as it was expressed in the highly determined context of a post-disaster reconstruction site, was manifested in work, the valuations of which shifted over time as humanitarian activities began to resemble market labour relations, thereby reformulating initial expressions of hope. The exact argument of this paper is that hope brings value to one's action and that it is through the notion of value that we can better ground hope in practice. I therefore converse with different literatures regarding hope and value and, in the latter case, find potential in the understanding of value as a meaning-making process through which people ascribe importance to their actions.

I begin by presenting the immediate post-disaster context where I encountered the 50 families for the first time. This allows me to briefly discuss the temporal horizon of hope to which it is usually associated. The next sections of this paper are more theoretical as I seek, on the one hand, to discuss how various anthropologists have engaged with hope and, on the other, to better articulate hope to action through the notion of value. Lastly, I explain how hopeful instantiations manifested themselves through labour activities in the concrete setting of a housing reconstruction project where the families lived and worked for over a year. Ultimately I wish to show how, contrary to some interpretations, hope can be understood as a valuation process brought about by action.

Setting the Stage: Salvadoran Hopes

The group of 50 families lived in a municipality called Lamaria located in the department of Sonsonate. Lamaria is a commercial town located 40 kilometres west of San Salvador. In 2001 it contained 23,800 inhabitants. Lamaria was not a tourist destination, but it was well known for its Saturday market. The local economy was based in agricultural production, although manufacturing and brick-making were also important activities. The municipality was divided between 28 urban administrative districts called *colonias* and 10 rural *cantones*. Smaller rural settlements were called *caseríos* and they numbered 33. Many disaster victims came from these more remote areas where many adobe houses did not withstand the telluric shocks.

When the January earthquake occurred, only three Salvadoran NGOs were working in Lamaria, and no international one had been present. Before the 2000 mayoral elections, the municipal office was held by the ARENA party, representing the interests of prominent landowners who were not very open to the involvement of foreign NGOs. But this changed in 2000 when a coalition of three left-wing parties acceded to power. The mayor, Don Gustavo, was a not a trained *político* (politician) but rather the owner of a well-known ironworks shop. He had planned many social projects for Lamaria, such as modernizing the market and improving the distribution of water and electricity to the cantones and caseríos. Unfortunately, like so many Salvadoran towns, Lamaria was not prepared to face the consequences of two powerful earthquakes.

While there was not a drastic loss of life compared to other areas in the country (23 people died compared to the 585 people in the Las Colinas landslide in Santa Tecla), the first earthquake damaged or destroyed more than half of the population's houses for a total number of 13,340 houses. The 50 families that I got to know came from various areas of the district, some from rural zones, others from the town center. Of course, there were many more people affected to a greater or lesser extent by the seismic events. However, these 50 families were part of a group targeted by local institutions as the "most vulnerable

population" of the district: they all qualified as poor by national standards, earning less than the minimum wage set at US$97 in 2001, and none had ever owned a house or plot of land. These characteristics were precisely those that lead them to later participate in a housing reconstruction initiative once the dust had settled.

Prior to their involvement in the project in May 2001, families with nowhere to go were gathered into temporary shelters built by *Médecins sans frontières* (MSF) who arrived three days after the January earthquake. This sets the stage to begin my analysis of the modalities of hope. MSF organized three campgrounds, one in the town centre, two others in its immediate outskirts where the NGO assembled aluminum sheeting or reinforced plastic shelters, communal stoves and large potable water tanks. With the help of the army, a group of nuns from the order of San Pedro Claver, respected for their care of homeless elderly, were in charge of distributing weekly food rations delivered from the World Food Program warehouses near San Salvador. I came in mid-February, a week after the second earthquake hit. If I had to describe the overall mood in one of the encampments, "hopeful" would be a good word to choose. Indeed, there was a heightened sense of expectation of things to come as for once these families were in the atypical position of being at the center of attention of an NGO, as well as municipal authorities who had generally ignored them in the past.

In discussing hope as a mood, philosopher James Dobb (2004) explains that the mood of hope can be defined by the unique temporality which generates it: a time of the "not-yet" anchored in the "now time" of an intense present. A mood is a state of mind, a disposition or a "receptive state of mind *predisposed to action*" (Merriam Webster Dictionary 2012). While I do not want to generalize and I remain cautious in rereading my field notes so as not to minimize peoples' experience of bleakness, there was nonetheless an unmistakable shared sense of anticipation: that something would unfold in a not-too-distant future that would be beneficial to them.

While hope is oriented toward the future, it also contains something else akin to a readiness to act in the present, which is precisely what I wish to consider in these pages. To discuss this one must discard the representation of disaster victims as passive sufferers, as they are often portrayed in the media. On the contrary, a lot of organizing and adaptation occurred in the disaster's aftermath. People had to adapt to shelter life; some individuals were involved in clearing up debris and others volunteered to help kin members affected by the disaster. The particular temporality of life in this camp was not about the cessation of happening and passive waiting time. It was closer to a liminal time marked by a break from ordinary life, the end point of which remained uncertain, but suffused with hopeful expectations.

Whether people believed that their stay in the camps was provisional depended on institutional discourses. All over the district, and elsewhere in the country, talk about housing reconstruction projects abounded. The Salvadoran MSF field officials had alluded to the possibility of a new housing initiative in the area and rumours fuelled peoples' projections about their future. It is fair to say that all the families hoped to find a permanent roof over their heads. At the same time, many questions arose: Would they rebuild where they lived before? But how could they since they did not own that land? Would they be relocated elsewhere? Would the government do something? Or would the NGO? The ethnographic context influences the structure of hope and in this respect, although people were unsure about what would come next, they were clear about what they wanted: *Quisieramos una casa, espero tener un lugar a donde vivir* (we want a house, I hope to have a place to live). Of course things were not idyllic; feelings of loss still prevailed, but they did not obviate all hope.

So far my comments concern the temporal dimension of hope and recall a frequent interpretation of hope as an inner stance of open-endedness that is future-oriented. Indeed, one generally hopes for something to come, not for something that has passed, although the past and the present do inform the quality of open-endedness and the content of hope. This open-endedness depicts well the outlook of the MSF beneficiaries. With this in mind, I wish to address in what follows the idea that hope is not always passive, that it can generate activity, which generates it in return.

Hope and Action

Hope has been approached from many angles, and when clearing conceptual ground on the subject, one is reminded that in traditional Christian creed it is one of the three theological virtues, along with faith and charity. Therefore it is not surprising to see it harnessed, like the gift, by humanitarian organizations that appeal to our good consciences in times of calamity to "give the gift of hope." While the gift has received much attention from anthropology, it is less so the case with hope. And if the theological underpinnings of hope have been discussed at length, that is not what I wish to dwell on.[2] Instead, I refer to various socio-anthropological interpretations that consider hope as a method for knowledge production and a category to analyze action. However, none of these explicitly tie hope to the notion of value.

A first anthropological reading of hope is that of Hirokazu Miyazaki who, in his book *The Method of Hope* (2004:9), refers to Ernst Bloch's idea of hope as the "not yet" conscious. In his famous summa *The Principle of Hope* written between 1930 and 1959, Bloch advances an overarching argument that is often referred to: it is the notion that hope is a "not-yet" consciousness towards which subjectivity tends. It is like an anticipatory posture sometimes conflated with desire, but nevertheless distinct from it. Miyazaki explains how this idea allowed Bloch to orient philosophy away from the past, from its retrospective character, and towards a prospective stance, towards the future. Hope becomes part of an epistemological device, or posture, in the production of knowledge instead of being *the* knowledge, or content, to be analyzed. This methodological move allowed Bloch to make hope, instead of contemplation, the modality of philosophy's prehension of the world.

For Miyazaki, hope as method in the production of knowledge inspires the anthropologist to go back to his fieldwork data from Fiji in order to examine with a more synchronic position an unfolding series of ritual events in which hope is enacted and I certainly take my cue from this move. Instead of relating what happened from the end-point of analysis, a posture which forecloses the expression of hope, Miyazaki's aim is to convey the open-ended stance of the ritual participants themselves. This allows him to better explain people's forward-looking orientation as they seek to achieve the object of their hope: the recognition of native land rights. Hope is not only that revealed by the ethnographic experience, here as content, but more importantly it is an epistemological device that allows the author to reorient his own activity of knowledge production, hoping, as it were, to provide new potentialities to anthropological critical thinking.

A different anthropological reading of hope is that of Vincent Crapanzano who squarely opposes hope and desire. Indeed, hope is sometimes defined as a desire accompanied by the expectation of or the belief in its fulfilment. Hope and desire do share many qualities so it can be difficult to distinguish them. While reminding us not to take hope as a translinguistic and transcultural category, Crapanzano writes that hope rests on a linear and measurable understanding of time. Contrary to desire, which Crapanzano considers active, the former is inherently related to passivism and resignation. Hope is waiting time and the passive counterpart to desire, which supposes human agency. He writes that "except where it is used as an equivalent to desire, hope depends on some other agency—a god, fate, chance, an other—for its fulfillment...You can do all you can to realize your hopes, but ultimately they depend on the fates—on someone else" (Crapanzano 2003:6). In this view, there is no causality between hope's materialization and the individual doing the hoping. Instead, the causal agent is exterior and relational dynamics are dismissed.

Another anthropological contribution is that of Jarrett Zigon (2007, 2008, 2009). Finding Crapanzano's hope too passive and Miyazaki's too idealistic, Zigon does not limit hope to an open-ended stance towards some better outcome, for indeed one can hope for very mundane things or even for one's situation to stay the same. Zigon integrates hope in his theory of morality as the "temporal orientation of intentional and ethical action" that he calls a moral breakdown (2009:253). For him, hope is twofold: on the one hand, it forms the existential background of our being-in-the-world and here it adopts a more passive stance, and on the other hand, it is also closely related to one's conscious capacity to reflect on what it means to act morally in the world. This occurs when one is faced with a problem, or moral breakdown, forcing a deliberate reformulation that is defined as an ethical moment. Hope, then, provides the temporal orientation of a moral breakdown, which leads to a conscious ethical reworking of a lived problem (2009:258). Here, argues Zigon, hope is active.

We are closer to a dynamic understanding of hope; however, these approaches still primarily locate hope in the elasticity of temporality. I am not arguing that hope is not part of a temporal structure orienting our engagement with the world, which of course it is. But in stating that hope influences our actions, we must better define how it does so and to do this I refer to the writing of French sociologist Claude Giraud (2007) who firmly anchors hope as a category for analyzing action. His epistemological underpinnings are distinct from Zigon's, namely when he argues that hope does not require an event to be active. Being actively hopeful may very well emerge out of a moral breakdown, but surely it is not confined to such situations.

Giraud seeks to map how hope is practiced, interrogating the causes and reasons behind its actualization. Obviously, hope is not present in every action: I do not hope for water to flow from the faucet every time I turn it on. For Giraud, hope is present in action when people do not envision their lives as completely out of their control, either because life is believed to be already written (predestination) or because it is seen as being an entirely unpredictable series of events. Hope is to be found in the diversity of social ties, and I would add inter-subjectivities, that need not be subsumed under a bounded category such as "community" or "group." It arises because

people coexist with one another and express their intentionality in the world.[3] Giraud defines hope as a capacity, a creative process tending toward the materialization of an intention. Hope is the capacity, not the content, the motivational structure; it is a "good without substance but that of its inner dynamic" (2007:25).[4] The implication here is that one will get from hope what one puts into it. This conception of hope links it more closely to human agency.

As hope can change or dissipate, one task is to follow its transformations. This is what I set out to do in this paper. But according to what factors should change be assessed? Giraud's discussion on issues of trust, sacrifice and promise provide useful insights to answer this question. Furthermore, they will also tie into considerations of value.

First, if hope is a meaning-producing activity, its dynamics rest on what Giraud calls an "objectification of the future"; that is, an ability to foresee the likelihood of a becoming.[5] This is a central feature explaining the capacity for hope. Indeed, one often (but not always) hopes for something that seems foreseeable.[6] A disaster victim may hope for concrete forms of relief, which may very likely arrive; or I may hope for peace in the world, which will probably not materialize during my lifetime. Between the two extremes, a case of adversity and a more "forward dreaming" stance as Ernst Bloch would say, the interplay between "subjective appropriations of external elements" and the "objectification of inner subjective reasons" varies (Giraud 2007:45).

Second, hope's proclivity to give meaning often incorporates a recognition of alterity, loosely defined as that which is different from what is known and lived in the now. Keeping in mind that the author's purpose is to study the relational dynamics of hope, the point is to identify different forms of relationality through which it actualizes itself. One such modality relevant to my discussion concerns the notion of promise. To have hope in a promise entails trusting its likely outcome while expecting continuity in people's behaviours. These comments are pertinent for the disaster-stricken families were indeed promised a new house by NGO representatives. This promise was foreseeable (many such projects were happening in the country), so people initially trusted those who made the pledge.

The question of alterity requires clarification: the point is not to systematically foreground difference, or an idea of otherness, as the prime mover of hope. But instead it is to highlight the idea that hope often objectifies an external promise from someone known or a distant stranger into a "social function" (finding a cure for a disease), a cause (revolution) or a project (marriage). This promise may be either directly or indirectly addressed to the person who then believes in it, entrusting certain groups or individuals seen as responsible to move it forward.[7] Yet this does not mean that agency must be located outside the self, as Crapanzano argues. Granted, in certain cases, it may very well be. But what Giraud unpacks are the forms of agency that hope produces in the one doing the hoping, even if the ultimate realization may depend on others.

This being said, not just any given promise engenders hope ipso facto. Giraud explains that the existence of hope depends on our capacity to put aside any disturbing information that would deter the trust and curiosity it requires. A cognitive selection process filters what kind of knowledge will sustain our investment in hope. Thus hope should be understood neither as the expected logical outcome of previous actions (too deterministic), nor limited to simple waiting time, as in waiting for a chance event. Along with trust, a necessary condition for hope is "sacrifice," not in the ritual sense, but as something corresponding to a form of expenditure or investment: one consents to invest time, energy, forms of belief and cognitions. To summarize, the capacity for hope as it emerges through action involves forms of expenditure, and depends on discarding information that would weaken it. This process characterizes many forms of hopeful engagements, such as political utopias, gaming, romantic relationships and collective action.

These observations do not restrict hope to a "not-yet-conscious" temporally defined cognitive stance or limit its capacity for action to a "moral breakdown" event announcing its genesis. Nevertheless, a caveat remains, for Giraud fails to fully explain why people, at times, decide to hope for something and for *this* something rather than for another. The problem of meaning-making is found wanting. If hoping depends on trust, on filtering information, on intentional investments, then would it not entail inherent forms of valuation? Giraud does not speak in such terms, but it seems constructive to relate hope to value.

Hope and Value

Ultimately, the connection I seek to make between these two notions is quite straightforward: hope is a human creative capacity that qualifies value, and because values are not just abstract things "out there" but also concretely enacted in many forms of acts, performances and ways of being, then hope must also be understood as a modality of doing. However, and specifically in light of the many debates around value, I must further elucidate my statement.

There are at least two ways to begin a discussion on value: one can either start from a holistic standpoint asserting that values organize social and cultural life (that is the way Graeber [2001], or Munn [1986], operate), or one can establish a distinction between types or spheres of values as they pertain to more circumscribed social contexts (Dumont 1971, Lambek 2008, Robbins 2007). I begin with the second route for it allows me to engage more directly with humanitarianism since humanitarian values were permeating all kinds of discourses in Lamaria after the earthquake, including the one framing the reconstruction project.

As an overall practice, humanitarianism is framed as a moral practice, grounded in virtue ethics, even if its numerous paradoxes have been rigorously critiqued (Fassin and Pandolfi 2010, Terry 2002). It is distinguished from the economic dimension of life since its raison d'être is not to make a profit but to help those in need (but often to compensate up to a certain point the very results of a profit-making global society). In our contemporary societies, ethical considerations have been increasingly estranged from economics, the latter becoming an abstract, self-sufficient and powerful forecasting discipline. The economical and the moral/ethical are conventionally set apart as two distinct spheres of values. Writing on the incommensurability of value spheres, Lambek (2008) notes that the first contains non-negotiable "absolute" values that stand alone (such as justice) and the second, on the contrary, contains "relative" values (such as fluctuating prices) that are measurable and open to choice. However this distinction should not be conceived as totally impermeable.

Anthropology has been well placed to show how rational choice and self-interested motives are not systematically the main operators of social action and can coexist with very different sets of values. Whereas morality and economics are still often opposed in ordinary thinking, one of the merits of anthropological inquiry from Mauss (1954) onwards has been to show how entertaining strict dichotomies fails to account for the complexity of meaning and practice, even in what we recognize as economical realms (Browne and Milgram 2009, Caillé 2007).

As Lambek explains, the ethical and the economic are not necessarily contradictory or unconnected domains of value. The barrier is a partial one implying "a lack of clear or complete equivalence that must lead to distortion, compromise, or working misunderstanding" (Lambek 2008: 139). Furthermore, saying that ethical values are absolute does not mean people uphold them like automatons under strict obligatory rules. People judge, assess and evaluate absolute ethical values as they manifest in the messiness of practice.[8]

Obviously, humanitarianism is not a gift economy (even if the notion can be reified within its confines) nor is it best analyzed solely in terms of (neo)liberal economical values—although at a macro level there is no doubt that contemporary humanitarianism partakes to complex geostrategic interests. Humanitarian space is a hybrid space, displaying a mix of "absolute" ethical and "relative" economic or utilitarian values that are not sealed tightly from each other.

This was certainly the case for those involved in the Salvadoran reconstruction project. Although humanitarian values dominated as families internalized the ongoing status of disaster "victim" and "vulnerable people" applied to them since January, they played with them too, saying it took the "opportunity" of a disaster for people in power (for example foreign NGOs, the municipal authorities and other local institutions) to take them into consideration and be generous. Certainly, having the possibility to own property, something they could not have easily afforded in normal time, influenced their moral reasoning. Utilitarian values (on the part of receivers) were as much part of the mix as altruistic ones (as donors upheld them), a hardly original comment. Hence, if actors involved in humanitarian practices uphold "absolute" ethical values such as altruism, helping those in need, or, alternately, see themselves as the deserving receivers of humanitarianism's attentions, it does not signify that they do so without exercising judgment about what they do, what they want (and hope for!) and what it all means in a given cultural setting. Any absolute value must be qualified through the way it is enacted.

Turning back to hope, as a capacity it can partake to both economical and ethical domains and operate precisely at this junction where values seem to enter in friction. I do not think hope must be constrained by a particular sphere of value—that it necessarily covers or pertains to one domain to the exclusion of another. As a capacity or form of engagement in the world, why should it be confined to a specific domain, strictly relating to a set of either/or absolute and relative values? Hope can be seen as a form of judgment about all kinds of values, as a particular style of assessing future aims we aspire to.

This line of reasoning leads me to the more holistic interpretation and recalls Graeber's discussion on value, which he defines as "the way people represent the importance of their own actions to themselves" (Graeber 2001:45).[9] Here value emerges out of creative action and can never be separated from its material medium. In this respect, recalling Marx is apropos since the question of labour is central to my case study.

In a Marxist perspective, the exchange value of an object is determined by the amount of labour put into its production, which depends on the context (means of production, technology, historical time and place, and so on), and always in relation to the amount of labour required in the production of other products within a given social totality. Value is not solely the intrinsic quality of an object, or of labour time needed to create something, but a relational process that mediates human activities, forms of representations and social relations. Turner explains well the semiotic dimension of Marx's analysis of value: for value to make sense it must be represented through the concrete media of circulation. Under capitalism, and other systems of commodity production, money performs this function. Money both measures and mediates human activities (at least those that are visible), assigning value to labour, to the product of labour, and does so in reference to the wider market system. Here, "value and its semiotic representations thus figure both as the emergent products of activity and the goals or purposes towards which that activity is directed" (Turner 2008:51). As a "token of value" (Graeber 2001:76) money ascribes meaning to actions, but it is one among many possibilities. Other types of media can measure productive activities as well, taken here in its widest sense as the deployment of creative energies (as they are found in labour but also in performances, rituals, agonistic gifting, and so on) as long as they render them perceptible to a larger audience. So values are rendered visible, they can be ranked, fetishized and they can be appropriated much like in the more conventional Marxist understanding of the appropriation of surplus value. The particular arrangement or structure they take on will depend on historical contingencies and circumstances. What Graeber and Turner ultimately stress is the importance of conceiving of values as a meaning-producing process anchored in practice and based on comparison within a wider "whole" imagined in the actor's mind.

There are interesting parallels to make between this discussion and the previous interpretations of hope. What I suggest is that if both hope and value stem from creative energies, then they are co-constitutive of meaning-making activities and hope participates to value-making practices. Hope is a process of valuation determining what is important for the person. Again, let me emphasize that hope may not be present in every action. But when it is to be found, then hope is also something that assigns importance to an envisioned or enacted action. In other words, it qualifies value, understood here in its semiotic sense as meaningful difference. The crux of the matter is how to theoretically speak of hope as a human modality that seeks to bring things into being without locating it outside practice. If value assigns importance to creative energies (which can incarnate in a myriad of forms or performances) and hope arises when there is a deliberate intentionality and investment in a potential outcome, then when human beings invest in hope it adds value to its referent.[10] We opt to channel towards its fulfillment various forms of creative energies, efforts or forms of expenditures. And this is done in coordination with a larger context or audience, whether real or imagined, within which manifestations of value and hope are located.

What I explore in the remaining part of this paper is how hope and value actualize themselves through labour in the particular context of a humanitarian reconstruction project, using this case-study to illustrate the connection I seek to establish between hope and value.

About a House: Creative Energies at Work

For the sheltered families, finding a house was a primary concern. Achieving this depended on others, namely international NGOs, and even then there was no guarantee for it was known that MSF did not run any construction initiatives in the country. However, in various parts of the district people were rebuilding: the national government was handing down corrugated aluminum sheeting via the municipal office for homeowners before the rainy season. Some NGOs, churches and solidarity groups were funding certain families to initiate repairs, but again these efforts mainly targeted registered homeowners. For the group of homeless people in the shelters, something else had to take place.

In April 2001, MSF announced that a European chapter of the Red Cross would take over the management of the camps. Shortly after, the Red Cross purchased land seven kilometres from the town center where 50 families relocated. This site was called La Hermandad. A kilometre away, another larger reconstruction site was underway under the auspices of the same Red Cross and two other NGOs for a total number of 150 families. Together, these initiatives were to lay the basis of "model urbanization" for the "most vulnerable people" of the district, which were namely the people gathered in the three shelters.

The 50 families came mostly from the central shelter in town but some had spent the previous months in the other encampments. All went through a selection process granting them the status of beneficiary of a participatory housing reconstruction project at the end of which they were promised a property title. Aside from being under the poverty line established at US$97/month, an important clause defining the project stated that only the

nuclear family was granted the status of beneficiary and, furthermore, no outside kin member was allowed on the site. There were few elderly people and single women headed households counted for a quarter of family groups. Counting the children, there were 300 people living in La Hermandad. One adult member per family had to abandon their job, if they had one, in order to dedicate themselves full-time to building activities. For the single women, this meant they had to participate in a typically male occupation, something they became quite proud about. Two figures of authority were present, a Nicaraguan engineer and a social worker from San Salvador who did not live there and who did not get along. Workers were trained by seventeen locally hired masons, and the entire endeavour was supposed to take six months. In fact it lasted for over a year.

In May the families moved to La Hermandad where they reassembled their temporary shelters in designated areas along the perimeter of the site in order to leave space for the building of houses. On the southernmost side, a stream provided water to mix cement and women would go there to wash clothes and cooking utensils. Potable water was delivered from special collection trucks and distributed on a weekly basis. The western border was marked by a dirt road leading to the other reconstruction site and, further north, to the fertile Zapotitan valley where seasonal workers picked produce such as cucumber, eggplants and tomatoes from various agricultural estates. From the embankments of the rivulets crisscrossing the Zapotitan valley, black earth was loaded on trucks back to La Hermandad for construction purposes. The NGO also collected white clay from nearby quarries. The steady back and forth of this traffic made La Hermandad a very dusty place to live. Everything was done manually, from the foundations to the steel frame of the houses as well as brick-laying. Throughout the process, no one knew which house would become theirs. In summary, for over a year people were actively involved in a reconstruction project, slowly building houses that would hopefully become their own.

Life in La Hermandad was structured around work. It was the prime occupation but it was not remunerated because this was a humanitarian endeavour framed under a non-monetary exchange logic: the NGO would give an 80 m^2 house on a 200 m^2 lot (for a total value of US$5000) in exchange for manual labour. This represented a substantial economical gain for the families and it would be foolish to think that utilitarian considerations were not powerful incentives. To compensate for the lack of income, the World Food Program delivered monthly food rations. In their specialized terminology, this is called a "Food for Work" project and there were many in the country at the time.

It is through the lens of peoples' investment in labour that processes of valuation and hoping can be analyzed. A general comment first: for many Salvadorans from various walks of life I met during my stay, work was something that was generally positively valued. There is a saying that stereotypes Salvadorans as people who *aguantan*, who keep going albeit adversity, who endure and toil hard. However, aside from this broad-brush cultural feature, work in La Hermandad became a ranking criterion distinguishing between who was a good "beneficiary" from a lazy one, and from the perspective of the families themselves, who was really "in need."

At first, work was well accepted. Sure, labour was demanding but there was excitement in seeing the houses slowly materialize. People started to imagine which one would be theirs, how they would decorate it. Michel de Certeau (1990) explains well how this invention of everyday life unfolds, how it deploys itself through place-making. Many families were gradually making this place their own with the limited means at their disposal. In this context, hope was expressed through people's activities, through their labour first and foremost, but also in planting flowers, playing soccer, and chitchatting about the prospect of owning a house for the first time while washing clothes by the stream. *"La Cruz Roja es buena para nosostros"* (the Red Cross is good for us) was commonly uttered, a statement acknowledging the altruistic underpinnings of this humanitarian project. Hope for a new life: if this seems like an evanescent objective lacking agency, for the La Hermandad crowd it was the opposite. Hope had a concrete substratum made of people's sweat and labour, a material object that was slowly emerging from brick and cement and it certainly gave value to the way they were spending their creative energies.

During these initial months, families did not doubt the intent of the project, they believed in the "promise" made by Red Cross representatives that they would become homeowners, placing their trust in the engineer and the social worker. They accepted working "for free" because what they hoped for seemed foreseeable, in turn assigning value to their effort: *"vale la pena trabajar"* (it is worth it to work), said many men and women involved. All the characteristics of hope described above were present.

Now, as for the engineer, his expectations were of a different nature. His priority was to ensure that the project advanced smoothly, according to schedule. He went back and forth between the two reconstruction sites. Although he was instructed by his superiors to instil in people a sense of community belonging,[11] which he tried

to achieve during monthly addresses to the residents, he was not a charismatic speaker and did not care much for such rhetoric. Living away from his family in Nicaragua, and under quite a bit of pressure from his bosses, what pleased him most was seeing workers committed to the job. Overall, I would say that he expected things to go smoothly and quickly, which they ultimately did not. The case of the social worker is different. She professed loud and clear her feminist critique of Salvadoran *machismo* and had a specific agenda: to mobilize people and especially women in various committees (vulnerability analysis, food distribution, latrine hygiene, and so on) as a form of *valor agregado* (added value) to what was predominantly a construction initiative. She took to heart the community-building aims framing the project. What she desired and told me clearly was to pursue a career with the Red Cross.

These comments are not merely anecdotal, for it is partly due to the polarized relations between the social worker and the engineer that working conditions soured to the point that previous forms of labour valuation were questioned, thus shaking the foundation of many peoples' understanding of the project's parameters.

The social worker granted many leave permits (chiefly for health reasons) and arbitrated several personal conflicts (mostly regarding intra-family violence, but she also had a man kicked out of the project for having abused his fourteen year-old step-daughter). "It's none of her business," the engineer told me, finding that her interfering slowed building activities. She would counteract saying *"¡somos humanitarios!"* (we are humanitarians!), a statement that would later galvanize certain beneficiaries' critique of the project.

The engineer complained to his superiors in San Salvador and after Christmas, Red Cross officials fired her, leaving him the ultimate authority on site. Also, people were becoming tired; two families left the project altogether finding the lack of income too big a sacrifice. Many felt the same but stayed on, saying that *"en el trabajo se ve quienes tienen necedidades"* (through one's labour one can see who is really in need). And although all the families seemed to belong to a similar socio-economic status, some were less economically vulnerable than others, so divisions arose between the haves and the have-nots. This was particularly the case of two women who opened food stalls where the technical crew bought cooked meals and other families purchased freshly baked tortillas. Over time, they accumulated some savings allowing them to lend money to their neighbours. In February it was clear that the project was lagging behind schedule. To remedy the situation the engineer increased working hours and tightened supervisory controls and it is no understatement to say that, by that time, the overall atmosphere was tense.

The technical crew became impatient with workers, criticizing various individuals publicly for their lack of dedication. The engineer compared the La Hermandad crowd to the Red Cross beneficiaries in the other reconstruction site. He often made particular reference to some families who had fled war-torn areas in the 1980s and who lived precariously by the railway track outside Lamaria when the earthquake hit: "Compared to them, the La Hermandad city folks are lazy," would say the engineer. By that he not only evoked an urban/rural divide but also emphasized how he valued people's commitment toward work. In return, the more vocal men in La Hermandad began to contest his authority outright, claiming that there was nothing humanitarian anymore in the way they were exhorted to work, that they were being treated as cheap labour. Many women shared their doubts with me about whether the houses would really become theirs, and whether the whole enterprise was a scam. People began to question the way their labour was valued.

Furthermore, in March the non-Red Cross beneficiaries working on the nearby site had taken possession of their houses mainly because heavy machinery was used, thus speeding up the construction process. Considering that value is created by comparison and within a larger context, this other initiative influenced the way people assigned value to what they were doing and consequently live their hope.

Labour, Value and Hope

In capitalism, labour is a commodity that can be bought and sold and it is ranked through the system of wages, which assigns a price value to a worker's labour. Money is the concrete token of value that measures people's creative energies, as much as it embodies value in and of itself. Wages establish a social relationship between workers and buyers of labour where, under capitalism, production is organized in such as way as to generate profits—the insatiable need of our particular regime of production.

Wage labour is something La Hermandad families knew well. In normal times all occupied low-paying jobs, some in the agricultural sector or in free-trade manufactures, others as small entrepreneurs or in domestic services. Now, under the auspices of the Red Cross they entered a different regime of production where their labour was not sold. In hoping to get a new house, these men and women had consciously decided to exchange their manual labour for property and monthly food rations.

According to all, the deal was a good one. Labour was defined as a counterpart under a non-monetary exchange framework where humanitarian values initially dominated defining donors and receivers.

In this logic, labour was not measured through money but through peoples' assiduity, dedication, and respect of authority as well as through the generation of the object of their effort itself: the houses. The value of peoples' action (physical work and appropriate behaviours) was made meaningful through comparison with others, via the public recognition of being a good worker, or not, and through the product of their labour. The humanitarian discourse advancing a non-monetary exchange relationship positioned the families as deserving receivers in need of assistance. It established a balance between work and the promise of a house, thereby feeding peoples' hopes, and vice versa as hope also gave value and meaning to their investment. But this balance changed when different value domains clashed, rendering the arrangement alienating.

The moral framework defining what we could call the "humanitarian production system" became unstable because it started to resemble a wage-labour system without wages. Due to the reduced recognition of workers' contribution to the project, they felt devalued. Work became regarded in the way it usually is under commodity production, but in this case it seemed unfair, for some even exploitative. Humanitarian values no longer corresponded as neatly with people's lived experience. Ultimately, NGO officials had to pay some of "their beneficiaries" to finalize the project while others re-entered the job market. The characteristics of economical forms of valuation competed with ethical configurations. In the minds of those who had toiled for over a year, a disjunction occurred between humanitarian ethical values and economical modalities of value formation and measurement.

How this affected expressions of hope certainly depended on the person: hope is after all an individual disposition although it can be fueled when shared with others. What transpired in La Hermandad was not a conversion of hope into hopelessness, but a general fatigue which, for some, lessened hope's take on its referent (for example the house) while for others it probably made them wish for something else. When in May a raffle finally assigned the houses to families they got what they had worked for.

My conclusion makes two comments on the expressions of hope. First, while hope is not necessarily considered or lived as a value per se, it is a human capacity that participates in value-making processes, understood here as that which assigns a meaningful difference to one's actions. It does so in the now and projects toward a future, yet as I have tried to show, it also translates into concrete actions. Hope is fluid and I do not believe it must be restricted to a single value sphere. On the contrary, hope can encompass both absolute and relative values: in La Hermandad, it played on the grammar of ethical exchange as well as on the logic of production.

Second, asking how a friction in values affects hope leads me to further defend the importance of hope's articulation to practice. In this sense, the transformations of hope into disillusionment, cynicism or complacency, to name a few possibilities, cannot be understood without taking into account what it is about its material basis that changes. The hermeneutic of hope cannot afford to overlook the political economy of its realization. Perhaps this comes as no surprise, but since we more readily associate its significance to a temporal outlook, a theological virtue, an evanescent feeling or mood, or a utopia, it is more rarely put the fore. I hope (!) to have shown how through the notion of value we can better engage with hope as a constitutive dimension of the way we think and act in the world.

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Notes

1 This research was conducted with the support of SSHRC and FQRSC doctoral grants. I would like to thank the reviewers as well as Pierre Beaucage and Bernard Bernier for their comments on this paper. Names of people and places have been changed to respect anonymity and confidentiality of certain information.

2 In French language and philosophy there is a distinction to be made between ordinary hope (*espoir*) and fundamental hope (*espérance*), which refers to the idea of hope as a cardinal virtue. This paper is concerned with ordinary hope. Furthermore, there are different philosophical schools that have debated the topic of hope as well as other disciplines such as psychology and psychiatry, which I cannot take into account in this paper.

3 Intentionality and hope are not same. I use the concept of intentionality in its phenomenological sense, as referring to a state of mind directed toward something (therefore intentionality is not necessarily the content of thought). Intentionality is at times explained as a feature of different mental states such as beliefs, judgments and hopes. Accordingly, hope is but a type of intentional directedness toward the world. Discussing Pieper, a philosopher who worked on hope, Schumacher writes that "hope is characterized by an intentional movement toward a preexisting object, a movement that presupposes the hoping subject has perceived the hoped-for object either through the senses, through an estimative faculty, or through the intelligence" (Schumacher 2003:66).

4 « ...l'espoir est un bien sans substance sinon celle de sa propre dynamique ».

5 « D'une façon plus générale, la traduction d'un futur en avenir est une des conditions objectives de la création de l'espoir » (46). The author makes a distinction between future and *avenir* where the later suggest a form of investment in the future. I translated *avenir* by the expression "likelihood of a becoming" in order to convey the nuance, but this should not be associated with Deleuze's conception of becoming.

6 One may wonder: if the object of hope is not foreseeable should we talk instead about wishful thinking? But then doesn't this way of stating things posit the ascendency of a Western form of rationality? Participants in a rain-making ceremony may very well hope for a sky entity to irrigate their fields, the ritual being an enactment of peoples' hope, if indeed this category makes sense to people. So the character of what is foreseeable depends on peoples' intentionality and worldview.

7 We should stress that the other can be a very abstract entity. The idea of the promised land of the Ancient Hebrews which transformed itself with the advent of Christianity is one example. Furthermore, a limitation in Giraud's treatment of hope is that his conceptual language does not always seem applicable to non-Western contexts. However there are ways to bridge his argumentation to very different situations. Are there not intimations in millenarist movements, for example, of hopeful stances?

8 Lambek uses the notion of judgment to talk about the ethical and explains that, contrary to the choice that characterizes market valuation processes (for example do I want this or that dishwashing liquid and will I pay more for the biodegradable lavender-scented one?), judgment implies forms of assessments around "absolute" values and certainly helps contextualize them. This move allows Lambek to break away from the constraining parameters the concept of obligation implies.

9 Graeber explains how anthropologists have used the notion of value in three principal ways. First, in economical terms deriving from the substantivist/formalist debate; second, in a semiotic sense where value signifies meaningful difference rendering visible sets of social relationships. While the first position foregrounds the existence of objects "out there" in an objective reality, the second is critiqued for not sufficiently taking into account the materiality which supports the actualization of social relationships. A third position understands value as creative activity, as something that emerges in action as "the way people represent the importance of their own actions to themselves" (2001:45). While the three overlap and are not mutually exclusive, it is this last perspective that I find most relevant to hope.

10 Indeed hoping for something makes it more valuable. However the literature I consulted on hope explains that hoping arises because the subject has a prior inclination toward an object, a desire for it, and furthermore that obtaining it implies a degree of difficulty, uncertainty in achieving it and requires some kind of effort.

11 I have written elsewhere on the caveats of community building through community participation in La Hermandad and there is ample literature on the subject in the field of development studies. Suffice it to say that the Red Cross, while acknowledging that it was not doing development work per se, still attempted to integrate these principles, which explained in part the reason for hiring a social worker.

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