

## Book Review:

Tia De Nora, *Hope: The Dream We Carry* (2021), Palgrave Macmillan. 1st ed. 2021 edition (22 April 2021); ISBN-10: 3030698696; ISBN-13: 978-3030698690

Before reading this inspiring short book, we held quite different but narrow conceptualisations of hope. What we both gained from De Nora's book was how hope as methodology, hope as collective work, hope as situated action, is deeply imbued in praxis and social change.

In many ways, *Hope* is in the tradition of Eviatar Zerubavel (2006), examining what is often viewed as unremarkable and taken for granted. De Nora is author as 'tour guide', helping us to see afresh the connections between social theory and the politics of the everyday, inspiring the reader to find new ways of thinking and seeing. For De Nora, hope is an orientation and openness – it supports endurance and buoyance. It is here that de Nora makes the phenomenological case, that to craft and imagine and then to act and pursue, is what makes hope a creative way of being. 'Hope, then, involves practical action. It involves imagining and longing for a hypothetical, better reality and actively pursuing that reality' (p5). Hope challenges us to confront the bitterest truths in the present – a necessary reckoning which keeps us alert to possibility and resource that can lead to change. Hope's creative force is its capacity to draw the future in, whilst simultaneously bringing the past to ground and root itself. Here, are alignments with research on temporality and affect. The red thread running throughout, is that to hope is to make the present world shift, even a millimetre. Indeed, it is often the millimetre that really matters, and the book provides numerous examples of this.

De Nora addresses the political ramifications involved when invoking hope. What hope is directed toward, and how it takes shape, is ambiguous. Across chapters 2 she explores how our cultural imaginaries invoke hope and to what end. In chapter 3 she focuses specifically upon health and wellbeing. The promissory nature of hope within biomedicine and its impacts has received considerable sociological attention, for example, giving vulnerable people and their families hope, with the future promise that such cures are 'on the horizon', leading to a situation of 'forever awaiting what might never occur' (p10). The book is critical of how hope is often utilised within biomedicine to enrol, measure, and categorise types and classes of patients, their responses to illness and recovery, highlighting this as a fruitful topic for critical medical sociology.

Whilst the book wears its ethnographic foundations lightly, the skilful deployment of tales from the field, underscores the book's presentation of hope as relational and sustained work. Hope is mustered, sustained, or undermined within specific networks of relationships, resources and imaginaries. Therefore, and importantly for us as ethnographers, *hope is situated action*. The book is rich with data from studies undertaken in places seen as 'hope-less' – care homes, hospices, and other sites of

captivity. De Nora's attention falls upon those who Ahmed (2011) calls 'affect aliens', people who are otherwise made to feel estranged from emotional regimes of optimism and happiness. Here she emphasises the significance of the importance of hope for those who are "confined in identities or social roles from which they feel there is 'no escape'".

De Nora's empirical examples help to furnish the book's conceptual work, but they also underscore an ethos and methodological argument. Her focus on hope is built on a deep connection to her long-term programme of research, the Care for Music project. This programme of research is itself founded upon a commitment to understanding the social life of music, often in the context of social care in late and end of life. The arguments in the book are rooted in a long-term engagement and approach, like Goethe, of 'gentle empiricism' (p112). This methodology involves quietly watching and waiting, for both understanding, and for change. The alertness De Nora identifies in hope is equally part of her research programme, as is patience in identifying and unravelling conditions for change. The gentle empiricism speaks to the importance of attention to detail, of patience, watching and waiting, the incremental, but importantly the micro incremental. Thus, one of the most fruitful and inspiring aspect of this book, which sets it apart, is as a way of seeing, hope's potential as a methodology, a method, an activity, and technique, that allows us 'to pay close attention to the present' and for signs and opportunities for change.

De Nora's careful argument is that if we can witness how and when hope is tended, we can learn from these episodes and encounters, we can seek to share these insights with others. "We can begin to 'see' what otherwise was invisible, namely little-by-little adjustments that, potentially, can bring into effect long-lasting and often-large forms of change" (p121). Locally produced activity can contribute to change in microcultures in ways more apposite and powerful, than aggressive 'change programmes.' Whilst De Nora does not use this language, there is a tenor of anticipatory ethnography in the book, that close attention in the present, to the 'doing' of hope, often in spaces deemed 'hope-less' could sketch a map for others. Perhaps we could mark the practices of hope in one place, to 'anticipate', indeed build, the conditions for hope in another. As she writes, 'considering hope's situations opens up hope to empirical investigation and in ways that privilege the meanings and values of those who do the hoping' (p14).

The book gives us courage that we can kindle hopefulness in 'hope-less' places by drawing upon slow gentle methods to inform micro-incremental shifts in practice. The situated action and relationships which underpin projects of hope, even *in extremis*, recognises that we need to carry each other, to be resourceful, alert, attuned to the present and imaginatively curious about the future. De Nora's sociology of hope is one that recognizes the wrenching realities of the present while simultaneously seeing them as part of the conditions of possibility. Those subjects *to* power, are at the same

time, subjects *of* power. The task of focused, gentle, and careful sociology is to discern the conditions of hope's possibility.

## References

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Katie Featherstone,  
The Geller Institute of Ageing and Memory,  
School of Biomedical Sciences,  
University of West London.

Emilie Morwenna Whitaker,  
School of Health and Society,  
University of Salford