

dictatorships—were massive poverty and inequality, strife, kidnapping, torture, and death. During the 1980s, US foreign policies designed to safeguard established “banana republics” in Central America led to military conflicts in places like El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala—the same countries from which most Central Americans migrate to the US. The reason these migrants are on our borders today is directly linked to over a century of US imperialism on their soils.

Whether from Mexico, the Caribbean, or Central America, Latinxs are in the United States not due to some romanticized vision of seeking freedom and opportunity. Nor are they here due to some racist delusion of seeking welfare, free services, and white women. Latinxs are here due to the consequences of past transnational events ignored by official US history (But because any conversation about restitution for US wrongdoings in Latin America would weaken Eurocentric power and privilege, the illusion of a city upon the hill must be maintained.)

PART II: Hopelessness as an Impetus for Praxis

The ignored and forgotten US history of incursion into Latinx lands of origin is responsible for today’s immigration crises. I would argue that these migrants do not cross borders hoping for a better future, they cross escaping desperate conditions mainly created by US avarice. They cross because staying means death. They cross because there is no other hope. True, I have spoken to some migrants whose crossing success is credited to the apparition of the Virgin Mother, or some angel leading them through the desert while providing hope. And I have no desire to debunk the faith of those motivated by desperation. Still, I am well aware of many of the other faithful whose bodies litter the desert, to whom neither María nor an angel appeared as desert guides. If such manifestation occurred, they were very arbitrary. Still, can something good come to the oppressed who hopes? Sure, why not? Hope might very well work for good as long as it is kept in the realm of the individual. Think of the often told sermon illustration of the child after the storm, walking along the beach making a difference to the one starfish picked up and thrown back into the ocean. The grumpy old man in the parable—who refuses to celebrate the one thrown back into the sea and instead cries for the thousands upon thousands who washed up on the seashore who will perish—has a better grasp of reality. Salvation for starfish, as humans, remains uncomfortably arbitrary.

Where does hope exist for generation after generation of the dis-

enfranchised? When hope is professed by those from the dominant culture, it smacks of egoism that consciously or unconsciously blames victims on the underside of history. According to Moltmann:

[I]n the promise of God [hope] can see a future also for the transient, the dying and the dead. That is why it can be said that living without hope is like no longer living. Hell is hopelessness, and it is not for nothing that at the entrance to Dante’s hell there stand the words: “Abandon hope, all ye who enter here.” (1967: 32)

But what Moltmann misses is that while he is correct to observe “Hell is hopelessness,” Hell is where the vast majority of the world’s oppressed currently live. And the question consistently ignored is: Who benefits from the creation of this Hell?

Those who constructed this Hell, sustain and maintain this Hell, and enjoy the privileges produced by this Hell attempt to provide hope to those living in Hell. It is somewhat disingenuous to tell Hell’s occupants they should believe in God’s promises for future eschatological possibilities of redemption. Make no mistake, the Hell of crossing the desert is the end product of rapacious US foreign and economic policies in Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central America. How do you prevent desperate people from risking everything in these remote lands and entering the US, people who are highly motivated to find work to feed and clothe the families left behind? You do this by not only making it deadly, but also hellish to enter the United States.

The premise upon which Operation Gatekeeper—our current southwestern border immigration policy—was based was a policy specifically termed “prevention through deterrence.” In an August 1, 2001 letter to the US Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Richard M. Stana of the US General Accounting Office wrote that the ultimate goal of Operation Gatekeeper was “to make it so difficult and costly for aliens to attempt illegal entry that fewer individuals would try” (2001: 1). In other words, making migration a living Hell. What Stana meant by making it costly was more than simply a financial expense. Deterrence is also achieved through the loss of life. Some migrants would die traversing dangerous terrain. But this is fine, because their deaths would deter others from attempting the same hazardous crossing.

The death of brown migrant bodies was not some unforeseen consequence of Operation Gatekeeper, but the cornerstone of the policy itself. And while migrants always faced hazards when crossing the border prior to the implementation of Operation Gatekeeper, migrant

deaths prior to the ratification of NAFTA remained rare. Ironically, Operation Gatekeeper failed to deter migration;¹⁵ it has, however, succeeded in killing brown people as pointed out earlier in this chapter, with five preventable migrant deaths every four days.

Besides creating the conditions responsible for migrants' death, immigration policy means that those who are caught face physical abuse. One out of every ten migrants reports some sort of physical abuse while in Border Patrol custody, and one in four report verbal abuse (CLAS, 2013: 24). Patrol agents have been known to kidnap and rape the undocumented, including brown girls as young as fourteen years old.¹⁶ Agents have beaten individuals, like Jose Gutiérrez Guzman, into a comatose state.¹⁷ At times, such abuses lead to death. Between 2010 and 2015, it is estimated at least thirty-nine individuals were killed by the Border Patrol. They include Valerie Munique Tachiquin-Alvarado (thirty-two), a mother of five who, in a residential San Diego suburb, suffered fourteen gunshot wounds inflicted by a plainclothes Border Patrol agent.¹⁸ Since 2014, the Border Patrol has been involved in more fatal shootings than perhaps any other US law enforcement agency, developing a reputation for abuse and corruption. On average, between 2005 and 2012, one border agent was arrested each and every day for misconduct.¹⁹

In an extensive study conducted by No More Deaths, 32,075 incidents of abuse and mistreatment of migrants by law enforcers were documented. According to the report:

Individuals suffering severe dehydration are deprived of water; people with life-threatening medical conditions are denied treatment; children and adults are beaten during apprehensions and in custody; family members are separated, their belongings confiscated and not returned; many are crammed into cells and subjected to extreme temperatures, deprived of sleep, and threatened with death by Border Patrol agents. (2011: 4)

Based on almost 13,000 interviews with migrants who were in Border

Patrol custody, the study discovered that only 20 percent of people in custody for more than two days received one meal. Children were more likely than adults to be denied water or given insufficient water. Many of those denied water by Border Patrol were already suffering from moderate to severe dehydration at the time they were apprehended. Physical abuse was reported by 10 percent of interviewees, including teens and children. The report concludes:

It is clear that instances of mistreatment and abuse in Border Patrol custody are not aberrational. Rather, they reflect common practice for an agency that is part of the largest federal law enforcement body in the country. Many of them plainly meet the definition of torture under international law. No undocumented immigrant is safe when in the custody of US enforcement agents. (Ibid.: 5)

When I consider the hellish conditions under which brown bodies are forced to live, I simply lack the luxury or privilege to hopefully wait with Moltmann for God's future promise to materialize. Too many dead and broken bodies obscure my view of the eschaton. Instead, I call for storming the very gates of Hell not at some future time, but now. Moltmann's theology of hope is in effect a theology of optimism based on a God of process derived from trust in a certain biblical interpretation rooted in linear progressive thinking issuing from the Eurocentric modernity project. And while such a hope may be comforting for middle-class Euroamerican Christians, it falls short and sounds hollow for the disenfranchised.

Rather than the prevailing theology of hope, I call for a theology of desperation that leads to hopelessness. I believe the greatest heroes of history, who have moved mountains for the cause of justice, have been those who out of desperation had no choice but to act. Hope is exhausting and tiresome for those residing in the Hell constructed by those complicit with institutional violence. The hopelessness I advocate rejects quick and easy fixes that temporarily soothe the conscience of the privileged but do not offer a more just social structure based on the empowerment of the world's used and abused. The hopelessness I advocate is not disabling; rather, it is a methodology propelling the marginalized toward liberative praxis—even if said praxis might lead to death in the desert.

Ignoring sin, such as depriving those crossing deserts from the fruits of their labor, reveals a certain arrogance in labeling hopelessness as sin while ignoring complicity with social structures responsible for

15. The presence of undocumented immigrants has substantially increased from about 8.4 million in 2000 to about 11.3 million in 2015. See Katherine McIntire Peters, "Up Against the Wall," *Government Executive*, October 1, 1996 <http://www.govexec.com/archdoc/1096/1096s1.htm>.

16. Ildefonso Ortiz, "Agent Sexually Assaults Family, Kidnaps Girl, Commits Suicide," *The Brownsville Herald*, March 13, 2014.

17. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xomI5NK01gc>.

18. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6wV_GMUq2aY&list=PLPW0ddSADS1w1ZIM2ep83ExlVQ-JAwN3mn.

19. Garrett M. Graff, "The Green Monster: How the Border Patrol Became America's Most Out-of-Control Law Enforcement Agency," *Politico Magazine* (November/December 2014).

causing the hopelessness. True, despair may lead to defeatism, apathy, and inertia. When I am in despair, I find comfort rolling up into the fetal position and doing nothing but grinding my teeth and weeping. But hopelessness need not be the product of despair. Hopelessness must be understood as desperation, a desperation rooted in the hope denied. When a people are desperate, they will do whatever it takes to change the situation because nothing is left to lose, even if it means crossing a desert. The Latin root for "desperate" suggests a hopelessness that leads to action, at times reckless action, brought about by great urgency and anxiety. It is not hope that propels people to the desert where more often than not death awaits; it is desperation. How many deserts would you cross to feed your children regardless of the risks involved? Hopelessness is an act of courage to embrace reality and to act even when the odds are in favor of defeat. Only at this critical junction of desperation, rooted in the now, is there a possibility for revolutionary change whose consequences might impact the future, or make the future worse as newer forms of oppression manifest themselves. But because we cannot discern the future with any accuracy, and because the future is not determined, we can only and boldly engage in liberative praxis within the now—and hope for the best.

(Desperation becomes the means by which we work out our liberation, our salvation, in fear and trembling.) But this liberation/salvation we work out is not some egocentric project. What is being worked out is how we stand in solidarity with the hopeless struggling for their liberation/salvation. To stand in solidarity with those facing genocide, pauperization, and unmitigated hatred prevents any simplistic platitudes on hope. For hearts to weep and bleed, they require brokenness and realism. To stand in solidarity is to stand in the space of the hopelessness they share. We embrace hopelessness when we embrace the sufferers of the world, and in embracing them, we discover our own humanity and salvation, providing impetus to our praxis, for hopelessness is the precursor to resistance and revolution.

Those on the margins have shown that the hopelessness of having nothing to lose propels toward radical praxis. We must be careful not to define hopelessness as resignation, inertia, and melancholy. For many, hopelessness is the realization that all too often crucifixion is an end. This realization can never be relegated as a sin lest it blame the victims for the violence that befalls them. To embrace hopelessness becomes an attempt to figure out how to believe in the midst of the end. To be hopeless is neither ideological nor depressing, because the

inevitable is accepted. To be hopeless is to be emboldened, knowing that a different result is not dependent on us (we are not the Savior).

The call for the hopeless is not despair, but perseverance, even when the end is so near. Hopelessness recognizes night is coming. Darkness may defeat us, may even consume us; nonetheless, the hopeless refuse to go silently into the night. In the desperation of the oncoming abyss, one may desire hope for its avoidance of reality; but hopelessness embraces the reality, recognizing that commitment to liberative principles is what defines our very humanity. With Jesus at Gethsemane, the hopeless drink fully from the cup they desperately pray God would take away (Luke 22:42). We can speculate that on the rim of the void, God makes God's presence felt. But even if God remains deaf-and-dumb, even if we share in Jesus's forsakenness upon the cross, our angst makes our presence felt by God. Maybe this is what Job meant when he cried out: "Though God may slay me, I have no other hope" (13:15). The faith of the hopeless cries out to an absent—or worse, a malicious God—choosing to remain faithful in the midst of desperation.

By contrast, Pope Benedict XVI argues that "hope is the fruit of faith" (1989). But rejecting assured but complicit hope does not indicate the tree of faith is fruitless. This is because the faith of the abandoned who cry out that God has forsaken them is a faith without certitude, the space where unbelievers believe. We believe without the certainty of placing our finger (as did Thomas) into the wounds of the crucified, advancing justice without any certain hope of success. So why do we hold on to faith, if only by our fingertips? We pray and seek God, even when silent, not to serve as our private magician and rescue us from the causes of our hopelessness. We pray and seek the face of God to define ourselves, to participate in communion, to converse with what remains beyond. We pursue a breakthrough of the Messiah in the urgency of the now, a God who claims to be Emmanuel even though we may not feel God is with us. (We hound the Divine so we can walk through the valley of the shadow of death, fearing no evil.)

Hopelessness embraces lament while hope short-circuits the struggle. As an ideology, hope whitewashes reality, preventing praxis from formulating. As a statement of unfounded belief, hope is an illusion beyond critical examination, serving an important middle-class purpose, providing a quasi-religious contentment in the midst of oppression. All too often, hope becomes an excuse not to deal with the reality of injustice. Engagement in positive and liberative praxis, even when the situation is deemed hopeless, remains possible. (We continue the

struggle for justice not because we hope we will win in the end; we struggle for justice for the sake of justice, regardless of the outcome. And we certainly do not struggle for justice in anticipation of some heavenly reward. There may or may not be a Heaven. Heck, there may or may not be a God. I'll let the theologians attempt to figure out God's existence. As an ethicist, I am more interested, as indicated throughout this book, in the atrocities committed in the name of God. We struggle for justice because we have no other choice, for the struggle defines our very humanity—or lack thereof.

Moltmann argues that hope brings about praxis: “[W]e become active insofar as we hope,” for hopelessness impels ethical praxis (2012: 3). I instead argue that hope, as false consciousness, leads to complacency with the oppressive status quo and breeds apathy. As long as hope exists, I might survive forces geared for my destruction. I just have to keep my head down and my voice muted. *Arbeit macht frei*. The disenfranchised often refuse to resist oppressive structures for the sake of survival or the desire to protect loved ones. As political scientist Jon C. Scott points out:

A cruel paradox of slavery, for example, is that in the interest of slave mothers, whose overriding wish is to keep their children safe and by their side, to train them in the routines of conformity. Out of love, they undertake to socialize their children to please, or at least not anger, their master and mistresses. (1990: 24)

And while we no longer live under slavocracy, still, the principle of conformity to survive is a reality attested by the working poor within communities of color who learn to keep their mouths shut and avoid political actions lest they find themselves without the means to feed their families.

To hope is to become dependent on the metaphysical to lead toward some utopian future without our need to participate to make the determined future a reality. Looking to occupy the future dictates how I must act in the present. The hope of survival means I have something in the future to lose, and protecting the little I imagine I have blocks me from the radical actions required if drastic change is desired. Those who recognize they have no future are already among the walking dead; but salvation and liberation may be possible by toppling Panopticon. We engage in liberative praxis because there is no choice but to fight for liberation from injustices, a fight for survival. I, of course, am not alone in calling for hopelessness in order to move closer to justice.

Cultural theorist Claire Colebrook, speaking about feminists' struggle for justice, also calls for the abandonment of hope:

Utopia could only be achieved through an intense hopelessness. Certainly, one of the laments of a perceived post-feminism is that now that women have achieved certain material benefits, there is no longer a desire for radical difference; with some degree of hope, we lose a genuinely feminist future, a future that would seem to be possible as a Utopia only if we could abandon or cease to be fed by these meagre hopes that diminish our force. (2011: 16)

I argue that her analysis is not limited to feminists but to all who are oppressed. Hope prevents all of us from committing to praxis capable of new constructs of reality along with utopian concepts of justice.

Refusing to Romanticize the Hopeless

Reading this book might lead the reader to the wrong conclusion that I am setting up a neat dichotomy: all that is bad is white and all that is good is of color. To make a preferential historiographical option for the narratives of the oppressed does not mean the marginalized are holier, more moral, or saintlier. The oppressed, like oppressors, can also become intoxicated with power and privilege given the opportunity. While in Santiago, Chile, I visited *el museo de la memoria y los derechos humanos* (Museum of Memory and Human Rights), which catalogues the horrors of torture, disappearance, and murder of thousands of Chileans during the US-backed seventeen-year Pinochet regime. Facing the Wall of Disappeared Persons, one looks into the faces of thousands who simply ceased to exist. Among the more moving item in the museum was the *parrilla*, the Spanish word for barbecue or grill. The victim was stripped naked and strapped (spread-eagle) on his back to a metallic bed-frame. Although the bed was usually hooked up to a standard wall socket, the one on display was attached to a car battery. Either a fixed wire was wrapped around the man's penis or a wire mesh bag was tightly fitted around his genitals. Additionally, a thin metal rod was inserted in his urethra. Women, after being raped, had a metal rod inserted into their vagina, and/or a metal clamp attached to their nipples, clitoris, or labia. Like a slab of meat on a grill, the victim was then “cooked.”

In La Habana, Cuba, in the *antiguo Palacio Presidencial* (old Presidential Palace) that now serves as *el museo de la Revolución* (the Museum of the