Does Hope Have a History?

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IN THE last few years, interest in the history of the emotions has been rapidly increasing. The history of fear has already been written (Lefebvre, 1932; Delumeau, 1978; Naphy and Roberts, 1997; Bourke, 2004). Is it also possible to write a history of hope?

An English poet, Alexander Pope, famous for articulating the conventional wisdom in memorable phrases, once wrote that "hope springs eternal in the human breast", as if this feeling was universal or even instinctive. In similar fashion, a recent history of the world begins with the ringing declaration that "what drives history is the human ambition to alter one's condition to match one's hopes" (McNeill and McNeill, 2003, p.1). Readers should not be surprised to learn that the authors of this history, William and John McNeill, father and son, are two North Americans, believers in the American Dream that will be discussed later in this article.

In contrast to both Pope and the McNeills, I should like to distinguish between varieties of hope, discussing hopes in the plural rather than Hope, with a capital H, in the singular. If the activity of hoping, what the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch (Bloch, 1954-9) called *Das Prinzip Hoffnung,* is timeless, the objects of hope are, on the contrary, generally time-bound.

These objects differ, so I shall try to argue, not only from time to time but also from place to place and from one social group to another. Different kinds of people hope for different things: for eternal life, for happiness in this world, for wealth, for security, for love, for fame, for a house of their own, and so on. Individuals may hope for all these things for themselves, but they may also transfer their hopes to the next generation, making sacrifices in order to pay for a good education for their children, for whom they may have "great expectations".

People are also more hopeful at some times and in some places than others, just as they are more or less aware of alternatives to the lives they are leading. We might therefore speak of changing horizons of hope, in the way that some German philosophers from Edmund Husserl to Hans-Georg Gadamer have written about the "horizon of expectations" (*Erwartungshorizont*). In this sense hope has a history, or more exactly, hopes have histories.

Histories of hopes

The next question is, What kinds of history do hopes have? There are at least three possibilities. In the first place, a psychohistory, on the model of the history of fear, love, anger and other emotions. After all, psychologists have

a good deal to say about hope, a trust in life derived from early memories of security and happiness (Cullen, 2003, 184).

To make such a psychohistory truly historical, however, it must be social and cultural as well. A social history, or historical sociology, the second possibility, might ask who hopes for what, when, where and with what consequences. It would also identify the institutions that encourage hope, from the family to the *telenovela*, remembering that an American anthropologist once described Hollywood as a "dream factory" (Powdermaker, 1950). Such a historical sociology might also discuss the relation between hopes and economic and political events, and the question whether the relation between hopes and society is one of reflection or compensation.

As for cultural history, this third approach is necessary in order to take account of traditions of hope, repertoires that form part of the collective imagination of a region, a period or a social class. Almost a century ago, a leading cultural historian, the Dutchman Johan Huizinga, wrote famous pages about what he called the "dream of chivalry" of medieval knights (Huizinga, 1959, p.86-9). It may be useful to follow Huizinga's example and to speak of "dreams", which are more concrete, rather than "hopes", which sound rather more abstract.

What follows offers a kind of historical cartography, a map of hopes or dreams in different places and times. As a beginning, one might distinguish between two continents on this map, two major kinds of hope that may be described as big and small. By "big hopes" is meant hopes for a better world, hopes for the human race. By "small hopes" I mean everyday hopes, hopes for a better life that are limited to oneself and one's family, including the hope of social mobility, which would be cancelled out if everyone achieved it. In what follows the two kinds of hope will be discussed one by one.

Big Hopes – religious

The emphasis in this article will be on worldly hopes, omitting the idea of Hope as a virtue; or the hope for life after death; or even the four last things (Daley, 1991). All the same, a historical cartography of hope cannot possibly leave out the many millenarian and messianic movements discussed in scores of scholarly monographs as well as in classic syntheses such as the books by the English historian Norman Cohn (Cohn, 1957) and the Italian anthropologist Vittorio Lanternari (Lanternari, 1960).

Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millennium* focussed on Northern and Central Europe from the early Middle Ages to the Reformation. The book discusses movements in search of "salvation", defined as a change that is at once collective, terrestrial, imminent, total and miraculous. Cohn explained these movements in both social and cultural terms. He viewed them as responses to what he called "social unrest", but also as responses that were shaped by cultural traditions, millenarian traditions running from the Old Testament to the prophecies of

Gioacchino di Fiore in medieval Italy. A key text in this tradition is the *Book of Revelation*, especially its description of "a new heaven and a new earth". "I John saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (*Revelation*, 21.22).

Complementing Cohn's work, the British anthropologist Peter Worsley wrote a general book on more recent millenarian movements, emphasizing the central role of "people who feel themselves to be oppressed and are longing for deliverance" (Worsley, 1957, p. 225). In similar fashion, Lanternari's *Movimenti religiosi di libertà e di salvezza dei popoli oppressi* (1960) offered a broad survey of Africa, the Americas, Oceania, and to a lesser degree, Asia over about a hundred years, focussing like Cohn and Worsley on the idea of deliverance or salvation.

Among the many movements discussed by Lanternari were the Ghost Dance of the Indians of North America, the Cargo Cults of Melanesia and the rebellions against British rule led by the Mahdi in the Sudan and by the Mau Mau in Kenya. Like Cohn, Lanternari explained these movements by a combination of social and cultural factors. The key social factor was virtually the same in every region: it was the invasion or intrusion of the Europeans, which disrupted traditional social systems. On the other hand, each movement took a different form, thanks to the variety of local cultural traditions. In Melanesia, for example, people expected the return of the dead, who would bring them goods of the kind owned by the Europeans. The goods would arrive in ships, carrying the cargo that led to the name "cargo cults". It is tempting to view the cargo cults as a cultural translation of the western ethos of consumption with which the Melanesians were beginning to become familiar.

Lanternari had relatively little to say about Brazil – a few pages on Canudos and Contestado – despite the long tradition of millenarian movements in this country. Indeed, at a landmark conference on the subject held at Chicago in 1960, the anthropologist René Ribeiro, whose task was to speak about "Brazilian messianic movements", told the audience that when he was about to catch a plane to go to the conference, a taxi-driver in Recife handed him a leaflet saying that the Second Coming of Jesus would take place that very year. Would the same thing happen in Brazil today, half a century later?

The big question, at least for a historian, is why millenarian and messianic movements occur at particular moments and not others. To answer that question we surely need to combine the two approaches, cultural and social, like Cohn and Lanternari, or as Ribeiro did when he wrote that "wherever a long-established tradition of hope exists … any change in social, economic or cultural conditions will favour the rise of a messianic movement" (Ribeiro, 1962, p.65). To this list we should add "political conditions" together with the need for a leader, preferably a charismatic leader.

Two examples will have to suffice to illustrate these points. The first, which needs no long discussion here, is that of the holy city or New Jerusalem

of Canudos, established by Antonio Conselheiro at a time of political and social upheaval: the combination of the abolition of slavery and the proclamation of a republic with millenarian traditions such as Sebastianismo.
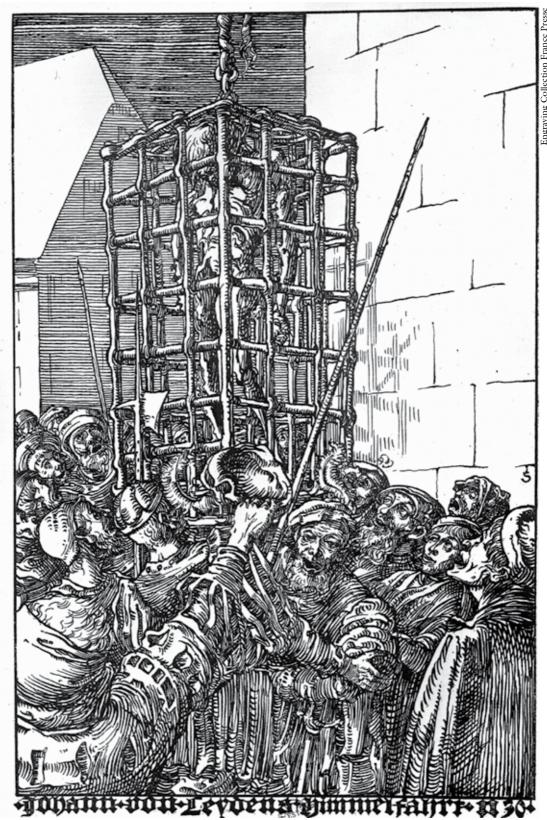
The second example, which was discussed in some detail by Norman Cohn (Cohn 1957, p. 252-80), concerns the German Anabaptists of the 1530s. In this case the holy city or New Jerusalem was Münster in Westphalia, the charismatic leader was the Dutchman Jan van Leiden and the social upheaval was the Protestant Reformation and the German Peasants' War. Incidentally, the Peasants' War was supported by the Protestant preacher and prophet Thomas Müntzer – a hero for Ernst Bloch (Bloch, 1921) – who saw him as an intellectual who had joined the people. Münzer was also a hero for the East German regime after 1945. After all, his advocacy of common property looked like an anticipation of Communism.

In Münster, a new social order was established, marked by community of goods and an ideal of social harmony. The citizens of the holy city called one another 'brother' and 'sister'. As in the case of Canudos, this alternative society was rapidly suppressed by force. Tourists who visit Münster can still see, hanging from a church tower, the iron cages in which some Anabaptists were confined before their execution.

Big hopes – secular

It is time to turn to big secular hopes, which a cultural historian is likely to view as the secularization of religious hopes. Utopias are heavens on earth. For immigrants, from the Pilgrim Fathers onwards, America appeared to be a new Promised Land.

Popular hopes are sometimes expressed by rumours, such as the return of the heroic leader in order to free his people and to bring justice, like Christ ushering in the millennium. In the Anglophone world, for instance, people expected the return of King Arthur, 'the past and future king', *rex quondam rexque futurus.* In the Lusophone world, they expected the return of King Sebastian (Azevedo, 1918). In Mexico, after the death of Emiliano Zapata, a hero of the Revolution of 1910, some peasants once again expected his return (Womack, 1969). Perhaps they still do: at any rate, he continues to inspire the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* in Chiapas.

Affliction Jean of Leyden (1509-1536), head of the Anabaptists of Münster, Germany.

Even when people do not expect the return of a specific past leader, a recurrent hope, especially visible in Brazil, though not only in Brazil, is for someone who will play the role of national saviour, "O Salvador da Patria", to borrow the title of a *telenovela* shown in 1989. The phrase remains useful as a description of the hopes pinned on Luis Carlos Prestes, "O Cavaleiro da Esperança", and more recently on successive candidates for President, here in Brazil and in other countries as well.

Times of Hope

Grand hopes for a better world are often expressed in what may be called "times of hope", a phrase borrowed from a novel by the English writer C. P. Snow. Snow's protagonist, born at the beginning of the twentieth century, looked back to the decade of the 1920s as such a time, "when political hope, international hope, was charging the air we breathed" like an electric current charging a battery (Snow, 1949, p. 98).

Such moments of collective euphoria include revolutions such as those of 1776, 1789, 1848, 1910, 1917, 1968 or 1989. Some analysts of revolutions believe that these events generally take place because of "rising expectations", hopes that have been blocked, leading to protest. In their turn such "magic moments" of collective action affect the social imagination, giving participants a new sense that anything is possible. As one of the graffiti on the walls of Paris in 1968 put it, *l'imagination au pouvoir*. Hopes of this kind may spread from one country to another. Revolutionary France, Russia and China were all viewed as model societies by some foreigners, especially the young.

A famous example of political hope is the American Revolution of 1776 and especially the Declaration of Independence, a document that has been called the "charter" of the American Dream, especially its famous phrase about "the pursuit of happiness" (Cullen 2003, 35). The French Revolution has also been linked to a major change in the collective imagination. As a leading German historian, the late Reinhart Koselleck, has argued, the end of the eighteenth century marks a major moment in history, which he called the *Sattelzeit*, the moment "on the saddle" between one epoch and another (Koselleck, 1979). What distinguished the new period, which Koselleck identified with modernity, was a new attitude to the future. The future was once perceived as destiny. By the late eighteenth century, on the other hand, at least a minority of westerners came to see the future as open, as malleable, as capable of being shaped by their own efforts.

Koselleck called this change an "inversion in the horizon of expectations". Instead of following examples from the past, the supporters of the French Revolution oriented themselves towards the future. The new attitude was symbolized by the change in the official calendar, according to which 1789 became year one of liberty, as if human history could begin again from ground zero. In my view, however, Koselleck puts a little too much emphasis on the late eighteenth century. As was suggested already, political and social upheavals

can liberate the imagination and it is not difficult to find examples of this liberation before the eighteenth century. One famous example is the German Reformation, in which figures like Thomas Müntzer made Martin Luther look like a conservative. Another is the English Revolution or Civil War of the mid-seventeenth century, when the ideas of the so-called "Levellers", who wanted all adult males to have the vote, and the "Diggers", who advocated common property in land, were much more radical than those of Oliver Cromwell.

In short, major events open up more space for hope, even if what we might call the "hope frontier" rapidly closes, as in the German and English examples mentioned above. What makes 1789 distinctive is the persistence of belief in an open future long after the execution of Robespierre and the exile of Napoleon. One might say that from the late 18th century onwards, hope was institutionalized, at least in Europe and the Americas.

Hope has a geography as well as a chronology. For example, it is illuminating to compare and contrast the French dream of liberty, equality and fraternity for all, achieved by means of the state, with the American dream of liberty and equality of opportunity for individuals, and the Brazilian dream of fraternity or "racial democracy". There is a long tradition of the foundation of new communities in the hope of realizing an ideal, not only in Münster or Canudos but in Scotland ("New Lanark") and the United States (the "North American Phalanx" in New Jersey) in the nineteenth century, or more recently in the *kibbutzim* of Israel and the communes of Western Europe in the 1960s.

Small Hopes

Magic moments do not last. A well-known North American historian, Arthur Schlesinger Junior, has argued that the United States passes through political cycles: periods dominated by hope, like the years when J. F. Kennedy was President, are followed by periods dominated by memory, by conservatism (Schlesinger, 1963). On the other hand, if hopes are not abandoned at the end of each magic moment, they become part of everyday life, everyday routine. For examples of this routinization we might turn to a book by another German historian, a former student of Koselleck's, Lucian Hölscher. In 1999, just in time for the millennium, Hölscher published a study entitled 'The Discovery of the Future' (*Die Entdeckung der Zukunft*), alluding to the title of a book published in 1902 by H. G. Wells, who devoted so much of his life and books to imagining the world that was coming that he is sometimes described as the founder of futurology (Wells, 1902; Hölscher, 1999).

Hölscher agreed with Koselleck that the open future was discovered in the late eighteenth century. However, he pursued the history of the future into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, employing concepts such as the *Zukunftsroman* (the novel set in the future, like the ones by Wells and Yevgeny Zamyatin) and the *Zukunftstaat*, the state organized around plans and calculations of future trends, such as the five-year plans of the USSR in the age of Stalin.

Official hopes of this kind, the projects of political leaders or bureaucrats, may be contrasted with everyday popular attempts to realize individual dreams, the "small hopes" mentioned earlier. "The American Dream" is a phrase that came into use in the 1930s. This dream is surely the most fully studied of all secular hopes, understandably enough since hope has become part of the identity of North Americans. The American Dream is a powerful one, not least because it is multiple and ambiguous (Cullen, 2003, p.6). How, for example, can one define the "pursuit of happiness"? Liberty is of course one major component of the dream. Another is equality, but that concept is itself ambiguous. From the nineteenth century onwards, the dream of white Americans has included equality of opportunity, the possibility of upward social mobility, of moving like Abraham Lincoln from log cabin to White House or of 'making it big' in some other way.

In practice, as the sociologist Eli Chinoy noted in a study of automobile workers published in the 1950s, ordinary Americans learn by experience to "focus their aspirations on a narrow range of alternatives". Individual aspirations become more limited as people grow older, "a process in which hope and desire come to terms with the realities of working-class life" (Chinoy, 1955, 110-11).

Blacks were not included in white dreams. However, in 1963, Martin Luther King extended the idea in a speech that has become famous: 'I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character'. Even the collective dream changes over time, however. Despite King's speech, a survey of attitudes to the dream that was published in 1995 concluded that African-Americans were less optimistic about their chances to succeed than they had been in the 1960s (Hochschild, 1995, 60, 69, 72). On the other hand, the election of Barack Obama as President gave new hope to African-Americans and appeared to make King's dream come true, or more exactly come a step closer to realization.

The Brazilian dream has also changed over time. In their study of race relations in São Paulo at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, Roger Bastide and Florestan Fernandes emphasized what they called the lack of hope among African-Brazilians. A more recent anthropological study, the result of fieldwork in a *favela* in Rio de Janeiro in the early 1990s, drew two rather different conclusions. In the first place, the *favelados*, who generally regarded themselves as belonging to the "black race" (*da raça negra*), whatever their skin colour, complained about discrimination in practice and rejected the idea of *democracia racial* as a description of Brazilian society. On the other hand, they believed in racial democracy as an ideal. As one of them told the anthropologist, "Nos somos todos iguais!" (Sheriff, 2001, p.4-8, 218-22).

The dreams of immigrants

The American and the Brazilian dreams both need to be placed in the context of migration, just as migration needs to be placed n the context of hope. The point has often been made that emigrants move for two reasons. Some are "pushed" by persecution or the pressure of population. On the other hand, many are "pulled" in the sense of being attracted by the hope of a better life for themselves or their children.

In sudies ranging from New England in the seventeenth century to Ghana in the twentieth, sociologists, anthropologists and historians all found that literate people were more likely to migrate. It seems that reading widened their imagination and made them more conscious of alternatives to the life they were leading (Lerner, 1958; Caldwell, 1969; Lockridge, 1974). The famous "gold rushes", migrations that followed the discovery of gold in Minas Gerais, the Klondike, California and Australia, are simply the most dramatic examples of a much larger process of ordinary people moving home in the attempt to make their hope for a better life come true.

The history of migration from the village to the city, tells a similar story of hope. Immigrants imagine that the streets of the city are paved with gold, metaphorically if not literally. In England in the seventeenth century, a time when *folhetos* circulated among ordinary people, one of the most popular themes was the story of Dick Whittington, a country boy who went to London to seek his fortune and became Lord Mayor of the city.

Even the *favela* can be a site of hope, one of the "slums of hope" as the anthropologist Peter Lloyd called them, following an earlier distinction between "slums of hope" and "slums of despair" (Stokes, 1962; Lloyd, 1979). In a study of Lima and Nigeria that countered the vision of a "culture of poverty" expressed in books by the American anthropologist Oscar Lewis, Lloyd suggested that many of the *favelados* believed in hard work and saving money in order to improve their condition (Lewis, 1959). In similar fashion, I sometimes think that if Max Weber could return to earth and observe Brazilians, especially Protestant Brazilians, today, he might smile at this evidence that his controversial idea about the Protestant ethic encouraging capitalism was right after all.

Coda

This article has omitted one important variety of hope, or more exactly left it until the last. It is the paradoxical hope of living without hope or more exactly of living without false hopes, without illusions. This was the attitude of,Machiavelli, for instance, and also the attitude of Weber, whose inaugural lecture at the University of Freiburg quoted Dante's famous phrase, "abandon hope", with approval: "As far as the dream of peace and human happiness is concerned, the words written over the portal into the unknown future of human history are, *lasciate ogni speranza*" (Weber, 1920, p.). This was also the attitude

of the British philosopher Isaiah Berlin, suspicious as he was of attempts to draw up blueprints for the future, for what he described sardonically as "the ultimate solution of the problems of society" (Berlin, 1958), and also the attitude of Reinhart Koselleck. In short, it can not only be argued that hope has a history but also that this history is social and cultural as well as political or economic.

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ABSTRACT – This article argues that hope has a history in the sense that people in different historical epochs hope for different things. Indeed, it has a cultural, social and political history because different social groups have different hopes – for salvation, for liberty, for security, for social mobility and so on.

KEYWORDS: Dream, Expectation, Hope, Imagination.