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The discipline of hope: abolishing the prison of immobility in post-Deportation narratives

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of hope in the stories of people with experiences of deportation collected during a photojournalistic research project following deportees from Europe. Drawing on the political philosophy of hope, specifically Ernst Bloch, this article explores the complex and ambiguous presence of hope and despair in the stories of deportees. Hope could present itself as denial, naïve optimism that everything will be fine, or as despair, a loss of hope. However, it also demonstrates itself in the persistence of not giving up hope for different futures. Building on Mariame Kaba's abolitionist thinking, the article illustrates how this 'discipline of hope' emerges as a survival strategy that has prefigurative socio-political dimensions. In the stories of deportees, this 'discipline of hope' was evidenced at the level of both imagination and practice; as a way to escape the post-deportation 'prison of one's home' or other unfavourable conditions people found themselves in. The interviewees' persistence in moving despite the border regime's violence reveals the system's ultimate failure to work against humans' aspiration to strive for better lives through mobility and points to the transformative nature of hope.

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Introduction

'If one does not have hope, one does not have anything'.
Almir, Bosnian 38-year-old former soldier and father of four
'Hope is a discipline. [W]e have to practice it every single day'.
Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'til We Free Us* (2021, 27)

Migration can be both a symbol and an enactment of hope (Pine 2014). While cross-border movement is an act against precarity and want in the present representing faith in the future, deportation reorganises or forecloses a migrant's future orientation. This article examines the role of hope in migration and post-deportation experiences drawing on narratives of people and families with experiences of deportation collected as part of a photojournalistic research project on deportations from Europe. Building

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on the abolitionist thinking of North American organiser Mariame Kaba (2021), I illustrate how the ‘discipline of hope’, and specifically the refusal to stop imagining alternative futures, emerges as a strategy in the stories of the deported, and argue for the socio-political dimensions of hope as a grounded practice of living. I conceptualise the discipline of hope as a prefigurative form of political action, where escape from unsatisfactory situations is a practical embodiment of the future and objectives migrants hope for (Escobar 2008; A. Gordon 2018).

People on the move are often exposed to violence and criminalisation, and the stories gathered from deportees from Europe to various locations around the world were filled with different types of border violence often culminating in the deportation experience. Despite the numbing immobility of post-deportation – ‘the prison of their own home’ to some – hope emerges as a survival strategy for both overcoming the despair border violence produces and maintaining a vision of a better future (see also Kallio, Meier, and Häkli 2021). Hope showed up in different forms in the narratives of the deportees. For some, the closure of a specific future horizon by deportation led to despair and loss of hope. Hope also presented as denial; a naïve optimism that everything would be fine in the face of the border regime and its uneven access to mobility. Still, hope also represented itself in the persistence of not giving up hope. This persistence often kept the door open for future attempts of remigration. Hope also had collective dimensions demonstrated in shared visions of different futures.

Drawing on the political philosophy of hope, specifically on Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch (1995), this article explores the complex and ambiguous presence of hope and despair in the stories of people with experiences of deportation. Hope is an ambivalent category that cannot be solely categorised as an emotion or an affect because it entails cognitive dimensions (Mar 2005). Hope is akin to desire, but it goes beyond pure fantasy as it is grounded in reality. It has an individual psychological dimension, but hope is also ‘public’ because these individual dimensions interact with intersubjectively-shared evaluations of possibilities (Mar 2005). For Bloch (1995) hope is a form of anticipatory consciousness, the ‘not yet’, that involves orientation to the future. Hope can be used to endure present realities, as in the compensatory wishes of daydreams, but it is also central for long-term speculative projects, such as migration. For Bloch, hope drives human action and opens possibilities in the world. Deportees’ stories of hope involved imagining possibilities rather than simply fixating on past defeats. The discipline of hope that people practice by being on the move despite obstacles, is a way to imagine and realise different more livable futures.

A photojournalistic project was undertaken with the aim of documenting and examining the functioning of the global border regime – the system of governance consisting of visa and immigration policies and border policing that attempts to control people’s ability to move and live – and its everyday consequences to a general audience. In this article, I shift from the structural analysis of the border regime to focus on how people manage the violence it produces. While recognising the importance of documenting the violence of the border regime, scholars have called for approaches that take distance from the narratives of violence to avoid contributing to the spectacle of suffering often surrounding the border regime (De Genova 2013; Könönen 2021). This article seeks to respond to the power of hope that was heavily present in the stories. Without romanticising migrants as proxies of resistance (Cabot 2019), I examine how this hope

extends beyond sustaining life in the face of despair often produced by deportations to a grounded practice of reworking the obstacles of the border regime. In line with ‘speculative thinking’ (Ticktin 2019) that does not stop at the description and criticism of the power relations, but attends to the potentialities of the present in the world through imagining (speculating) the connections between potentiality and possibility, this article highlights the ways in which people imagine and create worlds where these power relations are organised otherwise. The discipline of hope – refusing to accept the border regime, maintaining belief in different worlds, creating an alternative vision of livable futures where the borders between political communities are not so violently guarded – can be conceived as prefigurative politics where people seek to enact visions of the future they want to see taking place in the present (Escobar 2008; Jeffrey and Dyson 2021; A. Gordon 2018).

The remainder of the article will discuss theorizations of hope and utopian margins and contextualise the article into broader migration studies. The following section introduces the methods and the data used for this study. Different aspects of hope in migration – its potential and collective dimensions in migration, despair, uncertainty and loss of hope, and hope as a survival strategy and discipline – are discussed in the subsequent four sections. I conclude by relating the politics and discipline of hope to wider themes of escape and migration’s transformative nature within migration studies.

Hope, migration, and the utopian margins

In *The Principle of Hope* (1995), Ernst Bloch foregrounds his understanding of hope as an anticipatory consciousness. Hoping and dreaming rely on past experiences; still, hope is not confined to them. Bloch conceives hope as a positive future-oriented affect that enhances a person’s capacities, unlike fear, which diminishes them. For him, fear represents nihilism that masks the crisis by tolerating and lamenting it rather than taking action to change (Bloch 1995, 1:4). Hoping entails venturing beyond fear, in an often extreme exercise of will. Therefore, it has a utopian quality: It means not tolerating the situation as it is. For Bloch, hope, with its fundamentally utopian surplus or ‘margins’, can not only drive action, it can turn it into a form of social commitment.

These ‘utopian margins’ are often hard to describe; Avery Gordon (2020) equates them to a fugitive mode of living whereby the ‘what if’ is thought of as if it were reality. Gordon (2018) describes these fugitive modes of living as a form of consciousness and knowledge, a mindset for living on terms more favourable than those offered. Utopian margins acknowledge that despite the overwhelming power of the systems of domination, they can never fully take over. In her book, the *Hawthorn Archive* (2018), Gordon traces these utopian margins to the historical roots of escape by the enslaved, vagrancy, soldier desertion, and other ‘often illegible, illegitimate, or trivialised forms of escape, resistance, opposition, and alternative ways of life’ (A. Gordon 2018, viii). Her approach comes close to the autonomy of migration scholars’ description of migration as an ‘escape’, as a refusal of one’s position in the global economy, and a desire to search for a better life (Mezzadra 2004).

Ideas of utopian margins and autonomist thinking resonate with Mariame Kaba’s (2021) approach to hope as a discipline. She understands hope as a resistance to the pessimism the current state of the world easily produces. But hope itself is not relegated to the

realm of optimism; it can co-exist with negative emotions such as sadness, frustration, and anger (Kaba 2021). Hope is about living in ‘the afterlife already in the present’, a notion akin to Bloch’s anticipatory consciousness (Kaba 2021, 26). For Kaba, hope is a philosophy of living: a disciplined, grounded practice of maintaining a vision of different futures and believing in the potential for change. Kaba’s understanding of hope as a grounded practice can be seen as a form of prefigurative politics; it ‘enacts in everyday practice the characteristics of the future world desired’ (Escobar 2008, 258). In the stories of deportees, this ‘discipline of hope’ was evidenced at the level of both imagination and practice; as a way to ‘escape’ the post-deportation ‘prison of one’s home’ or other unfavourable conditions people found themselves in, and in the overall persistence of people to move despite the border regime’s obstacles and violence.

The persistent insistence on moving enabled through the discipline of hope demonstrates the ultimate failure of the border violence to ‘kill’ these hopes and practices.¹ If we understand abolitionism as a life-affirming world-building practice that aims to create new livable futures for all and to end the violence that is used to control the organised abandonment of marginalised groups neoliberal policies and neocolonial practices produce (Gilmore 2007; Kaba 2021), the connections between abolitionist thinking, the refusal of the border regime, and escape become visible.

Along the lines of abolitionist speculative theorising, this article attends to the ‘utopian margins’ already present in the collective imaginary by focusing on the potentialities of the future existing in the imaginations and practices of people (Ticktin 2019; A. F. Gordon 2020). I conceptualise the discipline of hope as one of these potentialities. As Kaba (2021, 27) writes: ‘Because in the world we live in, it’s easy to feel a sense of hopelessness, that everything is all bad all the time, that nothing is going to change ever [...] I just choose differently. I choose to think in a different way, and I choose to act in a different way’. Hope is believing despite the evidence of the violent nature of the border regime and ‘watching the evidence change’ (Kaba 2021, 27).

Dominant political institutions often present the current conditions, such as the world of the nation-states and its restrictive border regime, as evident and necessary; they preempt alternative futures to manage the present and maintain prevailing power relations (Jeffrey and Dyson 2021). This is visible in the demands on ‘realism’ and reformism in migration debates which reduce reality to actuality and empty it from all forms of potentiality (Hage 2004). Similar pessimism can also follow from the critique of the border regime, when the desire of scholars to reveal underlying power structures and systems of oppression hinders being open to the potentialities of the present and reduces the reality to the actuality (Sedgwick 2003). Speculative thinking responds to these limits of critique (Ticktin 2019) and counters pessimism in discussions on migration and borders.

Interest in hope in anthropology and social philosophy has increased since the 2000s (Kleist and Jansen 2016; Stengers 2003; Hage 2003). Hope has also entered research on migration; however, analytical engagements on mobility and hope have been less extensive (Kleist and Thorsen 2016). Scholars who discuss hope in migration mostly contextualise hope in their empirical work’s specific economic or social transformation or zeitgeist and examine how that empirical backdrop informs the formation of hope (Kleist and Thorsen 2016). Schielke (2020) has discussed the hopes of Egyptians migrating to the Gulf states, and Mar (2005) the emotional structures of hope of people migrating during Hong Kong’s postcolonial transition. Parla (2019) has examined

Bulgarian Muslim migrants' hopes for legalisation in the context of relative privilege in Turkey. Pine (2014) has used Bloch's theories to explore ideas of hope and future in socialist and post-socialist contexts (Pine 2014). In a collected volume on hope and West African migration, the authors discuss how people locate opportunities and meaningful futures in different sources and places, such as bureaucratic classifications (Drotbohm 2022) and how hope mediates migrants' uncertainty related to return (Fernandez-Carretero 2022). Scholars have also discussed hope in relation to temporality and waiting, especially in arguing against non-linear understandings of time, as well as agency and resistance in a situation where migrants or asylum seekers feel stuck (Bendixsen and Hylland Eriksen 2018; Kallio, Meier, and Häkli 2021). They have also examined hope as a location of a struggle between migrants' and politicians' aspirations (Hodge and Hodge 2021; Lindberg and Edward 2021).

Literature on hope in the post-deportation context is scarce. Kleist (2016) has examined topographies of social hope in Ghana among deportees. Drawing on Mar (2005) and Hage (2003), she analyzes how migration weaves into collective hopes of a good life and how returned migrants negotiate with them. Lucht (2022) discusses existential mobility and how Ghanaian migrants and deportees in Niger negotiate hope and despair. In her rich ethnography of 'failed' migrations in Southern Mali, Schultz (2022) examines how deportees negotiate with 'failure' individually and socially, analyzing men's affective management of the contingent post-deportation future and contributing to my discussions on the multifaceted meanings of hope. This article adds to this literature by discussing hope specifically in relation to the post-deportation context. In line with Kleist and Thorsen (2016), I approach hope as an analytical perspective that pays attention to the simultaneous potentiality and uncertainty of the future. In this way, this article contributes to the understanding of the multifaceted role of hope in migration, and to the overall literature on post-deportation experiences (see, e.g. Coutin 2016; Drotbohm and Hasselberg 2015; Galvin 2015; Golash-Boza 2015; Khosravi 2018; Radziwinowiczówna 2019; Schuster and Majidi 2013). Moreover, the article offers analytical tools to comprehend hope's transformative potential by bringing abolitionist theories of hope and utopian margins into conversation with migration studies. Overall, the article advances the use of speculative approaches in migration studies to grasp migration's transformative nature and furthers an understanding of migration as a life-affirming world-building practice with prefigurative political dimensions akin to abolitionist approaches.

Material and methods of analysis

The general aim of the photojournalistic project was to lift the veil of obscurity from deportations and deportees and therefore to depict with dignity deportees as real people with complex histories whose experiences and voices should be visible in public discussions (see also De León 2015). The project took place between 2013 and 2017 with the core working group of a journalist Kaisa Viitanen, a photographer Katja Tähjä, a playwright/director Elina Izarra, a graphic designer Anna-Mari Ahonen, and a researcher Niina Vuolajärvi. The journalists identified participants through the snowball method and conducted the interviews by following people after they had been deported or remigrated. In one case, the story was narrated by family members who were left behind in Europe. The interviews were conducted at

different stages of the deportation process: most interviewees were met after their deportation, some in detention centres waiting to be deported, some when trying to remigrate after being deported, or when they had been able to return to the country that deported them.

The photojournalistic material reflecting the everyday lives and objects of people deported was published in a book (Viitanen and Tähjä 2016), and presented in a play and an exhibition. The article includes, but does not analyze, images from the project as visual context for the narratives collected. Many of the participants wanted to be seen and heard; they had been fighting publicly against their deportation or wanted to give a human face to deportees and verbally consented to their identities, with full names and faces, being included in the project's stories and images. However, only first names are provided here to ensure interviewees' safety, as interviewee identity is not central to this analysis and because the working group is not in touch with all the interviewees and therefore not aware how the publication of their full names attached to their stories would affect the interviewees. In general, the project took a subject-centered ethical approach, which meant that ensuring the wellbeing and safety of the participants was a priority (Mai 2009) and the research respected guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity.²

Unlike studies on post-deportation experiences focusing on deportees in one national context (see e.g. Khosravi 2018; exceptions Turnbull 2018), the material collected for this project does not reflect the experiences of a specific ethnic or national group. Instead, it portrays experiences of migration and post-deportation across various ethnicities, countries of origin and removal, motivations for migration, and reasons for removal. Furthermore, instead of individual narratives, the stories often include the voices of multiple family members and friends, highlighting how deportations and the border regime affect not just the person deported but disrupt families and work, neighbourhood, and school communities (Dreby 2012; Hagan, Leal, and Rodriguez 2015). Hence, this work can enrich our understanding of the collective aspects of post-deportation experiences.

Sixteen narratives of deportations traversing 26 countries were collected. Forty-two people, including migrants and their family members and friends, participated in the interviews in various countries of origin and transit (Austria, Finland, Ghana, Kosovo, the Philippines, Turkey, and Uganda). Interviewees had fled the war areas of Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Iraq; or migrated, fleeing persecution or seeking better opportunities, from the Gambia, Ghana, Kosovo, Nigeria, the Philippines, Russia, Thailand, and Uganda. Their movement had taken them to Australia, Austria, Greece, Finland, Italy, Kenya, Slovenia, Mali, Morocco, the Netherlands, Niger, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

This article uses inductive thematic analysis (Mills, Durepos, and Wiebe 2010), meaning that I read the narratives several times, coded them, and extracted themes from the codes. Some inductively developed themes were the continuum of violence, interruption of everyday life, collective rupture, embodied immobility, and affective dynamics of hope and despair. While the project focused on the material effects and functioning of the border regime and the violence it inflicts, in this analysis, I move beyond the structural focus to examine the potentiality and uncertainty of future in migration and the dynamics of hope and despair in (im)mobility, analyzing these themes in conversation with scholarship on hope, deportations, and border regimes.

Travels of hope

The working group met Ahmad, a 32-year-old Afghan man, in Taksim Square in Turkey, where he was looking to cross to Greece for a second time after being detained and deported on his first attempt (Figure 1).

Quadrat [Ahmad's friend] and I have been walking around here since the morning. We can well take a little break. We are looking for a smuggler to take us to Europe. Which story do you want to hear: the truth or the one meant for the authorities?

On their first attempt at reaching Europe, the smuggler had abandoned Ahmad and his family – wife Asma, and their 8 – and 4-year-old children. After wandering around for three days on the shore, without food or water, Greek police detained and deported them back to Turkey without the possibility to apply for asylum.

We left [Afghanistan] because there was no future for our children. My whole life so far has been a chain of conflicts. We did not have one single clear reason to leave. Many of my close ones have died. We belong to the Hazara tribe that is discriminated against basically by everyone in Afghanistan. I want a better life for my children and proper education.

Migrating is traveling in the hope of a better future, or in Ahmad's words, simply to have 'a future'. According to Pine (2014, 98), migration embodies hope. In the stories, while people often moved hoping to settle into a better life, some were fleeing persecution based on sexuality, ethnicity, or political activity; in other words, they were – according to the legal system – defined as refugees and asylum seekers. Applying for asylum was the only way to stay in Europe because, for most of the world population, there are very few



Figure 1. Ahmad weighing the dangers of crossing in their rental in Turkey, photo by Katja Tähjä.

official ways to migrate. Others had arrived in Europe to study, work, be reunited with their loved ones, or look for better opportunities.

The stories of Ahmad and other interviewees demonstrate how migration cannot be easily categorised into single reasons or dichotomies of forced-voluntary, humanitarian-economic, or legal-illegal (Maury 2021). Multiple reasons motivate people's decision to try a new life somewhere else. As Ahmad stated: 'We did not have one single reason to leave'. All migrants must navigate the border regime and its residence permit system and fit into the categories of legality to stay in Europe. For one reason or another, the people interviewed had not managed to shape their lives or histories so that they would have had access to or stayed within the categories of legality: Their persecution was not credible enough for asylum, they did not have a stable enough income for a work permit or family reunification, their studies had gotten interrupted, or they had not managed to stay on the right side of the law. Even if Ahmad was escaping a life dominated by war and conflict, he knew that his story would not be enough for the officials:

This is the story of our family. It might be that we need to tell another story to the authorities. Even if there are only conflicts in our home country, I have understood that Europeans do not believe it. So that we are not flown back to Afghanistan, we maybe have to tell a more dramatic story for them.

Bloch (1995) writes that hope rests on the capacity of imagination. Hope consists of dreams and desires which contain ideas of a good life. In migration, hope as an anticipatory expectation and a desire for something better is central. Migration consists of a utopian surplus of a world where one can live on better terms than those one was offered (A. Gordon 2018). It is an escape from unfavourable conditions and refusal to accept them as given. In the stories, people's movement was filled with hopes and dreams of the not-yet lived and future horizons. Migration is an enacting of the potentialities of the present into a reality.

Migration is often a collective project; it embodies hope for a better life for oneself and the broader family through remittances and offering different futures for children (Mar 2005). For many communities, migration has developed as a collective strategy to create 'new spaces of hope' for the generations to come (Pine 2014, 113). The successful migrant can bring home a relatively large income. Because of this potential, migration becomes highly desired and valued (Vuolajärvi 2019). One person's travel is often a collective investment. For example, Shvan, a 29-year-old Iraqi Kurd, was encouraged by his parents to migrate and join his girlfriend who was studying law in the Netherlands:

It is evident to all Kurds that life in Europe is better than here [in Iraq]. My father's three siblings are already in Europe. Dad sold our family apartment, big and beautiful, and my parents moved to a dilapidated area. My father paid the smugglers with the money he received, so I got to the Netherlands.

Hope also portrays understandings of freedom and visions of a just life that go beyond the individual to alternative visions of the way society is organised (Zournazi 2003). For example, Asma, Ahmad's wife, imagined and hoped for a new life where her gender and the family's class/origin would limit neither her education possibilities, nor their access to education and healthcare: 'In Afghanistan, women do not work outside the home. If we get to Sweden, I would like to study a profession. The most important thing is for the

boys to get to school. And that my son could get his eyes fixed'. For Asma and others, envisioning alternative forms of social organisation and believing in the potential for this future to realise itself is a grounded practice rooted in the discipline of hope.

The uncertainty of hope and closing of the future horizon

Uncertainty and doubt are part of Bloch's complex, multi-layered notion of hope. The collective investment in the hope for better futures through migration puts pressure on those who leave and who often face harsh working conditions in Europe. According to Khosravi (2017), there is a time aspect to hope (the not-yet) that highlights how hope (affect) and waiting (act) intersect. Asma describes this dynamic of hope, uncertainty and waiting: 'It is also possible that we will not be able to move on from Turkey. Waiting is stressful. I am afraid to dream of a new life yet'. One can never know that the future one hopes for will occur or in the way one desires. Informal border crossing offers no guarantees and even if one can make it in one piece, one never knows how things will go in Europe. Asma's fears of giving in to the future horizon of hope are accompanied by worries about the dangers of the coming border crossing:

Yesterday we met a smuggler who promised heaven and the moon and places for a luxury cruiser. But you cannot trust it. In the worst-case scenario, another small Greek boat awaits at the shore. I know a lot of those boats are sinking. This is a lottery with my children's lives.

But hope would not be hope in the absence of uncertainty, without the possibility of the hoped-for object not being reached. Without doubt, anticipation would be confidence instead of hope (Pine 2014).

Hope can be disappointing or flip over into fear. Fear is the anticipation of what will happen if the hope fades away and the future horizon closes (Bloch 1995). The dire conditions in the Greek detention centre on their first attempt to get to Europe had made Ahmad momentarily lose hope: 'Those days I had dark thoughts. I regretted that I had sold absolutely everything in Afghanistan. If we really had to leave, we would have nothing to return to'.

For all the people interviewed for the project, irrespective of the reason for migrating, deportation was akin to a crisis both personal and often also collective. Deportation not only meant a closing of the future horizon, but for most, a return to a situation worse than the one they initially left behind (Khosravi 2018). After three years in the Netherlands, Shvan was deported and became depressed: 'I felt like I was at the bottom. At some point, my parents' sympathy waned. I saw the disappointment in their eyes. Dad had sold his house for me, and I was back here, useless'. Shvan felt that he had let down his family (Figure 2).

Interviewees often experienced deportation as a rupture of everyday life, an interruption or closing of a future that had started to build itself. Lana and Hunar, a police officer in Iraq, had fled persecution they experienced related to targeting by a criminal organisation. They divested their belongings to pay 50 000 Euros for safe travel to Sweden. Lana described their life in Sweden through images of refuge. 'We settled in Sweden. I was pregnant with our second child, and Hunar got a job at the bakery. I was relieved I no longer had to fear for him. We started to get to know the Swedish families in the neighbourhood. Sweden began to feel like home'.



Figure 2. Shvan in Iraq after his deportation, photo by Katja Tähjä.

According to Bloch (1995), people's future visions comprise both their hopes and fears. For many of the deportees, this future dimension was distorted to contain only hopes. Even as the threat of deportation loomed explicitly, deportation often came as a shock: It was a future they could not or did not want to imagine (Turnbull 2018). For Lana and Hunar, as well, when their asylum was denied within a year of their arrival in Sweden and their deportation was postponed because of Lana's three pregnancies, their situation only materialised for them when the authorities came to take photos of children for identity cards needed for deportation:

Hunar: The stress was too much for Lana. She tried to kill herself. First with a kitchen knife and then jumping out the kitchen window. Fortunately, I was able to intervene.

Soon after the authorities visit, the police deported the family (Figure 3):

Lana: Everything ended when we were eating, and the police rushed in. The door flew to the floor, and closer to 30 cops rushed into the living room. Those photos taken on the previous visit ended up on our deportation papers.

We were not allowed to pack. I was wearing these same blue plastic sandals. The children were passed to one car, me to another, and Hunar to a third. I cried out non-stop that I wanted to go to my children.

Deportation materialises the slow process of the border bureaucracy and closes the future horizon imagined. Many of the interviewees had not lost hope before the deportation. For Bloch (1995) despair is the opposite of hope; it is nihilism, which portrays the situation as inevitable. It is a future without a vision of one. Deportation was a violent



Figure 3. Lana in Iraq with the blue plastic sandals she was wearing during the deportation, photo by Katja Tähjä.

interruption to the flow of everyday life; it reconfigured the life that had promised refuge and happiness and often resulted in despair.

The prison of immobility

For the interviewees who had fled due to persecution or were forcibly returned to conflict zones, deportation was an act of *refoulement* returning them to a situation of persecution and hiding. Prossie, a 28-year-old Ugandan woman, fled to the UK when she was 17 after her relationship to another woman was exposed; her grandmother was killed in the aftermath. She lived undocumented but was starting an asylum application based on sexual persecution when she got deported. At the time of the interview, Prossie had been confined to her house in Uganda for ten months (Figure 4).

Wait, I will turn on the TV so we can talk. I do not want the neighbors to hear a word. I do not speak to them; I do not even say hello. I stay inside most of the day. I even dry the laundry inside.

No one can know that I live here. In Uganda, being a lesbian is illegal. Ugandans prefer to take justice into their own hands. It is up to the police to pick up the body. [...]

I must remain anonymous.

Prossie survived in Uganda through financial aid provided by a UK support network. Isolation together with the violence she experienced during the detention and deportation process left her with pain, and insomnia causing paranoid hallucinations. Prossie oscillated between hope, fear, and despair: ‘Constant hiding is not life. I am wondering



Figure 4. Prossie in Uganda, photo by Katja Tähjä.

when my life will begin. What happens if [my supporters] will not pay my rent anymore? What will happen to me then?’ Prossie’s life was on hold; the only thing preventing her falling into despair was the support network fighting for her asylum case to be reconsidered, pointing to the collective and political dimensions of sustaining hope.

For some of the deportees, ‘home’ became a prison (see also Hasselberg 2018). Presenting deportation as a return to ‘home’ masks the brutality embedded in deportation (Khosravi 2018). It individualises the difficulties that deported people struggle with and depoliticizes the border violence. The cycle of violence, persecution, and poverty that people fled was revived after the deportation, especially in post-deportation life, as explained by Lana and Hunar, who at the time of the interview had spent ‘one year and six days’ in a one-room rental (Figure 5):

Hunar: We are prisoners in our home country. Our persecutors must not know that we have returned. We avoid unnecessary moving outside. Our relatives do not know that we have returned. We pretend we are still in Sweden and assure them that things are well, although nothing is well.

Lana: The hardest part is the fear of constant revelation and all the days with three small children inside. In Sweden, we were always in playgrounds. Here you would not even think of going to a nearby street to throw a ball. It is safest to be inside, hidden from view.

Hunar was desperate and felt his hope fading:

I cannot take this anymore. I have not slept in a while. I feel so sick in the mornings that I don’t get a word out of my mouth. If death could be bought from a store, I would have probably done it already.



Figure 5. Hanar and Luna with their three children in their rental after deportation, photo by Katja Tähjä.

If I kill myself, what will my family do? I need to cope one day at a time. Fortunately, I have a good relationship with Lana. She gives me much strength. We have not entirely given up hope that one day we will be able to return to Sweden.

Hope is not always necessarily future-oriented. It can also be something that sustains one over difficult periods of life (Ahmed 2017; Kallio, Meier, and Häkli 2021). The only thing that kept Hunar from losing himself was his relationship with Lana and the hope of one day returning to Sweden. Hope can carry people through difficult times and give them a sense that there is a point to persevering. In this way, even in a situation that does not give many potentialities of action, hope can become a survival strategy of resisting nihilism and overcoming the despair of deportation and maintaining an image of some sort of future.

The discipline of hope

Hope rises from the refusal of deprivation (Bloch 1995; A. Gordon 2018). Superior to fear, which is passive, hope is an active affective stance that creates expansiveness rather than confining a person to nothingness (Bloch 1995). For Kaba (2021), hope is not a state of optimism; it is a practice, an act of living. Choosing to believe in change, and not succumbing to pessimism, marked the discipline of hope present in the stories of deportees. Thirty-eight-year-old Almir (Figure 6) had twice been deported with his wife, Edisa, and four children from Finland after a failed asylum.

The tensions of the Yugoslavian war dominated Almir's and Edisa's lives. Edisa is a Serb; Almir, a Bosniak, served in the Serbian army during the war. They were not welcome in their Kosovan neighbourhood:



Figure 6. Almir, his wife Edisa and one of their four sons at their house in Kosovo after the second deportation, photo by Katja Tähjä.

I am an optimist until the last. Even if we have been deported twice, I am sure that we will succeed and settle in Finland. Sometimes Edisa loses her nerves with my hopefulness. But I always say that one must not give up hope. If one does not have hope, one does not have anything.

On the surface, everything looks normal, but we are broken. The money is diminishing. There are no jobs here. There is no future here. Neighbors' children will not play with our children.

No. It will not do. I will not even think about the possibility that we will stay here.

Almir refused to lose hope despite the dire situation. Life in Kosovo was not an option for him; there was no future there. He planned to go to Finland alone, and rather than apply for asylum, apply for a work permit through the Finnish National Theater, his former work community which supported his return. His hope was not wholly unfounded, even if settling in Finland through a work permit with five family members would be difficult: He would have to earn over 3100 Euros monthly after taxes³ to be able to bring his family to Finland. This would probably mean working several jobs at the same time.

While almost all the interviewees started thinking about remigration immediately after their deportation (see also Galvin 2015; Khosravi 2018; Könönen 2021; Schuster and Majidi 2013), the possibilities of return varied significantly. It is easier to leave again to try one's luck from Kosovo, for example, than from Iraq or West Africa; access to support networks also makes a difference. Hoping rises from different grounds and is unevenly distributed (Hage 2003). The different functions of hope that Hanar and Lunar in Iraq, in a situation of persecution, and Almir in Kosovo maintain reflect these structural conditions of hope, as well as the meaning of networks actualizing

the potentialities of alternative futures. For Shvan, having support from a wife with a residence permit in the Netherlands proved crucial for his return; moreover, his wife kept working for his return even if Shvan himself fell into despair after the deportation.

Many scholars have theorised the violence of the border regime and deportations as deterrence methods; they aim to kill hope for border crossing and settling (Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias, and Pickles 2015). Almir's discipline of hope, the determination to create the life he desired for himself and his family and not abandon a vision of this future demonstrates how the border regime fails to prevent movement; instead, presenting an inconvenient, however dangerous, system that people on the move need to navigate and which functions as a slow down (see, e.g. Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias, and Pickles 2015). Shvan was able to reunite with his wife, but only after three years of having his life in the Netherlands on hold, experiencing violence and trauma during his detention and deportation.

Jobe, a 32-year-old Gambian man, also talks about the border regime as a hindrance rather than an obstacle to the future of his family. Jobe migrated ten years ago to support his family of twenty. He was interviewed at a Finnish detention centre while waiting for his fourth deportation attempt because the Gambian officials had refused to take him into the country (Figure 7).

First, I looked for jobs in Senegal, Mali, and Niger. I lived for nine years in Spain before coming here. The depression wiped out all the work there, and I continued to travel. I am a worker. I know I can survive anywhere; I am a vagabond. If the deportation ever succeeds, I will get back here. Sea routes are tightened, but you can always get through one way or another. The journey is difficult and dangerous, so I really hope I do not have to retake it.



Figure 7. Jobe, who describes himself as a 'vagabond', in the detention centre, photo by Katja Tähjä.

The discipline of hope is believing and enacting the potentialities of the present and believing in the potential for change (Kaba 2021). Not giving up in the face of the violence of the border regime speaks to Bloch's and Kaba's notions of hope as a transformative practice. Interviewees' persistence in moving, hoping, and working for different futures for themselves demonstrates the system's ultimate failure to work against humans' aspiration to strive for better lives through mobility. They enact a view of a different world where nation-state borders do not limit the life opportunities of people, and one can move in search of a better life. In this way, hope as a grounded practice of living has a socio-political dimension as a fugitive form of living where people materialise in their practice 'every day utopias' of a good life (A. Gordon 2018).

Despite the difficulties the border regime poses, some interviewees were able to return to the places from which they were deported. Prossie's return to the UK was facilitated by support networks after she spent over five years in Uganda, often ill or homeless and in fear of discovery. Prossie's support group kept on fighting for her; she never relinquished her hope and determination to return to her life in the UK. Even with the right to pursue a new asylum claim, Prossie is still struggling to regularise herself. But her experience has politicised her: She has told her story to people detained at the centre she was sent to, encouraging them to fight for their rights, and she continues to work in different social justice networks.

The discipline of hope is part of the active side of hope. By turning hope, with the visions of the future it entails, into action, it challenges the idea that history is something that happens to us, reminding us instead that the world is something that is made every day – and therefore it can be contested and remade. Abolitionism is a life-affirming and world-building practice, which Kaba (2021) defines as a project that is not short-term but rather needs a long view, recognising the long histories of the movement (for example anti-colonial struggles) together with a timeline that is not limited to the timeline of the individual. Therefore, the change that abolitionists strive for cannot take place within a lifetime, but rather is a broader project of change that furthers a different vision of a society. In a similar manner to abolitionists, people who keep moving despite the obstacles advance an alternative more life-affirming vision of the world. Sometimes this vision turns into social commitment to a longer struggle, as in the case of Prossie, who was now fighting for more livable futures for all and to end the organised violence used to control people on the move.

Conclusion and discussion

Hope arose in the deportees' stories as a location through which different lives were imagined and realised. Drawing on Marxist and abolitionist theorizations of hope, specifically Ernst Bloch and Mariame Kaba, this article has explored the complicated and multifaceted coincidence of hope and despair in post-deportation experiences complementing the understandings of hope in migration and the overall literature on post-deportation experiences. The article offers new analytical understandings of hope by bringing abolitionist theories of hope and utopian margins into conversation with migration studies. It argues that speculative thinking, which this article also engages in, is key to attending to the transformative potential of hope in migration. In line

with abolitionist thought, the article furthers a view of migration as a life-affirming world-building practice that aspires to create livable futures by refusing the nation-state order and its violent border regime. This practice has prefigurative political dimensions: Through hoping and acting on these hopes, people on the move not only advance individual dreams, but these hopes also consist of ideas of freedom and a just world that contain alternative visions of how society is organised.

Bloch understands hope as a force propelling human action and opening possibilities in the world. The desire for social and material mobility often fuels migration, and in this way, migration is a hopeful activity per se (Hage 2004; Mar 2005; Pine 2014). In the deportees' narratives, hope took different forms and often oscillated between fear and despair; as, for example, in Ahmad and Asma's thoughts while planning their second attempt to Europe in Turkey demonstrates. Hope in migration could turn into a form of 'cruel optimism', (Berlant 2011)⁴ an unfulfilled promise of the prosperity of the West. Interviewees often found themselves without a stable future and in a reduced position of rights and legal status, and exploited in labour. Hope presented in the stories as naïve optimism; yet, hope also emerged as something that kept people afloat in the precarity of existence and the feeling of future closure that deportation often produced. Hope was also a way to escape the prison of one's home and not fall into despair, offering, for example, relief for Hunar's despair at being stuck in Afghanistan. Overall, hope emerged as a survival strategy for overcoming the despair border violence produces and maintaining an image of a different future (Kallio, Meier, and Häkli 2021; Bendixsen and Hylland Eriksen 2018; Lindberg and Edward 2021).

Hope and sustaining hope in migration has collective dimensions, with migration often embodying collective hopes of better futures for the next generations and extended families (Mar 2005; Pine 2014; Kleist and Thorsen 2016). Deportation is often described as the 'end' of the migration journey. However, people deported often started to plan a new journey almost immediately and saw the border regime as more of a temporary hindrance than an obstacle. The reality of return often depended on the country they were deported to and the resources and networks they had at their disposal. Community support often functioned as 'an infrastructure of hope', enabling migration or the remigration of the deportee, as in Prossie's case.

Most powerfully, hope is demonstrated as a refusal of and an escape from the unfavourable conditions and a desire to create alternative ways of living (Pine 2014). Autonomy of migration scholars have used the concepts of refusal and right to escape to refocus migration research from the state's perspective to the agency of migrants and to conceptualise migration's transformative nature in relation to state sovereignty and border regimes (Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias, and Pickles 2015). Other migration theories take similar distance from common victimising perspectives toward migration by stressing the role of migration in social transformation (Castles 2010), complementing an understanding of hope advanced here.

This article suggests that the hope present in the stories is not only hope in the face of the improbable but also a practical reimagining of new world orders and making them happen. Hope transcends daydreams; consisting also of ideas of freedom and a just world that contain alternative visions of the way society is organised. In the project narratives, hope has a prefigurative socio-political dimension in that hope emerges as a projection of the future growing from the potentialities of reality. Prefigurative politics

responds to the uncertainty of the political situation and aims to address current life crises and dangerous futures with the imagined capacity to act (Jeffrey and Dyson 2021). Here, I conceive of the discipline of hope as a prefigurative form of political action, whereby the interviewees, through hoping and enacting the futures entailed in them, reject their present socio-political conditions in favour of the alternative visions of the world (Escobar 2008; A. Gordon 2018).

With its deterrence and deportation practices, the border regime aims to ‘kill hope’ in migration: Its violence aims to instill fear and stop people from dreaming of different futures and practicing them through migration. Hope, Bloch holds (1995, 3), rises from a refusal of deprivation to work against this fear and ‘against its creators’, the structures that prevent people from flourishing (see also Lindberg and Edward 2021). The narratives in this article demonstrate how people refuse to surrender to the pessimism of the border regime pointing to the ultimate failure of its violence. Hope is not necessarily capable of changing things, but it points to areas where practical change could lie (Hage 2004). In this way, hope as an everyday practice challenges the pessimism that seems to underpin demands for ‘realism’ and reformism in discussions of migration that portray the world dominated by nation-state boundaries as inevitable. The everyday practices of people on the move demonstrate how the ‘impossible’ is already in the making.

Migration is a speculative and open-ended practice that challenges the sedentary ideas and fixed relations between people, places, and identities (Mar 2005). People who refuse to accept the border regime or the pessimism it inheres; and reject the place it attempts to assign them, adhere to hope as a grounded practice akin to Kaba’s (2021) hope as a discipline. For survival, people need to believe something will come out of the struggles they have engaged in. Hope can be damned, it can fail or turn cruel, but without hoping and refusing to stop imagining a world organised differently, there is, in Ahmad’s words, ‘no life’.

Notes

1. Mountz (2020) discusses “killing the asylum” on physical, ontological and political levels. I extend her analysis to the psychological factor of the border regime deterring by killing hope of migration. See also Lindberg and Edward (2021) on how the deportation regime tries to manipulate hope.
2. The FNBRI does not require a formal ethical review.
3. Migri 2022: <https://migri.fi/en/income-requirement-for-family-members-of-a-person-who-has-been-granted-a-residence-permit-in-finland>
4. Lauren Berlant (2011) has described cruel optimism as a situation where the collective affective structures trap people into lifelines in hope for things they no longer provide, creating a situation where what you hope for actually becomes an obstacle of self-flourishment.

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