

The politics of hope: privilege, despair and political theology

CARON E. GENTRY*

In a recent *Guardian* article, DeRay Mckesson, a Black Lives Matter activist, wrote about both hope and despair, declaring he ‘learned hope the hard way’ during a sit-in at the St Louis metropolitan police headquarters where he and his fellow protestors were met with violence.¹ Having already received numerous death threats and now facing a taser at the sit-in, Mckesson felt an odd calmness:

<ext>It was in losing the fear of death that I began to understand faith and hope. Faith is the belief that certain outcomes *will* happen, and hope is the belief that they *can* happen. The work of faith is to actively surrender to forces unseen, to acknowledge that what is desired will come about, but by means you might never know . . .

Hope is the belief that our tomorrows can be better than our todays, when we talk about about being hopeful for a future in which black bodies are not considered weapons, it is so easy to deride hope as a platitude, or even as an enemy of progress. But hope can also be a driving force.² <extend>

While International Relations (IR) scholarship frequently focuses on power,³ it often prioritizes military or economic power, thereby missing the power that Mckesson is implicitly addressing here: structural hierarchies that harm individuals. While the Black Lives

* This article is part of a special section of the March 2020 issue of *International Affairs* on ‘Engaging religions and religious studies in international affairs’, guest-edited by Katherine Brown.

¹ DeRay Mckesson, “‘I learned hope the hard way’: on the early days of Black Lives Matter”, *Guardian*, 12 April 2019, www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/12/black-lives-matter-deray-mckesson-ferguson-protests. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 26 Jan. 2020.)

² Mckesson, “‘I learned hope the hard way’”.

³ See e.g. Yuen Foong Khong, ‘Power as prestige in world politics’, *International Affairs* 95: 1, Jan. 2019, pp. 119–42; Jany Burbank and Frederick Cooper, ‘Empires after 1919: old, new and transformed’, *International Affairs* 95: 1, Jan. 2019, pp. 81–100; Peter Trubowitz and Peter Harris, ‘The end of the American century? Slow erosion of the domestic sources of usable power’, *International Affairs* 95: 3, May 2019, pp. 619–40; Sonja Le Gouriellec, ‘Regional power and contested hierarchy: Ethiopia, “imperfect hegemon” in the Horn of Africa’, *International Affairs* 94: 5, Sept. 2018, pp. 1059–76.

Matter movement could easily be dismissed as ‘domestic politics’, it addresses, within the US context, larger structural hierarchies that span and have shaped global politics.⁴ These are evident in the facts that, in the United States, black people are three times more likely than white people to be killed by police,⁵ and are ‘incarcerated at more than 5 times the rate of whites’; and black women are imprisoned at twice the rate of white women.⁶ Yet, in the face of these oppressions, Mckesson has hope. While for Mckesson hope is an emotion, it is also clearly a motivating force. Although there is plenty of work in IR on emotions, particularly on how emotions form communities,⁷ hope in this context is not just an emotion but a force for sustaining activism in the face of brutality, repression and violence.

This article is a feminist political-theological examination of what hope as a force for political change in IR might look like. It approaches this question in a particular way, one that is not encountered much (any more) in IR: hope as a theological concept, rooted in both the belief structure of Christianity and also in the agential consideration of what it means to live a ‘Christian life’.⁸ There is overlap with Elina Penttinen’s work on joy in IR,⁹ as my study also aims to embrace a positive (as in hopeful) ontological and epistemological

⁴ Charles Mills, *The racial contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, ‘Rethinking racism: toward a structural interpretation’, *American Sociological Review* 62: 3, 1997, pp. 465–80; Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda and Robbie Shilliam, eds, *Race and religion in international relations: confronting the global colour line* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

⁵ Mapping Police Violence, n.d., <https://mappingpoliceviolence.org>; Carla Norrlof, ‘Hegemony and inequality: Trump and the liberal playbook’, *International Affairs* 94: 1, Jan. 2018, pp. 63–88.

⁶ NAACP, *Criminal justice fact sheet*, n.d., www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/.

⁷ Emma Hutchison, ‘Affective communities as security communities’, *Critical Studies on Security* 1: 1, 2013, pp. 127–9.

⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, ‘Political theology’, *Theology Today* 28: 1, 1967, pp. 6–23; Jürgen Moltmann, ‘Hope and history’, *Theology Today* 25: 3, 1968, pp. 369–86; Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of hope* (London: SCM Press, 2002; first publ. in English 1971); Richard Bauckman, ‘Preface’, in Moltmann, *Theology of hope*, pp. xi–xx.

⁹ Elina Penttinen, *Joy and International Relations: a new methodology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

approach to IR, building upon my previous articulation of feminist Christian realism.¹⁰

However, I build upon this prior work in the face of two caveats: first, in the recognition that much harm has been done in the name of God and Christianity both historically, through colonial imperialism, and currently, with the threat to women's rights in the United States emanating from the Evangelical community; and second, in the recognition that although this article presents a particular view of hope, faith and theology, the author strongly believes that this is one among many ways of being and believing.

Feminist Christian realism is premised on an intersectional,¹¹ post-structural critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian realism. As a minister, scholar, and presidential adviser in the United States during the mid-1900s, Niebuhr made instrumental contributions to both Hans Morgenthau's classical realism and Kenneth Waltz's neo-realism.¹² For him, power was a central concern to politics and international affairs because humans are both bodily and existentially vulnerable creatures, and accordingly construct physical and political threats out of anxiety.¹³ For Niebuhr, there were two responses to anxiety: destruction or creativity. Destruction could range from domestic injustices—US racist laws were (and are) a case in point—or international ills, such as weapons of mass destruction. Niebuhr's creative solution

¹⁰ Caron E. Gentry, *This American moment: a feminist Christian realist intervention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹¹ Understanding intersectionality is being vigilantly aware that oppression is not often the result of just one hegemonic structure, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, etc., but of the intersecting of these oppressions. Intersectionality stems from recognition of the lack of engagement between the feminist movement and the black rights movement to consider the multiple oppressions that black women faced: see Combahee River Collective, 'The Combahee River Collective statement', April 1977, https://americanstudies.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Keyword%20Coalition_Readings.pdf; Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, 'Mapping the margins: intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color', *Stanford Law Review* 43: 6, 1991, pp. 1241–99. Thus intersectionality is both a methodological disposition to look for the intersections and a lived reality for a multitude of people globally.

¹² Caron E. Gentry, *Offering hospitality: questioning Christian approaches to war* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), pp. 65–6.

¹³ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The nature and destiny of man*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964; first publ. 1941), p. 182.

to these was to press for justice as derived from a balance of power. Feminist Christian realism challenges the masculinist assumptions upon which Niebuhr depended in his reliance on justice and the balance of power.¹⁴ Instead, my position advocates a feminist reconceptualization of creativity, centralizing the activity of love. Feminist Christian realism seeks more deeply creative solutions, ones dependent upon love, community and relationships. I have come to recognize that there is more work to be done on how creative solutions are not only arrived at but also sustained over long periods of time—and that requires a focus upon hope.

This article will begin by looking at the context of feminist Christian realism and the central proposition within it: that love can be used to articulate more creative solutions to the crises humans face as vulnerable beings. Thus, while most ideas of creativity centre on aesthetic practices, feminist Christian realism is deeply invested in a form of creativity that values relationships and human and community flourishing. Feminist Christian realism stays true to this context by removing power from the abstract, looking at how larger international power structures play out in the lives of individuals.¹⁵ It recognizes that political creativity can only be known in a thin way if hope is not present. Therefore, it next explores what hope is, how it is understood as central to political theology, foundational to political change, and how hope and privilege live in tension with one another. Seeing hope as intrinsic to feminist Christian realism's commitment to creativity, it then turns to look at the personal narratives of some of those who have made creative change integral to their lives: first, theologian Jürgen Moltmann, whose own life story exemplifies the theme; second, Asim Qureshi, a Muslim activist and advocate in the United Kingdom; and, third, Patrisse Khan-Cullors, one of the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement. Each individual has directly experienced the 'stuff' of IR—respectively, the Second World War, the war on terror, and international racial hierarchies. Looking at these individuals in their own contexts helps to take the impacts of power on people's lives out of abstraction and locate them in concrete actuality.

Hope is political theology and political theology is activism

¹⁴ Gentry, *This American moment*, p. 37.

¹⁵ Cynthia Enloe, *Nimo's war, Emma's war: making feminist sense of the war in Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Annick Wibben, *Feminist security studies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).

Beyond this special section of *International Affairs*, there has been a recent resurgence of political theology within IR.¹⁶ In the mid-twentieth century it was not unusual, at least in the United States and United Kingdom, to see theological engagement in politics and international affairs, specifically from Christian realists such as Niebuhr, Martin Wight and Herbert Butterfield. They offered a caution against hubris and overreliance upon power. Thereafter, theology faded from mainstream IR, remaining only, over the past 30–40 years, in some just war scholarship,¹⁷ political theory¹⁸ or policy work.¹⁹ However, in recent years a call has been increasingly heard for a renewal of such a perspective, recognizing the normative impetus behind the engagement of many IR scholars in their field.²⁰ Political theology is an application of theology—the engagement with spiritual {1} beliefs and teachings—to political problems. Within theology, this is not rare: scholars such as Sarah Coakley, Marilyn McCord Adams, Jeffrey Stout and Stanley Hauerwas all investigate power and political problems, seeking to resolve or define them within a Christian engagement.²¹ My own political theology is dependent upon my post-structural feminist understanding of

¹⁶ See e.g. the special issue of the *Journal of International Relations and Development* 22: 2, 2019 titled Political Theologies of the International: The Continued Relevance of Theology in International Relations; Afshon Ostovar, ‘Iran, its clients, and the future of the Middle East: the limits of religion’, *International Affairs* 94: 6, Nov. 2018, pp. 1237–56.

¹⁷ Daniel Bell, *Just war as Christian discipleship* (Ada, MI: Baker, 2009); Jean Bethke Elshtain, ed., *Just war theory* (New York: New York University Press, 1992); Nigel Biggar, *In defence of war* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁸ Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Who are we? Critical reflections and hopeful possibilities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000); Scott Thomas, ‘Living critically and “living faithfully” in a global age: justice, emancipation, and the political theology of International Relations’, *Millennium* 39: 2, 2010, pp. 505–24.

¹⁹ See for instance the policy-focused journal *Review of Faith and International Affairs*.

²⁰ Cecilia Lynch, ‘Dogma, praxis, and religious perspectives on multiculturalism’, in Fabio Petitio and Pavolos Hazopoulos, eds, *Religion in International Relations: the return from exile* (London: Palgrave, 2010), pp. 55–78.

²¹ Sarah Coakley, *Powers and submissions: spirituality, philosophy and gender* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2008); Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and horrors: the coherence of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Stanley Hauerwas, *The peaceable kingdom: a primer in Christian ethics* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).

how power is discursively constructed, taking into account the intersectional hierarchies of, among other factors, gender, race and sexuality. Because post-structuralism is frank about the Foucauldian discursive power/knowledge nexus,²² feminist Christian realism critiques Christian realism's own replication of these hierarchies, updating analysis within the progressive dynamic of twenty-first-century IR scholarship.²³

Using feminism to push for a stronger engagement with creativity—an engagement informed by love—is the defining feature of feminist Christian realism. Feminist Christian realism interrogates discursive hierarchical structures such as (among others) gender, race and heteronormativity. Unlike Christian realism, feminist Christian realism understands that because power operates through these structures, different people experience different impacts and harms. To dismiss love as a political force is to fall victim to masculinist epistemologies. Feminism reclaims love, allowing it to function through relational creativity. What makes this possible is hope; and hope as creativity in action needs to be a central feature of feminist Christian realism.

Hope is a central feature of how Jürgen Moltmann defines political theology: he sees hope as the necessary driving force for meaningful Christian engagement in the world. This section will accordingly begin by explaining the central premise of the creative dynamic before exploring how hope deepens this premise. Hope is a feeling; it is also an impetus to action. It originates in how Christians view the afterlife (eschatology), and also in how they are meant to engage in the world. When hope is discussed in the New Testament, it is as a realization of the life that is promised to those who believe in God and the resurrection of Christ;²⁴ it is also political, owing to the power structures of the time in which these texts were written.

Christians in New Testament times were persecuted, facing threats to their lives. Thus, hope stemmed from faith but also from a place of oppression and harm.²⁵ Hope in Christianity, then, is multifaceted. It springs from and is sustained by the life promised to Christians by God and through the resurrection of Christ, but it also speaks into the reality of life in a world where corruption, oppression and harm occurs.

The difference of feminist Christian realism

²² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison* (London: Penguin, 1977).

²³ Caron E. Gentry, 'Anxiety politics: creativity and feminist Christian realism', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 22: 2, 2017, pp. 389–412.

²⁴ Romans 8: 20–25, New International Version (NIV)

²⁵ Romans 5: 1–4, NIV.

The central proposition of Christian realism is the belief that humans, made by God as they are, are intelligent beings able to think transcendently but bound by their fallible and finite nature.²⁶ This paradoxical condition means that humans feel vulnerability—both about threats to their physical safety and also existentially, about threats to the various conceptualizations of ontological security.²⁷ This leads to acute, existential anxiety. In this context, anxiety is a future-oriented emotion that is related to worry and fear, but operates differently because it relates not to a specific feared outcome or event, but to a more amorphous and generalized condition of uncertainty.²⁸ Such socio-cultural anxiety leads to power-seeking. Thus, one of the central claims of Christian realism concerns how humans resolve this anxiety, through either destructive or creative choices.

In most of his work, Reinhold Niebuhr strove to offer what he saw as creative responses, primarily locating justice in the balancing of power. Yet feminist Christian realism has determined that Niebuhr's Christian realism is limited by a masculinist interpretation of creativity. It has done so first by problematizing Niebuhr's view of love as a necessity to public life, but a necessity that he saw as very limited because too particularistic. In his formative text *Moral man and immoral society*,²⁹ Niebuhr does argue that love *can* have an impact on both personal behaviour and social problems; but he further argues that, given the

²⁶ Reinhold Niebuhr, 'The self and the dramas of history', in Elizabeth Sifton, ed., *Reinhold Niebuhr: major works on religion and politics*, electronic edn (New York: Library of America, 2015), loc. 13369.

²⁷ Catarina Kinnvall, 'Globalization and religious nationalism: self, identity, and the search for ontological security', *Political Psychology* 25: 5, 2004, pp. 741–67; Brent J. Steele, *Ontological security in International Relations: self-identity and the IR state* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008); Dmitry Chernobrov, 'Ontological security and public (mis)recognition of international crises: uncertainty, political imagining, and the self', *Political Psychology* 37: 5, 2016, pp. 581–96.

²⁸ see Sara Ahmed, *The cultural politics of emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006); Brian Massumi, 'Fear (the spectrum said)', *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 13: 1, 2005, pp. 31–48; Murray Bowen, *Family therapy in clinical practice* (Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson, 1993), pp. 361–2; Michael E. Kerr, 'Chronic anxiety and defining a self', *Atlantic Monthly*, Sept. 1988, pp. 35–58.

²⁹ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral man and immoral society* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932).

complexity and diversity of public life, love as a moral value is limited. For Niebuhr, love should be a goal; but owing to human fallibility, love is not a reliable enough to make public decisions. For example, those who act from love, such as Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jr, put themselves in harm's way: this type of sacrificial love is not the type of activity valued by humans, even if it is representative of an eternal love.³⁰ Action on such a basis, for Niebuhr, is *not* the most practical way of acting in the corrupted, human world.³¹ Justice, he argues, is a more reliable ordering principle, and one that is followed and achieved in political life through the balance of competing interests, values, norms and, ultimately, power.³² This, to Niebuhr, is creative.

In espousing feminist Christian realism, I pose an intersectional feminist critique of this understanding of what it is to be 'creative'. Minimizing an emotion like love while centralizing one like anxiety is a masculinist move.³³ Accepting anxiety leads to the prioritizing of power as a solution; it fails to recognize that in a (pre- and) post-Enlightenment West (an environment of which Niebuhr is highly critical), justice and protection within the balance of power are gendered, racialized and heteronormative propositions privileging primarily white men and rendering most others marginalized.³⁴ For instance, Carol Pateman notes that justice is tied to ideas of intelligence, rationality and

³⁰ Niebuhr, *The nature and destiny of man*, p. 69.

³¹ Niebuhr, *The nature and destiny of man*, p. 69.

³² Niebuhr, *Moral man*, p. 57; Dennis L. Thompson, 'The basic doctrine and concepts of Reinhold Niebuhr's political thought', *Journal of Church and State* 17: 2, 1975, pp. 275–99, 286; Robin W. Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian realism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 26, 70–71.

³³ Emotions have historically been limited to the feminine private sphere, on the assumption that the masculine public sphere needs to operate rationality and logically. This has limited the role of emotions in politics and international affairs, for example in areas such as security. See Neta Crawford, 'The passion of world politics: propositions on emotion and emotional relationships', *International Security* 24: 4, 2000, pp. 116–56; Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of thought: the intelligence of emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³⁴ Elizabeth Pearson, 'Extremism and toxic masculinity', *International Affairs* 95: 6, Nov. 2019, pp. 1251–70.

logic—attributes to which historic western thought limited women’s access.³⁵ Decolonizing scholarship highlights that people of colour were also constructed with little or no access to these attributes.³⁶ Thus women and people of colour have been assumed not to possess the necessary faculties for functioning in public life, such as the capacity to evaluate notions of power and justice.³⁷ This implicit bias continues in legal systems, in academic thought, and in social biases and prejudices.³⁸ Thus, any ‘creative’ solution that depends upon hierarchies such as those of gender, race, sexuality or class is going to be substantially inadequate and simply replicate the very power structures it aims to critique.

It is love that allows us to return to issues of exclusion and marginalization in a meaningful, creative way. While creativity is often defined in terms of artistic or entrepreneurial practices, within Christian theology creativity is about relationships. The relational quality of human creativity derives from our being creatures of the creator God. The triune God of Christianity is a dynamic relationship between the Father, the Holy Spirit and the Son, Christ.³⁹ The

³⁵ Carole Pateman, ‘The disorder of women: women, love, and the sense of justice’, *Ethics* 91: 1, 1980, pp. 20–34.

³⁶ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous peoples* (London: Zed, 2013).

³⁷ Pateman, ‘The disorder of women’; Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public man, private woman: women in social and political thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Mills, *The racial contract*.

³⁸ Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Leslie McCall, ‘Toward a field of intersectionality studies: theory, applications, and praxis’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38: 4, 2013, pp. 785–810; Crenshaw, ‘Mapping the margins’; Himadeep Muppidi, ‘Shame and rage: International Relations and the world school of colonialism’, in Robin L. Riley and Naeem Inayatullah, eds, *Interrogating imperialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 51–61; Debra Thompson, ‘Through, against, and beyond the racial state: the transnational stratum of race’, in Anievas et al., eds, *Race and religion*, pp. 44–61; Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton, eds, *Policing the planet: why the policing crisis led to Black Lives Matter* (London: Verso, 2016).

³⁹ John Webster, ‘“Love is also a lover of life”: *creatio ex nihilo* and creaturely goodness’, *Modern Theology* 29: 2, 2013, pp. 156–71; Dorothy L. Sayers, *Mind of the maker* (London: Mowbray, 1941), p. 28; Ian A. McFarland, *From nothing: a theology of creation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2014), pp. 22–3.

desire of the Trinity to be in relationship with humans is an outcome of its relational nature (*imago dei*){4}. This desire engenders in humans who respond to it an obligation to a relational existence: Christians are called to be in community, in deep relationship, with other humans.⁴⁰ This is not a pick-and-choose relationship, where Christians determine whom they love or serve, such as is arguably driving the current contentious strand of US politics on women's and LGBTQI rights, but a command to love and serve *all* people. This is love—neighbourly, one-for-the-other, *agapic* love⁴¹—and loving relationships are difficult ones. Love as an action also aligns with feminist literature, particularly the work of bell hooks,⁴² in which she discusses how love is a verb. It is fundamentally a way of being present in the world—a way of challenging prejudices and biases, therefore challenging power and thereby privilege. In such a way, love-as-a-doing is related to hope-as-a-doing: both are about making this world *better* for those who are disenfranchised.

Yet there is still a problem at the heart of feminist Christian realism's creativity: how do we do it, and how is it sustained? I have previously highlighted creative endeavours that purposefully build relationships, for instance, Edward Saïd and Daniel Barenboim's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, or some of the police responses to Black Live Matters activists in which the police invited activists to community picnics (Wichita) or serve them hot chocolate (Nashville).⁴³ Yet it becomes harder to find or articulate creative responses that build relationships across the deep fissures in this era of growing populism and ultra-nationalism across the globe. How do we keep moving forward in the face of power politics determined to raze entire communities to the bare earth? This requires hope. But it also requires a recognition of privilege, which is really an intersection of hegemonic ideals. Who am I to suddenly feel despair when other communities have faced far greater, more sustained threats to their very existence for far longer than we face in Trump or Brexit? In an interview, Moltmann claimed that 'the rich don't have hope, they have only anxiety because they have

⁴⁰ Elshtain, *Who are we?*.

⁴¹ Timothy P. Jackson, *The priority of love: Christian charity and social justice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁴² bell hooks, *All about love: new visions* (New York: William Morrow, 2016).

⁴³ Gentry, *This American moment*, pp. 54–5, 65.

something to lose; but those who have nothing to lose but their chains, as Marx said once, have real hope in an alternative future'.⁴⁴

The tension between hope and privilege demands an intersectional approach, and it is a question to which Moltmann's articulation of hope speaks. Equally, hope cannot be a platitude, a way of whitewashing, silencing or minimizing the voices of others. Hope must be an active resistance to injustice anywhere and at any time to be determined by those with need, not by those with power.

Hope is political theology

Superficially, the only thing that may unite a Christian hope with secular hope is the definition; yet in the following section of this article, which turns to the personal narratives of Moltmann, Qureshi and Khan-Cullors, it is evident that there are other shared similarities across different articulations of hope. While hope may be basically defined as an aspiration for something (better) to happen, it is also, in this context, a determination for the world to be a better place. For Christians, hope is grounded in the person of Christ, whose death and resurrection makes possible a hopeful life now and the promise of life after death.

Eschatology—belief in the final things of this world and of the world that is to come—is one of the harder pieces of faith to grasp from the outside: that Jesus died a physical, spiritual and, indeed, political death on the cross and was resurrected as Christ to fulfil God's promise to the world of reconciliation with God. As creatures of God, humans are invited into this transcendence of human life through the faith that we too will be resurrected in life after death. According to Moltmann, eschatology, political theology and hope are almost impossible to define separately: 'eschatology is . . . the *doctrine of hope*' (emphasis in the original),⁴⁵ and the political of political theology is determined by 'the political consciousness of theology itself'.⁴⁶ If Christians believe in the divine promise of an afterlife redeemed by God's love, and also—paradoxically—believe that by the resurrection of Christ *this world has also already come*, they have a responsibility to bring the hope engendered by both of these realizations to bear on the daily realities of socio-political ills.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Simon Jenkins, 'Look forward!', *High Profiles*, 2012, <https://highprofiles.info/interview/jurgen-moltmann/> (accessed 28 January 2020)

⁴⁵ Moltmann, 'Hope and history', p. 371. {?}

⁴⁶ Moltmann, *Theology of hope*, p. 8

⁴⁷ Moltmann, 'Hope and history', p. 371; Moltmann, *Theology of hope*, pp. 15–16.

Thus, in hope (as an action and disposition) faith and love come together in wanting to see something better in the present as we also move into the future. Marianne Williamson, an American spiritual leader and activist, makes this connection between hope and love: ‘One thing that makes suffering bearable is love. Love not only makes a crisis endurable; it makes it transformable. For where there is love, miracles happen. Love changes people, and when people are changed we change the world around us.’⁴⁸ Hope, anchored in the promise of redemption via God’s love, is an amorphous yet deliberate belief, in the words of Martin Luther King Jr, that ‘the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice’ (and a justice, feminist Christian realism holds, that is cognisant of hierarchical harms). Therefore, the anticipated and hoped-for future is an inclusive vision: ‘It is an all-encompassing future. As all-encompassing . . . its power of hope is able to mediate faith to earthly needs and to lead it into real life.’⁴⁹ Furthermore, as we are already living part of that redemption, ‘the doctrine of the action of hope . . . brings the hoped for future into the sufferings of present age’.⁵⁰

The previous section of this article defined anxiety as a non-centralized or amorphous fear of an existential future threat arising from feelings of vulnerability; hope is the antithesis of this anxiety. Christians are explicitly charged with bringing their (and all of creation’s) future orientation into the present. This creates an immediate imperative for Christians to be actively engaged in the world: to ‘bring the “power of the future world” into the trouble spots of the present, personally, socially, and traditionally’.⁵¹ There is a deliberate belief in the promise of tomorrow, as part of a hopeful disposition. In 1995, Václav Havel wrote that ‘genuine hope is humanity’s profound and essentially archetypal certaintythat our life on this earth is not just random’.⁵² Life has meaning, and this ontological positioning is evidence of the metaphysical.⁵³ This creates an imperative: humans must awaken to ‘a universal sense of responsibility, the kind of responsibility unrepresented in the world of transient and

⁴⁸ Marianne Williamson, *A politics of love: a handbook for a new American revolution* (New York: HarperOne, 2019), p. 6.

⁴⁹ Moltmann, ‘Hope and history’, p. 371.

⁵⁰ Moltmann, ‘Hope and history’, p. 371.

⁵¹ Moltmann, ‘Hope and history’, p. 371.

⁵² Václav Havel, *The art of the impossible: politics as morality in practice* (New York: Knopf, 1997), p. 239.

⁵³ Havel, *The art of the impossible*, p. 238.

temporary earthly interests'.⁵⁴ Therefore, it makes sense that responsible hope within any vision, but particularly within feminist Christian realism, must take cognizance of 'earthly' power structures.

Also, on some level, hope belongs to those those at the margins. While Christianity has rightly been criticized for the harms done in the name of God, including colonial imperialism, forced conversions of LGBTQI people, misogyny and racist practices, the deep heart of the message of Christ is centred on 'the poor, the mourning, the persecuted'.⁵⁵ Therefore, Christianity 'seeks out those with whom the crucified one has entered into solidarity and those for whom he has become' responsible.⁵⁶ In a message that seeks to overthrow hierarchies and acknowledges the conditions of the subaltern, Paulo Freire's classic *Pedagogy of hope* positions hope as an 'ontological need' which demands 'practice in order to become historical[ly] concre[te]'.⁵⁷ It is an awareness of 'socioeconomic structures' and a 'critical understanding of the situation of oppression' that allow oppressed individuals to begin to hope for lasting change.⁵⁸

Christianity speaks critically to power as a means of upending it and standing with the oppressed. God is the 'God of the wretched, the refuge of the oppressed'; and 'Jesus grasped human society . . . at the lowest extreme.'⁵⁹ When humans finally fully 'comprehend this . . . , we will also discover again the subversive and revolutionary character of the Bible'.⁶⁰ Most importantly, those who are freed by these hope-actions should not replicate hierarchies but be 'empowered by . . . hope so far as possible to rid this world utterly of the master-slave relationship and the mechanism of oppression'.⁶¹

In many respects this brings me back to creativity and the intimate, dependent relationship between hope and creativity, as both are bound by the relational love of God. Creativity and

⁵⁴ Havel, *The art of the impossible*, p. 242.

⁵⁵ Moltmann, *Theology of hope*, p. 21.

⁵⁶ Moltmann, *Theology of hope*, p. 21.

⁵⁷ Paulo Freire, *The pedagogy of hope: reliving pedagogy of the oppressed* (London: Bloomsbury, 1994), p. 2.

⁵⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of hope: reliving pedagogy of the oppressed* (London: Bloomsbury, 1994), p. 23.

⁵⁹ Moltmann, *Theology of hope*, p. 20.

⁶⁰ Moltmann, *Theology of hope*, p. 20.

⁶¹ Moltmann, *Theology of hope*, p. 21.

hope are both iterative, yet creativity cannot form or flourish without the drive and future orientation that hope brings. If ‘faith, hope, and love’ remain always,⁶² it is faith that leads us to hope, all resolved in ‘the greatest of these’: God’s eternal love. Without this infinite interconnectivity, Christianity and Christians get nowhere in making change in this world. Therefore, it becomes necessary to look at what hopeful change might look like.

Hopeful change

This section aims to trace how hope can be both spiritually and politically located. It recognizes that not all people identify as Christians and that hope is not the exclusive preserve of Christianity. It is vitally important to the intersectional feminist ethos of this article to look at more experience than that of just white people or of just Christians—particularly as Christianity in the West is still tied to the hegemonic narrative, even as Europe and the Anglophile world become increasingly post-Christian. For this reason I have chosen to consider an explicitly Christian grasp of hope in Moltmann’s own life story and then to look at hope in action in the lives of a British Muslim community activist, Asim Qureshi, and one of the founders of Black Lives Matter, Patrisse Khan-Cullors. Furthermore, feminism within IR requires that we take abstract concepts—such as hope—and look at how they play out in the lives of individuals, particularly as those individuals narrate their lives.⁶³ This approach can be seen in Cynthia Enloe’s engagement with the impacts of the Iraq War on different women, and in Christine Sylvester’s work on the empathetic and experiential engagement of individuals with power structures (more specifically war).⁶⁴ It is also integral to Freire’s own pedagogy of hope.⁶⁵ Accordingly, this section looks at the personal narratives of three very different individuals and how they speak about hope.

It aims to situate the political struggles that Moltmann himself came to encounter, and with which Qureshi and Khan-Cullors *live* on a daily basis, as ‘horrors’ in the language of Marilyn McCord Adams.⁶⁶ As a feminist theologian, McCord Adams conceived of ‘horrors’ as the substantial mismatches between human need and vulnerability and the inability of the

⁶² 1 Corinthians 13: 13, NIV.

⁶³ Wibben, *Feminist security studies*.

⁶⁴ Enloe, *Nimo’s war, Emma’s war*; Christine Sylvester, ‘Empathetic cooperation: a feminist method for IR’, *Millennium* 23: 2, 1994, pp. 315–34; Christine Sylvester, *War as experience* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

⁶⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of hope*, p. 30.

⁶⁶ McCord Adams, *Christ and horrors*.

material world to meet these needs. Because not all needs can be met, human knowledge of such gaps leads us into evil, such as racism, misogyny, genocide and other forms of oppression, harm and death. In the face of these harms, Christians, among others, must struggle to call out the horrors as they see them and work against them. Speaking out is the work of hope. Similarities are found in all three very different personal narratives of hope: of individuals finding themselves in despair and distress, of a fundamental belief in relationships (whether divine, human or both), of seeing and realizing creativity, and of how all these drive a vision of a better world.

Jürgen Moltmann

Raised in a secular German family, Moltmann grew up in a ‘settlement outside of Hamburg’ which ‘was part of a movement before and after World War I, to return to a simple and healthy life and raise one’s own vegetables,’ where ‘instead of going to church on Sunday, we had to labour in the garden’.⁶⁷ In 1943, when he was 16, Moltmann, along with ‘his whole class at School’, were drafted and ‘put in the anti-aircraft batteries in Hamburg’.⁶⁸ As further evidence of his secularism, the two books he brought with him into the military were ‘Goethe’s poems and the works of Nietzsche’.⁶⁹ The war, as for many of his era, was a turning point. Fighting on behalf of the Nazis never sat well with Moltmann, and rather famously he surrendered to the first Allied officer he encountered after serving only six months.

In his journey towards both a Christian faith and a hopeful existence, he recalls two important moments during the war. The first was watching the ‘firestorm’ that was Hamburg after the RAF’s Operation Gomorrah in July 1943, in which 40,000 people died.⁷⁰ The second was at the prisoner-of-war camp in Scotland where he was detained, witnessing in his fellow prisoners a level of despair and depression when ‘Hitler’s empire imploded’, revealing all of the horrors contained therein, and, in the face of this, how the ‘other German prisoners “collapsed inwardly, . . . gave up all hope, sickening for the lack of it, some of them

⁶⁷ Jenkins, ‘Look forward!’.

⁶⁸ Jenkins, ‘Look forward!’.

⁶⁹ Philip Yancy, ‘God behind barbed wire’, *Christianity Today*, 29 Aug. 2005, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/september/20.120.html>.

⁷⁰ Greig Watson, ‘Operation Gomorrah: firestorm created “Germany’s Nagasaki”’, BBC News, 2 Aug. 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-43546839>.

dying”.⁷¹ In both instances, Moltmann found himself crying out to God—asking not *why* God would allow such a catastrophic event to happen but *where* God was in all of this. For Moltmann, this differentiation between *why* and *where* is important: ‘I [didn’t] want it explained why I was in this misery, I wanted to be liberated from it, and therefore I cry to God: “Where are you? Save me!”’⁷²

While Moltmann was a POW, ‘an American chaplain gave him an Army-issue New Testament and Psalms, signed by President Roosevelt’. He read the Psalms in the camp: **<ext>**‘If I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there,’ [Moltmann] read. Could God be present in that dark place? As he read on . . . [he, the prisoner,] became convinced that God ‘was present even behind the barbed wire—no, *most of all behind the barbed wire*’.⁷³ **<extend>**

<fl>Importantly, then, despair and anguish were central to how Moltmann found hope, and how his theology then developed his understanding of hope.

Additional signs of hope sprang from creativity and relationships. In a 2012 interview, Moltmann was asked what, after the war, ‘awakened [him] from a dark night of the soul’ and allowed him to ‘again experience an unconditional love for life’. He responded:

<ext>Well, three things I still remember. One was the cherry trees blossoming in Belgium in May ’45, which gave me an overwhelming feeling for life after the darkness and coldness of the prison camp.

And then the humanity of the Scottish workers and their families, who were amazing. They felt solidarity with us because they felt they, too, were victims of violence and injustice from their own government . . .

And then there was the Bible I received from a chaplain. These three things convinced me to love life again.⁷⁴ **<extend>**

Moltmann cuts a complicated figure. Even if he surrendered at the first opportunity and experienced life as a POW (in what he describes as a hospitable environment in Scotland), his privilege as an embodiment of a version of German ethnicity acceptable to the Nazis tempers his experience of the Second World War. Thus, his postwar restoration of hope in humanity is vastly different from, for example, Elie Wiesel’s reflection on surviving

⁷¹ Watson, ‘Operation Gomorrah’.

⁷² Jenkins, ‘Look forward!’.

⁷³ Yancy, ‘God behind barbed wire’.

⁷⁴ Jenkins, ‘Look forward!’.

Auschwitz: one in which he documents his loss of faith in God and in fellow humans.⁷⁵ Indeed, one of Moltmann's theologies, *The crucified God*,⁷⁶ was positioned as theology after Auschwitz. Therefore, Moltmann's response to the existence of Auschwitz radically differs from Wiesel's. His entire body of work, however, seems to be one of seeking redemption and of working through how evils happen without losing faith and hope. Hope became a central premise of his theology: his first monograph was *Theology of Hope* (published in German in 1965). Thus, encountering Moltmann, through his story or particularly in the context of how he writes hope and therefore political theology, one must take account of his privilege.

Asim Qureshi

Qureshi is a well-known figure in British politics on matters relating to charges of 'radicalisation' against Muslims and as the director of CAGE, a non-profit-making organization which 'empower[s] communities impacted by the War on Terror'.⁷⁷ In his book *A virtue of disobedience*, Qureshi reflects on oppression, non-violence, civil rights and justice within the framework of his Muslim faith.⁷⁸ In his work as an advocate and in this book, he 'bears witness' to a multitude of injustices. If one does not act after being a witness, 'does that leave [one] condemned' as well?⁷⁹ And here stems the beginning of a hope-in-action. While there is a need for and scope to construct an interreligious theology of hope, that project lies beyond the length and expertise limitations of this article and its author. Instead, I seek out the similarities between these narratives, not as erasing Islam or Qureshi's faith in Allah, but as a way of finding commonalities that begin to speak to a larger, cross-boundary idea of hope.

Qureshi begins with, and returns to at several points in *A virtue of disobedience*, the construction of Muslim communities in the UK since 9/11 and 7/7 as 'suspect communities'.⁸⁰ The term 'suspect communities' emerged out of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, where the Catholic community was treated as an undifferentiated whole, all

⁷⁵ Elie Wiesel, *Night* (London: Macmillan, 2006).

⁷⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The crucified God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

⁷⁷ See <https://www.cage.ngo/>.

⁷⁸ Asim Qureshi, *A virtue of disobedience: a civil rights handbook for today* (London: Byline, 2018).

⁷⁹ Qureshi, *A virtue of disobedience*, p. 73.

⁸⁰ Qureshi, *A virtue of disobedience*, pp. 15–21, 49–51, 107–13, 151–3, 189–91, 210–219.

suspicious and all conceivably supportive of Republican terrorism.⁸¹ In the 2000s, the term was adopted to describe the implications of the UK counterterrorism's strategy, Contest, and in particular its counter-radicalization pillar, Prevent. Prevent has been roundly criticized for decontextualizing political mobilization in the long history of terrorism within the UK, for its representation of the (only) threat as that stemming from radical Islamism, and for doing so in a particularly gendered and neo-Orientalist way.⁸² As such, Prevent spells out multiple forms of counter- and anti-terrorism that target (all) Muslim communities as possibly suspect. Thus, Muslim communities are disproportionately targeted in warrantless stop-and-search operations and police surveillance, among other tactics, all of which feed into the growing tide of Islamophobia within the larger UK public.

Indeed, the problem goes wider than this. Neo-Orientalist prejudice, with its roots in imperial colonialism, holds that all of Islam is a problem: that it is backwards and anti-progressive.⁸³ It is as if Samuel Huntington, in propounding his 'clash of civilizations' thesis, were not racist but prophetic in pronouncing that 'Islam has bloody borders'.⁸⁴ It is important, then, that Qureshi tackles neo-Orientalist racialized thinking head-on:

<ext>On both sides of the Atlantic, we find that think tanks . . . consistently put forward the view that Islam itself as a culture is a problem. For this reason, Muslims cannot be trusted to make their own minds up about what just governance looks like . . .

⁸¹ Marie Breen Smyth, 'Subjectivities, "suspect communities", governments, and the ethics of research on "terrorism"', in Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth and Jeroen Gunning, eds, *Critical terrorism studies: a new research agenda* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 194–215; Marie Breen Smyth, 'Theorising the "suspect community": counterterrorism, security practices and the public imagination', *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 7: 2, 2014, pp. 223–40.

⁸² Jonathan Githens-Mazer and Robert Lambert, 'Why conventional wisdom on radicalization fails', *International Affairs* 86: 4, July 2010, pp. 889–901; Charlotte Heath-Kelly, 'Counterterrorism and the counterfactual: producing the "radicalisation" discourse and the UK PREVENT strategy', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 15: 3, 2013, pp. 394–415; Katherine Brown and Tania Saeed, 'Radicalization and counter-radicalization at British universities: Muslim encounters and alternatives', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38: 11, 2015, pp. 1952–68.

⁸³ Elleke Boehmer, 'Questions of neo-Orientalism', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 1: 1, 1998, pp. 18–21.

⁸⁴ Samuel Huntington, 'A clash of civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs* 72: 3, 1993, pp. 22–49.

Through this epistemological lens, Muslims cannot self-determine—they cannot be left alone to their own devices, for if they do, they will choose incorrectly and so the West must intervene on their behalf.⁸⁵<extend>

Qureshi's aim, and indeed the aim of this section of the article, is to see this prejudice towards Islam and Muslims as leading to harm and as something that must be addressed through hopeful action. Qureshi's intention and the purpose of his work with CAGE is to support people who have been personally affected by these social and political trends.

'Despair' might be the word we reach for when reflecting on the injustices Qureshi describes:

<ext>Today, there is an entire generation of young Muslims . . . that have only ever known a political reality where they are labelled as being potential future threats. This takes place across multiple platforms, from children in the school calling Muslim pupils 'terrorists' as a form of bullying, to teachers implementing the duty imposed by . . . Prevent within schools, to politicians speaking about Muslims as outsiders . . .

For the average Muslim child, they are drip-fed a narrative on a daily basis that they are to be feared, if not now, then potentially in the future.⁸⁶<extend>

Qureshi is worried that the effects of both the oppression and the construction of Muslims within the UK will have widespread implications for decades to come; and this is the rationale for his activism.

He believes that the need—upon which oppressive hierarchies depend—to create self and Other communities arises from the hatred sown by Iblis, or the Devil. Iblis refused Allah's command to prostrate himself before the Prophet Adam, the first human Allah created, because Adam was inferior to him, frail in being 'formed of clay'.⁸⁷ For Qureshi, Iblis' arrogance is important: he 'projects the same racism that blights our contemporary world. His inability to see the best in Adam, to rather concentrate on form and not substance' invokes a 'supremacy' that should 'remin[d] . . . all that arrogance and jealousy . . . destroy [our] ability' to see 'into the soul of another'.⁸⁸ 'We cannot even hope to begin to change the world unless we see beyond what is superficial,' Qureshi powerfully declares.⁸⁹ Thus, changing oppressive structures is a hopeful, relational (if not creative) activity.

⁸⁵ Qureshi, *A virtue of disobedience*, p. 179.

⁸⁶ Qureshi, *A virtue of disobedience*, p. 20.

⁸⁷ Qureshi, *A virtue of disobedience*, p. 36.

⁸⁸ Qureshi, *A virtue of disobedience*, p. 36.

⁸⁹ Qureshi, *A virtue of disobedience*, p. 36.

After a discussion on non-violence, Qureshi begins to build a case for how things can be made better. This includes building and relying upon larger relationships among a community of like-minded individuals:

<ext>Unity takes real effort though. It requires many actions of the heart to see past the smaller things that divide us, particularly when before us looms an edifice of oppression . . . Now, more than ever, we need one another. We need to unite, not just among ourselves as Muslim groups, but in our private lives, within our organisations, with those who will stand by us both inside and outside of our traditions. Only then, can we really have a chance at bringing about systemic change.⁹⁰<extend>

Change will only result from a shift in epistemic attitudes towards the Muslim other in western discourses and knowledge practices.

For Qureshi, this means listening to the subaltern, letting them speak and claim their space. Instead of silencing/quieting Others, western audiences—from liberal progressive to conservative—must silence themselves and energetically listen as space is claimed:

<ext>You cannot erase the imprints of empire, colonialism, racism and division from our histories, identities, and narratives. For us to be true about the world we live in and to understand how it is that we have constructed ourselves as a response, we first need to be honest enough to inject our histories into the present day, as their consequences are real and not imagined.⁹¹<extend>

Hope in Qureshi's estimation is a complicated activity. While he himself is privileged, he is deeply aware that, as agents of change, Muslim activity and agency will often be clouded by how others do or do not recognize them. His points on epistemic activity, then, are a challenge to the western self on how it chooses to tell the story of itself, of Islam and of justice. An actualization of hope, for those without power, is conditioned by the path the privileged and powerful choose to take.

Patrisse Khan-Cullors

In both her book *When they call you a terrorist*,⁹² and in numerous interviews, Khan-Cullors is very outspoken about her assessment of race relations in the United States and how race, gender, sexuality and class collide. Khan-Cullors' description of her life, growing up in

⁹⁰ Qureshi, *A virtue of disobedience*, pp. 57–8.

⁹¹ Qureshi, *A virtue of disobedience*, p. 186.

⁹² Patrisse Khan-Cullors and Asha Bandele, *When they call you a terrorist: a Black Lives Matter memoir* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2018).

poverty in Los Angeles, and the lives of those she loves—a mother who worked in numerous jobs; a devoted father with an addiction problem who cycled in and out of prison; a brother diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder that effectively criminalized him, leading to arrest and imprisonment where he was tortured and denied health care—is, at times, a tough read. It is also a hopeful read. Her desire to bear witness to these events was fostered via her education at a high school devoted to raising awareness about social justice.⁹³ Together, these experiences and influences culminated in Khan-Cullors co-founding Black Lives Matter, an enterprise that is hope-in-action.

Watching her father return to prison multiple times, realizing that most young men she knew were destined for juvenile detention and later prison, led Khan-Cullors to a stark awareness about social injustice and systemic racism in the United States:

<ext>It was the 1990s and what was mostly said—in carefully chosen language—was that being born Black or Mexican was enough to label you a gang member . . . there were no parks and rec, no programming, nothing except sidewalks and alleyways to hang out in.⁹⁴<extend>

According to Khan-Cullors, the attempt to stem gang activity led to the gang and anti-gang killings of 10,000 young people in LA between 1990 and 2010.⁹⁵ She experiences at first hand the criminalization of addiction via the ‘war on drugs’, and the trap in which this places her father, her family and other black people. She watches her father struggle with drug addiction, becoming aware that each time he relapses, he is sent back to prison instead of being treated.

When her father was out of prison, she would attend his twelve-step programme meetings. She found these dubious because they hold only the individual accountable, whereas she wondered about the failure of the system and the failure of the community to give addicts (and others) the support that they need.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, watching people at twelve-step meetings leads her to a life-shaping awareness: ‘I will learn there is something radical and beautiful and deeply transformational in bearing witness to public accountability, accountability before a community gathered for the sake of wholeness.’⁹⁷

⁹³ Khan-Cullors and Bandele, *When they call you a terrorist*, pp. 68–9.

⁹⁴ Khan-Cullors and Bandele, *When they call you a terrorist*, pp. 54–5.

⁹⁵ Khan-Cullors and Bandele, *When they call you a terrorist*, pp. 54–5.

⁹⁶ Khan-Cullors and Bandele, *When they call you a terrorist*, pp. 37, 41.

⁹⁷ Khan-Cullors and Bandele, *When they call you a terrorist*, pp. 37–8.

Khan-Cullors manages an escape of sorts: her intelligence and testing scores enable her to transfer into better schools, the first in the primarily white and very affluent Sherman Oaks neighbourhood of LA. Making friends, she is made aware of the difference between the socio-economic conditions in which she lives and those of her new school environment—a gulf that opens up when a friend’s father asks her what she wants to be when she grows up. This question is inconceivable to her—something that has never been ventured before: ‘There was no education plan for us—school budgets had been decimated . . . the only plan left for us was prison or death.’⁹⁸

Relationality is clear in her concern for those caught in the poverty and criminalization structures. Her desire to build and form community is honed while at Cleveland High School, for it is here that she becomes aware of the harms of racist structures.⁹⁹ After high school, Khan-Cullors becomes a community organizer in order to build ‘what I dream about and care about . . . a new world’.¹⁰⁰ She connects this creative desire with being taught ‘to know faith, to understand spirit as a verb’, like love or hope.¹⁰¹ She writes with hope: ‘I learned that nothing could break a community united, a community guided by love . . . I learned to reimagine a world. A world where my family can be safe.’¹⁰²

All of this future-oriented community-building happens alongside her brother’s repeated incarceration (an action criminalizing his mental illness). After reading an American Civil Liberties Union complaint against the LA County Sheriff’s department for torture,¹⁰³ she begins to learn the full horrors of her brother’s experience in jail and prison:

<ext>The sheriffs at the LA County Jail were the ones who beat him for his illness. They beat him and they kept water from him and they tied him down, four-point hold, and they drugged him nearly out of existence. There are drugs to take when a person is having a psychotic break . . . This is not what they did to my brother. They drugged Monte to incapacitate him, to incapacitate his humanity. To leave him with no dignity.¹⁰⁴<extend>

⁹⁸ Khan-Cullors and Bandele, *When they call you a terrorist*, pp. 54–5.

⁹⁹ Khan-Cullors and Bandele, *When they call you a terrorist*, p. 140.

¹⁰⁰ Khan-Cullors and Bandele, *When they call you a terrorist*, p. 94.

¹⁰¹ Khan-Cullors and Bandele, *When they call you a terrorist*, p. 128.

¹⁰² Khan-Cullors and Bandele, *When they call you a terrorist*, p. 129.

¹⁰³ Khan-Cullors and Bandele, *When they call you a terrorist*, p. 158.

¹⁰⁴ Khan-Cullors and Bandele, *When they call you a terrorist*, pp. 59–60.

Her activism then led to the founding of Black Lives Matter. She begins to follow the trial of the man accused, and later acquitted, of Trayvon Martin's death in Florida primarily via news and social media.¹⁰⁵ She explains the necessity of this witness:

<ext>We are scared because Trayvon's beautiful life and terrible death is meant to be erased; the reporting of it made no front-page news, no *Dateline*, no Anderson Cooper. The story on my Facebook feed was a tiny blog post, a post not connected with mainstream media. A white man is questioned and then released after he shoots and kills an unarmed Black boy who was walking home. And in that instant I was filled with rage and confusion.¹⁰⁶<extend>

<fl>When Trayvon's killer is acquitted, Khan-Cullors responded with the now iconic hashtag: #BlackLivesMatter. Together with Garza and Opal Tometti, a black organiser in Brooklyn, she launches Black Lives Matter.

Conclusion

I began this article with the claim that I aimed to do something positive in the study of IR: to bring hope into the discussion. However, in focusing on war, Islamophobia and racism, it is easier to see the stuff of IR—hegemonic structures, harm and oppression—than what the term 'hope' conveys. Hope seems to be at odds with the stuff of IR: it seems to be all lightness and good, like Moltmann's cherry trees in bloom in Belgium. The reality of hope in action is not all lightness and good: it is rooted in a determination to achieve a good, to envision a better future, but it is difficult and gruelling work sometimes to achieve that hoped-for end.

This article contributes to a wider literature that notes how war, empire, poverty, neo-imperialism and gender structures are all inscribed on the lives of individuals. Moltmann's entire career was built upon his personal experience of (some of) the horrors of Nazi Germany and the Second World War. Asim Qureshi's mission is to aid those affected by the way the war on terror infiltrates the daily lives of the marginalized in the West—perfectly illustrating the erosion of civil rights and liberties. Patrisse Khan-Cullors viscerally depicts elements of black life in contemporary America. If we think her story—or their stories—is not the stuff of IR, it behoves us to remember that modern racial hierarchies are owed to the international slave trade and colonial governance, themselves deeply implicated in the early

¹⁰⁵ Khan-Cullors and Bandele, *When they call you a terrorist*, pp. 166–81.

¹⁰⁶ Khan-Cullors and Bandele, *When they call you a terrorist*, p. 174.

foundations of IR.¹⁰⁷ Hierarchies are the very stuff of IR; and so is addressing them via hope, hopeful dispositions and hopeful actions.

From a white academic sitting in her ivory tower, ‘hope’ could easily come across as a minimizing pat on the hand: just have hope. However, I do not want ‘hope’ to become lost in any sense of acquiescence or acceptance, or to be diminished to a platitude of resilience. Hope is not and cannot be owned by the powerful or the privileged. The tension between hope and privilege must be embraced. Those with privilege do not need hope—or do not need as much or need it with such life-changing imperative as those who are systematically set apart from power. Hope, then, belongs to those in need, and those with privilege need not only to recognize this but to further recognize the onus on us to be their allies. Therefore, in IR, how many of us sit within a position of privilege, able to cast an eye over the problems of the world, without actually having to encounter them? How much have we participated in the minimization of these very issues by narrowly defining power in IR, or by seeing IR as involving only state-to-state behaviour? How, then, instead can we amplify these injustices, better accounting for the misuse of power, and do something for hope?

¹⁰⁷ Robert Vitalis, *White world order, black power politics: the birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).