



Pia Olsson & Jenni Rinne

Hope in Hopelessness

Affective Practices in Times of Crisis

Abstract

The question we address in this article concerns the kind of affective practices that people adopt in order to negotiate the various emotions aroused by global crises, and how these negotiations allow room for hope. In doing so, we focus on two recent major upheavals, namely the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia's war in Ukraine, and on how they have affected people's everyday lives. Both crises were documented in two rapid-response questionnaires organised by the Finnish Literature Society.

Keeping daily routines as normal as possible, prepping and preparing, sending and receiving memes and other humorous materials via social media, and becoming involved in grass-roots actions and activism were incorporated into the descriptions of everyday life. As such, these actions gave people the feeling that they were doing something and that they had some control over what was happening around them. Here, we discuss these affective practices as a way of allowing room for hope and engendering hopefulness for a better future among those taking the action, and those in their sphere of influence. In acquiring agency, people were negotiating hope for a better future despite the uncertain situation.

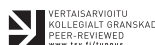
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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic became the reality in Finland in March 2020. People had been following the spread of the virus and its route to Northern Europe via the media for a couple of months. On 16 March, the Government together with the President of the Republic declared “that there is a state of emergency in the country as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak” (Valtioneuvosto 2020). This measure reflected the worsening situation, and it highlighted the seriousness of the pandemic. The state of emergency was in effect from 16 March until 15 June 2020, although the pandemic affected people’s everyday lives until the autumn of 2022. Meanwhile, on 24 February 2022 Russia started a new phase in its planned invasion of Ukraine, which has affected the whole of Europe in various ways – economically, psychologically and in humanitarian terms. The war was still going on at the time this research was conducted. Consequently, both the pandemic and the war have been touching people’s lives in Europe for more than three years now. Although the two crises affected Finland in very different ways, both brought with them a sense of uncertainty and insecurity that penetrated the lives of people. COVID-19 was experienced as an imminent threat to people’s health and the health of those close to them, whereas the war in Ukraine aroused fears about the future and strong concern about the suffering being experienced in the country.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a life-changing experience both in people’s personal lives and on the societal and global level (see e.g., Lupton & Willis (eds.) 2021; Lupton 2022). Data scientist Emile Aarts and others (2020, 2–3) point out that even though this was not the first pandemic to affect humankind, few people had strong memories of previous ones: most were not experienced first-hand by people who were now experiencing COVID-19. It changed the rhythms of everyday life, everyday routines and general perceptions of potential crises (Damsholt 2020; Mellander 2021; Nilsson & Marander-Eklund 2021).

Thus far, there has been less research on the effects of the war in Ukraine on people’s everyday lives outside Ukraine, than on the corresponding effects of COVID-19. However, in Finland the war has re-kindled various collective memories about the Second World War. More than 90,000 Finns lost their lives, and Finland ceded significant parts of its territory to the Soviet Union during the wars in 1939–1945, the losses are still actively remembered in Finnish families. (see e.g., Kinnunen & Jokisipilä 2012; Vehkalahti 2015; Heimo 2022) Many people born in the 1930s and 1940s have recollected their own and their family histories in connection with the war in Ukraine: the bombardments, the evacuation of people from the ceded territories and the long-term traumatic effects on families are seen as experiences that parallel contemporary aggression in Ukraine (see the questionnaire *Sota Ukrainassa*). The sim-

ilarities between the historical events in Finland and the contemporary war in Ukraine have fundamentally changed individual people's sense of security, as well as the overall political atmosphere in Finland, most notably with its recent and swift accession to NATO after decades of political discussion.

In the following, we focus on these two recent upheavals in the everyday lives of people in Finland. To identify affective practices stemming from sudden crises we examined two sets of questionnaire responses supplied by the Finnish Literature Society by means of affective reading. The respondents had written freely about their everyday practices and feelings in times of global crisis with its tangible and mental effects on their lives. These descriptions are emotionally intense. Uncertainty may have ambiguous consequences, however: it gives rise to psychological distress, but also to more positive emotions such as hope, optimism and resilience when people navigate through the difficult experiences and find coping mechanisms (Smithson et al. 2022). Here, we focus on signs of hope in the responses. We look for direct expressions of hope as well as for its feasibility in situations in which people must deal with new kinds of insecurities and where feelings of hopelessness caused by anxiety and uncertainty constitute a considerable risk (Frumkin 2022; Saricali et al. 2020). We chose to focus on hope as a significant factor in generating belief in a better future. Among individuals, it could also serve to make their actions meaningful, giving a sense of purpose and the feeling of making a difference even in difficult situations. Thus, hope could be a generative power with the potential to change society.

We base our analyses on Margaret Wetherell's (2012) affect theory and the idea that emotions are active agents in understanding people's everyday lives (Ahmed 2004). Thus, we concentrate on the cultural and social layers of meaning-making in affective practices of creating hope. Theoretically, we do not distinguish between affect and emotion, as some studies do. For instance, one could study named emotions from the perspective of cultural history by looking at the long-term cultural constructions and shared meanings of particular emotions such as love or fear. Hence, some scholars distinguish emotion from affect as pre-social intensities felt through the body whereas emotions are cognitive and social, expressed through language (Massumi 1995, 88). We suggest that affect and emotion are experienced as both cognitive and embodied. Thus, both have a cultural context while being embodied (Wetherell 2012, 4; Ahmed 2004, 9). Our focus in this article is on emotion and affect as practices that have generative power. As Ahmed puts it, emotions do something, whereas according to Wetherell affects move people. In other words, emotions and affects are not innate psychological states but practices that create meaning and move people (Ahmed 2004, 9; Wetherell 2012, 2, 4).

Although we agree with Wetherell and Ahmed that is not productive to make a conceptual distinction between emotion and affect, for the sake of clarity we use “emotion” in the text to refer to specific named emotions such as hope or grief. When we use “affect” we refer to the affective practices that cover the different patterns defining our bodily and mental reactions and reflecting specific emotions. Practices comprise affective patterns of embodied experiences, discursive and narrative elements, and past societal and personal histories, as well as memories. They vary in duration from repetitive everyday routines to more spontaneous actions (Wetherell 2012).

Hope

In everyday use, hope is a concept that is quite easy to comprehend and define: it is directed to future events. Hope has positive connotations; it expresses a wish that something that is desired will happen soon, or at least eventually. It is about potentiality, about “futural momentum” (Bryant & Knight 2019, 134). The dictionary definition corresponds quite closely with this understanding. As a verb, *to hope* means “To want something to happen or to be true and usually have a good reason to think it might”; as a noun it means “[s]omething good that you want to happen in the future, or a confident feeling about what will happen in the future.” (Cambridge Dictionary)

However, as conceptualised in research, hope is much more complex and ambivalent. It is directed towards the future: according to Sara Ahmed, “[h]ope is a feeling that is present (a pleasure in the mind) but is directed toward an object that is not yet present”. As such, it is an indicator of possible causes of happiness. Ahmed also points out the connection between hope and anxiety. Having hope is anxiety-provoking in that one never knows if one achieves what one hopes for. One might wish that things had gone differently in the past, indicating “a stubborn attachment to a lost object” or “a form of melancholia”. (Ahmed 2010, 181–183, 189) Hope comprises elements such as goals, pathways and agency to reach the goals, but also elements of expectation and probability. It is not only cognitive but also affective and emotional, and it is emphasised with action. (see e.g., Frumkin 2022)

However, not everything that is hoped for is positive (see e.g., Eagleton 2018): people may hope for bad things by way of retribution. Thus, hoping is not always altruistic, for something “good”. Moreover, it is sometimes expressed when there are no grounds for it, in other words it is “false hope” (Frumkin 2022): there may be no good reason to suppose that the hoped-for future will materialise. As Sara Ahmed (2010, 181, cites Zygmunt Bauman, 2008) points out, hope is a factor that can evoke feelings of both happiness and unhappiness. This could apply in acute crises when it may be difficult to

believe in a positive outcome, or it is not likely that things will get better, but these things are still hoped for. Expressions such as “hope against hope” and “hoping against all odds” are used in such instances. Hoping against hope may also be a “cruel experience” if there are no societal structures to support the hopes. Berlant writes about “false hope”, which means that even through hard work and following the accepted pathway to a good life with a job and secure housing, life might not turn out as was hoped for in neoliberal societies. (Berlant 2011) Under these circumstances, hope is not necessarily a positive emotion (see Smithson et al. 2022, 11). The opposite of hopefulness is pessimism, an emotion that prepares people for disappointment when there appears to be no hope of achieving what they would like to achieve (Ahmed 2010, 178).

Our research material contains many examples of hope expressed in an ambivalent and complex manner described in the context of sudden societal turmoil: a worldwide pandemic and the war in Ukraine. In times of societal crises, it is difficult to know what will happen and where the world is going, and the first reaction may be to come to terms with what has already happened. Uncertainty and insecurity become shared experiences. However, a crisis could also open up the possibility or the hope of building a different kind of future. Some scholars have defined hope as “a way of virtually pushing potentiality to actuality” (Bryant and Knight 2019, 134). A crisis could make people act to secure a better future. Our focus in this article is on the possibility of hope in situations in which current societal conditions have profoundly shaken people’s general sense of security. After all, the intensity of hope and the specific hopes people have, are shaped in specific circumstances (Jansen 2021).

Many earlier studies conducted in the fields of social science and humanities have focused on anticipation of the future, and on the philosophical and epistemological definitions of hope – meaning the ways in which the future is understood and imagined, and how hope can be defined in this context (e.g., Appadurai 2016). Alternatively, hope has been discussed and defined as a dis-socialised trait in people’s private lives instead of a societal-level wish for a better future for communities (e.g., Thompson and Žižek 2013). Previous studies have also considered hope in the context of major developments, change and mood swings in the late capitalist society (Berlant 2011). These empirical studies have focused on specific formations of hope and anticipation in particular socio-historical settings, such as in various political and economic crises, and during the rise of inequality and globalisation. (For a more extensive listing, see Kleist & Jansen 2016, 373; see e.g., Jansen 2021.) Hope has been similarly covered in certain journal articles published in the 2016 *History and*

Anthropology of Hope over time, for example, including *Crises, Immobility and Future-Making*. Hopefulness is found in the most precarious contexts, in which another kind of future is difficult to see (Kleist & Jansen 2016).

Our study fits well into this latter body of work, given that it is about hope in times of crisis. Specifically, we understand hope as a product of embodied and emotional practice in the context of lived everyday life. Our interest is in the narrative leads of these processes, in the cultural and discursive patterns and the ways in which people describe their affective practices, their everyday strategies for living with them, and for controlling and using them – here, concentrating especially on the ambivalent and complex affective practices that can create hope. According to Wetherell (2012, 14), affective practices are based on patterns of narratives, interpretative repertoires, social relations, personal and social histories and ways of life, in addition to embodied and sensory experiences. Affective practices accumulate for different durations, from a few brief moments and episodes to a semi-continuous background feeling of recurrent activity over days, weeks or more (Wetherell 2012, 12). However, Wetherell emphasises the dynamism of affective processes and warns against simple lines of causation and neat emotional categories (Wetherell 2012, 4). Moreover, the patterns work together differently in different social and historical processes (Wetherell 2012; Wetherell, McConville & McCreanor 2019). Our aim is to seek and unveil practices that create hope in times of crisis, and to analyse how they are culturally and socially lived and defined. We ask what kind of affective practices are people adopting to negotiate the different kinds of emotions aroused by the crises, and how these practices open up the possibility for hope.

Research material and methodology

Both crises analysed here were actively documented by heritage institutions, both museums and archives. These activities were part of the rapid-response operations of the institutions, the aim being to document contemporary, rapidly appearing social phenomena as they are taking place (Tebeau 2021; see also Nilsson & Marander-Eklund 2021, 11; Matres 2022). Finnish heritage institutions have been collecting people's experiences of cultural phenomena and changes in society for over 100 years (Korkiakangas et al. 2016). This has resulted in the accumulation of a huge and meaningful body of texts documenting people's experiences of different events and phenomena over time, often as they unfold (ibid. 206, 17). We focus in our analyses on two questionnaires distributed by the Finnish Literature Society dealing with the most recent crises that have affected everyday life in the past few years. The first of these, entitled Corona spring [Koronakevät], was launched on 12 March

2020, one day before the Emergency Powers Act came into force, which required the closing of educational premises and cultural institutions and the limiting of other public gatherings, for example. As the pandemic continued, the response deadline was extended from April until 16 September. Examples of changes in everyday life caused by the pandemic were used to activate potential respondents:

Spring 2020 has become Corona spring. The new form of the coronavirus, COVID-19, has developed into a global pandemic and has become a major topic in coffee-table discussions and news headlines. The pandemic originated in China at the turn of the year, and quickly spread around the world as people continued to travel. The number of infections rises every day in Finland, too. COVID-19 has caused a drop in stock-market prices, the cancelling of concerts and sporting events, the closing of borders and the extensive imposition of quarantine regulations all over the world.

What feelings and thoughts has the spread of Coronavirus throughout the world and in Finland aroused in you? Tell us about your experiences and feelings!

The questionnaire concerning the war in Ukraine was launched on 9 March, and was open until the end of May 2022. The call for writing about the experiences initially highlighted the historical nature of the war and the concomitant changes in peoples' everyday actions:

The date 24.2.2022 is denoted in history books as the day that Russia started its war against Ukraine. News flows were filled with war events, reports on emergencies and gestures of solidarity. The crisis has provoked demonstrations and aid-work. It has shaken the global economy and sense of security. How have you reacted to the events in Ukraine? Tell SKS [The Finnish Literature Society] about your thoughts, feelings and concrete actions.

The respondents to both questionnaires were given some questions to support their writing, mainly about changes in everyday life. In relation to the pandemic these concerned avoiding infection, testing, being in isolation, social relations and how COVID-19 affected their visions for the future. With regard to the war in Ukraine, they were asked about their reactions, thoughts and emotions, and about any practical actions they had taken. In the questionnaire material, the only context information elicited from the respondents was their year of birth, gender and occupation: responding to this was voluntary, and not all respondents gave the information. It is possible to infer some context information from the text, but this does not yield extensive information on the respondents.

When we were analysing this material, we had to keep in mind the fact that the questions directed the focus of the respondents' answers. However, they had the freedom to choose what kind of text to write, hence the responses varied in length and form. The shortest ones are a couple of sentences whereas the longer ones might include a detailed diary from the first days of the pandemic or the war. There are also poems and detailed media reporting with relevant links, as well as more traditional responses that directly address the questions presented. Almost all the responses are in Finnish, and most describe the situation in Finland during both crises. The respondents varied in age and occupation. In the case of the COVID-19 questionnaire, for example, some teachers encouraged their pupils to respond, and at the same time older respondents actively engaged in the process. Our focus in this article is on the responses that describe life in Helsinki, the Capital of Finland, on the assumption that changes caused by the pandemic have been most significant within the urban context. The collection includes a total of 96 responses from Helsinki, only 13 of which were written by men. There is also wide variation in age among the respondents to the war-in-Ukraine questionnaire, although they do not include school children. The Finnish Literature Society received 70 responses related to the war-in-Ukraine questionnaire, amounting to 209 pages. The most common length of a response was between two and three pages, and most were type-written. Five of the responses were written by hand and then scanned. Most of the War-in-Ukraine responses were authored by women, only 17 coming from men. We do not analyse the ways in which gender and age affected their experiences in this article, but in order to contextualise the quotations we have added the year-of-birth and gender information after each quotation when possible. The authors translated the quotations from Finnish into English. Both sets of questionnaire materials are accessible at the archives of The Finnish Literature Society, identified by the questionnaire title and number stated after each citation of the empirical material.

It is important to acknowledge that responses to this kind of material can be analysed from different perspectives or placed in different contexts. Our reading focused on expressions of hope and its feasibility, as well as on affective reactions to the crisis situation. The responses did indeed reflect a multitude of feelings and emotions that the changing situations aroused in people. Those in both situations were facing something very new and unexpected, and uncertainty about the future is the underlying emotion in the descriptions. The implication is that, even though affective practices are partially culturally structured, and even though people have a pre-understanding about possible affective practices (Edensor 2012; Wetherell 2012), one could

also argue that these new situations allowed for improvisation and creativity in finding new affective practices – or adapting them in new ways – to deal with the circumstances.

Pia Olsson read and organised the material related to the pandemic while Jenni Rinne focused on the War-in-Ukraine questionnaire. We approached the materials through the process of affective reading, focusing on descriptions of affective experiences and practices. For this, we looked for words and expressions of emotions, metaphors and other descriptions of the practices. Consequently, neither emotion nor affective practice of hope is named in the responses as such, but both are present in the “figures of speech” (Ahmed 2004, 12–13). After processing the respective materials individually, we joined forces to discuss and identify the common traits and themes in them, as well as to identify the theoretical starting points in our understanding of hope.

Methodologically, this process resonates with team ethnography whereby individual and shared processes of analysis are combined (Hine 2015, 189–190), although our focus is on written narratives. When we compared our observations we looked for aspects that were somewhat common in both sets of materials, the aim being to understand the mechanisms behind the affective practices. Accordingly, we created two narratives of practices aimed at creating hope: solidarity and adaptive everyday practices. These aspects are visible in both sets of materials, although with different emphases, and they are also present in the narratives both explicitly and implicitly. However, hope was not explicitly mentioned as something to be described in the responses. We therefore based our reading of practices of creating hope on the understanding of hope as goals, pathways and agency for the future.

Solidarity, aid work and escapism as affective practices of hope

Hope is not the first affective practice that is expected to appear in moments of crisis. This applies here, too: immediate reactions to the two crises cannot be characterised as initially hopeful. The most common reactions to the war in the narratives are grief, sadness, fear and anger, and to the pandemic also fear, as well as bafflement, disappointment and distress about the “correct” forms of action to take. The tone of the responses could rather be read as expressions of hopelessness than of hopefulness. One of the respondents commenting on the war explicitly writes about this: “The main feeling is hopelessness because I cannot understand. Hopelessness that people are warmongering animals, and hopelessness when I don’t know what is true and what is not” (Sota Ukrainassa 50: woman, born 1991). The shock of the events seemed to evoke the sudden loss of a sense of security, as well as despair. Trust in people, in foreseeability and in knowing the truth had disappeared. Thus, it was

difficult if not impossible to find articulations of hope, especially in the context of the war. However, what we can focus on is how people navigate the unexpected difficult experiences through affective practices that might bring or maintain hope in crisis situations, such as signs of curiosity, which could be interpreted as a component of hope (Smithson et al. 2022).

As documented in both sets of materials, one way of responding to the distressing situation was to engage in activities aimed at making changes for the better. This highlights agency over situations that are difficult to bear instead of giving in to a passive take on events. Although agency is connected with hope, the direction of the causality is not clear (Smithson 2022, 3–4). However, hope has the power to motivate people into action (Bryant & Knight 2019, 157). One such action is giving aid to others. In the case of the war in Ukraine, one of the most common reactions was to help Ukrainian refugees in Finland and elsewhere. The respondents wrote about donating money, clothes and supplies to incoming refugees and people in the war areas. Some were also volunteering in help centres and aid organisations that were distributing clothes, supplies and furniture, and organising activities for children and other incomers. Many respondents described in detail the voluntary work they had done, and the strong need they felt to do so. One of the respondents described her reaction to the war and to voluntary work, emphasising the need to be personally involved in the practical aid-giving:

In the spring I had a strong drive to DO something and not just to participate in the fundraising. I felt physical pain in my chest when I followed the desperate situation of refugees in Mariupol on the news, for example. (Sota Ukrainassa 38: woman, born 1954)

This affective response to the war and to people's suffering was described as physical, as the example also shows. It is notable that different kinds of bodily reactions were described as a driving force in terms of doing aid work, such as a pounding heart and constant tearfulness. Volunteering was also connected to psychological despair, in the form of anxiousness and a sense of being paralysed, as another respondent wrote:

In the beginning the situation aroused a strong sense of insecurity and fear of loss. Because I have suddenly lost people close to me and to my home. I can relate to people who were in danger and had to leave their home quickly. I felt paralysed at first, but then I started to act. It relieved my anxiety. I could not give a lot of money, but I made a load of woollen socks, which I donated to refugees or sold and gave the money to the aid effort. I will continue the sock project during the autumn of 2022.

I managed to get some yarn as a donation, for which I am thankful. (Sota Ukrainassa 39: woman, born 1976)

It seems that affective reactions to the war made people participate in aid work. It is implied in many of the written narratives that the motivation to act was also connected to the idea that Finnish people could easily be in the same situation as the Ukrainians, Russia also being their neighbouring country. This is interesting in the context of events taking place in 2015, involving the forced dislocation of a vast number of people from outside the EU. The situation was understood as external to Europe due to the location of the crisis, even though one could argue that it was connected to Europe's power position (Picozza 2021). In the context of the war in Ukraine, the crisis is perceived to be closer to home, and the genealogical roots of the refugees are more acceptable and relatable (*ibid.*). In the Finnish case, too, a violent history of living next to Russia, albeit now after almost 80 years of peace, could be entangled with perceptions of and affective reactions to war. Even though the various ways of helping are universal, the knitting of warm socks and other items is also part of the Finnish collective war history from the Winter and Continuation Wars (Rauhala 2019, 188–193), and as such connects the aid work with the national history. An elderly lady recalls how she imagined herself as a Ukrainian:

Once I started to wonder what if I were in the same situation as a woman in Ukraine who is the same age as I am. What would I feel, and what would I do, and how would I cope? Would I fall apart? Would I lose my ability to act? It is difficult to put myself in another person's position when I have never experienced anything like they are going through. It was clear to me from the beginning that I would help as much as I could. SPR [The Finnish Red Cross], Unicef, UN Woman, Finnish Church Aid and others set up donation collections really quickly. I donate money. I admire people who have the strength to do much more. To bring help to Ukraine and to transport refugees back to Finland. (--). I have donated money for the village club, which organised summer camps for kids living in the refugee centre. My small donation secured two camp days for one child, and that eased my conscience. (Sota Ukrainassa 4: woman, born 1958)

Help for the incomers was not always distributed through organisations, as individuals took the initiative to help as well, and some refugees were offered privately owned houses and rooms in which to stay. Such hospitality towards refugees was also visible in Finland and elsewhere when large numbers of people were seeking refuge in the EU in 2015 (e.g., Farahani 2021). However, at that time, hostility towards newcomers was also stronger throughout Europe. The idea of potential cultural and religious incompatibility was

the underlying thought fuelling the opposition to refugees back then, which was prevalent in Europe because of the colonial legacy that was behind the othering of non-European descendants (Yeğenoğlu 2012). Finns could relate better to Ukrainians and their situation, thus the refugees were easier to accept. The reflections of a woman in her forties shows how Ukrainian refugees were welcomed into a private home, but also the mixed emotions that unexpectedly arose afterwards:

We want to help Ukrainians and because of that we have promised to let them stay in our Airbnb room for free for a period of time. I feel that I have to do something concrete. At the same time, I am worried about facing them. I am ashamed that I have started to regret my promise, but I know that I will look after them better than we are expected to. They have escaped war, and I am worried about my own well-being. These people somehow bring the threat of war too close. It reminds us too much that we are really worried about ourselves. That the same thing could be in front of us and then we would hope that others would help us. On the other hand, the help Ukrainians have received from all over Europe has restored my faith in people. (Sota Ukrainassa 53: woman, born 1977)

The above example reflects the thought that the help the Ukrainians received also rekindled hope for humankind. The act of helping those in need, in whatever form it is, could then be understood as something that generates hope and a belief in people's goodness in a situation in which hope for people is lost. This could also stretch beyond helpers to the receiving end. Perhaps generating hopefulness for others or generating hope for humanity through helping is one of the underlying motivations of people doing aid work. As such, aid work could be interpreted as an affective practice that generates hope (Wetherell 2012), even though in general it could be connected to many other affective practices such as altruism or fostering a sense of security that is historically and culturally layered. In the case of the war in Ukraine in particular, the cultural and historical aspects of affective practices became visible when people reflected on the current situation in the context of Finnish history and the histories of their own families.

As in the case of the war in Ukraine, the emotions aroused by the COVID-19 pandemic were mixed, focusing on both the physical health and the mental wellbeing of oneself and those in one's immediate circle. "I hope that I won't get COVID-19. I hope that we won't experience Covid deaths in Finland. There are too many of those abroad already", as one of the respondents wrote in her response dated 13 March (Koronakevät 11: woman, born 1975). The pandemic and the way people acted during the height of the crisis made some of the

respondents feel “ashamed” and “fucked-up”, and COVID-19 was nominated “the world’s biggest party-pooper” (Koronakevät 39: man, born 1988; Koronakevät 44: man, born 2004; Koronakevät 46: woman, born 2001). In other words, strong signs of hopelessness are present in many responses. Looking for signs of hopefulness is, to some extent, to read between the lines, although some respondents explicitly highlight experiences of goodness and solidarity, and also the signs of hope in them. In the COVID-19 case, too, people felt the need to help others. The urban landscape changed when people started to place teddy bears in their windows for children to see (Koronakevät 72: woman, born 1987).

29.3.

The placing of teddy bears and rainbows in the windows for children to see feels like a nice idea.

Together with my offspring we saw several stuffed animals in the windows of houses in our street. [--]

In one of the windows there was a big heart.

“Is that some kind of Valentine’s Day thing?”, the child wonders.

“Oh, I think someone wants to share warmth and kindness at this time”, I reply. (Koronakevät 221: woman, born 1977.)

The description ends when a place is found for a stuffed animal in a window of the family’s own home, whereby they assumed agency in bringing hope to others. Some of the respondents also experienced the COVID-19 crisis as a time that positively brought people together – at least in the beginning. When things became difficult, solutions were sought jointly, not only by individuals in their everyday lives but also by political decision makers. As such, it constituted a breeding ground, at least for a moment, for social change and solidarity:

I have always been quite a neurotic person, but suddenly no amount of neuroticism felt excessive. [--] At this time of post-truth and quarrelling it suddenly felt truly important to have everyone on the same side. I noticed a small item of news in the newspaper about the Finns Party [a right-wing political party, at that time in the opposition] had withdrawn an interpellation because of the situation, and it felt like a really meaningful thing. Now is not the time for challenging and quarrelling. (Koronakevät 72: woman, born 1987)

Here, the idea that politicians were working together towards a common goal, and not focusing on disputes based on party-politics, helped the narrator to see pathways for the future. Other respondents also highlighted the feeling of solidarity or a sense of togetherness, not only with their loved ones but also

“with the whole world” when experiencing the oddest time of their lives (Koronakevät 124: woman, born 1992). The need for support was recognised, and people were also ready to give it: “At times like this, you notice how everyone needs support and how well it is given” (Koronakevät 153: woman, born 2006). The crisis was experienced as shared: “I like the new saying that everyone is in the same storm but in different boats”. (Koronakevät 251: woman, born 1991)

Social-media groups as well as aid organisations and NGOs also played an important role in forming temporary and more permanent communities to share emotions, and also in giving support to Ukrainians. The scale of the support varied from dedicating most of one’s time to volunteer work to making small gestures as part of everyday life. Giving an example related to social media, one of the respondents wrote: “My sister bought me a Ukrainian flag. I put the flag next to a vase with yellow goldenrod and blue monkshoods. The picture of the setting received over twenty likes on Facebook.” (Sota Ukrainassa 23: woman, born 1945) Another of these respondents wrote: “[e]specially in the spring it felt important to organise events that brought people together” (Sota Ukrainassa 18: woman, born 1963); and another that: “We watched the Eurovision song contest together with an ‘international friends’ group. The host of the evening was Ukrainian, and it was especially wonderful to see the people brought together showing support for her country.” (Sota Ukrainassa 52: woman, born 1989) Helping others, showing solidarity, and sharing emotions seemed to relieve the anxiety raised on account of the war, and to create conditions for hope.

The agency these respondents assumed during the crises also reflects the nature of hope in the sense of a “short-term coping strategy” and a “gateway to a micro-utopia of ‘otherwise’” (Bryant & Knight 2019, 153). The practices described here were not planned as permanent life changes, but were actions taken to cope with contemporary challenges (Berlant 2011; Bryant & Knight 2019, 153). Rebecca Bryant and Daniel M. Knight (2019, 155) refer to escapism when they write about sports events providing “tasters of how things could be otherwise”. For the respondents to the questionnaires analysed here, escapism was an affective practice of briefly taking control of events that seemed to pour down on one in an uncontrolled manner.

Creating everyday practices in new circumstances

I’m scared this will never normalise. I mean, will there ever really be a normal time anymore. I would like to not be in this time, where everything is connected with COVID-19 and everything is a state of emergency. I don’t know if it is artificial, but I try to direct my own thoughts away from the panic to something positive. To something that makes this period of time exceptional in some good way or at least exceptional

in a non-frightening way. Tomorrow at 7 o'clock I have a weekly breakfast meeting via video call at home, because this every Tuesday [--] meeting will not be skipped. I agreed with my sister about a [--] painting soirée. Soon a [food delivery] driver will bring ice cream and nuggets from McDonald's to celebrate my husband's name day¹. We'll tune into a Netflix Party auditorium with our friends so that we can watch the movie together each in our own quarantine. (Koronakevät 31: woman, born 1993)

COVID-19 changed everyone's life to some extent. For some, such as the woman born in 1993, the abnormality of the pandemic was frightening and made her actively look for reminders of everyday life when she felt safe and comfortable. We interpret this as arousing hopefulness by imitating "normal" life. Hoped-for life was life before the pandemic, and imitating it could be interpreted as an attempt to bring back what used to be. It was a way of coping with all the other feelings described as being present during the different phases of the pandemic: the respondent's emotions had fluctuated from indifference and arrogance to worry and anxiety. As Danish ethnologist Tine Damsholt (2020) points out, the pandemic comprehensively affected the everyday life rhythms and spatial dimensions of individuals. The "new normal" was present in small everyday actions such as following the guidelines for washing hands, but also in the shrinking environment whereby one's sphere of life diminished both socially and geographically, "to two kilometres from home" (Koronakevät 82: woman, born 1978).

Hope has also been described as movement towards something (Bloch 1986, as cited in Bryant & Knight 2019, 136), and on this basis, Bryant and Knight (2019, 137) define it as "the pursuit of materializing the otherwise-than-actual". Socialising, celebrating and holding on to everyday practices as normally as possible helped both the narrator and those close to her to maintain hopefulness. All this was based on creativity and problem-solving abilities that could be connected with hope (Fredrickson 2004, as cited in Smithson et al. 2022), which were also the things the respondent had control over when other things – such as the spread of the disease or the actions of other people or the state – were out of reach. She seemed to have a clear strategy for coping with the negative emotions aroused by the pandemic, thereby creating hope in a hopeless situation. This reflects emotional labour, namely "the act of selection and construction" meaning that affective meaning-making is not only "an act of natural expression", that was done by many of the respondents with regard to both COVID-19 and the ongoing war in Ukraine (see Wetherell 2012, 135).

1 The Finnish calendar designates specific names to each day. It has been the tradition to celebrate these name days in different ways, previously by having a cup of coffee and some cake with family and friends, nowadays more modestly exchanging greetings.

Ethnologist Fredrik Nilsson and folklore researcher Lena Marander-Eklund (2021, 14) also analysed how new, everyday micro practices such as washing hands, using hand sanitiser and avoiding touching surfaces in public spaces served to create order in the changed everyday life. As such, creating the “new normal” could be interpreted as an affective practice.

Maintaining social relations with others and the world outside was the main coping strategy for many other respondents as well. One of the younger ones, an early teenager at the time, highlighted the role of social media in helping her to keep in touch with her friend:

My friend was travelling during the corona virus and had to be quarantined for two weeks when she came back to Finland. I was so sorry, and I couldn't meet them afterwards either because of the home schooling. Luckily we have Skype and Whatsapp. (Koronakevät 69: born 2007)

In both cases, social media served as a channel for posting memes and jokes about the difficult situation, but also for offering social support. In relation to the war in Ukraine, for example, one respondent wrote:

The humorous material on Twitter, especially different kinds of memes, gives me hope and faith that the war may eventually end. The official news, on the other hand, depresses me, frightens me, and makes me lose my faith in humankind. (Sota Ukrainassa 42: woman, born 1992)

It was evident in both sets of materials that the news was followed very intensively when the crises started. However, especially in the case of the war, as the situation worsened people started to avoid the news as a way of handling the difficult situation. Instead, they sought hope and peace in not following what was happening, as the response quoted above shows. As such, choosing not to do something can also be interpreted as an affective practice for coping in an emotionally hard situation. One of the respondents wrote that she had stopped sharing news in her social-media account because she did not want to upset people who were already distressed about the constant news flow (Sota Ukrainassa 43: woman, born 1955). On the other hand, digital humour, as mentioned in the above response, served to maintain relationships with like-minded people (see Löfgren & Tolgensbakk 2021).

Some of the respondents to the pandemic questionnaire wrote that they had quickly learned the new routines and found enjoyment in spending time in the countryside with their children and slowing their life down (Koronakevät 72: woman, born 1987). One student also described how cooking with friends

and taking long walks together enabled the tight-knit student community to survive the difficult time (see Damsholt 2020, 143–146):

Now that everyday life has started to roll despite Corona, I have started to think about the positive sides of this. People's sense of community, caring has increased. I have contacted my friends all over the world, Europe, the Nordic Countries and Finland more than ever. (Koronakevät 124: woman, born 1992)

The last sentence in her response ends with an exclamation mark: “We will pull through this!” (Koronakevät 124; see also Koronakevät 155: woman, born 2004) These were the words President Sauli Niinistö used in his messages on social media and on his home page in March 2020, encouraging people to exercise caution (e.g., presidentti.fi 16.3.2020), and as such the above quotation shows both the intertextuality of the responses and the power of authorities to affect people's moods and emotions.

We will pull through this, as well, was written on the ground with a crayon. As long as there is nothing else, all there is to believe in is tomorrow. (Koronakevät 125: woman, born 1983)

There were also people who seemed to remain calm in the face of changes they could not influence. One respondent, for example, started by describing the coming of spring, and the urban environment that seemed different in the absence of the hurrying masses. For her, these changes were not bad, but they were a sign of something special happening. She found comfort in the peacefulness of her own life, although in a somewhat melancholic way: “It is warm inside at home, and the soup is on the stove. The world may tumble down; nothing is that important.” (Koronakevät 48: woman, born 1990) There were also others who found the situation intriguing: “I like this state, this situation. I like the fact that it feels odd. That I am moving in a world that is changing so fast [--].” (Koronakevät 233: woman, born 1974.) Here, the element of curiosity is emphasised again. Being actively curious and describing oneself as a spectator of the crisis is also an affective practice, but one that could be seen as privileged.

One means of taking an active role in the two crises was prepping, in other words being prepared, which was a strategy used by both sets of respondents to make everyday life more secure. Prepping could mean many things, varying from official recommendations to the work of underground movements and subcultures. In the case of COVID-19, it also became a source of jokes and memes as people started to hoard toilet paper. Many of these respondents pondered over the kind of choices they should make. On the one hand, prep-

ping could give some security in times of uncertainty, but on the other hand it seemed to carry some kind of stigma:

Seeing other people do it, I also considered stockpiling goods, namely if I should also hoard canned food in the cupboard so that I could manage for a couple of weeks without going out. What I do not understand is that people are even hoarding toilet paper at the moment. Perhaps I'll skip the whole hoarding thing, I don't care about canned food normally anyway. And I suppose you get something somewhere if there is an emergency. (Koronakevät 11: woman, born 1975)

Similarly, with regard to the war in Ukraine, some respondents mentioned that they had checked the 72-hours home-preparedness guidance written by the authorities and NGOs (SPEK). There seemed to be some relief in doing something concrete, similar to the aid work discussed earlier:

In case there is a crisis, I have realised that I need to put in order the home-preparedness plan. I have started to think about expanding subsistence farming and where to preserve the crop, so that the long power cuts would not make it go bad. The housing cooperative has thought about a safety plan and found the address of the closest civil-protection place. Women's preparedness education is also interesting. Handwriting does not help, taking action does. (Sota Ukrainassa 43: woman, born 1955)

There were respondents in both samples who did do some prepping with food despite feeling ambivalent about it, thereby bringing some kind of foreseeability into the uncertainty (see Mellander 2021, 5–6). This affective practice of anticipating the future reflects what the respondent quoted above mentioned with reference to COVID-19: only taking action helps. There were also those who, although sharing their ideas about prepping – or hoarding, as some of them put it – wanted to distance themselves from the culture. In the case of COVID-19, prepping and hoarding seemed to be a phenomenon that was connected to the very beginning of the crisis: as the “new normal” became a natural part of everyday life, new routines became established in people's lives: “Now we live one day at a time – something we can learn from our child” (Koronakevät 72). A respondent who wrote about her feelings when the restrictions started to be relaxed exemplifies how the “new normal” had become the “normal normal”:

I thought it would feel nice but it is actually distressing. [--] The pause button that has controlled the whole of life has been hit, and one has to start taking responsibility for things [--]. (Koronakevät 251: woman, born 1991)

In the case of the war in Ukraine, everyday lives became more political and intense, and people wanted to participate in various forms of activism. Many of the respondents had joined public demonstrations in cities all over Finland, or in front of the Russian Embassy in Helsinki. One of them had given a lecture to parents in schools about how to manage their children's exposure to war news: "I felt that lecturing at parents' evenings was my own small but still important way to participate in the crisis that touched each of us" (Sota Ukrainassa 52: woman, born 1989). Another respondent helped to raise funds in the streets, equipped with a Finnish Red Cross donation box, and wrote about the sharing and interaction between people helping in different roles:

This morning is full of feeling and thanks! Because people had been asking for box collectors from the Red Cross there were a lot of eager people putting money into the boxes! In addition to the coins, paper money was also slipped in! Older people wanted to share their feelings and a lot of people were moved! [--] Some people looked deep into my eyes and thanked me for my work. (Sota Ukrainassa 47: woman, born 1966)

A third respondent wrote about a knitted graffiti event she organised: "Crocheted sunflowers, blue-and-yellow flags and other knitted and crocheted work beautified the streets for about three weeks. [--] The graffiti event was meant to remind people of the ongoing war." (Sota Ukrainassa 4: woman, born 1958) For these respondents, taking action in their everyday lives was an affective experience of meaningfulness that created conditions of hope. Agency, or "goal-directed determination", is one of two elements connected with hope, the other being pathways, namely the "planning of ways to meet the goals" (Snyder et al. 1991, as cited by Geragthy et al. 2010). Doing something to help is a hope-filled act aimed at influencing the present and the future. This also highlights the embodied aspect of affective practices, the need to be involved in actions not only mentally but also as concretely as possible. Emotions have the force to make people act (Ahmed 2004).

Conclusions: Hope in hopelessness

Hope is always related to the situation in which it occurs (Jansen 2021). The responses that we analysed for this article were written at the beginning of the pandemic and of the war in Ukraine. Thus, they strongly reflect the first shock of the events, and the emotional tone of the texts could be described as without hope rather than hopeful. However, we have shown in this article that by looking beyond the articulations of hope it is possible to identify practices that reflect optimism or facilitate hope. Hope is not an isolated emotion: it is intertwined in the spectrum of affective responses and emotional

articulations caused by crisis situations. The respondents recognised how they assumed agency to enable themselves and others to cope with the situation. They did not always clearly recognise or specify processes such as planning, taking action and defining goals, but their descriptions clearly reflect the need to achieve positive change for the future (Bryant & Knight 2019, 134).

Gestures of solidarity and sharing emotions were considered important in affective practices of aid-giving and community-building. We argue that within these practices a condition of hope – for a better future and for better humankind – was created. The emotional responses to the crises also shaped everyday practices in new ways. A future orientation became prevalent in the changed situation, hence hopefulness was also present in the descriptions of insecurity and emotions aroused by missing out on life as it used to be or as it was expected to be. Hope was not always positively oriented, but was sometimes rather an ambivalent sentiment of survival through the first months of the crisis. In both cases one navigation strategy in the affectively difficult situation was not to do something, such as not to read the news, or not to share posts in social media that might upset people’s already stressful everyday being. Keeping everyday life as normal as possible, prepping, sending and receiving memes and other humorous materials via social media, taking grass-roots actions and activism were embedded in everyday life. As such, they gave people a sense of agency and of having some control over the events happening around them. We interpret these actions as ways of keeping up hopefulness and creating hope in hopeless situations.

The emotional first reactions to the crises – the flow of affect (see e.g., Wetherell 2012, 28–31) – made people take action that offered them some relief in a hopeless situation. Such action-orientation is also typical in situations where people experience “sharp bursts of affect” (Wetherell 2012, 29). In our case, these practices were fuelled by affective – embodied and mental – responses to the war and the pandemic. For instance, people reported bodily reactions such as a pounding heart or tearfulness, as well as a sense of anxiety, uncertainty, feeling sad for others and fear, which provoked various reactions. Indeed, we agree that affects and emotions drive people to do things, as Sarah Ahmed argues (2004). In our material, affective responses to the crises made people act to secure a better future. What they did varied, however. They may have self-isolated, which could be interpreted as non-action or passive inertia, but in fact, is emphasised in the responses as assuming agency in safeguarding not only oneself but also others. There may also have been active and activist deeds such as helping refugees and taking a stance on the streets. We argue that these affective practices are a way of producing possibilities for hope and hopefulness for a better future, among both those taking the action and those

in the sphere of influence of these practices. People were negotiating a better future by assuming agency over the uncertain situation.

We have shown that affective practices have an important role to play in creating conditions that foster hope for a better future. These practices were closely aligned to the onset of events that were quite surprising and had a strong impact on people in terms of making them take some kind of action. When crises such as wars are protracted people start to lose interest in following the events. They might feel too overwhelmed and become numbed to events, or feel that they cannot influence them for the better. Russia's war in Ukraine is still going on, but grand gestures of solidarity have started to fade. However, we have shown that affective practices of hope may also involve small everyday actions aimed at taking care of loved ones and exerting agency in a hopeless situation. Only time will tell how the patterning of affective practices will change and become entangled with the possibility of hope in the long term.

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