ANXIOUS HOPE:
A Critical Analysis of
a Pandemic Picturebook

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AS THE WORLD GRAPPLES with the spread of COVID-19, the sense among educators is that a crisis of global proportions demands a response. To support the perceived need of parents, families, and children to understand and process what is happening, dozens of picturebooks about the pandemic have been published since the spring of 2020 (Falcus & Caldwell, in press). These books originated from a large variety of sources; everyone from public health organizations to school networks, to individuals, to major international philanthropies and development organizations seemed to be publishing pandemic books (Falcus & Caldwell, in press). Most of these texts were designed as a pedagogical resource for teachers and students to understand the crisis and how they might respond. This article critically examines one such book, *Hope, Where Are You?* (Doucet & Guerra, 2020), its accompanying pedagogical materials, and its promotional social media campaign, and reveals that they are far from being a straightforward resource for teachers and students. This analysis of the "Hope Movement" argues educators must carefully evaluate pedagogical materials arriving at their doorstep during times of crisis and what agendas may have propelled them there.

How Hope Found Us

Both authors encountered *Hope, Where Are You?* (Doucet & Guerra, 2020) in ways that demonstrate the broad reach of this text and explain why we initially became interested in examining it. The second author, living and working in Nairobi,

Kenya, encountered the text during a meeting with a network of schools in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East. While discussing how this network of schools might author its own children's book about the pandemic, one attendee asked, "Did you see what LEGO did?" and quickly produced her phone to show the group trending social media hashtags—#HopeWhereAreYou—on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. The first author, living and working in New York, USA, encountered the text as an official recommendation from the New York City School Library System.[1] *Hope, Where Are You?*, published in May of 2020, was one of the earliest additions to their collection of free electronic texts meant to help teachers, parents, and students respond to the pandemic. Described as the story of six children around the world who are experiencing school closures because of the pandemic, the picturebook *Hope, Where Are You?* has been downloaded over 1.5 million times and translated into 45 languages. Each story illustrates and narrates "patterns of frustrations and challenge, finding their [the children's] hope and spreading their hope to others" (Hope Where Are You, n.d.) The book, however, is only the beginning of the work this text promotes. Readers are encouraged to spread hope on social media using the #HopeWhereAreYou hashtag and to donate money to

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[1] The library's website includes a list of free ebooks in many different languages about the coronavirus and COVID-19 (https://nycdoe.libguides.com /COVID-19ebooks/free).

UNICEF via the Hope Where Are You website. The website also features ways for people to "Join the Hope Movement" on social media, offers instructional resources students can complete at home, and provides access to the growing number of translations of the text. Our interest in this text, then, stems not only from our professional experience in teaching children's literature but also from our desire to explore the network producing the text as a curriculum resource proffering a hopeful cure at a time of global crisis.

Process

Reading children's literature critically involves paying careful attention to the text, the contexts producing it, and the pedagogical context in which it is read. Short (2016) wrote that "critical content analysis involves bringing a critical lens to an analysis of a text…in an effort to explore the possibly underlying messages…particularly as related to issues of power" (pp. 6–7). In this critique, we use a blend of approaches in critical literature and critical content analyses. Critical peritextual analysis asks readers to consider the unwritten words within interstices of the text. For this to be considered a critical reading, the analysis highlights power relationships, which we allude to when considering broader questions, such as "Whose story is this? Who benefits from this story? Whose voices are not being heard?" (Reese, 2018, as cited in Sivashankar et al., 2020, p. 484). We pair critical peritextual analysis with Short's (2016) critical content analysis three-part framework. *Focalization* asks whose story is told and from whose perspective. *Social process of the characters* identifies who has power and agency. Finally, *closure* questions how a story is resolved and what assumptions exist in the story. After the critical rereading, we turn to consider how such a text is part of a larger global project, and a vector whereby racist colonizing perspectives enter pedagogical materials in a time of crisis. We consider how educators might use educated hope (Giroux, 2019) to critically evaluate the resources they encounter. Rather than recommending teachers not read this book, we present our critical rereading in order to construct a counternarrative that might guide teachers in how to conduct their own interrogation and inquire into the text's problems with students. Our hope is that communities of educators and students might use problematic texts to better understand how essentializing and oppressive discourses find their way into our classrooms and to offer a way to resist those discourses.

A Summary of *Hope, Where Are You?*

"Schools closed" announces a banner on the opening page of *Hope, Where Are You?* (Doucet & Guerra, 2020). A diverse array of children stand holding the banner in front of Egyptian pyramids, Big Ben, the Taj Mahal, and other global landmarks. Many visual differences mark the varieties of children in this tableau, including skin tones, ethnic clothing, wheelchairs, and hairstyles. The children are not all smiling. Most appear pensive, with mouths drawn in flat horizontal angles and eyebrows raised to indicate worry. The message is that schools are closed everywhere and these students are facing uncertainty. Accompanying each child's narrative are brief instructional resources, created by the authors, that are distributed for free online alongside the book.

Mulu, from Africa, is the first story of hope. Mulu lives in a rural village without paved roads, running water, or modern homes. She lives with her family in a hut made from sticks and grass. Because school is closed, Mulu spends her time helping her mother with household chores while her sisters play, and readers learn that for Mulu, "staying busy keeps my mind off my hunger" (p. 7). The main challenge Mulu faces, besides starvation, is that her father will not send her back to school. Instead of going to school, where Mulu dreams of becoming a teacher, she worries that she will become a child bride because her "older sister was married at twelve. I'm just 11" (p. 7). Her challenge resolves when a teacher and two unknown officials arrive at Mulu's home to discuss her education. Mulu, her mother, and her sisters remain outside while the men speak with Mulu's father. She is invited to teach a math lesson to the family, and Mulu's father announces that she will return to school. Mulu finds hope that she will become a teacher. Accompanying Mulu's story is a short math lesson where students are encouraged to use sticks, leaves, and

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stones, like Mulu does, to create a mandala, thus learning geometric concepts.

Nikau, from Oceana, has moved to the country with his family, but he feels lonely without his friends. Although readers do not see Nikau's home, we do see a grassy rural landscape and a spare wooden fence with a single wire running across it. Nikau wears an all-black sports outfit and carries a rugby ball. In response to his loneliness, Nikau's brother suggests using empty moving boxes to make a replica of his old home in the city. He uses old rusty cans to represent germs: "I start throwing my rugby ball to knock them down. I feel empowered. I imagine myself defeating the germs to free my friends in our old neighborhood" (p. 12). He uses his phone to show his new game to friends back in the old neighborhood and does not feel as lonely as before. Nikau's educational activity asks readers to build their own obstacle course and challenge friends online to do the same.

Kate, from North America, is a restless child. She is depicted in her home running around and upsetting her mother, a teacher, and her older brothers, who are learning remotely. Laptops are tumbling and cups spilling as Kate runs through her living room. Staying at home is difficult for Kate: "It feels like my skin is crawling, and I'm antsy" (p. 15). Kate's challenge, then, is to learn to be still at home and feel less restless, but when asked to stand still, Kate's "legs start twitching" (p. 16). A virtual conversation with her teacher reminds Kate that she benefits from yoga. Kate leads her family in yoga exercises and finally feels like herself again. Kate's educational materials encourage readers to do a series of yoga poses and try breathing exercises to help them relax.

Bo, from Asia, refused to bid his parents goodbye out of sadness. Because they are both doctors, they could not come home from work for some time. Bo is, instead, under the care of an aunt who "only loves to watch television" (p. 19). Bo's challenge is his own feeling of shame for not saying goodbye to his parents. To overcome his feeling of shame, Bo uses his computer and 3D printer to create new face masks for his parents and their colleagues. Bo regains his parents' approval and feels better: "Mom and Dad are beaming. I am very busy, feeling more like myself" (p. 21). Bo's instructional resource encourages readers to brainstorm a problem and try to build a product to solve it. They should share their problem and product solutions with friends on social media using the hashtag #MyGreatHopeIdea.

Gaby, from Latin America, is having a difficult time being

home with her family all day. Her infant younger brothers are distracting and her papi is not able to work because his business is closed: "He gets angry and yells at mama.… I tell [Grandpa] that my parents are stressed and fighting a lot" (p. 23). Gaby misses baking with her father and sharing their cookies with classmates at school. Following her grandpa's suggestion, Gaby writes a story about baking with her father. She shares it with her family, and they all bake a batch of cookies together, singing and feeling like a happy family again. Gaby's instructional activity asks readers to write about what they miss most from life as it used to be, then use household items to create trophies about what they miss doing and have friends guess the activity.

Alessandro, from Europe, loses his grandmother. He is depicted as being at home with his family while his mother is on the phone, presumably with a hospital. The sadness Alessandro feels makes it difficult for him to speak: "I stay quiet, not sure what to say" (p. 28). Alessandro is encouraged to use his violin to express his emotions, and he plays out on his family's city balcony. Others join in from their balconies by singing, clapping, or playing instruments of their own. Playing his violin allows Alessandro to grieve and he feels like himself again. Alessandro's educational materials encourage readers to build their own instruments out of household items.

In addition to the primary narratives, each of the six stories features a pair of small symbolic creatures. A small red creature with spikes resembles the now-ubiquitous image of the coronavirus. With arms, legs, and a face, this COVID critter, "Germ," competes with a small yellow sun, "Hope," on the pages of each child's narrative. The sun, representing hope, always wins by the final page of each narrative, either by trapping the COVID critter or by implying the COVID critter's defeat through its absence from the final page. These additional skits represent the triumph of hope over the virus and overcoming the impact of the pandemic.

The book closes with another tableau of the same group of diverse children and some of the adults from the narratives playing in a field. Many are holding small yellow suns to indicate that they found their respective hopes. Others are holding hands, dancing, and smiling. Behind them, the planet Earth floats in a field of blue, indicating that children throughout the world have found their hope.

The Ideologies of *Hope, Where Are You?*

Bradford (2010) noted a premise central to our critique here: It is not evident that the end of colonialism frees children's texts

of the "ideological freight of those earlier times" (p. 39). The second author of this article concurs with Bradford; as a citizen of a postcolonial society and living in a culture scarred by racialized inequality, I have witnessed, and can reveal occasional complicity in, the persistence of some habits of thought and devaluing associated with colonial ideologies, even though they are currently being superseded by political and social change. Children's literature texts, especially those that base the dignity of human beings on racial and other social markers, have often claimed that their crafts "are merely works of their time, as though the authors of these texts were no more than conduits of prevailing cultural norms" (Bradford, 2010, p. 39). *Hope, Where Are You?* (Doucet & Guerra, 2020) is yet another example of the paucity of creative work offering counternarratives to stereotypical views on lives, peoples, schooling, and children, both visually and in text. The production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements regarding quotidian life on the planet do little to move away from the status quo or colonialist "regimes of truth" (Foucault, 1980; Nodelman, 1992). The implications posed to education suggest that education works to respond to the reification of dominant narratives and Western subjectivities.[2] The presence of stereotypes in children's literature is antithetical to the cultivation of educated hope, repeats harmful representations of global youth, reveals discourses of supremacy, and speaks to "inter-minoritarian politics" (Leonardo, 2004, p. 145), as we show in our analysis of *Hope, Where Are You?* (Doucet & Guerra, 2020).

Hope From Essentialized Stereotypes

The narratives in *Hope, Where Are You?* (Doucet & Guerra, 2020) communicate an essentializing or reductive form of representation. Mulu, the most obvious outlier in this group of characters, is a well-worn colonial trope. She is a poor, Black, African girl-child and lives without access to water, food, or modern dwellings. Mulu is, like her mother and sisters, subject to her father's patriarchal power. He has previously arranged an older sister's marriage at the age of 12, and as an 11-year-old herself, Mulu fears being married off as a child bride instead of

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[2] We admit our challenge to categorize the outcomes and fields of education to which this text and its objectives correspond. For their global reach, we considered either multicultural education or global citizenship education, although proponents of both fields would question their affiliation to these bodies of pedagogy and curricula; this issue further confirms our concerns that *Hope, Where Are You?* (Doucet & Guerra, 2020) and its extended Hope Movement are hard to interpret within genres of scholarly work.

continuing her studies. Mulu's deliverance from her dire circumstances comes from the external influence of a teacher and some unnamed male officials who negotiate with her father for her to be able to go to school. Her ability to find hope is not her own but is, instead, delivered to her by outside agents.

Other narratives also traffic in stereotyping. Nikau wears a rugby outfit reminiscent of the All Blacks, New Zealand's national rugby team that is well known for performing a Maori haka, a warrior's challenge, before each match. Thus, Nikau's appearance, his love of rugby, and his combatting of the "germs" by throwing his rugby ball at rusty cans invoke the image of a Maori warrior. Kate's behavior seems to suggest a hyperactivity disorder or, perhaps, an autism spectrum disorder. She cannot sit still, cannot stop bothering her family members, and relies on yoga to calm herself. Again, this is an essentializing stereotype: that American children are hyperactive and need some kind of self-control intervention. (For an analysis of contemporary depictions of yoga in the United States, its commodification, its female objectification, and its cultural appropriation, see Bhalla & Moscowitz [2020].)

Bo, an Asian, lives in a culture of shame where he must live up to his own notions of parental acceptance. Notably, Bo's parents are so devoted to their careers that they appear to live at the hospital indefinitely. Bo loves science and technology and feels happiest when producing products. Taken together, Bo's narrative is a blend of tired racial slanders: Asian parents choose work over family, Asian children feel ashamed if they do not live up to parental expectations, and Asians try to excel in the sciences and related industries, thus winning parental pride and approval.

Gaby initially seems to escape being reduced to a stereotype of Latin America, but her narrative is still troubling. Rather than essentializing an entire continent of people, Gaby's story places responsibility for a family's happiness on children. Her parents face real challenges because some unnamed event has caused businesses, including her father's, to close. This creates financial stress, while her two infant brothers cause relational stress. Her father, Papi, responds by yelling at her mother—at the very least, this may be an emotionally abusive situation. Gaby saves the day by writing a story and shows readers that children bear the responsibility of fixing relational strife and undoing the emotional damage of verbally abusive marriages.

Only Alessandro's story borders on the innocuous. Clearly inspired by real events in Italy during the early pandemic, Alessandro's playing of the violin on his balcony is

meant to show how to grieve a lost family member. Yet, readers learn nothing of Alessandro's grandmother, why she was sick, or why the family cannot be with her in her final moments. Again, the pandemic, the COVID-19 virus, and the public health responses are absent from the narrative. When he expresses his desire for his dead grandmother to hear his music, Alessandro's hope story is the only one to mention the idea of an afterlife or invoke any kind of spirituality or internal belief system at all. Alessandro's narrative is also the only one to confront the illness and death of a family member—though the causes are unidentified.

Further critical readings could unpack other stereotypical patterns in *Hope, Where Are You?* For example, the boys are active, productive, and expressive. The girls are passive, needing rescue, calmness, or to provide emotional stability for the home. The role of children in each scenario also seems to suggest that each child—except for Mulu—is responsible for his or her own happiness and hope. Critical readers might question which of these children have agency, how far that agency extends, and the entanglements of their self-actualization facilitated by anxious family members. Additionally, there seems to be uneven consideration of parents' and family members' responsibilities toward their children, especially with regard to surviving a deadly pandemic.

Pandemic ''Hope'' With No Pandemic

In their study of 73 pandemic-focused picturebooks, Falcus and Caldwell (in press) found that most books present scientific knowledge about the coronavirus and incorporate prior knowledge of germs to produce an explanation for the global disruption. These narratives both feature adults' fears and teach behavioral measures children might take to fight the virus—sometimes featuring children as heroic in their fight against COVID-19 (Falcus & Caldwell, in press). Throughout *Hope, Where Are You?* (Doucet & Guerra, 2020), the closure of schools serves as an impetus for each child to face a challenge and navigate hope, yet the pandemic is never named as a cause of their troubles and the disruptions to the children's lives remain nebulous. We wonder, for example, why are Bo's parents at the hospital and unable to come home? How does Alessandro's grandmother die? What causes Gaby's father's business to close? While readers will likely assume the pandemic as a proximate cause, without naming and discussing the pandemic these stories seem to live outside of the crisis itself, in an adjacent world where the biggest problem facing children is feeling hope.

Absent, too, are mentions of practical actions children and their families could take to mitigate the risks of catching COVID-19. There is no mention of wearing masks. Social distancing exists in the sense that schools are closed, but there is no portrayal of social distancing otherwise. The concluding tableau depicts characters from the six narratives among others holding hands, playing, and standing close together. Responses to the public health imperatives of the pandemic are put aside in favor of this narrative of hope.

Mulu's narrative, in particular, has very little to do with the pandemic. Her challenge is, instead, an unmodern patriarchy keeping her rooted in a culture of child marriage and material poverty and without further access to education. Her older sister being married off as a child bride happened before the pandemic, so the pandemic cannot be the cause. Instead, it seems that *Hope, Where Are You?* is portraying Mulu's father as generally skeptical of education as a valuable undertaking for his daughters, regardless of the access to schooling due to pandemic-induced closures.

What takes precedence in lieu of discussing the pandemic are small pantomime skits on each page where an anthropomorphized red COVID-looking critter, Germ, and an anthropomorphized yellow sun, Hope, do battle. Usually, the COVID critter has the upper hand and has trapped or evaded the sun, only for the tables to be turned by the end of each of the narratives. The little sun is always victorious over the COVID critter, and thus hope wins in each narrative.

Is This Hope?

We consider this picture ebook to be a bit of a puzzle: How could a series of problematic narratives that only tangentially approach the crisis become a far-reaching example of pandemic-focused children's literature? We see the emergence of *Hope, Where Are You?* (Doucet & Guerra, 2020) and the Hope Movement at a time of international crisis as a component of a larger ongoing discourse around international education, neoliberalism, and development. We argue that the book, its associated instructional materials, and the social media–driven movement are examples of all three. The problem of the pandemic as portrayed in the book is not that thousands of people around the world are affected directly or indirectly by the virus, that thousands die each day, or that massive public health interventions require masking, closing schools, and social distancing, but rather that children will lose hope. The urge to do something,

born of anxieties to remain productive and competitive in a global economy, is conscripted into the struggle of finding one's own hope and sharing stories of hope so others may find theirs. We contrast this notion of hope as a "do some-thing" anxious symbol of development logic with a more critical notion of hope, what Henry Giroux (2015) called "educated hope." Using educated hope and drawing on tra-ditions of critical pedagogy, we argue that anyone looking for pedagogical resources during a time of crisis should eval-uate them critically. Providing hope in *Hope, Where Are You?* (Doucet & Guerra, 2020) becomes a silver-bullet solution. Rather than promoting harmful notions of hope embedded in a culturally reductive, essentializing, and colonialist text, educated hope rests in promoting democratic, liberatory, collectively agentive responses to crises.

"Did You See What LEGO Did?": Hope as Doing Something

Writing in the early days of the pandemic, Zadie Smith attempt-ed to capture the affective aspects of living during the initial months of the crisis. In "Something to Do" (Smith, 2020), she considered the urge she felt to fill the time spent during lock-down with doing something: "We make banana bread, we sew dresses, we go for a run, we complete all the levels of Minecraft, we do something, then photograph that *something* and not infre-quently put it online" (p. 19). Yet, Smith identified a tension in doing something during the pandemic, namely that we also feel guilt-ridden and uncomfortable while doing it. It is, she said, a source of anxiety because "even as we do something, we simulta-neously accuse ourselves: *you use the extremity as only another oc-casion for self-improvement, another pointless act of self-realization*" (Smith, 2020, p. 19). For Smith, this anxiety is rooted in the feeling that she needs to produce "powerful art" instead of bak-ing banana bread, while knowing that both acts of production are only good and worthwhile if done with caring intent.

We believe Smith artfully identifies the dilemma of neo-liberal personhood that underlies many anxieties in today's globalized, networked world. In *Neoliberalism*, Julie Wilson (2018) argued that today's neoliberal world of individuals in competition for scarce resources creates a particular kind of anxiety. "Neoliberalism asks us," she wrote, "to be self-enclosed individuals in charge of our own fates," but "individuals alone cannot control their fates in a global, complex, capitalist soci-ety" (p. 4). The insistence on the individual as the unit of agen-cy implies that only proper actions by a self-enclosed individual

as the "enterprising" "CEO of oneself" (Wilson, 2018, p. 4) are considered within this worldview. Hence, Zadie Smith's dilemma that she too feels compelled to do something while also feeling anxious doing it. What Smith surfaces for us is the moral anxiety we as authors/scholars/creatives inhabit by our very nature, the place between compulsion and consecration, a place both physical and affective, which we find ourselves in when writing this critique. Smith, like Wilson, recognizes that the individual's neoliberal self-improvement project in the face of a global pandemic is "pointless" (Smith, 2020, p. 19), but she continues to do something anyway.

Hope, Where Are You? (Doucet & Guerra, 2020) is both an example of this pressure to do something in the face of a crisis and the networked reproduction of the neoliberal person as a self-enclosed individual. The only actions available to the children in these six stories are those of self-improvement and self-realization. Each child's situation is anxiety-inducing, and for readers, finding hope becomes an anxious pressure for read-ers themselves to do something by joining the Hope Movement and sharing their own stories of hope on social media. Hope as a concept in these pages becomes the process of self-improve-ment that is only value-added if shared with others.

The Hope Movement as a Proxy for Development Logic

We first became interested in examining *Hope, Where Are You?* (Doucet & Guerra, 2020) and the Hope Movement because of this element of sharing hope across networked social me-dia. Both the website and the book are replete with requests to share the book, to share personal stories of finding hope, or to contact the authors via social media—especially on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. The Hope Movement social media campaign stands in as a proxy for the logic of devel-opment work and global education under neoliberalism more generally. We draw on the work of Friedrich et al. (2015), who analyzed the way in which Teach For All's extended network shares data on social media to create universalizing statements of problems and solutions. Importantly, and as a connection to both the development logic of the Hope Movement as well as the anxious neoliberal urge to *do something*, the sharing and use of data did not always align with the messages being sent. For example, the authors described

> the wide circulation among the Teach For All net-work via Twitter of international comparative re-

ports (produced or compiled by NGOs such as UNICEF) indicating the countries with the worst absentee problems, lowest performance, etc., without there being any correlation between these countries and the location of the Teach For All programs. (Friedrich et al., 2015, p. 9)

Whether or not the data are directly addressing something relevant is not itself relevant because the data imply that some action can be taken (Friedrich et al., 2015). It is a stand-in for the overall ideas of international development. Put another way, what really matters is that interested individuals do something because doing something reinforces and validates the salience of their program.

In the same way, the eventual success of the Hope Movement, the proliferation of *Hope, Where Are You?* (Doucet & Guerra, 2020), and the mitigation of the pandemic are secondary to the affective work implied in sharing and promoting a specific kind of hope, an anxious hope. The text and the movement work as a proxy for the perspectives of the international aid organizations. Implicitly via sharing and explicitly in the text and associated instructional resources, the feeling that some places and people need development, international aid, and formal education comes to the foreground, while the response to the pandemic and gaining the upper hand in the face of a global disease shifts to the background.

Hope as a Silver Bullet

Today's globalized world features international organizations, quasi-governmental entities, philanthropies, and corporations all responding in times of crisis, including responses meant for educational industries. A defining feature of the global education space is that the "distinction between businesses, social enterprises, not-for-profits, and philanthropies is blurred" (Ball, 2012, p. 82). The spaces where education initiatives are conceptualized are often separate from the places where those initiatives take place, yet these differences are often glossed in favor of silver-bullet solutions that are technical, generic, and scalable (Ball, 2012, p. 71). As the pandemic emerged and disrupted education worldwide, a network of individuals from the LEGO Foundation, the UNESCO International Commission for the Futures of Education, and Education Scotland came together to "change the narrative and give children and families hope" (Hope Where Are You, n.d.). Their three stated goals are (a) "to create a resource to support children and families impacted by the pandemic and associated school clo-

sures," (b) "to fundraise 1 million US dollars for the UNICEF COVID-19 Response," and (c) "to create a hope movement" meant to "showcase hope through social and global solidarity" (Hope Where Are You, n.d.). In the blurred production of *Hope, Where Are You?* (Doucet & Guerra, 2020), the very idea of hope becomes a quick fix. Hope is technical in two ways: It posits a solution to a problem, and desired messaging around hope is distributed electronically as a resource. Hope is generic in that anyone can have hope, regardless of their circumstances, but those with material means can choose to donate money to create more hope. Hope is scalable in that it can be shared along the same networks used to distribute the messaging and facilitate fundraising.

Critically Interpreting *Hope, Where Are You?*

A critical rereading of *Hope, Where Are You?* (Doucet & Guerra, 2020) reveals a text that reproduces harmful ethnic stereotypes and superficial forms of youth socialization while remaining disconnected from the pandemic. As mentioned above, each of the six characters in this text embodies problematic representations; however, Mulu's story is the key example of development logic written into the text. Mulu, "from Africa," lives in a rural village without paved roads, running water, or modern homes. The main challenge Mulu faces, besides starvation, is not the pandemic but that her father will not send her back to school. Instead she worries that she will become a child bride (Doucet & Guerra, 2020, p. 7). Mulu's narrative in this text is a stand-in for an entire continent of people, embodying the danger of a "single story" (Adichie, 2009) told from a Western perspective.

The danger in this single story suggests that even a global pandemic cannot interrupt the perspective that African people, especially girls, need the intervention of paternalistic development organizations. Mulu's crisis is the unmodern patriarchal power and material poverty that she faces and must receive outside assistance to overcome. Importantly, the official UNICEF recommendations surrounding child marriage are present in the text, including "exploring the role of men and boys in preventing child marriage" and teaching them "strategies to negotiate family pressures to marry underage girls" (United Nations Population Fund and UNICEF, 2017). Khoja-Moolji (2017) discussed the "reduction of individuals and social projects to economic logics" (p. 542), that is, the process by which such discourses transform girls into economic actors and reduce education to produce flexible labor for a market-driven economy. The logic that girls' education leads to economic growth has

been variously described as "the girl effect" or "the girl dividend" in development studies (Summers, 1992). As readers and lovers of children's literature, we agree with Khoja-Moolji (2017) and are fatigued by the pervasive tropes, "problem"-solving, and erasures we encounter in contemporary transnational discourses within children's literature. And, like Bradford (2010), we observe that this contemporary text does not resist tendencies to resort to racialized hierarchies.

Finally, the book portrays children as self-contained individuals responsible in isolation for their own emotional well-being or in need of rescuing, like Mulu, so they may become self-realized individuals who control their own destiny (Mbembe, 2003). Because no one person can end the pandemic, that problem is largely ignored in the text, and the happy resolution to the pandemic is found only through self-discovery. The narrative's closure is simply assumed, while collective practices to promote health and survival are dangerously omitted. In the face of a global pandemic, the pressure to do something becomes co-opted by globalized education entities to produce a text. Within those pages, hope becomes a personal achievement and gives us all something to do, and sharing how we found hope carries with it the messages of neoliberal productive anxieties. These perspectives' presence in the story makes sense in light of the network of actors who influenced the creation of this text. Sharing stories of hope on social media and joining the Hope Movement are symbolic proxies for the work done by development organizations (Friedrich et al., 2015) and the assumption that Black and brown children from the Global South are victims and need to be saved from their circumstances by global development networks.

The second author has years of experience working in many countries in the Global South, and she finds portrayals like Mulu's—stories of Africa and African children, especially girls—to be pernicious. Such stereotypes supersede other ways in which Africa, Africans, and African girls are known to be and can be fierce and hopeful. Contrasting images of lifeworlds from across all corners of the globe belong in children's literature. As educators, we are committed to resisting the dominant narratives circulating in children's literature by crafting counternarratives such as this critical rereading of *Hope, Where Are You?* (Doucet & Guerra, 2020). We intend for this critical reading to be useful for educators by revealing "procedures for critical content analyses that focus on locating power in social practices by understanding, uncovering, and transforming conditions of inequality" (Beach et al., 2009, p. 129).

Implications

Returning to Short's (2016) critical reading framework, it becomes clear that *Hope, Where Are You?* (Doucet & Guerra, 2020) is a very different story than it first appears to be. Focally, it is not truly the story of children responding to school closures or the pandemic. Children's perspectives within the narratives are not really children's perspectives at all but are instead repetitions of harmful stereotypical tropes and problematic roles and responsibilities. The point of view is an adult one. The social processes of the characters, their power, and their agency are wrapped up in this adult, ideological perspective. Children are meant to be CEOs of themselves, responsible in isolation for their own emotional well-being, or alternatively, they are in need of rescuing so that they can become self-actualized individuals as seen through the eyes of adult narrators.

In times of local, national, or global emergencies, the need to quickly locate valuable instructional resources means organizations and networks with capacity and scale will be the first movers and can quickly supply materials to meet needs. We therefore urge caution to anyone seeking children's literature during times of crisis. The reach of *Hope, Where Are You?* (Doucet & Guerra, 2020) across time zones, continents, and contexts is a testament to the power and efficiency that global education and development networks have at their disposal, but it is a power they have deployed, in this case, irresponsibly. A text that seems innocuous and comes from some sort of officialdom—LEGO, the United Nations—comes laden with meanings that should not go unquestioned by educators or drop into the hands of children unacknowledged.

Educated Hope as an Alternative Praxis of Hope

As an alternative to the idea of hope as an anxious individual undertaking and as a heuristic for evaluating educational materials that emerge during a crisis, we turn to the work of Henry Giroux and his notion of educated hope. Giroux (1997) regarded educated hope as an act of imagination, based on certain norms that are initiated by educators or produced collaboratively in educational practices. According to Giroux, when problems are posed, educators function as transformative agents by initiating dialogue using language of critique and possibility, thus encouraging and co-creating hope. Critical pedagogy is a form of educated hope committed to producing young people who are able and willing to expand and deepen their sense of themselves, to think of the world critically, to

imagine something beyond their own self-interest and well-being, to serve the public good, to take risks, and to struggle for a substantive democracy (Giroux, 2015).

When we encounter a new text, curriculum, or other resource, as educators we should ask ourselves what kind of work is being done. Will our students learn not just about themselves but about something beyond their own self-interests? Can reading, watching, or participating in these learning experiences encourage children to take risks for the public good with an understanding that others, whoever and wherever they are, also possess dignity and are worthy of respect? Does the text accurately name and address the crisis or, like *Hope, Where Are You?* (Doucet & Guerra, 2020), does it dodge pressing realities in favor of a happier narrative? Asking these questions among others in the frame of criticality, collective construction of knowledge, and challenging oppressive power is a path toward educated hope and away from anxious "do something" hope.

Following Giroux (2019), educating for democracy is a way of thinking about education, connecting "equity to excellence, learning to ethics, and agency to the imperatives of the public good" (p. 151). Pedagogy must therefore be "rigorous, self-reflective and committed to the practice of freedom, to advancing the parameters of knowledge, addressing crucial social issues, and connecting private troubles and public issues" (Giroux, 2019, p. 149). Nonetheless, even a flawed text offers a productive resource for educators and students. Thinking through pedagogies of critical literacy, supporting learners in becoming "consciously aware of the systems of meaning" (Beach et al., 2009, p. 142) that operate in texts, helps us to identify and disrupt the harmful aspects of such texts, speak back to power, and promote democratic representations of cultures and communities.

Conclusion

Echoing Short (2016), we might also ask, Whose perspective is represented? Who has power and agency? How does the story end with regard to those relationships and representations? Woodson (2003) explained what this could look like: "My hope is that those who write about the tears and the laughter and the language in my grandmother's house have first sat down at the table with us and dipped the bread of their own experiences into our stew" (p. 45). Thus, a narrative's ability to represent a particular group or place must be cross-referenced with the political meanings of the text and whether the narrative prizes meaningful relationships with the cultures of depicted characters.

An admirable example of educated hope from crisis literature comes from Puerto Rico. Torres and Medina (2021) highlighted *cuentos combativos*, stories of resistance during the last four years of disasters. They named four recent children's books as the latest in a history of "resistance against the trajectories of colonial oppression" and as using "people's multiliteracy resources as tools for resistance" (p. 243). The stories speak to the consequences of and responses to Hurricane María and are recast as decolonial projects "disrupting dominant portrayals of Puerto Ricans as docile, passive, lazy, and solely dependent on the United States' aid" (Torres & Medina, 2021, p. 260). *Cuentos combativos* are stories of educated hope. They provide us with a model of children's literature as resistance to dominant narratives and in their resistance invite a hope for the future that rests on youth being critically engaged. Educated hope is not "a romanticized and empty" version of hope; rather, it is a form of hope enabled by critique that "taps into our deepest experiences and longing for a life of dignity with others, a life in which it becomes possible to imagine a future that does not mimic the present" (Giroux, 2019, p. 151). Educated hope cannot be a silver bullet: It is not technical but embodied, not generic but specific, not scalable but organic. When educators present texts and materials to children, especially in response to a crisis, we encourage them to do so in the spirit of educated hope. For young students to truly find hope in the face of a crisis, like the current global pandemic, they need texts and materials willing to support them in imagining other possible futures. We wish that more literary works, especially those created with children as their readers, would embrace educated hope as an act of imagination beyond present realities. •

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