



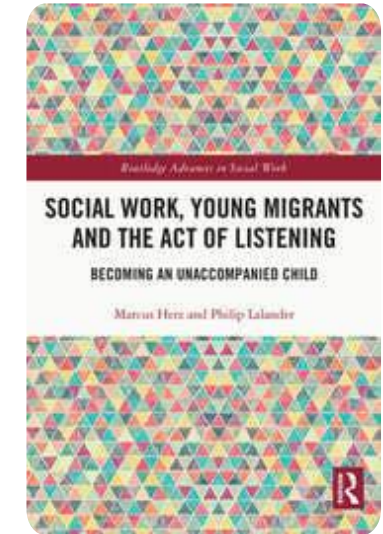
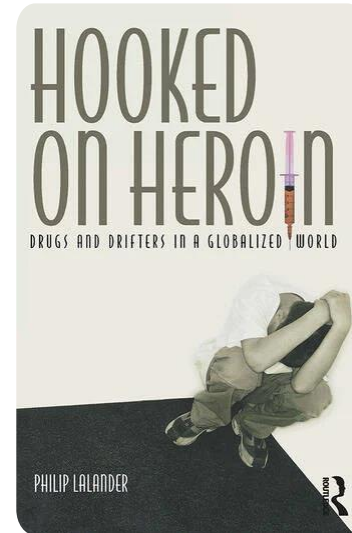
Finding a social work that works (and provides hope): Beyond repression and nationalism


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About my background which I will draw on

- Longitudinal and relational ethnography about people with heroin experience, between 2000 and 2016
- Studies of migration and social work, including Hope in the asylum process. The last years about young people who escaped Sweden searching for asylum in other European nations. When they had their final decision from the Swedish state, municipal social work took away its support to the individuals.
- How can we create a social work that works for people who are oppressed (due to inequalities on a structural and political level), stigmatized (and categorized) and live precarious lives?
- My studies give some clues



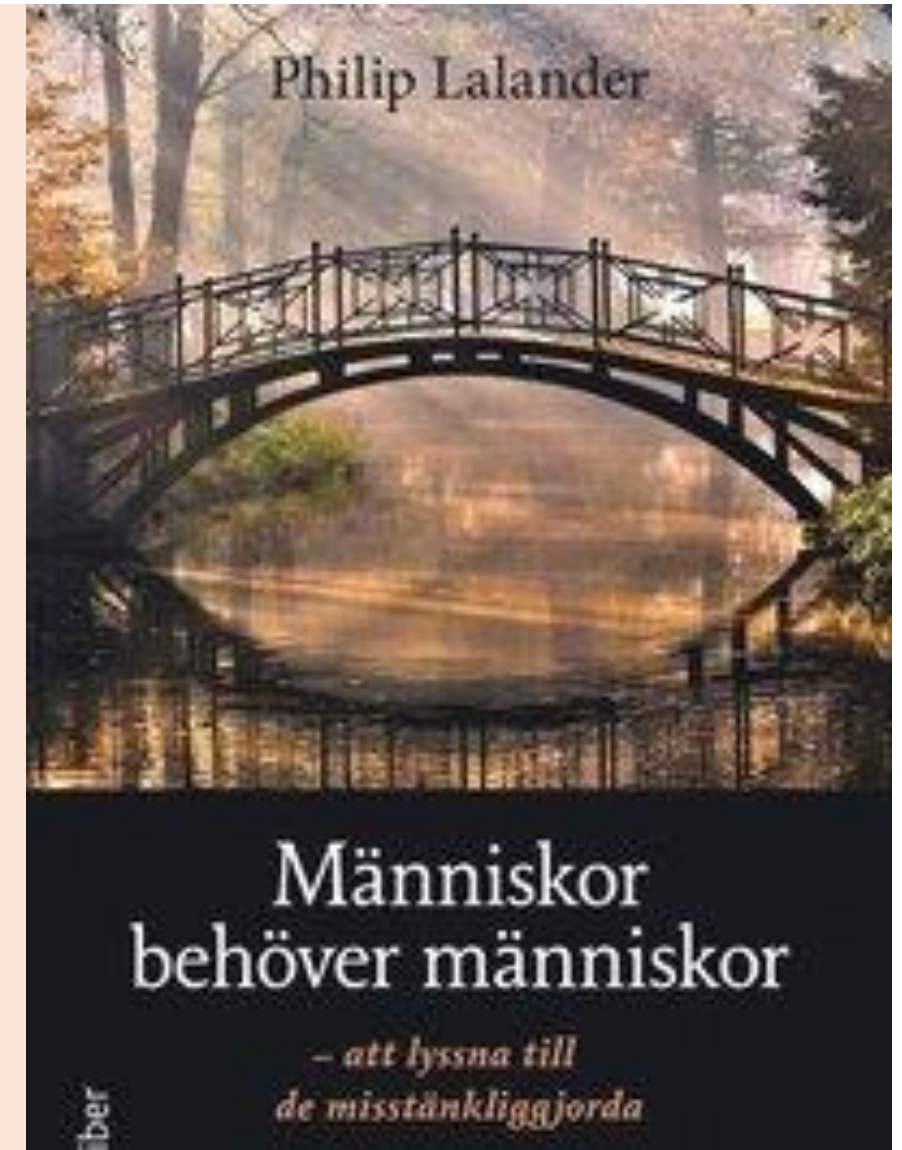
A photograph of a public space, likely a park or plaza. In the background, there is a large, multi-story yellow building with a dark roof and many windows. To the left of the building, there are several outdoor seating areas with tables and chairs, some covered by thatched umbrellas. A paved path leads from the foreground towards the building. In the foreground, there is a large, grassy slope that people are sitting on. Some people are standing near the path, while others are sitting on the grass. Large trees are visible behind the building and to the right. The sky is clear and blue.

Siri's case and
liberation from
power structures

"they forgot that
people need people"

What Siri tells us about is:

- How she has been objectified, measured and weighed: through blood, urine etcetera, "they forgot that ...". Implicitly she talks about medicalization, and a biochemical view of human existence. She does not talk about *social* work.
- That the objectification felt unpleasant for Siri, as if she could not see herself as a concrete and complex human being in the gaze and response of others and, thus, discover her humanity. This implies a kind of alienation, an outcome of repeated and systematized repression and subordination that is not seen as such (they are rather seen as "the way things are").
- Living with repeated and systematized objectification and repression can make people feel alien and abstract, which in turn can contribute to that they relapse and seek social arenas in which they are seen as human, as competent actors (see Grönnestad & Lalander).
- See the Swedish sociologist Johan Asplunds theory on concrete and abstract sociality (*Det sociala livets elementära former*, 1987).
- How social work could include meetings with people (people need people) who see each others as concrete people and who share a sense of solidarity.



Social work should, thus, be about social relations and acts of solidarity.
It should be the heart of social work

- The relationship between social workers and their ‘service users’ has been valued differently over the years: from being considered ‘the heart of social work’ (Collins and Collins 1981, 6) to instead having fallen, as Trevithick put it, ‘out of favour’ (2003, 163) (Herz & Lalander, 2019: 19, ‘Unaccompanied children’ talking about their social workers in Sweden)
- Margareta was a social worker who went her own way. How? She spent a lot of time with the clients, she valued them as human beings and was often welcome when the children of their clients had their birthdays. The “clients” had a well established relationship history with her. Her reputation was spread out. Margareta could make a difference. They knew she was “on their side”, they could feel it.
- As Primo said: “Margareta is highly valued in our family.”
- She even organized a kind of *structural and political social work* together with her clients, by creating a contact with a local journalist, who was interested in the deficiencies within the addiction treatment system, and thus, criticizing the politicians.
- Some “clients” say about Margareta: “We did it *together*”, she let them keep their agency.



The case of NOA, an open treatment center for people with drug problems

- You could tell them (the staff at NOA) things that you cannot tell them now (the staff at the hospital). They were there for you, to support you, not to put you down. You felt we were going somewhere together (Salle x-heroin user)
- At NOA, it was more cozy, it was more like WE work together against something, you talked about life and what dreams you have, yes, we talked about DEVELOPMENT. But now, up there (the hospital) it is like (silence), that they have lost it. (Siri)

Besides they arranged big meetings

- In the staff coffee and lunch room.
- Siri describes those meetings as cosy ... "you had a cup of coffee and a cookie" ... "they let us in, into theirs" (interrupt herself). It is, thus, a matter of *border crossing* here, of lessening social distance, which was not the case in the hospital in which the hierarchy was more carved in stone



Working together towards the future; creating some hope

- Let people keep their agency and "concreteness" (*you could say things, they listened, you were not suspected*).
- In this type of social interaction (relational social work) a sense of *hope* may be experienced.
- Hope represents a mental state, a combination of belief and desire in relation to a sometimes near and sometimes distant future. (Stockdale 2021)
- A collective dimension of hope. Someone is with you in the journey towards your future. This is a relational social work, a social work, where people meet people (remember Siri), that may work, since it can provide hope.
- But, relational and creative social work takes time and organization.



Case Ahmed: stuck in waiting in Italy

- They set *borders* on our lives.
- Earth is *everyone's*.
- To *live* is not the same as *having a life*



What type of social work may work in the case of Ahmed?

- During his first time in Italy he was running out of money and had no place to live.
- On an individual level SW could help him to survive, giving him food and shelter, language skills, education, giving him the assistance of a lawyer.
- This support could make Ahmed's life better than it would have been without it.
- But changes on an individual level does not change the social structures that keep him and other people in precariousness. Status quo prevails (Herz, Lalander & Elsrud 2022).
- In order to possibly change these structures social work also has to be political and a mobilizing force for a radical change, not just individual changes, leaving people hanging in uncertainty.
- Marcus Herz (2021, *Politiskt social arbete*) and Sarah Banks (2006, *Ethics and Values in Social Work*) write that social work should be political. Herz writes that today in Sweden and many other countries, politics is not included as legitimate within official social work. Politics is not something you do at work, this is the norm, the doxa.

We stand with the refugees

In the face of the contemporary ‘refugee crisis’ social work is faced with a fundamental question: whose side are we on? This is a question that can only be answered politically. The refugee crisis demands that we meet the needs of vulnerable people for social and material support and protection as they flee war, poverty, environmental degradation and oppression. Confronting the refugees, we have powerful states and elites who have imprisoned, impoverished, dehumanised and stigmatised the vulnerable. For a profession committed to social justice, equality and confronting both oppression and inequality, there should be no doubt: we stand with the refugees. (Ferguson et al, 2018: 110, see also Elsrud & Lalander 2022)



Case The man on the square

- Stop hoping
- Don't hope



Governing through
hope: an exploration
of hope and social
change in the asylum
context (Herz,
Lalander and Elsrud,
Emotions and Society,
2022.)

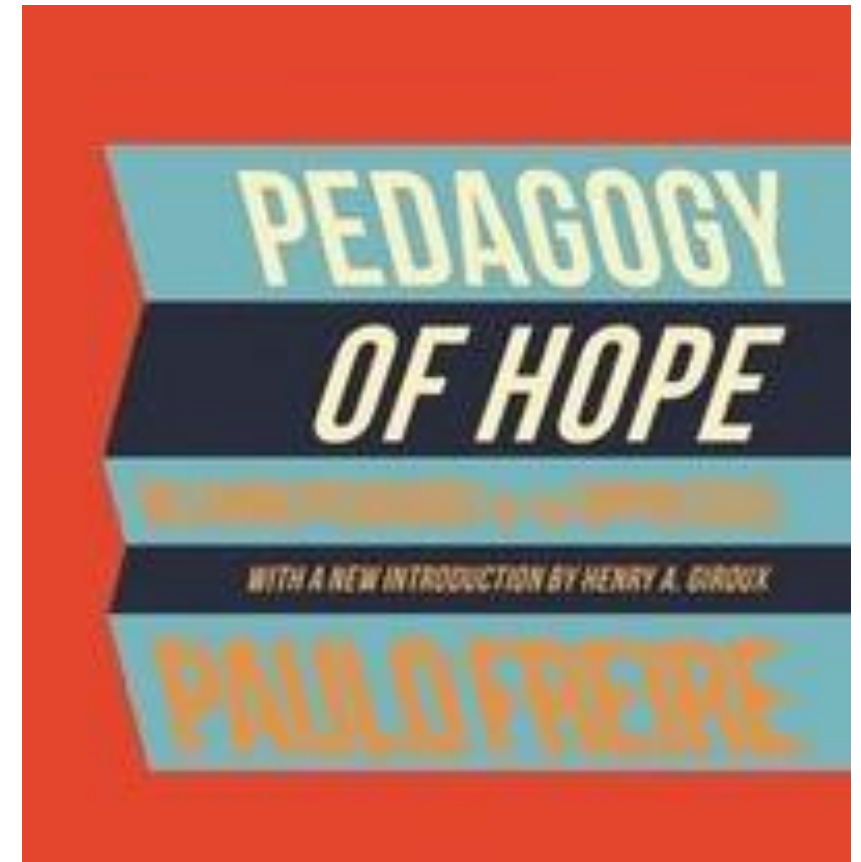
- Hope is sometimes celebrated as a ‘magic bullet solution’, improving individuals’ lives and providing them with positive thoughts about their future (see Schrank et al, 2008).
- There’s a normative dimension with regard to different emotions. Some emotions are seen as good, while others are seen as bad. Anger, bitterness, suffering and hopelessness may be seen as bad, while for example happiness and hope are seen as good feeling, feelings that you should express according to what Sara Ahmed calls a positive psychology. This means a governing of emotions. “She is just bitter”, puts the blame on the individual rather than social inequalities, that the person labeled as bitter has experienced. This means an individualization of emotions.
- But “bad” feelings, such as anger, despair and bitterness can be important regarding mobilization for social change (possibly together with hope). The Metoo, Black lives matters, Black Panthers etcetera.
- If people are optimistic, if they have some hope for the future, they will not complain so much or mobilize resistance.
- Terry Eagleton (2017: 4) argues that optimism is ‘a typical component of ruling-class ideologies’.
- bell hooks (1990) sees hopelessness as grounds for liberation and Colebrook (2010) regards pessimism as vital for change. Stockdale, in turn, discusses how ‘bitterness’ can be related to social justice by referring to Lynne McFall, who views bitterness as ‘a refusal to forgive and forget moral wrongs that have disappointed one’s important hopes’ (McFall cited in Stockdale, 2021: 118).
- In Alison M. Jaggar’s (1989: 166) words, bitterness can be considered an ‘outlaw emotion’ since members of oppressed groups may use it as a political act of resistance to protest injustices shaping their lives.

Ahmed's bitterness and loss of hope

- Ahmed has now waited for almost 4 years in Italy for a decision. He waited more than three years in Sweden.
- Ahmed says that hope is essential to “fight for what you want, but it is not easy to hope. I have hoped for so many times but it has not happened. I always lose hope, get disappointed. I think a lot about Sweden, the life I left. They took my life away from me, I will never forget that.” (Herz, Lalander & Elsrud, 2022: 228-229).
- “Ahmed also tells us that someday he will fight against the migration authorities. His thoughts about fighting originate in his biography and the injustices, suffering, and bitterness involved. Thus, as Sarah Ahmed (2010) claims, ‘negative’ feelings are activities. They can be performed as resistance to social injustice toward social change. They are emotions that can motivate people to act towards social change.” (see hooks, 1990; Colebrook, 2010; Cooper, 2014; Eagleton, 2017) (Herz, Lalander & Elsrud, 2022: 229).
- Social work should listen to the bitter and angry people and don't see them as “bad, messy and non-docile clients” and join them in a struggle towards social injustice rather than turn them down.
- However, people living under oppression need hope, in order to keep going, to survive.

Paulo Freire, hope and social work

- The idea that hope alone will transform the world, and action undertaken in that kind of naïveté, is an excellent route to hopelessness, pessimism, and fatalism. (Freire 1995)
- Just to hope is to hope in vain (Freire 1995).
- Hope is something done, it does not produce itself.
- Hope is created socially. It is hard to create hope on your own.
- Think about the big meetings at NOA, in Norrköping, these meetings are remembered, because they provided feelings of solidarity (proved through the crossing of borders) and a direction of bodies/individuals towards the same goal (a life without heroin). This gives energy (see also Randal Collins theory about emotional energy). Social work, thus, should be about *solidarity*. Without solidarity and some sense of hope it is difficult to create a change (of the system or in individuals).



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