Editorial:

The Promise [1]

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[1] Special thanks to Maury Saslaff for improving my written English!

Some decades ago C. Wright Mills wrote his well-known book, The Sociological Imagination (1959). To improve sociological analyses, Wright Mills distinguishes between “personal troubles” and “public issues”, which he argues helps us to grasp the sources of and solutions to social problems (Ferguson 1999). He says:

Nowadays men often feel that their private lives are a series of traps. They sense that within their everyday worlds, they cannot overcome their troubles, and in this feeling, they are often correct: What ordinary men are directly aware of and what they try to do are bounded by the private orbits in which they live; their visions and their powers are limited to the close-up scenes of job, family, neighbourhood…And the more aware they become, however vaguely, of ambitions and of threats which transcend their immediate locales, the more trapped they seem to feel. (Wright Mills, 1999:1)

Wright Mills is concerned with the feeling of being possessed by a sense of trap. How can we assume that ordinary men [2] and women see their troubles in terms of “historical change and institutional contradiction” (p.2)? To assist them, the author calls upon journalists, scholars and editors (and some more) for the sociological imagination. This particular imagination is there to make us see history and biography and the relations between the two, as he puts it. “To recognize this task and this promise is the mark of the classic social analyst” (p.3).

However, the distinction between personal troubles and public issues is crucial. “Troubles” occur within the individual and refer to the private including his or her relations with other whereas “issues” transcend the individual as a biographical entity and his or her local environment by its reference to the institutional and the structural. Though well positioned within history, as individuals we often feel trapped, unable to envisage the often intricate linkages between (the so-called) man and society. By reference to classic social scientists such as Torstein Veblen, Joseph Schumpeter and Karl Marx, Wright Mills claims that “No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, history and their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey (p.4)…To be able to do that is to possess the sociological imagination (p.7).”

[2] Wright Mills uses “men” as a generic reference to both men and women, which is rather typical of his time.

The promise of sociological imagination goes beyond the sociological discipline into all social science studies whose primary pursuit is that of producing knowledge (Hammersley 2008). In this sense academic journals fill in a gap by offering a site for social scientists to communicate their analytic conclusions. Knowledge is a prerequisite for more targeted social justice and for improving people's lives, a classic virtue associated with social work that is in accordance with the very opening phrase of the Social Work Code of Ethics (NASW 2011): "The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well--being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty". Wright Mills advocated that academics should speak out against social injustice, and he himself criticised social conditions through his work by following his argument that academics should be socially responsible, as in his books, White Collar: The American Middle Class (1951) and The Power Elite (1956). Nevertheless, we notice that counter to the second Chicago school and most contemporary sociological and social work, his focus was on "studying up".

The history of social science has displayed the many ways and many controversies as to how a concern with social (in) justice is best done stretching over into the many more classic and newer innovative methodological ways (as in Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) though not without a critical perspective as in Travers (2009)) in which social science studies are now being materialised.

Importantly, the sociological imagination also applies to studying social science itself on a more global level, with its many contradictions and paradoxes. The academic life of a social scientist is a life within transforming institutions away from Humboldt's idea of a university towards higher education as a commodity for sale facilitated by international agreements and new technology. The old ideas of teaching based on research with students actively integrated into the research seminars, is at risk of turning into "academic capitalism" (Kjeldstadli, 2010:66). This turn towards a more explicit economic rationality comes with many costs, including more cultural imperialism for universities in the South that have to accept a quality assessment policy worked out by external actors such as the US and the EU. This applies in that they either want their students to be accepted for further studies outside their region, or for their students to file up within the foreign educational institutions established in the South for profit. This opens up for a system of rather free-floating institutions or organisations which are not coordinated with local needs or educational policies, nor are they obliged to base their courses on local textbooks or cases, thus creating a system that perpetuates neo-colonialism (Gobo and Ryen, 2011).

The internationalisation of higher education comes at the cost of reinforcing old regimes and hegemonies such as the Western hegemonic position in research. The Western structural dominance in academic journals, with its rather well organised organisational environments which facilitates an infrastructure that includes English as the common language in research, makes academic globalisation less global than is often portrayed. Statistics show that this structure represents a barrier for social scientists outside the classic West despite the fact that certain barriers are also locally produced (Mohamedbai, 2008; ISSC, 2010 a, b, c). More than other social scientists, social scientists in certain regions may thus become spectators to the contemporary social science history.

Wright Mills' promise thereby also refers to the troubles and issues in the midst of our own

world, our professions and our disciplines. If it is correct that research has no borders, we should hear this as a call for an unbounded social science that science includes rather than excludes and that represents a meeting place across contexts, places and spaces, in addition to being one that and offers knowledge produced across local contexts wherever that locality is, whether a place or in trans-national spaces (Stake and Rizvi, 2008). Even so, it is important that some journals, including this one, offer open access without costly and tedious procedures. We all know the hardship of working to be accepted for publication in a journal, as well as knowing the problem students in the South in particular face when trying to acquire access to relevant literature for their studies. This illustrates the potential of new technology insofar as offering a zone not yet fully integrated into academic capitalism. Open access journals provide an opportunity for voices and for disseminating ideas from across local contexts. It would be a paradox to exclude an audience from reading publications from their own region as in the case of the article from Cameroon and the essay from Cuba, and even more so when produced by colleagues or professors who are closely familiar with that same structure, as in the essay from Ghana, all of which are in this issue of our journal.
In their own way, articles and essays in this issue all refer to Wright Mills' promise to make visible how troubles and issues are interlinked in their various ways, as they do so in different ways. They also point to viable directions for those whose focus is with social practice.

In the first article, Public – private partnership; A critical discussion the authors, Johans Tveit Sandvin, Frode Bjørgo, Gunn Strand Hutchinson and Per Olav Johansen, write on the public-private partnership which is highly valued in Western welfare states, as observed in times of turbulence that seem to have nurtured a stronger focus on the voluntary non-profit organisations (VNPOs). They claim that the driving force has been the potential to deliver cheaper and better services compared with the public sector, referred to as supplementary relations, as the authors challenge this dominant perception of the cooperation across these sectors. Based on their study, they argue against this narrow perception of the public-voluntary organisational cooperation, which they see as favouring the individual attributes of VNPOs over relational issues. So what? This works as a point of departure on how and include conditions for a useful partnership with public social services.
In their concern with these services, their focus is with Wright Mills' "issues", or with the institutional side or conditions in which individuals are embedded.

This also applies to the next article, Professional work in the squeeze: Experiences from a new control regime in residential care for children and youth in Norway, but with a different focus. As authors Sigrid Nordstoga and Anne Marie Støkken put it, "This article examines the effects on the professional system of creating a new system for quality assurance of residential care in the Norwegian child welfare service." Their focus is also with service deliverers and the administrative apparatus, or more precisely with the effects of administrative transformations within the Norwegian child welfare service. They refer to this change being the implementation of "a new control regime", and are concerned with the effects on professional autonomy in social work and the observed ambiguities inherent in the new control regime.

In the two next articles we move into other territory, and are invited into cross-cultural issues based on fieldwork in fields outside the authors' own culture, in which they highlight the intersection of the wider society and personal experiences, or issues and troubles. Both reach analytical conclusions firmly based in their data drawn from rich experiences in the field, and both invite us to reflect on "How do we know?", as put by Sarder (2006) in his

critical discussion of Europe`s hegemonic position in research (also see Gobo and Ryen, 2011).

In her article entitled Social Work in Ghana: Engaging Traditional Actors in Professional Practices, Christel Avendal writes from her study in Ghana. She investigates into the teaching of contemporary professional social work in Ghana investigating the teaching of professional social work with a focus as to the extent, or rather how does the teaching of professional social work relate to traditional actors and practices? She explores the impact of colonialism, which is as much about ideas as it is about classic resources, as illustrated by a Western-influenced social work that operates parallel to a more classic African system. Of note, her discussion relates to the Ghanaian system as being a most relevant illustration of a local practice in one of many African contexts in which she reports from what she refers to as "The Intersection of Subworlds". Avendal shows the complexity of social work practice in this context, and reminds us that "localisation involves the question of whose reality social workers should consider. To localise work is to adapt work to service users' culture and traditions. Yet, who has the right to determine which (cultural) considerations to take into account?" The article is as relevant in the North as it is in the South.

In A Troubled Past: Fieldworking in a Contested Place Jonas Frykman and Kirsti Mathiesen Hjemdahl write about their project in Croatia, or more precisely from former president Josip Broz Tito`s village of Kumrovec, and the celebration of the Day of Youth, dan mladosti – which falls on May 25th , Tito's official birthday - a most contested event locally. They claim that "monuments and material objects become invested with political ideology and incorporated by citizens and filled with meaning and affective power". Collaborating with the local university as well as overcoming initial resistance, they use a phenomenological approach to explore into tacit knowledge and the taken for granted. As opposed to the often rather naïve presupposed privileged gaze by the insider (Ryen 2008), the authors illustrate how the outsider becomes crucial in de-trivialising the all too familiar as they describe it. They also remind us of the importance of studying on the site phenomena as they happen, which eventually leads to their conclusion in which they point to the close connection between place and body. They illustrate very well the potential for the sociological imagination to open up for acknowledging the impact of the unfamiliar gaze on the everyday, taken-for-granted familiarity.

This issue also has two essays. In her Encouraging girl child education in my village, Delphine Etongwe writes on her experience of being appointed as one of the students to go to her home village one year after her graduation to lead a student cultural week under the heading, "Raising awareness on education". Going from theory to practice is a long step, and her task did not turn out as expected. She makes us see the complex locale that she entered, and she takes us into the practical though still so challenging question of: What do I do now and how? There is a link between her reflections and Avendal's article that deals with social work in complex contexts. Etwonge takes us into the intersection of levels of social work within structural frames that necessitates reflections on relations and positions: so how does this impact on my work as a social worker? She invites us to reflect on these issues.

The same goes for Kajsa Liisa Høiland in her essay, The courage to face yourself - about being a social worker in an unknown culture and in unfamiliar situations, in which she writes about her internship on the outskirts of Havana, Cuba as she reflects on being a Norwegian social worker in another country. Whereas Etwonge assumed she would work in familiar

contexts, Høilund was prepared to cross boundaries. They both write about the vulnerable social worker, as opposed to the classic upper position associated with being a service provider. Among others things, Høiland reports on her noticing differences rather than similarities, which is classic in cross-cultural interaction. She describes the social process she undergoes as being nurtured by social interaction. As she accentuates, this is an often painful process of self-awareness, “Yet it is in these situations that learning takes place.”

Lastly, Åse Vagli, reviews the Norwegian version of the book, Sosiologi for sosionomer. En stående invitasjon (the Norwegian version, with the original title in Swedish Sociologi för socionomer. En stående inbjudan) by Katarina Jacobsson, Joakim Thelander and David Wästerfors, which was published in 2011. Described briefly, the book deals with the relevance of sociological terms and perspectives to social work, and the authors discuss the relevance of sociology in knowledge production in social work. The authors all hold positions in social work and sociology at Lund University and Kristianstad University, both in Sweden. Vagli concludes by recommending the book for introductory courses in sociology for bachelor students in social work.

We hope that the readers find that this issue of Journal of Comparative Social Work contributes C. Wright Mills’ The Promise as described above by how the various articles and essays analyse and reflect in their own ways on the intersection of personal troubles and public issues of great value to social work across contexts.

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