

POVERTY, SHAME, AND THE CLASS JOURNEY IN PUBLIC IMAGINATION

ABSTRACT

Bringing together social science and literary sensibilities, this article employs a focused content analysis of the texts of three influential Norwegian novels for their personal portrayal of the relationship between modernization, the new welfare state, poverty, and shame. As significant facets of public imagination, the big and little stories presented in the novels deploy a decidedly *social* psychology, in which individual accounts reflexively relate to social life. Featuring associated characters and identities, the novels construct possible experiences. In this context, emotions such as shame are taken to be indigenous ingredients of modernization and the welfare state. The lessons of a lyrical sociology for understanding personal experience and social change are discussed in the conclusion.

Keywords: Norwegian welfare state, modernity, poverty, shame, Norwegian literature, lyrical sociology

The concept of poverty is loaded with meaning and has been described internationally within a framework of varying agendas (O'Connor 2004, Townsend 1979, Walker 1995). Because of a generous level of social welfare protections and services, poverty in Norway today most often takes shape in relative, not absolute, terms. It is grounded in the realities, norms, and expectations of an egalitarian society (Hagen and Lødemel 2010). But while absolute poverty is rare, the personal effects of relative poverty are still evident in the differences marking the particular context of their production.

Poverty is a material and a social phenomenon. Robert Castel's (1995, 2012) historical model of employment societies in pre- and post-industrial times redefines poverty according to this multiplicity. Castel (1995, 2012) aligns the poverty experience – including abject poverty and relative precariousness – along a two-way axis according to work security and to social stability and integration. While the social and the material have shaped the poverty experience since the pre-industrial guild era, these axes have been transformed in post-industrial times and again in the past decades (Castel 2012). This transformation is illustrated in the historical moments described in the Norwegian novels analysed here.

The meaning of poverty also extends to the shifting emotional contours of experience. No matter how small or large the absolute differences, who we are and how we feel about it draws from and reflects where we are in social life and in relationships with others, in both past and future. Experience is reflexively constructed in relation to available and prevalent social distinctions, regardless of how small or large the differences (Blumer 1969). The societal and the personal are mutually informative, each reflexively producing its effects in the context of the other. If there is a psychology in tow, it is a decidedly *social* one, rent with the practical forces that impinge upon and cause those in question to articulate their lives and respond accordingly (Mead 1934/1967).

The interaction between these components is evidenced in the idea that the inability to draw upon economic or social resources in order to participate in those activities that society deems valuable or to effectively respond to one's aggrieved

situation increases social exclusion (Castel 1995, Skeggs and Loveday 2012). As early as 1776, Adam Smith spoke of the necessity of being able to procure material goods to live in society without shame. Amartya Sen (2009) suggests that a key part of one's ability to participate in socially valued activities is the ability to live without shame. The experience of shame and being shamed or stigmatized in turn reduces one's agency and ability to act. For centuries, this social psychological impact has resulted in an increasing sense of disaffiliation, the feeling that one belongs only to a "social no-man's land" (Castel 2012, 523). Emotional experience, shame in this case, is informed by a socially reflexive sense of identity, which implies that the phenomenon of shame is both externally generated and internally felt (Goffman 1963, Scheff 1988, Sennett and Cobb 1972). Being incapable of participating in broad social networks and poverty-associated stigma is contingent upon a diverse array of culturally- and historically-bound assumptions, expectations, and practices. Understandings of poverty and the feelings associated with them are drawn through a matrix of invidious social contingencies.

Bringing together social science and literary sensibilities, this article examines how the relationship between the societal and the personal plays out emotionally in selected fiction through Norway's past century. Some of the inspiration for this article draws from Andrew Abbott's (2007) call for what he names "lyrical sociology." This is a form of sociology that carries an analytic sensibility centred on something, such as class, "that is." This is as opposed to what Abbott refers to as "narrative sociology," which seeks to explain how something (again, such as class) has come to be what it is. Much of sociological analysis takes this form. Abbott encourages us to do something different, to take up a form of analysis that Harvey Zorbaugh (1929), for example, put into place decades ago in his vivid and compelling description of "the gold coast and the slum" in Chicago. Zorbaugh's description is lyrical because it conveys vibrantly what being urban is like as a way of life. In looking at the emotional experience of poverty in this article through the lens of Norwegian novels, I aim to convey something similarly vibrant: the overpowering feeling of shame associated with poverty in Norway, seeking to "awaken those feelings in the minds—and even the hearts—of [my] readers" (Abbott, 2007, p. 70). In Abbott's words, the article deals with the emotional experience *that is* poverty in this national context, not how poverty and shame *has happened* in Norway the way it did.

The article traces how the movement into and out of poverty—the so-called class journey—works in terms of what Meili Steele (2005) calls "public imagination" – the "inherited public meanings" that are represented by the symbols, stories and practices of a culture (18). Cultural expressions such as painting, film, and literature may be used to illuminate our understanding of these phenomena. Here, I focus on novels as a culturally significant means of shedding light on social issues and their personal effects. Popular novels offer a rare view into historical discourses concerning personal experience and their associated feelings. In this way, they are a cultural artefact and a fruitful source for ethnographic inquiry (Brinkmann, 2009).

The specific goal is to trace dominant representations of the poverty experience and shame in older and newer Norwegian novels as a way of documenting the related public imagination in tow. Selected Norwegian novels from the late 19th to the

late 20th century are used as case studies to describe shifts in the imagination of the poverty experience. In particular focus is the way in which movements within status hierarchies have occurred and the effects of these at a personal level. Three historical moments are compared: what I'll call "then" (poverty experiences before rural to urban migration, modernization and the emergence of the welfare state), "now" (during modernization and the development of the Norwegian welfare state), and "later (in life)" (referring to the future). Then, now, and later, rather than specific years or decades, are part of the vocabulary of ordinary historical consciousness of the characters affected. Their social psychology is organized in terms of this broad timeline, considering their pasts, presents, and futures in non-metrical terms.

As the data are drawn from fiction, I will refer in my analysis to the big and little stories being represented (Gubrium and Holstein 2009, Ch. 11). The big stories are accounts in the novels of broad societal changes; the little stories are personalized accounts of emotional responses to these changes. One should not take from this that the storied character of accounts and their empirical significance is limited to fiction, a point to which I will return in the conclusion. Nonfictional everyday life is equally storied. What is emphasized in this article is the empirical embeddedness of stories in public imagination, which, like lived experience, serves to shape the personal in various ways.

With an analytic lens focused prominently on the little stories portrayed through Norwegian literature, the article's findings are aimed at three broad questions. The first concerns the question of modernization, (geographical and class) movement and shame, as attached to the poverty experience. The second concerns the question of poverty and shame with respect to the development of the Norwegian welfare state. The third concerns the question of poverty and shame as experienced with respect to a downward class journey.

THE CLASS JOURNEY TROPE

The class journey trope (*klassereise*) has been used to document changing representations of poverty at the nexus of the two levels noted, one societal and the other personal. At a societal level, the trope has been used to tell the big story of poverty and shame in a changing Norway, as it unfolded in relation to migration, modernization and welfare state development during the 20th century and as it resulted in increased social mobility throughout this period (Kildal and Kuhnle 2005, Østli and Neegaard 2005). On a personal level, the trope frames the many little stories dealing with individual class journeys, especially the associated feelings of insecurity coming with changing social status (Johannessen 2007). The little stories are usually more varied than the big story, but their central resonances are similar.

Social mobility flags the possibility of escaping situations marked by absolute or relative poverty. In Norway, the class journey trope has been discursively predicated upon the vision of full social mobility. It is broadly understood that social mobility vastly increased with the rise of the welfare state in the mid-20th century. Social mobility indices now rank Norway at the top of international comparisons (Beller and Hout 2006). Whether and under what terms social mobility has continued to increase within Norway in recent decades, however, is controversial. There has been some disagreement

concerning the shift in levels of economic social mobility in Norway over the past half century, with some suggesting greater fluidity (Ringdal 2004, Breen 2004) and others suggesting less (Chan *et al.* 2011, Mastekaasa 2004 and 2011, Wiborg 2010, Wiborg and Nordli-Hansen 2009).

Disagreements notwithstanding, social mobility and class journey stories have been part of the public imagination in Norway for the past century and a half (Johannessen 2007, Wiborg 2010). My concern here is not whether the social mobility aspect of the class journey is or is not a reality, but rather is how this trope has reflected and shaped the public imagination of the poverty experience. An important specification of the class journey prominently featured in the novels relates to the difference between inter-generational mobility (differences in economic and cultural status between parents and their children) and intra-generational mobility (being upwardly or downwardly mobile within a generation).

KEY TEXTS AND METHOD OF ANALYSIS

While Norwegian novels have dealt with the semblance of a class journey trope for the past two centuries, use of this specific term is relatively recent. Arne Garborg's (1883) *Bondestudentar (Farmer Student)* is an early example of Norwegian novel writing implicitly applying the class journey trope. The term itself was coined by Swedish sociologist Ronny Ambjörnsson in his 1996 novel, *Mitt förnamn är Ronny (My First Name is Ronny)*. Several Norwegian novels, authored from a similar national experience, have in recent years expressly used the trope, including Karin Sveen's (2000) *Klassereise: Et livshistorisk essay (Class journey: A life history essay)* and Lars Ove Seljestad's novels *Blind* and *Fjorden (The Fjord)*, published in 2005 and 2011, respectively.

The novels providing the data for this article are a subset of a larger corpus of pertinent texts (novels and short stories) from the Norwegian canon. Only texts dealing with the poverty experience were considered. The corpus was generated using a top-down approach starting with all possible texts fulfilling this criterion. The population of modern Norwegian novels dealing with the issue of poverty is small. I chose influential and popular Norwegian novels that were most prominently concerned with poverty. Eleven texts were identified. From this list, we culled a smaller sample of novels to analyse in detail, as described below. All texts were defined as traditional and modern Norwegian classics within the Norwegian literary canon. The assumption was that classic texts have been publicly influential in representing the Norwegian poverty experience for a broad audience of readers. Beyond the novels' direct readership, the public imagination does its work in and through representational influences throughout society. Shame, in particular, is relational and forms out of the breadth of social influences.

Selection and Significance

The concept of poverty and the groups of people associated with this concept have shifted significantly within Norway within the last 100 years. "Poverty" and "the poor" in 1890s Norway – when the industrial period wholeheartedly began – differs from that in Norway during World War II, and from how these concepts may be

popularly defined in today's Norway. In order to operationalize these concepts, I focused on those novels specifically portraying the groups, individuals and identities that were and are currently associated with poverty during these periods. I also allowed myself to modify the selection process as I moved along, so that texts relevant to my research questions, discussed below, also guided the process.

This selection process resulted in a set of three key texts. The first text, Knut Hamsun's (1890/1998) novel *Hunger*, represents then and describes conceptions of poverty, social exclusion, and shame pertinent to the class journey during the emerging industrial era and before the onset of Norway's welfare state. The novel's nameless protagonist closely illustrates Castel's (1995, 2012) able-bodied, yet jobless "vagrant" of the pre-industrial era. The second text, Roy Jacobsen's (1991) semi-autobiographical novel *Seierherrene (The Conquerors)*, was selected for its narrative contrast between then, now and later (here, the post-Fordist condition). The bridging experience between these moments, as portrayed for the protagonist and his parents, is most marked for those who have grown up in the 1930s and 1940s and directly experienced the establishment of the welfare state and/or for those who moved from rural to urban areas 30 to 40 years ago. The third text, Ingvar Ambjørnsen's (1986) novel *Hvite Niggere (White Niggers)*, also addresses the bridging process, but most notably alludes to downward mobility in the context of its new possibility in the post-industrial welfare state, something counter-intuitive in the public imagination.

Each novel is considered an influential text and thus can be considered to represent the public imagination. Hamsun's *Hunger* was published to great critical success in 1890, with the result that Hamsun was and has since been hailed as one of Norway's most significant novelists. Both nationally and internationally, Hamsun was in the late 19th century and is still considered a pioneer of the modern, psychology-driven novel. *Hunger* offers a keen stream-of-consciousness portrayal of the tortured social psychology of poverty then. Jacobsen's *Seierherrene* won Norway's Bookseller's Prize in 1991 and was nominated for the Nordic Council's Literary Prize. The novel also was in 2006 listed in one of Norway's national newspapers (*Dagbladet*) as one of the "25 best novels" from the past 25 years. Closely depicting Norway's movement over an 80-year period from a hardscrabble agrarian and proletarian society into a post-industrial and welfare society, it has been acclaimed for bringing the class journey phenomenon to the Norwegian public, perhaps more directly than any other Norwegian work of fiction. Ambjørnsen's *Hvite Niggere* won the novel competition of one of Norway's premier publishing firms, Cappelen, in 1986 and was distributed by a well-known Norwegian book club. It has been critically acclaimed for its gritty portrayal of the post-industrial downward mobility.

Method of Analysis

I applied content analysis to these texts, using the methods outlined by James Gee (1999) and Ruth Wodak and Michal Krzyzanowski (2008). More specifically, I examined the "text in context" (van Dijk 1997: 4). Texts were coded according to the social, cultural, historical, cognitive, and political contexts of language used by the authors as they described the class journey. Special attention was paid to shifting notions of poverty (Wodak and Krzyzanowski 2008). I drew from analytic

techniques based on the assumptions of New Historicism and focused on social context, where information concerning the author and intended audience was taken into account. As such, my analysis of these texts considered how the authors' descriptions of the reality of the poor and the social phenomenon of poverty may have been reciprocally influenced by the period in which the text was written, the period of time the text focused upon, and the possible influence of the intended audience. The presence of *Seierherrene* and its modern author's discussion of poverty in earlier eras presents a challenge to this claim. Yet its author has drawn deeply from the personal experiences of his own family in his depiction of an earlier poverty experience in Norway and thus the novel fits with my more lyrical attempt to convey the personal experience of poverty rather than to explain the phenomenon (Abbott, 2007). Furthermore, the novel's specific focus on the class journey is useful as it addresses a historical shift that took place between Hamsun's then (a novelist writing in the 1890s about being poor in the 1890s) to Jacobsen's (a novelist writing in the 1990s about being poor in 1930s) conception.

RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

My analysis centres on three questions. The first focuses on how the class journey trope is used to represent poverty and shame in the context of then, now, and later as this relates to modernization via urbanization and industrialisation. The second question raises the issue of poverty and shame specifically in relation to an emergent welfare state. The third question centres on downward mobility, asking how this is represented in a narrative environment shaped by the expectation of full social mobility, wherein the class journey is taken to be an upward movement.

The Question of Modernization, Movement, and Shame

Urbanisation in Norway was, in large part, spurred by a shift in employment from traditional small and capital-intensive rural- and coastal- based industries to the expansion of manufacturing and service sectors, as well as to the mechanisation of traditional industries (Myklebost 1968, 1984). Beginning with industrialisation toward the end of the 19th century and rapidly expanding until the 1970s, the urbanisation of Norway resulted in populations concentrated in well-established national, regional and local urban centres of varying size. The share of Norway's total population residing in urban settlements increased from 30% in 1890 to slightly above 70% one hundred years later (Byfuglien 1995). Modernisation was accompanied by the comparatively late development of the Norwegian welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990). While the concept of *folkeforsikring* (the people's insurance) had entered the Norwegian policy arena well before the turn of the century (Kuhnle, 1994; Seip, 1981), the country's fiscal scarcities and limited set of *national* social insurance provisions placed it among the least generous countries in Europe until the mid-1930s (Kuhnle, 1983). As suggested by the empirical data presented below, the particular developmental trajectory of the Norwegian welfare state was felt in the particular harshness of poverty in this earlier period.

Norwegian migrants in the early 20th century experienced a geo-social journey wherein movement to urban areas meant encountering previously unknown labour relations and social positions (Rye and Almås 2004). The concept of egalitarianism had taken root early on within a setting wherein a rural and proletarian society was marked by strong coalitions of small

family farmers (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 30). Still, the rise of a new social and economic precariousness with industrialism was matched by a broader individualised condemnation of the “undeserving”, able-bodied poor as deserving of shame for a condition that was increasingly seen as a matter of individual responsibility and blame (Welshman 2006, Castel 2012). New conditions seemingly provided urban dwellers in industrial settings with increased means for upward social mobility. Yet new opportunities also meant the latent possibility of missed opportunities. The impoverished were seen as bearing a flawed worldview and psychology. Poverty became a choice.

The period of geo-social change in Norway has been viewed as a cultural process of movement between varying social class terrains wherein prevailing social norms and expectations have been both challenged and the challenge (Gullestad 2001). Jacobsen’s novel illustrates this movement across social terrains. He uses the experiences of a bridging protagonist, Marta, and her son, Rogern, bridging then and now through their move from Northern Norway to urban Oslo in the 1930s and subsequent suburban life in the 1960s and 1970s. The experience of being poor is told in a class journey from rural subsistence to urban residence. Jacobsen suggests three generation-specific experiences associated with poverty: The experience before the class journey was broadly possible within Norway, the experience for individuals personally embarking on this journey, and the experience of subsequent generations who benefitted from their forebears’ journeys.

Jacobsen’s modern perspective offers a slightly romanticized version of the experience of poverty in 1920s and 1930s Norway. This story of then illustrates an emotion impact from poverty that is muted by one’s ability to maintain an independent subsistence. Marta, the bridging protagonist, describes her father’s “older” poverty experience in which a hardscrabble existence had been a structural reality in her coastal hometown. Within this older context, the subsistence fisherman or farmer maintained a sense of dignity, not shame, from knowing one’s station in life and performing accordingly: “one knew the conditions, one lifted one’s value out of the harbour, oneself, the family and a whole farm” (22). Within this context, Marta’s father has little expectation for social mobility: “fishermen have always lived as he now does...that’s life” (149). Surrounded by a community living in similarly harsh conditions, Marta suggests that her father’s poverty does not bear the mark of personal failure. Furthermore, economic poverty is tempered by having the means to independently provide for one’s family: “He possesses a knowledge that no one other than he knows, that no one other than he and those like him therefore value either, which does not make him bitter” (150). Marta “knows that in her father’s world it is not will and hopes and ‘possibilities’ that rule, but fate, ‘the machine’, as he called it” (222).

The experience of poverty then as presented in Hamsun’s urban setting at the turn of the century is markedly different from Jacobsen’s version of dignified rural poverty in 1930s Norway. As with Jacobsen’s description, Hamsun’s text focuses on the poverty experience at the beginning of industrialisation in Norway and represents the case before the welfare state-mediated class journey was the centre of this big story. And in Hamsun’s urban setting illustrates a more negatively valenced understanding of poverty. Hamsun’s impoverished and homeless protagonist – who remains nameless throughout the novel – lives in harsh circumstances within 1890s Oslo, a city that had begun to take on the trappings of a more modern

life focused on maintaining appearances and economic comfort. He is able to work and yet cannot find work. He spends much of his time wandering around town and seeking odd jobs. Without a publicly provided safety net, he is hungry, homeless and unkempt. He must depend on the kindness of community and the individuals around him to stay alive. At the same time, he proudly shuns charity that is offered as a replacement for deeper social engagement. When a former love interest attempts to offer him ten kroner “alms money” he reacts with anger at her assumption of his dependency: “I had merely aroused her compassion and coaxed her out of a pennyworth of charity...there was no end to my degradation!” (189). His freedom is negative – he is materially and socially deprived.

Jacobsen closely chronicles the changing notion of poverty shaped by urbanization and industrialisation. While movement into urban areas opened new opportunities, Jacobsen writes that it also dispersed the means of production beyond the family and resulted in a heightened sense of powerlessness and dependence for the economically challenged: “there was unemployment in the city, pure misery many places, for unlike the islanders, they couldn’t just sit themselves in a boat and row home a meal when their bellies screamed, they had to stand in a line with notes and beg and lower themselves” (91). This loss of autonomy attached to the transition to a money economy also offers a new risk of downward mobility. This new set of risks is reflected in a new sense of helplessness that is translated into a feeling of shame at one’s economic situation.

Marta’s journey involves the uneasy negotiation of new cultural codes, identities, and norms, and the casting away of old ones. Within the urban/modern context, it is not only how hard one can work/produce that counts, it is also (and perhaps more importantly) one’s ability to recognize and manage new cultural and technological cues. Within this newer context, shame arises from the cultural as well as the material, from one’s inability to fit in with the dominant society. Marta is demeaned for her lack of knowledge of modern household appliances: “‘Poor little one’the sentence is unfortunately said in a special tone, in the hopes maybe that the compassionate folds of her vocal cords are enough to eradicate its cause, namely, Marta’s ignorance” (164). She is forced to change her Northern Norwegian dialect so that her employer may “be spared Marta’s degenerate speech” (164). She is shamed, disparaged and forced to culturally assimilate.

Marta also finds herself in a society where there is, for the first time, the expectation that all members will strive for a higher standard of living. While surrounded by people living in miserable conditions, the city provides her with a first look at a more comfortable lifestyle and she feels a new pressure to keep up with others. The improved material circumstances she encounters in the city do not necessarily result in improved self-esteem: “The city has its own way of making an individual poor right after receiving one’s wages. The more knowledgeable and an insider one becomes, the faster an individual notes that they are missing something in the way of clothing; standards change all the time and must to a certain degree be followed, either one wants to be fine or invisible” (166). While Marta is better off in absolute terms than she was in her coastal hometown, she experiences an internal sense of shame from being relatively impoverished within the context of new dominant norms and goals of comfortable living. Marta’s is a complex class journey, mixing an absolute rise in living standards with a decline in self-esteem. She keenly feels the shift in economic status relative to her surrounding community

as she struggles to negotiate a new status quo.

The post-industrial influence of cultural capital in the determination of one's class status has been empirically substantiated (Brown 1995). Mike Savage, Gaynor Bagnall and Brian Longhurst (2001), drawing on data from the UK, have described the "ambivalent nature of contemporary class identities" (p. 875). The rise of the middle class has been marked by a rising concern with boundary-making to maintain or mark one's individual status (Savage et al. 1992, Bourdieu 1987). This distinction-making activity directs shame towards those who do not have the cultural capital to effectively or reflexively engage in this activity (Skeggs and Loveday 2012, Savage et al. 2001). This is reflected in Jacobsen's coverage of the 1960s and beyond. The focus on material consumption and cultural capital is palpable within his depiction of the suburban context of a transitional (working to middle class) Oslo suburb. Within the post-industrial context of opportunity, Jacobsen's novel intimates that modern shame arises from the dissonance between who one could be and who one is. Shame emerges futuristically; opportunity, ironically, takes its emotional toll in relation to what one once had and what one still does not.

Rogern, Marta's son, grows up in the cultural upheaval of the late sixties and early seventies. Rather than pride in what one does and what one produces, shame becomes attached to an experience counter to the vision that one will continue upward in one's class journey. As Rogern notes: "Shame is, as Kundera says, not tied to something we *do*, but to what we *are*, that which we have no control over" (365). Rogern is shamed when he is unable to easily find his way within the newly imposed nuances, expectations, and pressures of the social and cultural hierarchy of his local environment. It isn't then and now that informs Rogern's shame, but now and later in life.

The Question of Poverty, Shame, and the Welfare State

Since WWII, Norway has implemented a set of welfare policies intended to promote egalitarian ideals (Eriksson and Goldthorpe 1992, Esping-Andersen 1990). These policies and ideals have helped shape a Scandinavian discourse of increased social mobility often used to describe Norway's modern situation (Wiborg 2010). Within this scenario, the class journey is a familiar storyline with its own emotional resonances: changes in the labour market due to industrialisation, the development of the Norwegian welfare state, as well as new attendant possibilities tied, among other things, to universal education. Thus, Norway has fit into a modern story in which – due to the opportunities offered by the welfare state – one's ability to journey upward – to be socially mobile – is now predicated upon one's chosen actions rather than on a fixed and inherent status (Wiborg 2010).

Hamsun's (1890/1998), Jacobsen's (1991) and Ambjørnsen's (1986) novels feature different experiences and expectations for varying generations of the poor in Norway. Hamsun's protagonist experiences an immediate, more present-oriented sense of shame at failing to uphold the social norms and rules of behaviour of his urban setting (Frønes 2001). Moreover, without the help of a generous public welfare state and given his rejection of any begrudging private assistance that is offered him, the protagonist is unable to transcend his miserable status and feels the shame of his immediate

circumstances: "I am disgusted with myself, even my hands appear loathsome to me...I hate my whole slack body and shudder at having to carry it" (130). He has lost any identity as a serious, respected, individual who is worthy of recognition. Shame has an embodiment that is not as readily apparent in Marta's class shame. It is reflected in the description by Hamsun's protagonist of his physical decay. As he states, "I could no longer present myself for a position like a respectable person" due to clothes that were "so shabby" (5). Bodily decay sits side-by-side with the decay of his identity. He describes his deteriorated sense of self: "a swarm of tiny vermin had forced its way inside me and hollowed me out" (17); "When I looked at my shoes, it was as though I had met a good friend or got back a torn off part of me" (20); "I felt I was...a crawling insect doomed to perish, seized by destruction in the midst of a whole world ready to go to sleep" (27).

The protagonist's shame is not only materially, but also socially, manifested. Whatever social capital he may have once had is lost. Hamsun intimates that the social exclusion of his protagonist is due in large part to the insecurity connected to his harsh living circumstances. The protagonist spends much of the novel searching for a means to make ends meet, for a friend to provide a meal and for a warm place to sleep. Hamsun writes that the protagonist's seeming inability to move beyond this situation serves to enhance his exclusion from society. The protagonist describes the experience of being shunned by a former friend, noting "Why was he in such a hurry? I certainly didn't mean to ask him for a hand out..." (7). With no welfare state to provide support, the protagonist's fate is palpable. Thus, while the protagonist feels shame from his circumstances, he casts off individual responsibility by describing poverty as something he has been condemned with: "it became more and more incomprehensible to me why precisely I should have been chosen as a guinea pig for a caprice of divine grace" (17).

In contrast, Ambjørnsen and Jacobsen depict a modern Norwegian scenario in which the normative pressure to move (or to have moved) upward is keenly felt within a country where a large majority of the population have fared so well economically. Norway's welfare state provides a seemingly easy means for embarking on a class journey out of poverty and it may be an extra strain to identify oneself, or to be identified, as relatively disadvantaged compared to one's peers.

Jacobsen's narrative takes place in the midst of Norway's welfare state progress. He demonstrates the challenge of maintaining the appearance of upward mobility through Rogern's descriptions of several of the women living in his apartment complex: "You have...the type who constantly inform their children – preferably high and clearly from the balcony – that 'Dad is at the office' today, as if the old man has a habit of changing jobs in a pinch. We have door-to-door salesmen, flower sellers, counter workers, builders...they are all 'Dad at the office'" (398). The protagonist describes the paradoxical challenge that individuals experiencing economic difficulties face in negotiating their social identities: "in addition to what you are (shameful), it is also the lack of ability to hide who you want to be" (365). Jacobsen's text suggests that the Norwegian history and discourse concerning the mass class journey undergone by its population in the early and mid-20th century has been followed by a discursive shift in responsibility for one's social position, for whether or not one is able to embark on a class journey. This shift is reflected in the changing nature of shame and social exclusion that some of the novels' characters tie to their failure to maintain or reach a desired social position, reminiscent of Marta's future-

oriented shame discussed earlier.

The long-term vision of Norway's welfare policies has been to remove the significance of social origin on social mobility (Wiborg and Nordli-Hansen 2009). Yet the novels describe a seeming paradox in which the greater possibility for social mobility that is predicated upon the establishment of a strong welfare state translates in the now and later into a heightened sense of shame. This arises from the dissonance between an expectation of mobility and the reality of constrained options. The paradox cannot, however, be merely explained by the presence of a strong welfare state. It is, rather, located in the timing of welfare state development in Norway and in its very nature. Strong agrarian and proletarian impulses shaped a welfare system that has followed a model of generous social insurance benefits and protections *for most*. Indeed, Gosta Esping-Andersen (1990) suggests that it is this near universality that is one of the key factors to the resilience of the social democratic welfare regime. However, in addition to a heavy welfare state connection between income and self worth, Norway experienced a relatively late movement from traditional (and highly stigmatized) Poor Law-based poverty relief to modern social assistance legislation in 1964. It is not surprising that the discursive impulses framing the development of modern Norwegian social assistance would be a product of the dominant pathologized discourses that surrounding poverty in the 1960s (Macnicol 1987, Lødemel 1997). Further, as broadly targeted social insurance provisions throughout the second half of the 20th century consecutively lifted "deserving" risk groups out of poverty, social assistance and family dependency, the few left to be covered by social assistance have increasingly represented a disparate array of society's most marginalized (Halvorsen and Stjernø 2008), with a social assistance "sub-regime" that is quite residual in nature (Lødemel 1997, 262).

Ambjørnsen's novel palpably and critically reflects the impact of this paradox. He depicts the Norwegian welfare state as a venue for the social stigmatization and shaming of the poor in its presumption that citizens will live according to certain rules and standards in exchange for benefits. Ambjørnsen suggests that this society follows a strict social hierarchy in which there is a higher position for those who follow specific rules and norms – those who play by the rules – and a lower position with a different set of rules for those who do not fit into the one-size-fits-all ideal. His protagonists, growing up in 1960s and 1970s Norway, are emblematic of Castel's (2012) image of the disaffiliated youth of a post-Fordist era wherein "the routes to mobility...have been closed and the class consciousness which used to provide a shared, positive representation of a situation under domination is absent" (2012, p. 531). They reject the narrative of progress that is attached to the presence of a strong welfare state. Recalling the scornful words of a fellow classmate – "You are white niggers. Hell, you have *chosen* to be niggers!" (241) – Ambjørnsen's main protagonist, Erling, represents a status within this hierarchy that is lower than those "deserving poor" who are on the margins or living in poverty by dint of circumstance. To be charged with not having wisely utilized the resources and responsibilities offered by generous welfare provisions is to reap social scorn and stigma.

Aside from the expectation of earning welfare rights in exchange for performing a set of social duties, the strain of economic difficulties may be further heightened by the relative nature of poverty's effects. Several scholars have suggested

that modern shame has been individualized and associated with the failure to realize individual goals, to attain a level of personal fulfilment and potential. Beverley Skeggs (2004), following the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984), examines the varying ways that class identities attach to the self as a form of value. She argues that it is precisely the power that is attached to class (and, following Bourdieu, class distinctions) that makes it particularly difficult and potentially shaming for individuals to directly articulate their own class identities (see also, Savage et al. 2001). The empirical grounds for her conclusions are based on data drawn from the UK, with its distinct class hierarchy. The Norwegian experience is interesting to contrast. One of the functions of the modern social democratic welfare state is, in part, to shift the burden (of leaving one's origins) from the individual to the institutional structures of society. In the setting of more egalitarian Norway, however, the failure to fit the norm may be internalized and result in loneliness and self-blame (Frønes 2001, Skårderud 2001, Underlid 2001), especially within the context of a high average Norwegian living standard. Furthermore, representing the paradox that is the Norwegian welfare state, the big story of generous support and general well-being means that, lacking the overt structural framework of a distinct class hierarchy through which to "connect and collectivize" understandings concerning one's difficulties (Skeggs and Loveday 2012), those who have not fared as well may instead feel a heightened sense of individualized shame.

Jacobsen, more than Ambjørnsen, picks up on this theme and uses changing narrative standpoint throughout his novel to convey newer individualized shame. The novel's first section, taking place then, in the early part of the 20th century, is written in the third person, with a shift in focus on several characters, including Marta. The final section, representing the now of 1960s through 1980s Norway, is told in the first-person from the standpoint of Rogern. While Jacobsen makes it clear that the losses associated with poverty take their toll on the young Marta, the shame of poverty is not felt keenly as a personal deficiency. Jacobsen effectively uses the third person standpoint to suggest that poverty is a structural phenomenon that Marta's father must deal with in order to keep his means of living and family intact. Jacobsen's shift to the first person in the novel's later section suggests the personalization and individualization of relative poverty and associated shaming that accompany the post-industrial condition and Norway's modern welfare state.

While the data above suggest a heightened sense of shame, stigma, and one's own limitations due to a (relatively low) status, Ambjørnsen and Jacobsen also refer to a new sense of agency experienced by the generation born in the 1960s and after, in marked contrast to their parental generation.ⁱⁱ Ambjørnsen, in particular, features this agency – which he depicts as shamelessness in its most positive connotation – of those who identify as economically marginalized and/or receive social assistance from the state during the 1960s and 1970s. He suggests that welfare state provisions provide the space for a sense of solidarity to form among those on society's margins. Erling describes this new possibility: "I was well used to being a deviant and an outcast, but I was also well used to *surrounding myself* with deviants and outcasts" (257). Whether or not this bonding social capital (Putnam 2000) is to the benefit or detriment of Ambjørnsen's marginalized youth is left to the reader's interpretation. Yet the novel does suggest that this newer possibility enables little stories surrounding poverty

that include a sense of agency and possibility.

The Question of a Downward Class Journey

In practice if not in the public imagination, class journeys do not always result in upward mobility; one can travel to a lower status. But the trope connotes upwardness. This forms a public imagination at considerable odds with downward mobility. One would expect the latter to be productive of considerable shame in a society whose institutional support and resources have made this relatively rare, given that the notion of upward mobility has been ingrained for over half a century.ⁱⁱⁱ

The three novels do not feature protagonists with this exceptional class experience and resulting emotional shamefulness. Hamsun's protagonist has fallen on hard times, yet the public imagination of his time has no reference to state-fostered social mobility. Ambjørnsen's novel highlights the case of a shameless downward class journey. Erling, reflecting Ambjørnsen's anarchist leanings, is not, however, disaffiliated in Castel's sense of a breakdown of social and economic resources. Rather, he feels pride in his "lifelong safari" on the margins (23), of living "a queer and defiant life on the verge of the impossible" (86). His experiences bear witness to the strong social ties that may remain for a downwardly mobile member of the service class (Li et al., 2008). Perhaps this glaring exception also supports the expected emotional rule (cf. Hochschild 1983). The reader is surprised at the anachronism; it seems counter-intuitive to a public imagination that strives to mitigate shame by adhering to a system of rights and duties. We come away from this exceptional story and its shamelessness with evidence for an otherwise correct understanding of the trope and its relationship to poverty and shame.

What the novels do feature in this regard are significant others who feel shame for those who are perceived as likely to become or who, in fact, are downwardly mobile. Those who have journeyed upward do not automatically lose contact with or divest themselves of others less fortunate. Rather, they often maintain contact with their former circumstances (Gullestad 2001, Johannessen 2007). The travellers depicted in Jacobsen's and Ambjørnsen's novels do not abruptly break ties with former acquaintances following their move to the city. Indeed, there is a desire to stay in touch with one's place and people of origin. Looking back to less fortunate circumstances in part shapes the way in which travellers evaluate their new situations.

Ambjørnsen describes the heightened shame felt by Erling's father due to his son's interactions with the fringes of small town society. Ambjørnsen suggests that the father – who made the journey from economically difficult circumstances to achieve the middle class respectability of small business ownership – feels shame over not fully escaping his humble origins. The shame he feels is tied to stigmatization and marginalization, as well as to losing face within the context of his pretensions to the middle class. Erling, the son, describes how his own actions have reflected poorly on his father in front of potential high status clients. The example also speaks to the generational character of shame.

He certainly tried to come up with some phrases that kids are kids, etc. But without visible success. I could suddenly feel the Oslo boys' pout in the pit of my stomach and I got the impression that nothing at [my father's business] could be good enough for them after this. Father went stumbling into the stale house, from a backyard that wasn't good enough, although it was constantly called 'the garden' (107).

Jacobsen's novel also describes and critiques the big story of welfare state progress. His protagonist, Rogern, is the beneficiary of the class journey that his mother, Marta, has made and so does not experience the discomfort of negotiating a former, lower status identity. Yet he feels the pressure that the modern welfare state creates to fit into the norms of a middle class, predicated upon the assumption of Norway's mass class journey into (or perhaps: towards greater) equality. Norway's welfare state can be said to be a reflection of a society that prides itself on its egalitarianism, yet this system may be predicated on an "equality of sameness" (Gullestad 1992). Within this context, "being one of us" requires a careful balance. As Gullestad (1984) notes, the things to be avoided are, on the one hand, failing to maintain or adhere to a common standard of norms that can be evaluated in one's appearance and behaviours. On the other hand, one must take care not to make explicit any social ambitions that attempt to open a hierarchical gap between oneself and one's peers.^{iv} And yet, always looming is the threat of failing to move into (or remain in) the comfortable middle class and instead falling into the "third way...a little strange outsider group, silent people who don't strive for favour...people who know they don't have a chance" (333).

Rogern describes the modern and situational shame that he experiences in the negotiation of his position (economically and socially) with respect to his peers and family across the course of his life. In contrast to the celebrated marginality of Ambjørnsen's Erling, Rogern explains how this possibility for feeling shame or for shaming others results in a careful performance to establish his "equalness" to others and describes the tension he experiences within the context of reunions with former acquaintances: "An extra strain is to again meet someone who in his own eyes hasn't 'managed so well'" (629). Rogern is embarrassed when encountering a former close friend and classmate who have fallen on hard times. At the same time, Jacobsen suggests that the internal and individualized shame that this friend must experience via his socially marginalized location casts shame upon his own society for failure to take collective responsibility for all its citizens. This sense of broad social shame further marginalizes the friend.

I became outraged, but don't believe my own outrage either, because I have in a way given up together with [him]...what is loyalty? I hang my head and decide...that we don't live in the same world. ...I begin...to feel the creeping suspicion that even the most responsible and sociable individuals have a category in the back of their heads that's called 'the helpless', the 'unchangeable', the 'lost cause', a category where one hides away everything one doesn't understand (526-527).

CONCLUSION

What do we learn from this kind of analysis? It is perhaps not surprising that the three texts analysed support the big story of social mobility, urbanisation and industrialisation in the period under consideration. But the novels are not primarily concerned with the big story; they imagine the personal consequences of social change, and from that we learn that individual consequences are significant features of social change, serving to portray Abbott's sense of "what it's like" for those affected.

A turn to the lyrical demonstrates that it is the little stories brought forth that provide interesting details, as they flesh out the personal and emotional contours of things otherwise blandly writ large by attempts to trace and explain the development of poverty. A comparative analysis of the three texts suggests that these changes have simultaneously shifted the national social psychology of poverty in Norway—a social psychology decidedly attuned to the public imagination of historical eras. The authors show how the selves, identities, and feelings in tow form in relation to social change, tying personal troubles such as shame to the public issues in place (see Mills 1959).

The authors use individual stories to personalize the national trend toward geographical centralisation in the first half of the 20th century, paralleled by modernisation and the development of a strong welfare state. These features have enabled individuals to embark on a class journey where new cultural cues and economic realities come into being. Imagined is a new social psychology in which one's identity on the socioeconomic hierarchy shifts from being relatively fixed to the formation of an individualized and relational poverty experience. This experience is formed within the context of a new labour market less focused on production and more on knowledge and personal interaction, as well as according to new cultural cues and expectations. These new distinctions further heighten the cultural and psychological distance imposed between socio-economic classes (Bourdieu 1984, Skeggs and Loveday 2012). Further, lacking the ability, space or resources to challenge new morally laden distinctions, the shame that is experienced for those living in poverty now may be heightened (Skeggs 2004, Savage et al. 2001).

An expectation of equality predicated upon generous welfare state rights and protections also plays an important role in this distinguishing and distancing process. As Jacobsen's Rogern suggests, in this modern scenario, because who we are (our impoverishment) is not fixed, the modern storyline constructs a social status that is contingent upon our social interactions and the choices we make. These interactions and choices, carried out in relation to the public imagination, introduces the possibility of relative impoverishment in the midst of plenty, something as much culturally derived as it is economically fuelled.

Changes in the public imagination result in new possibilities and new ambitions for identities. They also reap new forms of emotion, such as new articulations and understanding of shame. Representing now, Ambjørnsen's and Jacobsen's novels feature a strong Norwegian welfare state, which mitigates the personal dependence of Hamsun's then and provides a space

for the impoverished to maintain or build social capital. It is a state that makes possible the agency for making personal choices and the ability to refuse to take on the identity and humility of impoverishment.

A dominant discourse in Norway suggests that the welfare state has made the class journey and full social mobility a possibility for all Norwegians. The new possibilities, however, also create a new space for social shaming and the individual internalization of shame. The industrial era social state successfully averted large-scale socioeconomic alienation (Castel 2012). While to be impoverished in Norway might have been the norm then, a century ago, the broad Norwegian experience of a mass class journey in the first part of the 20th century has made impoverishment a marginal experience. This along with the post-modern tendency by the middle class to accrue value, mark boundaries and maintain interests (Bourdieu 1987, Savage et al. 1992, Skeggs and Loveday 2012) may, however, result in a shame connected to poverty in Norway that is especially notable for its individualized intensity. The varied sorts of shame described by Ivar Frønes (2001) suggest as much. While we may speak of Norway as a country with generous welfare provisions and an egalitarian ethos, the novels imply that this is not a bed of roses. Rather, imagined is new poverty: To be poor in a rich (and egalitarian) country may be to experience a particularly insidious kind of shame.

The novels also address the possible bi-directionality of the class journey. The class journey is not always to a higher social status; one can also journey downward. But the public imagination of the class journey as upward makes this exceptional, and by that token more pernicious. Norwegian egalitarianism and equality can heighten the shame of those who fail to move upward and of those who move downward, as well as the discomfort of significant others who have fared better.

The class journey is also bi-directional in the sense that endings continually confront beginnings. One does not simply finish a class journey. The experience involves looking back and taking stock of where one has been in relation to where one is. This experience is highly social, implicating significant others and is perhaps similar to the experience of migration across nation states. It recalls the social psychology of migration implied in Ong's (1999) idea of transnationality, albeit within the context of an *intra*-national diaspora in Norway. The mass migration from rural to urban areas throughout Norway's 20th century resulted in geographic displacement and material changes, but also resulted in one's sense of living dual (often asymmetrically valued) lives. Speaking two languages, having lived in vastly different locations and maintaining regular contact between then and now constructs little stories of new identities and feelings, consequent to the big story in view (Portes *et al.* 1999). Again, while counter-intuitive, the shame and corresponding guilt of plenty also becomes a reality as it is contrasted to what was before.

Finally, (following a point made earlier,) we also learn from this kind of analysis that whether they are fictional or lived accounts, little stories both inform and challenge related big stories. Like lived accounts, the little stories of fiction, such as those presented in the three novels analysed, bring complex life to the grand sweep of historical narratives. The neatness of big stories is tempered by the little stories, both fictive and real. But, because they are imagined, the little stories of fiction

do something more. While they may be more or less nuanced than what might be gathered, say, in surveys or casual interviews, they also serve as keenly portrayed reflections of public meanings and understandings (see Abbott, 2007). Thus, they provide possible storylines for asking about journeys and responding with real-life accounts. They are, as Clyde Kluckhohn's (1944) book title might have put it, "mirrors for man(kind)," ways of imagining who and what we are in life and how we feel about it. That also is an important lesson, in this case derived from bringing together social science and literary sensibilities.

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ⁱⁱ While social assistance claimants may have felt newfound agency, this is not to suggest that the stigma attached to assistance receipt ceased to exist. While there have been no in depth studies of the stigma attached to the receipt of social assistance in Norway during the 1970s, Guttormsen and Høigård (1978) describe reported experience of stigma by social assistance claimants in a well-to-do suburb of Oslo, both within the context of one's lowered sense of self as a social assistance claimant and the negative attitudes of others regarding claimants.

ⁱⁱⁱ However, as there is now a trend toward the beginnings of a massive downward mobility from parent-to child generation- on both sides of the Atlantic, the exceptionality of this narrative may change in coming years.

^{iv} This recalls the set of Danish-Norwegian cultural "laws" – the Jante Law (Sandemose 1933). This text suggests a series of normative parameters for group behaviour towards individuals within Scandinavian social communities, including the critique of individual success and achievement as negative and inappropriate.