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EXPERIENCING AND ENCOUNTERING IMPOVERISHMENT IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY FINLAND

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ABSTRACT

The nineteenth century in Finland was characterized by significant societal changes. Since 1809 a Grand Duchy of imperial Russia, Finland began to transform from an early modern society of estates to a modern civic society. The end of the nineteenth century was characterized by significant economic growth. Despite this general development, for many people this era signaled impoverishment and downward mobility that affected even the next generations. A fresh look at the economic threats on various societal layers is called for. In this theme issue we are concerned with socially varying dimensions of destitution, its manifestations, and the ways in which it was experienced and repelled. We explore the manifold and fruitful sources available, some of which are as yet little explored, while others afford novel approaches to the history of poverty.

POVERTY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY FINLAND

In Finnish history, poverty and impoverishment, as personally experienced and lived through, have so far been paid only slight attention to when it comes to early modern society and especially to its various social segments. This has partially been the result of a lack of biographical or autobiographical sources and other documents that might yield detailed, personal depictions of individual struggle.

Nonetheless, the era between the early modern and the modern age, the nineteenth century, and especially if understood as a “long century” from the late eighteenth century to the First World War, appears a highly relevant period to explore experiences of poverty among various social groups. Little by little, the social order

that was based on the different judicial positions and economic privileges of the four estates, the nobility, the bourgeoisie, the peasantry, and the clergy—with the majority of the people belonging to the commoners outside all the estates—was in decline. A new hierarchy between the heterogeneous gentlefolk (Swe. *ståndspersoner*) (including the nobility, civil servants, entrepreneurs, clerks, and the like) and the populace was taking shape. However, the social division into gentry and common people was not congruent with the difference between rich and poor. Despite his style of living, education, and genealogical pride, a member of the gentry could live on more modest means than an uneducated rural peasant or skilled laborer who could advance in his career by education. One of the most crucial effects in the long run was that material wealth, power, and, in practice, the whole life course were no longer determined by the individual's family roots and estate to the same extent as once was the case (Jutikkala 1968; Wirilander 1982).

The interest in the poor in history has usually been synonymous with an interest in the lowest strata of society. The fact that since the turn of the twentieth century there has been a clear increase in the material produced and narrated by poor people themselves has undoubtedly influenced the emphasis of this era as regards the perspective *from below* on the history of poverty and marginality (Häkkinen, Pulma, and Tervonen 2005; Peltola 2008; Stark 2011; Halmekoski 2011). Much of today's understanding of the history of the poor from the viewpoint of their own agency is owed to these studies. Antti Häkkinen has recently considered broadly the question of inheriting poverty (Häkkinen 2013).

The focus in the long tradition in research on poverty has been on the history of poor relief, its forms, ideas, and changing policies—the historical roots of social work (e.g., Helsingius 1899; Louhivuori 1915; Piirainen 1958; Soikkanen 1966; Pulma 1994). The Lutheran ideas behind the poor relief provided by the Church and welfare states have likewise been specially considered (Mäkinen 2002; Arffman 2002; Mustakallio 2002; Markkola 2011; van Kersbergen 2011). On the other hand, we perceive the existing research of this field as a story of charity, philanthropy, their evolution into vocational professions, and their (gendered) role in the making of the civil society at the end of the nineteenth century (Ramsay 1993; Jordansson 1998; Jordansson and Vammen 1998; Markkola 2002; Annola 2011). Owing to this valuable work we have reached a comprehensive understanding of the history of poverty from the viewpoint of those who helped and fought to alleviate poverty, and the ideology that motivated their actions. Instead, those who were helped have

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been studied mainly from a structural macro perspective, which is why they have remained more or less anonymous masses and humble recipients of aid.

Häkkinen (2004) suggests that a structural perspective is only one way to approach poverty in history. Alongside the structural perspective, Häkkinen highlights the importance of the cultural, political, and action-focused dimensions of poverty, that is, how poverty was actualized in people's agency. All these are crucial here, but we are especially interested in the cultural perspective because we still lack research on who the poor really were, how their poverty was defined, experienced, and endured by themselves in those economic, social, and cultural frameworks that determined their lives. This perspective is furthermore widened to a consideration of how poverty manifested in practice in society and daily life and what can be regarded as its defining features. In addition to pursuing the experiences of the poor themselves, we try to reach the contemporary witnesses, what was said about the variously impoverished people and why. This theme issue provides articles that analyze the coeval public discussion.

In order to widen the social and temporal scope of the work accomplished on the poorest social groups and their poverty at the turn of the twentieth century, our version of the *from below* perspective comprehends here both privileged and underprivileged people. As the common denominator for the perspective we see the goal of accessing people's *experiences*. The underlying principle is to consider both lower and upper social groups as highly heterogeneous entities in terms of their inner hierarchies and livelihood circumstances. Factors such as gender, regional differences, and uneven distribution of inherited land, and the gentrification of the old privileged positions (e.g., after the 1810 abolition of the Finnish Army) are taken into account.

We argue that, because of the lack of a wider view of the various kinds of impoverishment destinies in estate society and the excluded viewpoint of those who virtually experienced destitution, the multifaceted and complex concept of "a poor person" has remained too limited and inadequate. The concept has mainly been restricted to fulfilling the criteria of a poor-relief dependent: needy children, disabled adults, and other people to whom relying on charity appeared as the last resort or a manifestation of the failure of all the other safety nets. Wider consideration for the term *poor* instead of *poor-relief dependent* was already called for in the 1960s by Pekka Haatanen (1968), who was interested in how the rural proletariat was depicted in older social science and fiction (69–70).

The role of a poor person cannot be regarded as that of merely a passive recipient of aid and control operations. To understand this, one has to look at poverty as an outcome of an impoverishment process. Impoverishment and economic threats force individuals and families to develop many kinds of survival strategies. This theme issue therefore poses the following questions: (1) How can we study impoverishment and people's agency in these processes instead of focusing only on the causal outcome, poverty, and that in its narrowest sense (i.e., poor-relief dependents)? (2) In what ways did poverty appear in both the lower and upper orders of society? What we call for is an understanding of what happened in those cases where people never received poor relief but coped with poverty in other ways. Was the term "poor" something that was attributed to low social position or could, for instance, even a nobleman—or woman—be "poor" in the eyes of contemporaries?

In this introductory article we consider the circumstances of material wealth and approximate income level in nineteenth-century Finland. As impoverishment or the threat thereof gave rise to preventive action, we argue that poverty in various levels of society can be identified by tracing coping strategies. That way, we provide an analysis of cultures of coping, both among nobility and beggars alike. This enables us to reconsider the concepts of *poverty* and *the poor*, as they were understood both by contemporaries and the previous research. Finally, we take a glance at the source material available for such an approach.

THE CENTURY OF UNEVENLY DISTRIBUTED MATERIAL WEALTH

The constitutional amendment in Sweden and Finland of 1789 gave freeholder peasants almost unlimited rights of possession and disposal of taxable land. It practically allowed the society of four estates to assume its purest form in Sweden and Finland, as freeholder peasants' privileges were formulated alongside those of the three other estates. This widened the gap between landowning and landless population in rural Finland, but then on the other hand strengthened the Finnish economy, which in the first part of the nineteenth century was still predominantly agrarian (Jutikkala 1968, 174–75). However, this era witnessed the decline of many early modern structures, and indeed of the four estates, in the face of modernization.

As suggested earlier, the nineteenth century was far from a consistent time period, especially from the economic point of view. Actually the first decades were more unstable and the economy declined more than in the latter part of the century. Still, by the 1850s, the level of the approximate real wage was similar to that in the late eighteenth century. Somewhat sporadic growth started only after that. The

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economy started to grow, albeit discontinuously and unevenly (Figure 1). As we will see, however, not all people could take advantage of this development.



Figure 1. Real wage (marks) in Finland 1789–1913 (1850 = 100). Source: Heikkinen, Hjerpe, Kaukiainen, Markkanen, and Nummela 1987, 69.

Compared to Western Europe, nineteenth-century Finland was a peripheral, undeveloped, and economically insignificant country. In the long run this changed, and by the twenty-first century Finland had become one of the richest countries in Europe. Yet at the beginning of the nineteenth century economic growth was slow, and periodically negative. As late as the 1860s, Finland still suffered from severe crop failures, and during the famine of 1867–68 more than 150,000 people perished (Hjerpe and Jalava 2006, 45–55; Häkkinen 1992, 125–26; Koskinen and Martelin 2007, 171).

The Grand Duchy of Finland was first and foremost an agricultural economy. Primary production (agriculture, forestry, hunting, and fishing) still employed more people than did secondary (e.g., manufacturing) or tertiary production (services). However, the proportion of manufacturing and services was growing faster than the above mentioned areas of primary production, and little by little Finland was industrializing. During the period 1860–90, the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita grew annually an average 2.2 percent. The secondary section grew faster (3.8 percent) than the tertiary section (2.6) or primary production (1.5). After this, in the 1890s, the economy grew even faster than before. Yet the GDP per

capita during the 1890s was still a mere seventy-five percent of that of Sweden. Hjerppe and Jalava (2006) argue that the growth of the Finnish economy from the mid-nineteenth century was the result of labor input, that is, an increase in hours worked, especially in manufacturing. This was possible because of new and better technology and production methods (Hjerppe and Jalava 2006, 45–55; Heikkinen et al. 1987, 76–77; Heikkinen 1992, 151–52; Eloranta, García-Iglesias, Jalava, and Ojala 2006, 22, 27).

Economic growth in Finland, especially during the late nineteenth century, included various structural and societal changes. Not all of these were positive, like the phenomenon of social downward mobility, which also occurred in Sweden, where it was connected to a new kind of impoverishment. In Finland and Sweden, the proportion of landless people certainly grew, as freeholder peasants' children could neither inherit nor claim taxable land as often as before (Winberg 1975, 17; Söderberg 1978, 126; Pulma 1994, 51–55). The material wealth was often distributed unevenly between the siblings: the youngest children of freeholder peasants could hardly expect the same living standard as their parents once had. As Häkkinen (2013) argues, referring to his large social-demographic database of Finnish families from the early eighteenth century to the early twenty-first century, the generation born in the period 1821–50 faced even more insecure life paths than their parents and grandparents. The family roots could influence them for better or for worse (13–35).

Despite the indisputable social downturn, Heikkinen (1992) argues that, actually, absolute, rural poverty did not spread during the nineteenth century in Finland because real wages grew in all rural groups. However, the growth rate varied considerably between population groups, and thus differences between social groups' standards of living became more apparent. Among the upper strata wages grew faster than among the lower strata, which meant that as the proportion of lower social groups was growing, the lower standard of living among the lower strata was emphasized (158). Especially on the local level differences could become notable and, compared to previous centuries, particularly in rural areas, the gap between freeholder peasants and the landless population grew dramatically (Lento 1951, 50; Haatanen 1968, 73; Soininen 1974, 370–71, 389; Heikkinen et al. 1987, 86–87; Heikkinen 1992, 158).

Even with these apparently opposite views, both are defensible: the number of poor people increased and, in the late nineteenth century, real wages grew. Yet the latter concerns only those persons who actually earned a salary, while the first

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viewpoint (i.e., the increasing numbers of the poor) could concern varying societal segments.

Scholars have defined the concepts of poverty and the poor, and recently there has been a call to extend these definitions beyond pure, absolute poverty in order to be more culture-specific. Besides this initiative, the concept of vulnerability has been recognized as a useful tool in understanding poverty and people's varying risks of losing livelihood. Vulnerability is not connected only to external hazards but also to more detrimental risks. Poverty and vulnerability go and interact hand in hand, and may even be mutually reinforcing (see, e.g., Engberg 2006, 31–32; Voutilainen 2015, 126–27).

In Finland, the growth of real wages or GDP per capita did not improve everybody's material wellbeing. As early as in 1913, Kilpi underlined that the proportion of those who could not maintain themselves and were dependent on poor relief grew. Recipients of poor relief were a heterogeneous group, which is also apparent in the statistics. The so-called F3 population in official population statistics included those supported by poor relief, prisoners, elderly persons, or people who had resigned their posts—groups of people who could not support themselves unaided. During the nineteenth century the burden of poor relief increased (137). As table 1 indicates, the percentage of people receiving the poor relief was minimal. The proportion of them was, however, rising especially during the late 1860s Great Finnish Famine.

Province	1845	1850	1855	1860	1865	1870	1875
Uusimaa	2,246	2,313	2,811	2,818	2,797	3,261	2,610
Turku and Pori	4,299	4,289	6,271	6,062	6,823	8,380	5,964
Häme	3,171	3,345	-	-	4,408	5,162	-
Viipuri	-	2,914	3,600	3,354	3,452	3,506	3,450
Mikkeli	2,355	-	-	-	3,819	4,421	-
Kuopio	2,763	2,885	4,173	4,466	5,068	5,017	5,693
Vaasa	3,856	4,003	6,368	7,722	10,005	9,221	6,307
Oulu	4,242	4,561	6,416	7,650	11,440	12,761	12,080
Total	22,932	24,310	29,639	32,072	47,812	51,729	36,104
Percent of total population	1.5	1.5	1.8	1.8	2.6	2.9	1.9
Total population	1,547,700	1,636,900	1,688,700	1,746,700	1,843,200	1,768,800	1,912,700

Table 1. Population and the number of people living with support from poor relief 1845–75. Source: Finnish population statistics in Kilpi 1913, 113; Vattula 1983, 18. For provinces, see Map 1 (Appendix 2).

The proportion of people supported by poor relief was slowly growing but still marginal, at most three percent of the whole population. An obvious question is whether this picture is actually too narrow to describe poverty. For instance, Engberg (2006) discovered that in nineteenth-century northern Sweden not all needy people actually received poor relief (32, 45–47). According to the population statistics, the proportion of people supported by poor relief grew in Finland during the period 1845–70 and decreased thereafter (see table 1 above). Since the statistics are not complete, the proportions should be higher in those years when some information is lacking. Both temporal and spatial variations have to be read here with extreme caution. The statistics were compiled by the local clergy, with no strict rules to follow. These numbers are more or less subjective interpretations.

The reasons explaining the growing burden of poor relief could be many, not only a growing number of needy people. In the course of slowly evolving and growing wealth, there probably was more to hand out to the needy. On the other hand, there was also the effect of the changing legislation. The new Poor Relief Act of 1852 raised the number of those eligible for poor relief, as from then on the able-bodied poor could also apply for poor relief (Pulma 1994, 48–49, 59–60).

The growing burden of poor relief gave rise to discussions among contemporaries. Johan Wilhelm Rosenborg, who in his 1858 doctoral thesis on pauperism as a societal problem argued for reformist and deregulated labor politics in the Finnish circumstances, was among those who regarded poverty as inextricably linked to the restrictions on trade and lack of education. This was decidedly radical compared to the still prevalent mercantilist labor policy.

The more liberalistic ideas gained ground the more this generously provided aid was criticized. Throughout the Nordic countries the poor-relief legislation moved close to the spirit of *laissez faire*; relying on poor relief should be made as difficult and as undesirable as possible. In Finland the reform took place in 1879, the same year as the liberalization of trade. As the liberalization of the economy and trade provided opportunities to advance and make a living, all people should be responsible for making their own fortune (e.g., Rahikainen 1992, 68–69; Markkola 2008, 218–20).

Contemporary authors also participated in this discussion in their literary depictions of the poor. As appears in Henrik Forsberg's article in this volume, late nineteenth-century authors defined needy people during the famine of 1867–68 as masculine and heroic victims who sacrificed themselves for the good of the nation. In other stories, authors pointed to the nobility's impoverishment and accused them of

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living beyond their means. That is, contemporaries had varying ideas about poverty and impoverishment. Furthermore, the authorities, the state, and the Lutheran Church also had their own definitions.

Besides poor-relief statistics, tax records are widely used sources in the history of poverty, and these studies usually analyze the proportions and characteristics of tax exemptions in defining the phenomenon. Lundsjö (1975), for instance, has defended the use of fiscal sources in the analysis of poverty, arguing that a person is poor when he or she lacks surplus. Everything is used for basic daily needs, and a person cannot afford to pay even the smallest taxes (39). With that definition in mind, Lundsjö found that during the mid-nineteenth century in southern central Sweden, the proportions of the poor according to fiscal sources could actually exceed thirty percent of the population (82).

Poor relief concerned fewer people than tax exemption numbers would show because a person could be exempted from tax for reasons other than poverty or infirmity. A person might be exempted from paying tax because of old age or a large number of children in the household. And, naturally, the nobility was exempt from paying tax. These reasons did not necessarily mean that a person was poor; however, as Engberg (2006) argues, the main reasons for tax exemption were poverty or infirmity. Thus, it is reasonable to analyze the aggregated data of people exempted from tax as a general poverty rate in a region. Analyzing both poor-relief documents and fiscal sources, Engberg found no specific connections between them. In other words, it was always the more personal matters that pushed the fiscally poor person over the edge into dependence upon poor relief. Neither was the dependency always permanent, as the reasons for poverty varied from case to case (38, 52). As for fiscal poverty in nineteenth-century Finland, tax records are studied in Miikka Voutilainen's article appearing in this theme issue. Voutilainen found that in Finland structural poverty was much wider than if defined merely as people living on poor relief: small farms and households headed by women in particular suffered from poverty. Fiscal sources thus give a more profound estimate of the number of the most disadvantaged and encourage scholars to approach the history of poverty from new viewpoints.

Poverty concerned all members of society, crop success could not be predicted, and accidents might unexpectedly ruin any individual's economy. People were very vulnerable, and they knew it. As the case of Henric Lindberg in Maare Paloheimo's article shows only too well, even a burgher could fall fast from a high social status in consequence of an accident, in this case the Great Fire of Turku in 1827.

TOWARD THE CONCEPT OF POVERTY RELATED TO SOCIETAL RANK

In the articles at hand, poverty and impoverishment are taken as relative and multi-faceted concepts. On the one hand, we pay attention to the heterogeneity of different social groups; on the other hand, to the insecurity in the face of sudden external crises common to all social groups. Even the most underprivileged and vulnerable people, who were the first to suffer from catastrophes such as crop failures and forced to rely on poor relief, varied in terms of social background, gender, social networks, geographical area, and general living standards. The nature of poverty was related to the social standing of the poor.

The poverty of the higher orders was an acknowledged phenomenon throughout pre-modern Europe. The concept of *pauvres honteux* (distressed gentlefolk), those who were ashamed of their poverty, referred to poor people of elite background, which made their external signs of impoverishment more embarrassing than the poverty of those who were already on the lowest rungs of the social ladder. For these distressed gentlefolk, impoverishment was a stigma caused by their having lost the battle to preserve status, respectability, and the lifestyle required by their social rank (e.g., Tepstra 2000, 1077). In total contrast to the depictions of the decline and degeneration of the noble estate (Vuorinen 2010) and its self-inflicted impoverishment caused by excessive extravagance analyzed in Marja Vuorinen's article, here, the *pauvres honteux* were seen as persons of class who were not the cause of their own misery (Broomhall 2004, 457). For example, gentlewomen's failure to marry was seen as this kind of risk of impoverishment that increased during the nineteenth century (Häggman 1994, 148).

For the *pauvres honteux*, the notion of submitting to public investigation at the hands of the parish poor relief and letting their names appear on the charity rolls was intolerable (Weiss 1983, 48). The ultimate difference between them and the laboring poor was that their high social rank debarred them from physical manual work, which was often required of the parish poor since public poor relief was allocated against "payment" and that way set as a part of the prevailing barter economy. This referred to the initial meaning of the term *the poor* in the Anglo-Saxon world: the poor were those whose survival was dependent on their physical labor input instead of land, personal property, or position (Van Leeuwen 1994, 590–93, Fontaine 2014, 15–18). In the context of the estate society, paid manual labor was in general the watershed between independent gentlemen and dependent commoners (Häggman 1994, 61). Because of this, *pauvres honteux* also referred to the way in

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which poor people of “quality” were assisted: in secret and usually with much more generous sums (Lander 1902, 197; Pugh 1974, 1980; van Leeuwen 1994, 593).

Discreetly assisting needy peers in the upper classes was something very typical for early modern societies. Van Leeuwen (1994) attaches the motif of providing aid for *pauvres honteux* to the attempts at perpetuating the God-given social order and combating the social decline of the upper social orders. Keeping the mechanisms of helping them and the less elevated poor separate maintained the social order. Thus it was necessary to provide different sums, different hospitals, and other institutions for people from different social groups (Van Leeuwen 1994, 593).

Poverty related to social rank was alleviated most of all through mutual help. According to the long tradition of mutual aid funds of artisan and trade guilds, people from different trade groups, especially in urban centers, voluntarily joined a fund where, against a membership fee, they and their family members could be entitled to loans or relief in case of sickness and widowhood, and also for funeral arrangements. In the nineteenth century these funds expanded to include factories and workers’ societies (Markkola 2008, 221–22). This system worked independently from poor relief and was crucial to many people who, because of their slightly more elevated social status, could not be seen to turn to the public charity of parishioners. On the other hand, for the most aristocratic families, it was possible to receive His Majesty the Tsar’s favor in the form of a grant proposed for the education of young family members or similar purposes, as we can read in Irene Ylönen’s article. This example suggests that it is reasonable to trace poverty related to social rank by concentrating on coping strategies. In the following these estate-related means of alleviating poverty are attached to the cultural framework of avoiding impoverishment.

CULTURES OF COPING

Not all people’s initiative and actions, whatever their social standing, can be understood as a serious and conscious fight against poverty and impoverishment, but merely as culturally and socially shared practices. Nevertheless, two kinds of coping strategies can be traced: those accomplished in the long run and those that helped to survive until the next day.

Overall in nineteenth-century Finland, to the majority of the common people, landless as they were, life in their local community was much more dominated by the principle of managing day by day (Heikkinen 1988, 70). Those who owned immovable property were less vulnerable than landless people. Landowning rested

on estate privileges, and people's vulnerability in the face of sudden accidents and crises revealed their state of material wealth. The fewer resources people had, the greater was the effect of economic fluctuations on mortality and fertility. As Dribe, Olsson, and Svensson (2012) have found, the manorial system could provide only short-term help for its inhabitants. These people usually lived hand-to-mouth, and their abilities to save for future needs were thus few (292–94; also Engberg 2006, 31).

Ownership of land and movable property provided a living. Land and property could also be mortgaged if investment loans were needed. Movable property was crucial because it was usually the means by which people tried to earn extra income and achieve a better standard of living, or simply to maintain the standard they had. In early modern times, this kind of investment was usually impossible if the person did not own land or enjoy crucial privileges. This became a serious problem for increasing numbers of people. As a result of population growth, more and more people, especially daughters, lost their generational link to landownership and inherited cash (Ågren 2009). The time of estate society was a time of privileges, also other than landownership. Merchants' and artisans' privileges were applied for from local authorities, and after approval the applicant was allowed to carry on the business in question. However, not all applications were successful (Keskinen 2012, 47; Uotila 2014, 122–31). During the nineteenth century these restrictions lost their relevance because of the liberalization of trade and the abolition of the early modern guild system (Appendix 1).

Coping strategies were shared by people from separate social layers. Borrowing is a very good example of this, since all population groups were involved in lending practices. In general the value of debts and credits was dependent on the level of debtors' or creditors' assets; in other words, the wealthier the person was, the larger were the sums lent or borrowed (Markkanen 1977; Nummela 1990, 289; Hemminki 2014, 135, 163).

In general, lending and borrowing—from small loans to larger sums for investments—were an everyday occurrence between ordinary people. Practices of borrowing and lending were in many ways also connected to monetary circumstances. Until the time when Finnish *markka* (mark) became official currency in 1860 (in use from 1863), both Swedish and Russian currencies were in use in Finland (Ojala 1999, 369–70). Because of a persistent lack of cash on the markets, most of the trade was barter and credit sales. However, borrowing practices also changed as modern banking and other financial institutions developed. Informal

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lending between individuals still continued, but as late as in the early twentieth century the role of banking and other financial institutions grew more important than informal means (Markkanen 1977; also Nummela 1990, 288).

The founding of formal banks offered a new kind of saving option. The first savings bank in Finland was opened in Turku in 1823, but the breakthrough of this business took place in towns in 1840–60 and in rural areas in 1860–1918. Eventually, savings banks were one reaction to the increasing problem of poverty, and the goal of establishing them was to improve living conditions among the urban working classes, and not primarily among rural people (Kuusterä 1995, 17–20, 42, 55–58, 85–88). People gradually learnt to take advantage of saving for a rainy day. As Johanna Annola points out in her article, wage earners like the poorhouse directress Elin Ahrenberg used to put money from their salary aside in bank accounts. Yet, changing savings practices were not only dependent on formal or informal practices: the life expectancy was from thirty to forty years before the 1870s, when it started to lengthen (Koskinen and Martelin 2007, 171). Thus, the need to save cash in bank for future need was questionable.

Informal lending was typically local and based on mutual trust, that is, it was a result of reciprocal and trustful relationships in local communities. People living in the same neighborhood, village, or parish were more or less obliged to cooperate in various situations of everyday life. As dependent as they were on one another, it was advantageous to think about the common good and not only about one's own best interests. Social relationships could be formed both horizontally and vertically since the elite and common folk interconnected with each other on the local credit market and within the micro economy of lending, pawning, and exchanging. Kinship is also usually known as an example of trustful relationships that could help people (Levi 1992, 131–32; Fuchs 2005, 6; Piilahi 2007, 269–72; Häkkinen 2013, 22–23; Hemminki 2014, 213; Fontaine 2014, 26, 95–127). Lack of such networks could have direct consequences in extreme situations, as in the case of poor and desperate parents who ultimately took their children's lives, as we can read in Anu Koskivirta's article. It seems clear that social networks and the immediacy of social ties emerge as most important and ultimate resources for both higher and lower social groups. This conclusion is also highlighted by earlier research (see, e.g., Levi 1992, 67, 77, 131–32; Häkkinen 2004, 156–57; Ojala and Luoma-aho 2008, 750).

Informal networks, trust, and reputation are also known as social capital, the theory that underlines the meaning of these intangible assets. Social capital should not be considered as equivalent to economic capital, as it cannot be “saved in a bank”

like money because it has to be maintained, or otherwise it may decline. Social capital can be used to gain economic capital, and, especially in an age without adequate social care, possession of social capital was crucial. The role of social capital in history has been observed and acknowledged, and the theory helps to understand relationships, economics, and actions in the past (Müller 1998, 31–33; Ogilvie 2004, 343–44; Laird 2008; Ogilvie 2010, 321). In the face of impoverishment, it was also intangible assets that mattered. Trustful relationships and networks could provide loans, gifts, or any kind of support in more or less desperate times. Gift giving has a long tradition in various primitive cultures and is traditionally reciprocal (Mauss [1950] 1999). A gift could be almost anything; the gesture was more important as it “oiled the social wheels” (Einonen 2011, 139–41). Gift giving was also a means to help someone who was struggling with impoverishment. This was the case in the noble family of Cedercreutz/Aminoff, analyzed in Irene Ylönen’s text: other nobles gave gifts to the relatively impoverished family. It was a question of the honor and dignity of the whole estate, setting it apart from the lower estates and groups.

In early modern times, education was connected with estates and privileges. In rural areas children were educated in “ambulatory schools” that were still significant in some areas in Finland even after the 1866 Decree on Elementary Education (Kotilainen 2013, 114). Basic education used to be the parishes’ responsibility before 1866, when it was transferred to the municipal authorities. The purpose was to develop education especially in rural areas, where most of the people still lived (Buchardt, Markkola, and Valtonen 2013, 10–11). There was a strong will to improve education in all social groups, and one of the ideas behind the struggle to develop an education system was to smooth out the differences between social groups and estates (Ikonen 2011, 219–20). In this volume, Johanna Annola analyzes how Elin Ahrenberg climbed the social ladder by educating herself and how she is an example of a woman who achieved a better living standard than the previous generation. Earlier, this had been restricted to a minority of people outside the nobility, clergy, and bourgeoisie.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century more than 350,000 people left Finland with dreams of a better life in North America (Kero 1996, 54). Yet moving as a way of coping was not solely oriented abroad: migration was also remarkable within the country, with St. Petersburg and its employment opportunities a major destination for many poor Finns. This burgeoned especially in the late nineteenth century, as agriculture could employ fewer people than before because of an intensification of production and increased job opportunities in factories and

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towns. However, migration was oriented not only to the towns; migration between rural parishes also increased in the late nineteenth century (Lento 1951, 44–53, 55–57, 106). The aforementioned Elin Ahrenberg is a good example of this, too: she moved many times within Finland in pursuit of work. Work-related migration was common even before the reforms in the freedom of movement in the late nineteenth century.

In spite of migration both to urban and rural parishes, better opportunities for social advancement were available in towns than in the rural areas (Haapala 1986, 96–98). During the years 1800–1900, the population in Finnish towns grew from 46,600 to 339,600, a more than sevenfold increase. Despite this urbanization, the majority of the population was still living in rural areas, in 1900 more than 2,372,900 persons, almost seven times as many as in towns (Vattula 1983, 25–26).

Sometimes casual actions were seen as reciprocal: by offering his labor, a poor person might obtain food, shelter, clothes, or money. Besides being a temporary supply of labor and other things, itinerant people were important connectors: they passed on the latest news and gossip. Odd jobs, debts, gifts, and poor relief are examples of legitimate means of survival; even begging was accepted with special restrictions (Fuchs 2005, 6; Pulma 2009, 77). Before the new poor-relief regulation of 1852, begging was considered one form of parish poor relief and was thus condoned only in the beggar's home parish. After 1852, begging was forbidden (Pulma 2009, 73–75).

Also higher social groups relied on moving and going around. Unmarried aristocratic women, for instance, could survive by staying with various acquaintances and family members. In this theme issue, we can read about people who stood on different rungs of the social ladder. For several of them, being mobile was crucial. Additionally, it was not only the wealthy who knew how to exploit their relationships. Lacking such relationships was equally disastrous for all.

There were also illegitimate ways of avoiding poverty or the threat thereof. The most severe was manslaughter, murder, any kind of homicide, or violence. In her work on nineteenth-century European poor women Rachel G. Fuchs (2005) has portrayed the vast *culture of expediencies*—as she calls the spectrum of legal, semi-legal, and illegal means of survival that underprivileged women relied on in their constant struggle in a *climate of calamities*. Fuchs highlights that this individual behavior and restricted freedom that was exercised within the limits of the prevailing social order reaches the term of agency. It was not similar to the higher social groups, but of its own kind, agency in a nothing-to-lose-context (15–17).

However, illegal survival strategies were used by various social groups and they cannot always be separated from the legal ways of coping. From the viewpoint of estate society and the distinctions between the different social strata, it is even more interesting to note that many well-to-do people facing the threat of impoverishment relied on the same expediencies as the most wretched. Some merchants, for example, resorted to the black market after bankruptcy, as Riina Turunen writes in her article. During the years of the Finnish famine 1867–68, the number of burglaries and other crimes also increased (Häkkinen 1995, 134–35).

DIFFERENT WAYS OF APPROACHING THE STUDY OF POVERTY

In this collection, we introduce little used sources on impoverished people from different social ranks, their agency in the frameworks of economic threats, and upward and downward social mobility. On the other hand, we operate with documents that are already widely used by Finnish historians such as census sources, mainly poll tax and parish records. What we seek is new ways of analyzing and testing these sources by asking how and by whom poverty was experienced.

First we come to the question of the scarcity of sources on underprivileged people. After looking for “normal exceptions,” that is, individuals or events giving rise to numerous documents because of their exceptional nature in their own spatial and temporal context, microhistorical tradition has come to the point where it tries to reach “typical types,” those among the millions of anonymous ordinary people, usually understood as homogeneous masses (Peltonen 2006, 161–65). Because it is extremely difficult to find source material where the chosen individuals appear as actors as such, all possible and additional information about the world and circumstances surrounding the individual must be collected. Usually this is done with the help of parish and tax records, but virtually any available official documents produced by secular and ecclesiastical authorities in their administrative and judicial practices are included as our source material. Eventually, the person may still be the missing piece of the puzzle so that very little personal information is acquired. What we achieve then is a cross-section of contexts all the way from micro- to macro-level in time, culture, and space. This method of individual-motivated contextualization leads us to speculative history. With the help of the contextualization, we have to construct what kind of life was likely for the person in question. Excellent examples include Alain Corbin’s (2001) experimental study of an early nineteenth-century clog-maker in his work *Life of an Unknown* and Irma Sulkunen’s (1999) book on the late eighteenth-century shepherd Liisa Eerikintytär (Liisa, Erik’s daughter), whose

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evangelical awakening probably caused mass-scale revivalist movements in western Finland.

In Finland, sources such as oral history, letters, diaries, and memoirs produced by ordinary people but even by the elite are extant only in fragments and until the twentieth century were confined to private and public archives (on oral history, see, e.g., Thompson 2006, 27–28). Some rare exceptions have found their way into edited books and into the hands of scholars (Ivendorff 2006; Kauranen 2009, 2013). In addition, expressing oneself in writing, especially in Finnish, was democratized only after the reform of the primary school system and as writing skills began to appear as a civic skill equal to literacy, which in turn had been demanded by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland since the days of the Reformation. The nineteenth century was an era of changes, but besides the economic and social upturns it was a melting pot of an old and new communication culture, a gradual transformation from an oral or semi-literate culture to a literate culture (e.g., Kauranen and Kuismin 2011). This affects what sources we have today.

If the poor appear as narrators of their lives only seldom, this is very different from their portrayal at the hands of the elite and societally active penmen. Contemporary attitudes toward poverty are thus amply represented in the coeval literature and newspapers. Two contributors of this issue, Henrik Forsberg and Marja Vuorinen, discuss fiction, nonfiction, national history, newspapers, and other literary narratives that can be regarded as more or less public discussion and well-known national narratives. To some extent these narratives color our conceptions of the past even today. As mentioned, at the end of the nineteenth century literary tradition was still weak in Finland. These narratives were used for nation-building and generating collective memory. In this process of “making our history,” poor people from different social ranks had surprisingly many symbolic and also gendered roles, from the ideal and humble deserving poor to despised spendthrifts who in their degenerateness appeared as impediments to nation-building and cultural development.

When we seek for the viewpoint of the poor and their own experiences, we are largely dependent on official documents. There is one particular type of official document that has been inexplicably under-utilized in nineteenth-century history, namely court records. They are typically used for studying everyday life and mentalities in early modern times, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Perhaps their infrequent use among historians studying the nineteenth century is the result of their actual content, the crime data, which is more easily available

from statistical sources during that era. On the other hand, depictions of everyday life during the nineteenth century are thought to be better reached in other kinds of source materials than during earlier centuries. Yet, if we want to acquire at least some information on the most underprivileged people, the records of court proceedings with their testimonies and “between the lines” information are almost the only way to form a picture of such people’s private lives and to glean hints of individual experiences.

Anu Koskivirta in her article examines court records to reveal such poor and desperate parents’ own voices and their own interpretations of the extreme situations which reduced them to killing their own offspring. These horrifying statements provide a unique perspective on the most disadvantaged people, especially single women. Yet, these “own voices” that spoke in court and were committed to paper by a clerk of the court cannot be regarded as autobiographical to the same extent as letters, diaries, or memoirs. Those were the words said aloud in court, in a public situation where people stood accused of the severest of crimes, homicide. However, what was said in court by the accused and witnesses may reflect the culture and mental climate with regard to poverty in general. Non-neonate infanticides and filicides most often coincided with crop-failures and other economic distress, such as the period immediately following the Finnish War (1808–09). That way, extreme crimes in extreme times unmask such extreme attitudes toward the poor and their own coping strategies that would not occur in less dire situations. Bankruptcies appear as a complex phenomenon that manifested in both late nineteenth-century burgeoning business activities and growth opportunities but also in personal crises caused by uncertainty for small-scale entrepreneurs in particular, as Riina Turunen points out in her article.

Bankruptcy documents include records of court proceedings and their appendices (bankruptcy files). The appendices may contain many kinds of information on debts and claims, both from the debtor’s and creditor’s standpoint. However, in order to get at the background stories which drove individuals into bankruptcy, especially in the case of small entrepreneurs, one has to outline their social and economic position in the local community by utilizing other robust source material, as Turunen shows in her article.

One such additional source material is probate inventories. These were written as a legal requirement after a death. All the immovable and movable assets of the estate were listed, as were also possible claims on the estate and debts. Thus probate inventories can be used both for examining the consumption habits and

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material wealth of different social groups and debt relationships between economic actors (e.g., Lindgren 2002). Petitions and registers of petitions in turn represent the old Swedish tradition, according to which all subjects of the King of Sweden were allowed to petition and appeal to the sovereign. It was also the last judicial option to appeal against verdicts or judgments handed down by lower courts. Typically more well-off people petitioned for licenses for their business transactions while less advantaged groups appealed directly for monetary aid (Paloheimo 2012). However, in this issue we can read in Maare Paloheimo's article that this was not always consistent.

These sources are analyzed here, considering both aristocratic and bourgeois families, both singly and interspersed with other sources. Cross-reading of the probate inventories and private letters of a noble family, as Irene Ylönen does in her article, reveals that the struggle against impoverishment was continuous, and that this struggle was specifically the task of the female members of the family, whom we tend to think of as excluded from the public sphere. The higher the social position, the more likely it is that some personal documents are today extant in public or private archives. However, reaching nineteenth-century people of higher social standing is not necessarily any easier than reaching the common people of that period. Successfully locating the probate inventory deeds according to a person's place of death may prove difficult because of the mobile lifestyle of older aristocratic individuals. Collating different sources and pieces of information is thus equally indispensable in the experience-oriented approach to the impoverishment of upper social groups as they are in the case of lower social groups.

As such, poverty caused by sudden, external crises could afflict almost anyone. On that account, impoverishment should be visible in the basic mechanism of the fiscal state, namely citizens' ability to pay their mandatory taxes. Tax records are very often used in population history in the same way as the ecclesiastical census sources (i.e., parish records), as a basic starting point to gather personal and genealogical data on people, their social positions, and connections, before researchers investigate other source material. Such usage fails to exploit fully other important information that taxation documents may yield, namely, what kinds of sums were actually paid in taxes, what taxpaying reveals of material wealth, social positions, regional variation, and, of greatest relevance here, what tax exemptions granted on grounds of poverty reveal about individuals and households facing impoverishment. Miikka Voutilainen seeks to utilize fiscal sources from this rather little applied perspective (see also Engberg 2006).

THE SPECTRUM OF POVERTY IN HISTORY

Poverty and impoverishment in nineteenth-century Finland cannot be understood without taking a look at those who lived through it. Poor relief can show us only the tip of the iceberg of poverty; yet, this was the most severe part. Neither can one be satisfied with approximate numbers of general levels of material wealth, notwithstanding the fact that these are unquestionably relevant in identifying overall and relative trends. Poverty, however, is concealed behind these averages and needs to be dug out with more detailed and case-specific tools. The reason for this is quite obvious. First of all, the poorest people rarely left behind individual documents. Second, regarding upper-class poverty and its victims known as *pauvres honteux*, one has to be very sensitive when identifying experiences of poverty. People from the upper orders did not easily admit to poverty. It is more like pursuing indications of calamities by scrutinizing ways of coping. As we suggested, cultures of coping were partly connected to needy persons on all levels of society.

The structure of this volume is the following: first, we concentrate on the analyses of how contemporary authors characterized poverty, its manifestations, causes, and effects in nineteenth-century Finland. Henrik Forsberg concentrates on fictional texts in order to discover how these writers perceived poverty, especially during the great Finnish famine 1867–68. Second come three articles that describe poverty experienced and grappled with by people on the lower levels of society. In this section Miikka Voutilainen studies tax exemptions in mid-nineteenth-century Finland and provides a unique overview of a hitherto less studied field in Finland. This is followed by Anu Koskivirta's article, where she analyzes the extreme conditions that led some poor and desperate parents to kill their own offspring. This phenomenon of homicides of no longer infant children has likewise been little studied in this context. However, poor and wretched origins did not necessarily mean similar outcomes, as the third article in this section shows. Johanna Annola's article about a poorhouse directress shows that people in nineteenth-century Finland could indeed succeed in climbing the social ladder. Yet, feasible ways of coping—including informal networks and relationships—were crucial, and lack of them could be disastrous.

The last section includes four articles and concentrates on impoverishment and poverty among the upper echelons of estate society, in this case both the nobility and bourgeoisie. Poverty among the nobility was not unknown, and it can be traced by analyzing personal letters and probate inventories, as Irene Ylönen's article shows. Impoverished noblemen and noblewomen tried to keep up appearances according

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to their estate and were thus obliged to solicit loans and gifts, while trying to maintain their reputation and trustful relationships. Marja Vuorinen concentrates on poverty among the nobility from another perspective. She analyses contemporary stories regarding the general decline and degeneration of the nobility in late nineteenth-century fiction, newspapers, and other texts. After this, two articles analyze how merchants faced impoverishment. Throughout the nineteenth century, merchants (especially small scale entrepreneurs and newcomers) might face serious problems when sustaining losses resulting from accidents or bankruptcy. However, this kind of misfortune was not necessarily handed down to future generations as Maare Paloheimo's article here proves: the son of an unsuccessful father could indeed succeed in business. Riina Turunen's article, then, describes what kinds of social ramifications a bankruptcy could have for an individual, not only with a reduction in economic prospects but also with significant social implications. Antti Häkkinen's afterword concludes this theme issue.

No one was immune to the threat of impoverishment during the nineteenth century in Finland. Of course, privileged groups had considerable advantages compared to the unprivileged, but ruin could afflict anyone. Good advice was precious, that is, each had to have some means of coping in case of hard times, either material or more immaterial.

APPENDIX 1

CHRONOLOGY OF THE LONG NINETEENTH-CENTURY FINLAND

- 1734 Code of Swedish Law
- 1746 First census in Sweden (and Finland)
- 1789 Constitutional reform, almost unlimited rights of possession and disposal of taxable land
- 1805 Hired labor act (males and females without property were obliged to go into service)
- 1808–09 The Finnish War
- 1809 The Diet in the town of Porvoo. Finland became a Grand Duchy of the imperial Russia
- 1810 Practical Abolition of the Finnish Army
- 1812 Old Finland (annexation to Russia in the peace treaties of 1721 and 1743) became attached to the Grand Duchy of Finland.
- 1812 Helsinki made the capital city (previously Turku)
- 1826 Abolition by the Tsar of capital punishment in Finland for all non-state crimes (the amnesty procedure commuted all death penalties to corporal punishment combined with hard labor)
- 1827 The Great Fire of Turku
- 1830s Major famines and cholera epidemics
- 1852 New Poor Relief Act, Hired Labor Act
- 1854–55 The Crimean War
- Late 1850s Major famines
- 1856 Completion of the Saimaa Canal
- 1857 Steam Sawmills Act
- 1859 Freedom of Land Trade Act
- 1862 The first railway track completed between Helsinki and Hämeenlinna
- 1863 The first Diet of the four estates after 1809
- 1863 The Finnish *markka* (mark) becomes the official currency
- 1864 Incorporated Company Act
- 1865 Abolition of Hired Labor Act
- 1865 Poll tax reform: lower age limit 16 years, reform of exemption basis
- 1866 Primary School Act
- 1866 Transformation to municipal administration (rural parishes)
- 1867–68 The Great Finnish Famine

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- 1868 Abolition of the Guild System and liberalization of industries
- 1868 The Bankruptcy Act
- 1873 Transformation to municipal administration (towns)
- 1878 Compulsory military service
- 1879 Freedom of Movement Act
- 1879 Freedom of Profession Act
- 1879 Poor Relief Act
- 1899–1905 The first era of Russification policy in Finland
- 1899 His Imperial Majesty's Manifesto (known as the Manifesto of February)
(Hans Kejserliga Majestäts Nådiga Manifest)
- 1899 The Great Address against Russification policy
- 1905 The General Strike
- 1906 Universal suffrage in elections for men and women aged over 21 years
- 1908–17 The second era of Russification policy in Finland
- 1917 The Russian Empire was overthrown in the February and October
Revolutions in Russia
- 1917 Finland declared as an independent state
- 1918 Civil War

APPENDIX 2

MAIN TOWNS AND PROVINCES IN FINLAND (1830s)



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