The importance of being rich: Social mobility in two families in Iceland, ca 1800 to ca 1970

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1. Social mobility in Iceland before 1850

The theme of the session is to test the claim that social mobility was much less in traditional societies than in modern societies. Iceland is an interesting case for consideration in this context because it is an example of a traditional society with a relatively rigid socio-economic structure that impeded occupational and social mobility. This becomes very clear when contrasted with early 20th century which was a time of substantial socio-economic changes in Iceland with significant occupational and social mobility.

Social mobility over time in Iceland has only recently been studied by scholars, and the research has concentrated mainly on the period prior to 1850. Much of the research has been on the social background of particular occupational groups, specially local sheriffs (Icel. *sýslumenn*) and the clergy. The occupation of their father has been examined at particular points of time in the 17th, 18th and 19th century. The results show that the fathers of about two third of the men in these groups had themselves been members of the very same group. Only one third of the fathers had been 'farmers' which indeed was a very heterogeneous group because the term 'farmer' includes poor peasants (sub-tenants and tenants) as well as rich landowners. The same applies to the priests; many of them were poor while some of them were well-off.[1]

These findings have been interpreted slightly differently. Some historians have concluded that Icelandic society clearly was characterised by a relatively closed elite that reproduced itself to a large extent over time.[2] In contrast to this, it has been

[1] Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, Old provinces, modern nations: Political responses to state integration in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Iceland and Brittany, PhD dissertation, Cornell University (1991), pp. 53–4. Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, 'Íslensk þjóðfélagsþróun á 19. öld' [The development of Icelandic society in the 19th century], *Íslensk þjóðfélagsþróun 1880–1990: Ritgerðir* [The development of Icelandic society, 1880–1990: Essays], ed. by Guðmundur Hálfdanarson and Svanur Kristjánsson (Reykjavík 1993), pp 13–14. Harald Gustafsson, *Mellan kung och allmoge: Ämbetsmän, beslutsprocess och inflytande på 1700-talets Island* [Between king and public: Civil servants, decision making and influences in 19th century Iceland], Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, Stockholm Studies in History, 33 (Stockholm 1985), p 78. Loftur Guttormsson, *Frá siðaskiptum til upplýsingar* [From Reformation to Enlightenment], vol. 3 of *Kristni á Íslandi* [Christianity in Iceland], ed. by Hjalti Hugason (Reykjavík 2000), pp 151–3.

[2] Harald Gustafsson, *Mellan kung och allmoge*, p 280 cf pp 313–14. Gísli Gunnarsson, *Monopoly trade and economic stagnation: Studies in the foreign trade of Iceland 1602–1787*, Skrifter utgivna av

pointed out that the farmer background of one third of the members of these groups shows that there was in fact a way for some farmers to get some of their sons into the ranks of these men.[3] However, if we consider circumstances in Iceland, only the real farmers — well-off landowning farmers — had the means to have their sons educated and these farmers probably were sons of officials or well-off farmers.[4] Therefore, looking back two generations for each individual, we presumably have relatively closed elite of rich farmers and officials.

It has also been maintained that Icelandic society had unclear class division and a homogenous culture because there was some flow between occupational groups and, thereby, chances of social upgrading. Simultaneously, however, these historians have admitted that there were sharp differences in wealth and in opportunities within the 'farmer' group.[5] One historian has, moreover, said that the picture of Iceland in the 19th century as a homogenous society is a myth.[6]

Other studies throw a further light on this debate. The social background of sheriffs in Iceland in 1650, 1700 and 1750 has been examined a few generations backwards in one study. The findings showed that in 1650 and 1700 the majority of sheriffs were the descendants of the most wealthy, powerful and prestigious families in the country. Or they had come to power with the aid of the Danish king in the aftermath of the reformation in Iceland and had married into those families. This

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Ekonomisk-historiska föreningen i Lund, 38 (Lund 1983), p 17. Icelandic translation of *Monopoly trade* is Gísli Gunnarsson, *Upp er boðið Ísaland: Einokunarverslun og íslenskt samfélag 1602–1787* [Iceland on auction: Monopoly trade and Icelandic society, 1602–1787] (Reykjavík 1987), p 25. Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, Old provinces, modern nations, pp 50–55. Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, 'Hvað gerir Íslendinga að þjóð? Nokkrar hugleiðingar um uppruna og eðli þjóðernis' [What makes Icelanders a nation? A few thoughts on the origin and nature of nationality], *Skírnir* 170 (1996), p 26.

[3] Gunnar Karlsson, 'Íslensk þjóðernisvitund á óþjóðlegum öldum' [Icelandic national consciousness in un-nationalistic centuries], *Skírnir* 173 (1999), p 177. Gunnar Karlsson, 'Syrpa um þjóðernisumræðu' [Miscellanea on nationality debate], *Skírnir* 178 (2004), pp 172–3.

[4] Incomplete data on the fathers of sheriffs in 18th century suggests this (Harald Gustafsson, *Mellan kung och allmoge*, p 79). The social background of those receiving secondary education in 1850 confirms this (Bragi Guðmundsson and Gunnar Karlsson, *Uppruni nútímans: Kennslubók í Íslandssögu eftir 1830* [The origin of modernity: Textbook in history of Iceland after 1830], 2nd ed. (Reykjavík 1997), pp 28–32.

[5] Gunnar Karlsson, 'Íslensk þjóðernisvitund á óþjóðlegum öldum', p 177. Gunnar Karlsson, 'Syrpa um þjóðernisumræðu', pp 171–2. Two other historians seem to take a similar view, see Aðalgeir Kristjánsson and Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson, 'Félags- og hagþróun á Íslandi á fyrri hluta 19. aldar' [Social and economic development in Iceland in early 19th century], *Saga* 28 (1990), pp 20, 21.

[6] Guðmundur Jónsson, 'Sambúð landsdrottna og leiguliða: Yfirvöld skrifa um leiguábúð 1829–35' [Relations of landlords and tenants: Administrative reports on tenancy, 1819–35], *Saga* 26 (1981), p 100 cf pp 63–106.

combined group formed the Icelandic aristocracy. In 1700 the situation was similar apart from the fact that a few Danes, most of them originally coming to Iceland as employees of merchants, had become sheriffs. In 1750, however, the situation was different because very few sheriffs came from the old Icelandic aristocracy. Instead most of them were of new families that were neither wealthy nor prestigious. The causes are not clear but the main hypothesis of the author is that the turbulence of an epidemic in 1707–09, where a quarter or perhaps one third of the population died, opened the way for men, outside the Icelandic elite and more obedient to the king, to be appointed sheriffs.[7]

Further to this, a study on the selection of spouses among the clergy in the 17th and 18th century concludes that women were selected in accordance with not only their social background but also on the basis of wealth. In other words, the findings show that there was not much difference in terms of prestige, power or wealth between families when a marriage was arranged.[8] Furthermore, contemporary sources indicate that mate selection among the upper levels of the social strata until the 19th century was usually conducted by the parents of the couple in question and that it was based on interests and 'proper' social background rather than based on mutual affection or love.[9] This evidence is in good harmony with a study showing that the Icelandic elite did in fact look upon itself as a superior group in the society. The elite felt, for example, that its consumption should reflect this, and the elite was somewhat irritated by occasional 'luxury' purchases of the general public.[10]

Present studies on social mobility in the early modern period and the 19th century Iceland have focused mainly on the reproduction of relatively high-standing

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[7] Gísli Gunnarsson, 'Afkoma og afkomendur meiri háttar fólks 1550–1800' [The conditions and descendants of the aristocracy, 1550–1800], *Íslenska sögupingið 28.–31. maí 1997: Ráðstefnurit* [The Icelandic history conference 28–31 May 1997: Reports], ed. by Guðmundur J. Guðmundsson and Eiríkur K. Björnsson, vol. 2 (Reykjavík 1998), pp 128–31.

[8] Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, 'Um íslensku prestskonuna á fyrri öldum' [On the Icelandic wives of priests in past centuries], *Konur og kristsmenn: Þættir úr kristnisögu Íslands* [Women and Christian men: Fragments from the history of Christianity in Iceland], ed. by Inga Huld Hákonardóttir (Reykjavík 1996), pp 222–6, 233, 235.

[9] Ragnheiður Kristjánsdóttir, Makaval Íslendinga 1750–1900 [Selection of spouses among Icelanders, 1750–1900], BA thesis, University of Iceland (1994), pp 40–42.

[10] Harald Gustafsson, 'Hugleiðingar um samfélagsgerð Íslendinga á árnýöld' [Thoughts on the Icelandic social structure in the early modern period], *Íslenska sögupingið 28.–31. maí 1997: Ráðstefnurit*, vol. 2, pp 115–17. Lýður Björnsson, 'Hvað er það sem óhófinu ofbýður?' [What offends the indulgence?], *Saga* 21 (1983), pp 88–101.

occupational or social groups, i.e., concentrated on social upgrading. However, social downgrading over generations was a permanent feature of Icelandic society. This was because most people could not sustain a family (marry and have children) without occupying a farm land. Since land was a limited resource and each generation reproduced more offspring than could maintain their position in the occupational and social position of their parents, a portion of each generation was pushed down the social ladder, generation after generation. For instance, a portion of the children of peasants always became labourers, socially infertile. This characteristic of inter-generational social downgrading is very evident in numerous family histories and genealogical compilations that have a long tradition in Iceland.[11]

2. The socio-economic transition of Iceland, 1880s to 1914

In the late 19th century and in the beginning of 20th century new developments set in that radically changed the Old Icelandic regime and put the society on a new track. The main cause for this was a population increase in the first half of the 19th century and as a result, the use of land became more extensive (often inferior land in some ways) and the number and size of households rose. However, this system did not allow for ever rising population without a drop in living standards and a rise in the number of labourers relative to farmers. The population could no longer be accommodated within the farming sector which also suffered from sheep scab in the late 1850s. Mass emigration to America became an outlet when it began in the 1870s and it continued until ca 1914 with ebbs and flows.[12]

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[11] Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, 'Fornar menntir í Hítardal: Eilítið um íslenska tignarmenn og ættartölurit á 17. öld' [Scholarly learning in Hítardalur: A few words on Icelandic aristocracy and genealogical compilations in 17th century], *Ný saga* 7 (1995), p 45. Gunnar Karlsson, 'Syrpa um þjóðernisumræðu', pp 173. Gísli Gunnarsson, *Monopoly trade*, pp 13–14, 22–23. Gísli Gunnarsson, *Upp er boðið Ísaland*, pp 18–19, 37–8. Gísli Gunnarsson, 'Afkoma og afkomendur meiri háttar fólks 1550–1800', pp 132.

[12] Aðalgeir Kristjánsson and Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson, 'Félags- og hagþróun á Íslandi á fyrri hluta 19. aldar', pp 12–25. Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, Old provinces, modern nations, pp 103–113, 134–43. Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, 'Íslensk þjóðfélagsþróun á 19. öld', pp 20–27, 53–6. Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson, *Family and household in Iceland 1801–1930: Studies in the relationship between demographic and socio-economic development, social legislation and family and household structures*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Historica Upsaliensia, 154 (Uppsala 1988). Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, 'Aðdragandi iðnbyltingar á 19. öld' [Advent of industrial revolution in Iceland in the 19th century], *Iðnbylting á Íslandi: Umsköpun atvinnulífs um 1880 til 1940* [The industrial revolution

By 1870, fishing had been practised in Iceland for centuries in traditional ways. Then the fishing sector began to develop in the 1880s, initially with changes in the ownership of fishing vessels. Capitalistic modes of production entered the stage and, shortly after 1900, fishing methods were mechanised. Urbanisation accelerated very much and new industries were born, including services. The infrastructure in the country slowly grew as well as the educational system, and the central administration expanded, partly as a consequence of Iceland's sovereignty in 1918 and full independence in 1944.[13]

The 20th century saw the birth of a new and flexible socio-economic structure in Iceland which gave much more room for population increase in different occupational groups. This structure was free of many previous constraints and social downgrading was in general replaced by social stability or social upgrading over generations.[14] But we do not know much more about social mobility in the 20th century, and we need a solid knowledge on when, how and in what way social mobility changed in Iceland in the 20th century. The following study is intended to offer some indication of this.

3. A tale of two families: The research method

Nearly all previous studies on social mobility in Iceland are all based on a two-generation comparison, i.e., an examination of the occupation of the parents (usually the father) of individuals that form either the entire occupational group or a sample

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in Iceland: Transformation of industries], Ritsafn Sagnfræðistofnunar, 21 (Reykjavík 1987), pp 24–32. Helgi Skúli Kjartansson and Steinþór Heiðarsson, *Framtíð handan hafs: Vesturfarir frá Íslandi 1870–1914*, Sagnfræðirannsóknir – Studia Historica (Reykjavík 2003).

[13] Magnús S. Magnússon, *Iceland in Transition: Labour and socio-economic change before 1940*, Skrifter utgivna av Ekonomisk-historiska föreningen i Lund, 45 (Lund 1985). Sigfús Jónsson, The development of the Icelandic fishing industry 1900–1940 and its regional implications, PhD dissertation, University of Newcastle (1980); also published in Reykjavík 1981 with the same title. Halldór Bjarnason, The Foreign Trade of Iceland, 1870–1914: An Analysis of Trade Statistics and a Survey of its Implications for the Icelandic Economy, PhD dissertation, University of Glasgow (2001). Magnús S. Magnússon, 'Efnahagsþróun á Íslandi 1880–1890' [Economic development in Iceland, 1880–1990], *Íslensk þjóðfélagsþróun 1880–1990: Ritgerðir*, pp 112–214.

[14] For general works on the history of Iceland in the 20th history, see: Gunnar Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 years: The history of a marginal society* (London 2000). Helgi Skúli Kjartansson, *Ísland á 20. öld* [Iceland in the 20th century] (Reykjavík 2002).

from a population.[15] By contrast, the present study is based on the social mobility of four successive generations in two families. Neither research method is superior to the other since the first offers a cross-sectional analysis at a given point of time while the latter method is a case study stretching over a certain period of time. The research methods do not give answers to the same set of questions so they are not interchangeable. Since the first one has dominated in Icelandic scholarship, it was decided to use the second method for this study to test the merits of the method as such. Besides, it was possible to ask different questions and get a different insight into social mobility in the 20th century.

The sources for the present paper are two family histories or genealogical compilations and the principal occupation of each individual was used as an indication of his lifetime social class.[16] To make the data comparable to international studies on social mobility, the occupations were sorted with the HISCO system which was subsequently recoded to the HISCLASS system on the basis of a recode file. made by Ineke Maas and Marco van Leeuwen, Amsterdam, 25 May 2004. Before the results will be discussed a few remarks on the sources and the method are in order. Using family history or genealogical compilations as a source in this way is not possible unless a) all or nearly all the descendants have been recorded and b) that there is a consistency in the naming of their occupation. Both of the family histories used here fulfilled both requirements well enough.[17]

The quality of findings where a family history is used rests very much on the accuracy of the compiler of the family history when recording the occupation of each individual. It is possible to take random examples to check them but it can be very

[15] The only exception is Gísli Gunnarsson's study, 'Afkoma og afkomendur meiri háttar fólks 1550–1800'. However, Gísli's presentation of the data itself is terse, the main emphasis being on the interpretation of the findings, so the material cannot be exploited any further.

[16] The core of this research was initially made several years ago, see Halldór Bjarnason, 'Frá fátækt til fjár: Athugun á fæðingarstétt og samfélagsstöðu í tveimur ættum' [From rags to riches: A study on social origin and social status in two families], *Ný saga* 2 (1988), pp 60–66. The descendants were classified mainly by occupational groups but for this paper, the research was made over again on the basis of the HISCO and HISCLASS systems and the historical interpretation was also elaborated.

[17] The number of unidentified descendants, most of them passing the age of twenty, and living in Iceland was five out of 114 (4.4%) for Kjartan Jónsson and seventeen out of 125 (13.6%) for Bogi Benediktsson. Some of these persons are naturally excluded by long-term illness or disability of some kind while information are lacking about a few descendants that took full part in the labour market. The majority of these unidentified descendants, however, died in their twenties or having just passed 30 years of age. In as much as this group had entered the labour market, it skews the distribution of descendants on social classes because they would all be put in the lowest social groups.

time consuming. Therefore, quality or the accuracy of the occupational recording in the source can usually not be verified efficiently unless with reference to the researcher's general historical knowledge of the society at the time and the local communities in question. If there are no conflicts, one must trust the accuracy of the source, and the two family histories used for this paper were deemed trustworthy in this respect.

Using 'principal occupation' in a person's lifetime as a meaningful indication of his or her social class may at first sight seem an inaccurate and a difficult measurement to analyse social mobility. It would also be possible to use, for example, the social position of the descendant at his marriage as criterion for the social classification. However, in practice this would require that one had to check every individual in marriage records for their position at the time, and this would make the research far more laborious although most studies on social mobility are in fact laborious. Also, those who did marry long after cohabitation with their spouse started, which was not uncommon in Iceland (and some never married), would require still more work. By the end of the day, this information would not necessarily provide more reliable information on social mobility, rather different information on matters such as future prospects at marriage/cohabitation. One of the merits of using principal occupation as a criterion is precisely the saving of time albeit at the cost of, for example, more accurate timing of movements in social mobility.

It goes without saying that any shifts in social mobility can only be located on a relatively long time scale, say 40 years, depending on average life expectancies. But this is all right if the period of study spans several generations as in our case, and if we are probing for long term movements as in our case rather than short term movements. However, using principal occupation as a criterion for a person's social class is not free of problems, for example, if the person had very different employments one after another or worked equally long in them; instances of this were few. Those individual who proved more of a problem were people who oscillated between the lower class occupations, mainly peasant/peasant wife, servant/maid, lodger (Icel. *húsmaður/húskona*), cottar (Icel. *búðsetumaður*) and free labourer (Icel. *lausamaður*). Such fluctuations in occupational status were not uncommon, especially

in the late 19th century.[18] This is a real problem and one can not, therefore, put too much weight on proportional shifts between these occupations which are anyway close in terms of social class. However, my rule of thumb was to sort this people by the occupation they had longest been engaged in over their lifetime and if in doubt, I sorted by the occupation that gave higher or highest social status. Nevertheless, even if my classification is not always fully accurate, it makes small margins of error for my principal purpose which is to analyse the overall distribution of the descendants across social classes.

In the classification process, the only significant problems or major decisions to make concerned women who worked at their homes. First, the majority of these women were married and to make the outcome of the research more useful, I put these women in the same occupation group as that of their husbands instead of putting them in their formally 'correct' occupation group, that of a housekeeper (22420). Second, some of the women working in their homes were unmarried and called matrons (Icel. *bústýra* or *ráðskona*) but they were in fact conconbines when they had children with the head of the household. This was in fact quite common in Iceland.[19] In such cases, they were sorted as married women since their their relation to the household was that of a wedded woman and they were not waged. On the other hand, those matrons that did not have any child with the head of household were deemed as truly waged house-keepers and were classified in accordance with this fact.

All descendants that moved abroad were obviously excluded from the research, and descendants born after 1910 were excluded for scholarly and practical reasons. The focus was put on the shift from the traditional farming-based economy to the new economy of urban based industries rather than examine its later developments. Therefore, it was not necessary to go beyond ca 1960 in my research and it was in fact difficult because the sources did not cover very well the occupations of the late 20th century descendents in the two families studied. By omitting one member of the fifth generation for the sake of simplicity, the research included this way four generations in both families, 217 persons in total (108 and 109 persons in each family).

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[18] Several instances of this can be found among Kjartan Jónsson's descendants, examined below. See also Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, Old provinces, modern nations, p 140.

[19] Ragnheiður Kristjánsdóttir, Makaval Íslendinga, pp 31–4.

The outcome of this research is mainly statistical in that the social position of these individuals is simply presented in a table class by class, generation by generation. Therefore, the tables doe not tell who, for instance, were the parents of those who moved down or up the social ladder from a particular position to another, or vice verse. The source material was sometimes studied closer to discuss this aspect in the text but the tables simply show the distribution of descendants across social classes as percentages of each generation. To highlight the main trends in upwards and downwards mobility all major movements (net) between generations are indicated with inserted arrows.

4. Intergenerational social mobility in the family history of Kjartan Jónsson, sub-tenant

The forefather of the first family examined for this paper was a peasant and a sub-tenant all his life and lived in the southern part of Iceland. His name was Kjartan Jónsson (1775–1856), son of a peasant and poor sub-tenant.[20] Kjartan had 13 children that were born alive, 3 of whom died in early childhood.[21] This number of children was not exceptionally large but the mothers were five which was more than usual. The explanation is that Kjartan married twice and he had children before his first marriage and in-between marriages. He also had one child from an extramarital affair. The social background of two of the mothers is obscure but the three other mothers were daughters of farmers/peasants and Kjartan's fathers-in-law lived on land which was valued above the average.[22]

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[20] The value of the tenant lands (Icel. *hjáleigur*) he held ranged from 6 to 14 hundreds (new valuation) while land of medium value was of ca 12 hundreds. One hundred in value meant that the land could feed one cow (or six ewes). See: *Ný jarðabók fyrir Ísland* ... [New land register for Iceland] (Copenhagen [1861]), pp 28 (Glóra and Krókur), 32 (Hreiðurborg). Einar Laxness, *Íslandssaga* a–h [History of Iceland a–h] (Reykjavík 1995), p 213.

[21] Jóhann Eiríksson, 'Niðjatal frá Kjartani Jónssyni bónda að Króki í Villingaholtshreppi, Árnessýslu' [Descendants of Kjartan Jónsson, peasant at Krókur, Villingaholt commune, Árnes county], in *Ættarþættir* ... [Family histories] by Jóhann Eiríksson (Reykjavik 1975), pp 279–391.

[22] Jóhann Eiríksson, 'Niðjatal frá Kjartani Jónssyni', pp 281, 354–5, 363–4. *Ný jarðabók fyrir Ísland*, pp 21 (Stóri-Klofi), 24 (Vatnsleysa).

Table 1

Descendants of Kjartan Jónsson (b. 1775) by HISCLASS

		Intergenerational distribution of social class			
Generation		1st gen.	2nd gen.	3rd gen.	4th gen.
First and last year of birth		1797-1831	1831-70	1880-1906	1893-1910
Median of birth years:		1810	1843	1883	1906
Time of adult years (ca 20 to death)		1830-60	1863-98	1903-1943	1926-73
1 Higher managers					
2 Higher professionals					
3 Lower managers		10%		12%	21%
4 Lower prof. and clerical, sales					3%
5 Lower clerical and sales				4%	3%
6 Foremen				2%	
7 Skilled workers				4%	3%
8 Farmers	Kjartan	50%	33%	16%	7%
9 Lower skilled workers				6%	17%
10 Lower skilled farm and fish. workers		40%	52%	29%	21%
11 Unskilled workers			10%	22%	24%
12 Unskilled farm workers			5%	4%	
		100%	100%	100%	100%
Number of descendants		10	21	49	29

Source: Jóhann Eiríksson, 'Niðjatal frá Kjartani Jónssyni ...' [Descendants of Kjartan Jónsson ...], in *Ættarþættir* ... by Jóhann Eiríksson (Reykjavik 1975), pp 279-391.

The children of the peasant Kjartan Jónsson were born between 1797 and 1831 with 1811 as median year (equally as many born before that year as after; Table 1). Most of them had were full participants in the labour market nearly twenty years later, around 1830, and granted the estimated average life expectancy at the time for 20 year old people, they could expect to life until about 1860.[23] As was anticipated, Kjartan's ten children almost wholly remained in the same social class as he belonged to or they moved down the social ladder. Five or 50% of them became peasants (as their father had been) or wives of peasants. Four children (40%) moved down and became lower skilled farm or fishing workers (Icel. *vinnuhjú* or *sjómaður*) or wives of those.[24]

[23] Life expectancy was estimated on basis of data in Guðmundur Jónsson and Magnús S. Magnússon (eds), *Hagskinna. Icelandic historical statistics* (Reykjavík 1997), p 199.

[24] The authors of the family histories or genealogical compilations used for this research speak of *sjómaður* which is more of a 20th century term in Iceland than 19th century term. The occupational

The only child of Kjartan Jónsson who moved up the social ladder was a daughter (10%), and she became a housekeeping matron (Icel. *bústýra* or *ráðskona*) of a peasant. Although it was common for matrons in Iceland to become the peasant's concubine, Kjartan Jónsson's daughter was a matron proper and did not have any children in her life so there was no offspring from her that could have kept themselves in the upper layers of the social strata.

The second generation from Kjartan Jónsson was born in 1831–70 with 1843 as median year. Hence, most of them were on the labour market from about 1863 until the end of the 19th century. The percentage of peasants fell because only one third of this generation (7 out of 21) became peasants as Kjartan had been and the rest of the second generation slid further down the social ladder. They became lower skilled or unskilled workers (or wives of those), either in the countryside or in the small hamlets that were growing by the seaside. It is difficult to tell exactly to which HISCLASS these descendents of Kjartan Jónsson best fit and the classification in the bottom band (groups 9–12) in Table 1 should be taken with reservation.[25] In more concrete terms, these descendents were servants in the farming sector (Icel. *vinnukona* and *vinnumaður*), made their living from fishing as cottars or were urban labourers (Icel. *verkamaður*). Wives of fishermen often took part in the fish curing among other things while wives of urban labourers presumably took all kinds of jobs, including unloading and loading freight ships for town merchants.[26]

After two generations of either equal social status or social downgrading, the descendents of Kjartan Jónsson the peasant began to climb up the social ladder. The third generation from Kjartan was born in 1880–1906 with 1883 as median year. Thus,

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term of these men in 19th century was usually *þurrabúðarmaður* or *tómthúsmaður*, i.e. 'a man living in an empty house', empty meaning without milk (cow or ewes).

[25] The twofold HISCLASS division in lower skilled vs. unskilled and general workers vs. farm and fishing workers is clear enough. However, the categorisation of individuals is problematic because Farm Servants (62120) fall in HISCLASS 10 (Lower skilled farm and fish. workers), while General Farmer-Workers (62105) fall in HISCLASS 12 (Unskilled farm workers). There does not seem to be much difference between these two groups and in Iceland, people sometimes became what can be called general farm workers (Icel. *húsmenn*) *after* they had worked for many years as farm servants. In Icelandic context this was more of an upwards move than downwards because it meant more slightly independence but in HISCLASS, they 'fall' from group 10 to 12. Apart from that, in both instances the people was equally unskilled, i.e., with no formal training of any sort.

[26] For a lucid description and analysis of the lives of people in urban nuclei in the late 19th century and early 20th century, see Finnur Magnússon, *The hidden class: Culture and class in a maritime setting Iceland 1880–1942*, North Atlantic Monographs, 1. Aarhus 1990.

most of the people of this generation were on the labour market by ca 1903 and was fully engaged there until ca 1940. In contrast to the first and second generation, some members of this generation (49 in total) managed to become lower managers, lower clerks and salespersons. Among these were owners of fishing ships, supervisors or foremen in production firms (Icel. *verkstjóri*) and a finance clerk (Icel. *innheimtumaður*). All these jobs were in urban localities. Other members of the third generation did not climb up the social ladder and took up jobs on the same social level as their forefather, some of them also in an urban setting. For example, one became foreman in road construction (Icel. *vegavinnuverkstjóri*) and two became skilled workers, one a shoemaker and another a furniture upholsterer.

The dramatic shift from farming occupations to urban based occupations in Iceland is evident in the third generation from Kjartan Jónsson. Compared to the second generation, the percentage of farmers continued to fall in line with exodus of people from the farming sector and rising productivity in the sector. In the same vain, the percentage of seamen and labourers was much higher. Also, people with other urban occupations in the third generation could be found, for example a lorry driver and a sewing woman. Cutting across these borderlines, the percentage of those in the bottom band of the HISCLASS groups — lower skilled and unskilled workers and wives of those, both in urban and rural areas (group 9–12) — fell only marginally from the second generation, from 67% to 61% as the broken arrow in Table 1 indicates. In contrast to this stasis at the bottom end of the social strata, there was also a conspicuous upwards trend in social mobility in the third generation. Clearly, Kjartan's descendants were reaching new heights in the social ladder while simultaneously reaching a kind of saturation point at the bottom.

The fourth generation from Kjartan Jónsson was born in 1893 onwards but 1910 was the last year included in my research. Most of them were born late in this sub-period of time as the median year 1906 indicates. Members of this last generation examined here (29 persons in total) were usually grown up by the mid 1920s and were in the labour market until ca 1970. It is short to say that all the same trends were at work among Kjartan Jónsson's descendents in fourth generation as in the third generation. The social climbing in the upper levels of the strata continued with greater success because a far larger portion of the generation (27%) reached the second top

band (social group 3–5) than in the third generation (16%). Most of these men were owners of fishing ships and supervisors or foremen in production firms as in the third generation. One men was a skipper, another storeroom clerk and third a shoemaker. A small but clear witness of the new times was that one of the women of the fourth generation married a musician.

This upgrading was mainly at the expense of the third band (group 6–8) where the percentage of descendants in these levels fell by more than half (from 22% to 10%) and the percentage of farmers fell equally as much (from 16% to 7%). Meanwhile, the percentage of the bottom band of the HISCLASS groups (9 to 12) remained onwards practically the same (62%) from the third generation as the horizontal arrow in Table 1 indicates. The groups in question were lower skilled and unskilled workers and wives of those, both in urban and rural areas. The stability in the proportional size of the lowest band in the social strata for three generations is quite remarkable and it possibly is a coincidence. However, their origins changed over time and the upwards trend on the social ladder for Kjartan's other descendants is no coincidence; both of this is discussed below.

5. Kjartan Jónsson's family history in context: Poverty and partial social upgrading

Social downgrading was a fact of life in the Old Icelandic regime, and Kjartan's family history in the 19th century is one more witness to this. However, a priori one would assume that the 'new' urban Iceland in the 20th century changed all this and that social upgrading was the general rule for all. This assumption is based on the general interpretation of Iceland's history in the 20th century saying that the shift from farming to fishing and other urban based industries lifted previous restrictions on the socio-economic structure. For instance, all kinds of industries proliferated in the 20th century compared to the 19th century, and people could freely migrate and engage in industries where there was a demand for their labour. These changes along with the building up of infrastructure and education, expansion of the civil service and

rise of living standards, to name a few causes, made room for a population increase at most levels in the socio-economic structure.[27]

This assumption about social upgrading in the 20th century applies to a part of Kjartan Jónsson's descendants in the third and fourth generation who advanced substantially up the social ladder (HISCLASS 3–8) although they did not reach the very highest layers of society. The socio-economic changes described above were clearly the main reasons for this advance because there were relatively small changes in the economic wealth among most of Kjartan's descendants. Also, from the start there was small symbolic og cultural power, using Pierre Bourdieu's terminology, in general in the family. By contrast, the percentage of those in the lower social classes (HISCLASS 9–12) remained very much the same in the third and fourth generation. Moreover, the percentage of the descendants in this band of the social strata was only marginally smaller than in the second generation.

The explanation for this has probably something to do with the fact that most members of the third generation were growing up in times (in the 1880s and 1890s) when formal schooling in Iceland was little. This is because primary education was not compulsory until 1907 and in 1903, for instance, only a quarter to more than a half of the children in the age groups 7–12 went to private schools or had temporary visiting teachers (Icel. *farkennarar*).[28] Therefore, schooling depended on the initiative and means of the parents. Presumably many farmers/peasants had the means to offer their children minimum education and this gave them advantage for life. But for the members in the lowest social groups who were generally poorer, these circumstances put their children at disadvantage from the start. With no family fortunes to depend on in most cases, this people took up available jobs as soon as they could work, and they stayed in the labour market until retiring around 1940. This story is reflected in the fact that two third of the people who were in the relatively low social classes 9–12 (in the third generation) were the children of people in the very same classes. Moreover, in this figure we excluded people who were the children of farmers (in social classes 8)

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[27] See, for example, Gunnar Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 years*, and Helgi Skúli Kjartansson, *Ísland á 20. öld*.

[28] Guðmundur Jónsson and Magnús S. Magnússon (eds), *Hagskinna*, p 846. Ingólfur Á. Jóhannesson, Menntakerfi í mótun: Barna- og unglingafræðslan á Íslandi 1908–1958 [Making of an educational system: Primary education in Iceland, 1908–1858], MA thesis, University of Iceland (1983), pp 5–6.

some of which were so utterly poor that the parents later divorced and received communal assistance for the upbringing of the children.[29] To put it differently, those who entered these lowest classes in society were mainly children of people who could ill afford to offer them any primary education and after school, most of them had to settle for unskilled and lower skilled jobs.

Circumstances for the fourth generation from Kjartan, mainly growing up in the first two decades of the 20th century, were in general better than for the third generation. Primary school was now compulsory, lasting from 10 to 14 years of age. The length of the school year was six months in the urban nuclei and two months in the countryside.[30] After school and if family circumstances allowed them to finish their school, they started to work to help the parents.[31] In the lifetime of the fourth generation, circumstances in the labour market shifted very much from one time to another. After having worked for several years, the Depression started in Iceland in 1930 and there were often difficult times in the 1930s. The Icelandic economy boomed in World War II, and in spite of ups and downs in the economy into the 1960s, living standards were generally improving.

The substantial upwards trend for the descendants in the upper levels of society is the most conspicuous evidence for better circumstances for the fourth generation than for the third generation. But more favourable circumstances can also be discerned for the lowest classes because of those in social classes 9–12 'only' 55% were the children of people in the same classes; to restate the ratio was 67% for the third generation. This change indicates that people in the lowest social classes (in the fourth generation) had significantly better chances to move upwards in society than it was for people in the same groups in the third generation. The education factor is perhaps not the only explanation for the overall upwards trend in social mobility, but it probably is the most important one.

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[29] Jóhann Eiríksson, 'Niðjatal frá Kjartani Jónssyni'. See, for instance, pp 326, 340. A similar case is discussed in Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, Old provinces, modern nations, pp 140–2.

[30] Ingólfur Á. Jóhannesson, Menntakerfi í mótun, p 7.

[31] Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, 'Kynjasögur á 19. og 20. öld? Hlutverkaskipan í íslensku samfélagi' [Modern fairy tales of the 19th and 20th centuries? Role division in Icelandic society], *Saga* 35 (1997), pp 157–63.

6. Intergenerational social mobility in the family history of Bogi Benediktsson, landowner and mercantile manager

The forefather of the second family that will be discussed here was Bogi Benediktsson (1771–1849).[32] He was of landed gentry, received education in a bishop school in Iceland, and at the age of 32 he was employed as a manager in Iceland for an established merchant house in Denmark which had branches in Iceland. The business prospered and Bogi's wealth grew over time. At the age of 55, after 23 years as manager, he retired and lived for over twenty years concentrating on literary studies with books and manuscripts he had acquired. Bogi married once and his wife was a daughter of a priest, presumably moderately well-off.[33]

Bogi Benediktsson had eight children all of which reached their mature years. Two of his sons moved to Copenhagen, Denmark, and took up residence there. They married Danish women and engaged in mercantile industries, both of them became prosperous wholesalers and they put up merchants houses which had branches in Iceland. They were both wealthy and their descendents received education, took on entrepreneurial activities an mixed blood with the social elite in Copenhagen. These two sons and their descendants were of course not included in my research since they lived most or all of their life outside Iceland.

The remaining six children of Bogi Benediktsson, one son and five daughters, all lived in Iceland and were born in 1799–1823. With 1811 as median year most of them entered their adulthood around 1830 and because they probably had better chances of higher life expectancy than the general public, they were active at work until about 1865 or even longer. In line with the social position of Bogi himself and the good fortunes of the two sons living in Denmark, the six other children reached the top layers of Icelandic society (Table 2). The only son became a well-off merchant as the father, keen on literary studies and patron of cultural activities. One daughter married a merchant, another daughter married a pharmacist, and three daughters

[32] His descendants have been recorded in Jón Pjetursson, *Staðarfellsætt* ... [The Staðarfell family history] (Reykjavík 1966), pp 5–57.

[33] Hannes Þorsteinsson, '*Æviágrip Boga Benediktssonar á Staðarfelli*' [Biographical outline of Bogi Benediktsson at Staðarfell], in *Staðarfellsætt* by Jón Pjetursson, pp 78–84.

married top officials in Iceland: a bishop, a high court judge, and a governor (Icel. *amtmaður*). Therefore, two third (four out of six) of Bogi's children in Iceland reached the top layers of society and the two others were very well-off.

Table 2

Descendants of Bogi Benediktsson (b. 1771) by HISCLASS

		Intergenerational distribution of social class			
Generation		1st gen.	2nd gen.	3rd gen.	4th gen.
First and last year of birth		1799-1823	1821-55	1852-96	1875-1910
Median of birth years:		1811	1835	1872	1902
Time of adult years (ca 20 to death)		1830-65	1855-90	1892-1932	1922-68
1 Higher managers		17%	29%	18%	11%
2 Higher professionals		50%	41%	23%	26%
3 Lower managers	Bogi			3%	9%
4 Lower prof. and clerical, sales		33%	12%	21%	15%
5 Lower clerical and sales				5%	7%
6 Foremen					2%
7 Skilled workers				3%	4%
8 Farmers			18%	21%	9%
9 Lower skilled workers					9%
10 Lower skilled farm and fish. workers					2%
11 Unskilled workers				8%	7%
12 Unskilled farm workers					
		100%	100%	100%	100%
Number of descendants		6	17	39	46

Source: Jón Pjetursson, *Staðarfellsætt* ... (Reykjavík 1966), pp 5-57.

Granted the high social status of Bogi Benediktsson's children and children-in-law, the social success of their children — Bogi's grandchildren — was largely repeated in the second generation. Its members were born in 1821–55 and with 1835 as median year; they were on the labour market from ca 1855 to ca 1890 or 1895. Two third of them (12 persons out of 17) entered the top layers of society just as in the first generation. The occupations of these descendants in the second generation and of the sons-in-law were governor general (Icel. *landshöfðingi*), sheriff and priest (several of each), a medical doctor and a secondary school teacher.

In spite of the social success of the second generation from Bogi, partial social downgrading nevertheless started because 12% belonged to lower professionals (wife of an archivist) and salespersons (wife of a merchant) compared to 33% in the first generation (merchant and wife of a merchant). The remaining 18% of the second generation became farmers, the first ones among Bogi's descendants. Although the value of the land they used for their farms was in two out of three cases well above medium sized land, one farm was only marginally above.[34] This fact and the farmer position shows the social downgrading which was a part and parcel of the Old Icelandic society and not even descendents of the top layers of society could escape it in the long run.

The third generation from Bogi Benediktsson marked the beginning of a more widespread social downgrading. This generation was entering the labour market mainly in the early 1890s and retiring in the early 1930s. The social downgrading was evident in that 'only' 41% of this generation reached the top levels of the social ladder compared to two third in the two generations before. Most of these descendants and sons-in-law were sheriffs, priests and medical doctors. Nearly all of the members of this generation who fell down to the second band in the social classification — and became lower managers, lower professionals, lower clerks, and salespersons (social group 3–5) — were sons and daughters of those who had been in the first band in the generation before. Partly therefore, there was a proportional increase of descendants in the second band from 12% in the second generation to 29% in the third generation. There was also an increase in the number of those in the third band compared to the second generation, and most of them came from the second band groups. Finally, for the first time descendants of Bogi Benediktsson were to be found in the fourth and bottom band, obviously descended from the groups above. This pattern testifies that the social downgrading in Iceland was usually gradual in that individuals fell step by step (or band by band) downwards from one generation to another rather than in large leaps.

[34] The land of these descendants was valued at 14.7, 21.8 and 38.1 hundreds (new valuation) while land of average value was ca 12 hundreds. See *Ný jarðabók fyrir Ísland* ..., pp 65 (Gvendareyjar), 68 (Arnarbæli), 113 (Naust). Cf Jón Pjetursson, *Staðarfellsætt*, pp 7, 20, 36, and Einar Laxness, *Íslandssaga* a–h, p 213.

Social stratification in the fourth generation from Bogi Benediktsson continued to witness social downgrading but only in the lower levels of the social ladder. The fourth generation was born in 1875 onwards with 1902 as median year which means that most of the members of this generation in my examination reached their adulthood in the early 1920s and were on the labour market until the late 1960s. The percentage of those in the two bands at the top of the social ladder in the fourth generation was about the same as in the third generation. Also, there were only very small changes in the percentages between these two bands. The first band was almost as high in the fourth and third generation, or 37% and 41% respectively. The percentage of those in the second band in the fourth generation was slightly higher than in the third generation, or 31% and 29% respectively. It is as if these social groups had a water-tight line between them and the bands below them but in fact some people crossed the line and either moved up or down.

In contrast to this relative stability in the first two bands, there were significant changes in the two bands at the bottom. The percentage of those working as foremen, skilled workers and farmers had fallen from 24% in the third generation to 15% in the fourth generation while the percentage of the lower skilled and unskilled workers (the bottom band) had risen, from 8% to 17%. Therefore, social downgrading was at work quite forcefully in the lowest social groups in the fourth generation of Bogi Benediktsson.

The occupations of both third and fourth generation from Bogi were very much characterised by the new urban society that was growing fast in Iceland after 1900, especially in the latter generation as might be expected. Thus, we find among the descendants and their spouses in the third generation a manager of production firm, (Icel. *forstjóri*), schoolmasters, a photographer, an organist, a booker, office clerks, a shoemaker, and labourers. In the fourth generation, we find occupations such as the manager of Road Construction Office (Icel. *vegamálastjóri*), manager of the Statistical Bureau of Iceland, manager of Ship Inspection Office (Icel. *skipaskoðunarstjóri*), state treasurer (Icel. *ríkisféhirðir*), manager of the Reykjavík gas station, an electrical engineer, a ship’s engineer, a dentist, a lawyer, a policeman, a furniture upholsterer, a builder, a lathe operator, radio mechanic, and blacksmith to name a few.

7. Bogi Benediktsson's family history in context: The importance of social capital assets

The family history of Bogi Benediktsson down to the 20th century cannot be understood properly without appreciation of his overall social position and background. This rich landowner and mercantile manager was of prestigious landed gentry for generations, and Bogi proudly published a book in his lifetime about his forefathers which was very unusual at the time.[35] His noble ancestry — in Icelandic context — no doubt was an important symbolic capital for him, in addition to his economic capital. Bogi was also esteemed for his literary interests and his father had in fact been educated in a bishop school in Iceland and was also keen on scholarly studies.[36] This gave Bogi and his family an additional asset which was cultural capital, both inherited and built on by him. Granted this, there is small surprise that Bogi's son in Iceland became a patron of cultural activities and learning in his community. Also, the governor of Iceland, the high court judge, and the bishop of Iceland, all men of substantial learning, were Bogi's sons-in-law. The holding of this cultural capital, in addition to his symbolic capital, gave Bogi's family a prestige and aristocratic flavour that was perhaps equally as important as the money wealth in attaining the very high social status that so many of the descendants of Bogi had over four generations.

In spite of the overall social success of Bogi's family, there was a marked social downgrading among some of his descendants in the 20th century. One explanation for this is that social downgrading simply is an inevitable part of intergenerational mobility in every society. In other words, it would be impossible for every descendant to either keep the social position of the parents or move upwards. The reason could be either a lack of interest or a lack of capabilities to do so. This is a very plausible explanation that can be supported with reference to common sense and

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[35] Bogi Benediktsson, *Æfi-Agrip Fedganna Jóns Péturssonar, Benedikts Jónssonar, Boga Benediktssonar og Benedikts Bogasonar* [Biographical outline of Jón Pétursson, Benedikt Jónsson, Bogi Benediktsson and Benedikt Bogason]. Viðey 1823.

[36] Bogi Benediktsson, 'Feðgaævir' [My forefathers], in *Staðarfellsætt* by Jón Pjetursson, pp 107, 110–11.

in general with examples of this kind. But this explanation probably does not tell the whole story.

Additional explanation for the social downgrading among Bogi's descendants in the 20th century could be that they now had to compete with descendants of other families for the higher positions in society. According to a study on the high officials in Reykjavík, signs of this can already be found in 1910. In 1870, one third of them had 'farmer' for a father and the rest of them were the sons of officials. In 1910, 'only' 64% of them were the sons of officials, the rest being of lower class origin: sons of merchants (6%), farmers (34%), and even 'seaman and labourers' (11%). The downwards trend was the same when other variables were examined: social position of the fathers-in-law of the high officials, the position of the high officials' sons and sons-in-law, and the position of the fathers-in-law of the high officials' children.[37] Most of these high officials had university education and it is, therefore, evident that in the wake of the social upheaval in Iceland in the end of the 19th century and in the early 20th century, better means and newly acquired wealth was often used to provide secondary and sometimes university education for the children. Also, close to the mid 20th century onwards young men who were lucky in terms of employment could raise considerable sums of money with seasonal work in the fishing sector and they sometimes were used to get education. Thus, talented people of relatively low social background could get education and compete with the descendants of the social elite.

8. Conclusions

The family history of Bogi Benediktsson suggests that wealth was decisive for how people fared not only in the Old Icelandic regime of 19th century but also in the 'new' urban Iceland in the 20th century. In the 19th century, two third of Bogi's descendants reached the very highest positions in society. In the 20th century, 'only' ca 40% reached the same levels of society. But the family wealth of Bogi consisted no less of

[37] Guðjón Friðriksson, 'Embættismannaaðallinn í Reykjavík' [The high officials aristocracy of Reykjavík], *Ný saga* 3 (1989), p 61 cf p 52–3. Note that while Table 1 is corrupted, Table 2 is correct.

kinds of other kinds of capital, i.e., symbolic and cultural capital, which are also important for social stratification as Pierre Bourdieu has argued. These kinds of capital assets were no doubt very important for the social success of Bogi's descendants.

In light of this conclusion, the question arises how typical Bogi's family history is for the 19th and 20th century Icelandic social elite in general. Were the other families equally as fortunate or was Bogi's family rather unique in its success? Since there exist no other studies on Icelandic families for comparison we can only guess, and my hypothesis is that Bogi's family was unusually endowed with the three kinds of capital Bourdieu has emphasised for social stratification. This hypothesis can be tested against families, for instance, with small economic wealth but of prestigious ancestry, or against families with economic wealth but of low social background. Anyway, if seems safe to suggest that not many families, if any, were bestowed with as much and diverse capital assets as Bogi's family. Hence, the social success of this family for more than 150 years probably was rather exceptional.

By contrast, poverty offered few chances and poor people had to work hard and labour long hours simply to stay alive. People of peasant origin, like Kjartan's descendants, either managed to remain in the same social level as their parents or they fell down to the lowest levels of society over time in the 19th century. In the 20th century, there was signicant social upgrading in Kjartan's family but it was partial because only some of the descendants managed to climb upwards and they were spread over a number of the mid range and upper social classes. Concurrently, the percentage of descendants in the lower levels of society (the bottom band of the social strata) remained remarkably stable for three generations from the 1860s to ca 1960s. Nevertheless, the reproduction of the lower classes by themselves diminished from the third to the fourth generation indicating an increasing social downgrading among the higher classes which helped filling the lower classes.

The reasons for these upwards trends in social mobility among Kjartan's descendants in the 20th century can not be ascertained here. But one of the reasons and perhaps one of the most important probably has very much to do with education and the introduction of compulsory schooling in 1907 was no doubt an important step in improving general education. Private school had been run for a few decades by then

but only a part of the children could be sent to school because of poverty and other causes. But even if the total amount of school time was short by some standards and the teaching had many shortcomings, this step in 1907 truly was an improvement over previous circumstances. The descendants of Kjartan in the fourth generation, at all levels of society, no doubt benefited from this and helped them improve their livelihood and prospects in the labour market.

Therefore, is seems safe to suggest that the family history of Kjartan Jónsson in the 20th century was typical for other families with similar background. It is interesting to note in this context that the American historian Harvey J. Graff has used an interesting categorisation, based on autobiographical sources, to explain people's different walks of life. His findings imply that formal schooling is a very influential variable to explain why people choose different paths in life.[38] That education is important for social mobility is not new but Graff's qualitative method is perhaps more of a novelty and fits well with our research method here.

On more general notes, the two different family histories examined for this paper can be regarded as showing the two ends of the social mobility scale and thus indicating how social mobility in general was affected by the socio-economic transition in Iceland in the early 20th century. The findings with our qualifications above no doubt are typical for many other families but we need to be cautious in our generalisations. The two families need not necessarily be representative of, for instance, families in other regions in Iceland where fishing was much less practised. Therefore, the findings need to be tested with more research using different family histories from other parts of the country.

Finally, the kind of research method used here has in my view showed that family histories can be used efficiently to study intergenerational social mobility. However, since the two families studied here were wide apart socially this method possibly is less useful in examining families with a more similar background. Also, the research period necessarily must span several generations unless we use, for example, social position at marriage/cohabitation as criterion. Although the method can be useful it needs further testing with more case studies, and it is important to use

[38] Harvey J. Graff, *Conflicting paths: Growing up in America*. Cambridge, Mass., 1995. I owe this observation to Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, 'Kynjasögur á 19. og 20. öld?', pp 164–6.

traditional methods as well such as static surveys of the background of given groups at given times. Qualitative methods also deserve more consideration. What is crucial is that research questions fit the research method and the source material, and, therefore, diversity in methods and sources will definitely produce the best results. Fortunately, irrespective of research method historians are well equipped with Iceland's rich material of family histories, censuses, ministerial books and other kinds of genealogical sources. This is a mine of information for research on social mobility which has not been studied at much length in Iceland.

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