

**C O N T E N T**

- A Letter from the RC 36 President	2
- <b>Call for Paper</b> - RC36 and RC38 Interim Conference "Beyond Alienation and Integration: Social Issues and Movements" in Curitiba/ Brazil (24 -25.07.2011)	4
- <b>ISA Forum 2012</b> in Buenos Aires/ Argentina	7
- <b>Paper</b> to the <b>XVII ISA World Congress of Sociology</b> , Gothenburg, Sand, Hans Petter 2010: „Reopening a National Wound“	8
- RC 36 Officers and Board Members	20

## A letter from the RC 36 President

Dear friends, colleagues and members of RC36:

Our RC has had a new leadership group for a half year now after our successful conference in Gothenburg, Sweden, last summer. The honor and responsibility of continuing our Committee's traditions of good leadership fell on me as the fourth president of RC 36. Some of you may remember reading in the *Newsletter* that our previous President, Lauren Langman, introduced me as his successor by emphasizing that he has known me for many years. However, knowing the traditions and officers of our Committee does not make my job any easier, for following such past RC 36 presidents as Lauren Langman, Devorah Kalekin-Fishman, and Felix Geyer is as much an honor as it is a challenge. Lauren also contrasted my "organizational skills" with his "personal chaos and disorganization," which supposedly constituted an obstacle for him doing the job. But I am not sure whether a victory over chaos is what has made RC 36 successful through the years, especially if one regards chaos in a Durkheimian sense as the necessary "evil" from which all good emerges. My impression is rather that our Committee's history of successful leadership should not be described in such terms since one of its constant features has been a sense of calling that makes such service a task more demanding than most academic positions.

As we move forward, perhaps the biggest challenge we face is to preserve the true spirit of our Committee. This involves renewing our research theme, supporting the motivation of our membership for high scholarly achievement, encouraging a sense of intellectual responsibility in a troubled world, creating a feeling of friendship amongst ourselves, and fostering the awareness that we belong to an important scholarly community. I believe that the new leadership of RC 36 possesses the necessary commitment to the cause of sociology as a science which possesses a dignified intellectual goal and an important social function. But in order for the new leadership to succeed in its endeavors, it will be necessary that you give the elected officers your trust and support, as you have always done in the past.

As you already know, the two immediate tasks facing us are our interim conference this coming July in Curitiba, Brazil, and our participation in the Second ISA Forum ("Social Justice and Democratization") in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in August 2012. I would like to thank all of you who

have already sent in your abstracts for Curitiba as well as those who have informed us you are interested in coming but have not yet sent them in. Please note the deadlines and details concerning these two events, which have been published in the *Newsletter* – particularly the fact that the deadline for submitting abstracts for Curitiba has been extended to 30 March.

The Board of RC36 has chosen not to organize regular sessions for the 40th World Congress of the International Institute of Sociology (IIS), which will take place in Delhi, India, 16-19 February 2012. We regret having to take this decision not only because the Congress topic ("After Western Hegemony: Social Science and Its Publics") is of particular interest to us, but also because we have been regular participants in IIS events over the years. It appeared that most of our members would likely not be able to be away from their universities during February in order to attend a conference. It also seemed likely that many of us might not be able to attend both the Delhi IIS Congress and the Buenos Aires ISA Forum in one and the same year. We gave our preference to the ISA event because the growing number of RCs that will participate in it promises to make the Forum a virtual ISA World Congress.

However, I encourage all of you who have the opportunity to be in Delhi to submit abstracts and join existing sessions. It is also possible for you to organize sessions of our own. Please let us know if you will be there so that we can keep track of all the events in which our members cooperate with the IIS.

I hope that the renowned beauty of the conference venues we have chosen for the next two years may help motivate you to join in. We trust that your indoor conference experiences will be at least as rewarding and exciting as your outdoor experiences will certainly be.

I look forward to receiving your abstracts for Curitiba and your session proposals for Buenos Aires, and also to meeting with you in either the one, or the other, or perhaps even both cities!

With best regards,

Vessela Misheva

## Call for Paper

RC36 and RC38 Interim Conference

“Beyond Alienation and Integration: Social Issues and Movements”

(Curitiba/ Brazil – 24 -25.07.2011)

The Research Committee on Alienation Theory and Research (RC36) and the Research Committee on Social Movements, Collective Action and Social Change (RC 48) are jointly organizing a two-day interim conference in Curitiba, Brazil, in conjunction with the XV Congress of the Brazilian Sociological Association.



This interim conference aims to bring together scholars from the two Committees who systematically deal with the modern challenges which research on alienation and social movements face today, including points of intersection between the two fields.

The topics to be discussed may include:

- Contemporary and classical perspectives on alienation
- Alienation, Integration and Social Movements: Theoretical Issues.
- Social Selves, Alienated Relationships, and Conflicts.
- Alienation, Well-being and Emotions at the Work-place.
- Emotions, Alienation and New Media
- Popular Youth Culture: Alienation, Expression and Identity
- Alienation, Socialization and Education
- Alienation, Lifestyle and Healthcare

Topics for joint sessions of RC36 and RC48 include:

- Emotions, Body, and Identity in the Study of Alienation and Collective Action.
- Identities, Collective Action, and Social Change.
- Main Tensions between the Local and the Global in Social Mobilizations.
- Emotions, Alienation, Collective Mobilizations.
- Framing, Discourse, and Ideology.
- Problems of Capitalist Societies and Social Crisis.
- Transnational Mobilization and Global Transformations.
- Social Movements, Struggles for Democracy and the State.

**DEADLINE for call for papers: Wednesday the 30<sup>th</sup> of March 2011**

The Papers should include:

- Title of presentation
- Abstract of the paper

Please send this mail to Cc also to Vessela Misheva ([vessela.misheva@soc.uu.se](mailto:vessela.misheva@soc.uu.se)), and with Cc to Miriam Adelman ([miriamad2008@gmail.com](mailto:miriamad2008@gmail.com)) and to Dirk Michel Schertges ([dimi@dpu.dk](mailto:dimi@dpu.dk)).

**ACCOMODATION:**

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webpage: [www.altareggia.com.br](http://www.altareggia.com.br)

Please send a copy of your registration to our contact person: **Paula Gimenes** ([eventos@altareggia.com.br](mailto:eventos@altareggia.com.br)) as well as to **Miriam** ([miriamad2008@gmail.com](mailto:miriamad2008@gmail.com)) to give her the chance to plan and to help if problems occur.

**DEADLINE for registration of the hotel: Friday, the 22nd of April 2011**

**Reservation Code to be given by room reservation: SOCIOLOGY EVENT UFPR**

**Contact person:**

**Paula Gimenes**, Events department, Hotel Altareggia; email:

[eventos@altareggia.com.br](mailto:eventos@altareggia.com.br)

**Price for one night :**

BR real \$112,50 per night (USD 67.57 at today's exchange rates,  
same rate for single or double room, with breakfast included)

Our conference will immediately precede the Brazilian conference, which runs from the 26th to the 29th of July. More information concerning the Brazilian Congress, the topic of which is *Changes, Permanencies and Sociological Challenges*, can be found at <http://www.sbs2011.sbsociologia.com.br/>. This site is available in Portuguese, Spanish, and English The link below provides a glimpse of the beauty of the conference venue:

<http://www.curitiba-parana.net/brazil/pictures.htm>

## SECOND ISA FORUM

„Social Justice and Democratization“

(Buenos Aires/ Argentina – 01. – 04.08.2012)

<http://www.isa-sociology.org/buenos-aires-2012/>

The RC36 at the ISA intends to take an active part in the work of the Second ISA Forum in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1-4-August 2012. RC36 invites interested members and researchers to submit proposals for sessions dealing with questions of theoretical and empirical significance for the field.

The proposal should include the name and the contact information of the session organizer, a session title, and an abstract of approximately 200 words that clarifies the session's theme and the type of research interests which it in particular will address.

Proposals for sessions which deal with the interpretation of classical perspectives, encourage the discussion of modern forms of alienation, or offer cross-national and comparative perspectives on the varieties and forms of alienation on personal, organizational, and societal levels in the contemporary world are equally welcomed. Also of interest are proposals for joint sessions to be held in cooperation with another ISA Research Committee.

**Session proposals are to be submitted by 15 June 2011**

Please send your session proposal by e-mail (address given below) to **Vessela Misheva** ([vessela.misheva@soc.uu.se](mailto:vessela.misheva@soc.uu.se)), who will serve as RC36 Program Coordinator for the 2012 ISA Forum and Cc to **Dirk Michel Schertges** ([dimi@dpu.dk](mailto:dimi@dpu.dk)).

Please note that if your proposal is approved you are expected to organize the session and serve as its convener and chair. According to regulations, a session chairperson cannot present a paper at the session s/he is chairing.

## Reopening a National Wound

Paper to the XVII ISA World Congress of Sociology, Gothenburg, Sweden, 11 – 17 July, 2010

By Hans Petter Sand, University of Agder (Kristiansand/ Norway)

2009 inevitably had to be an anniversary marking of the novelist Knut Hamsun in Norway. It was 150 years since Hamsun was born. The word *inevitably* is used because in the two preceding years the nation had celebrated anniversary of playwright Henrik Ibsen and the internationally little known writer Henrik Wergeland. Hamsun is, next to Ibsen, the most well known literary writer in Norway, but was sentenced to a heavy penalty after World War II for having been a nazi. This is the large national wound of the young nation of Norway.

After the war, the Norwegian authorities tried to have Hamsun diagnosed as mentally sick on the grounds of old age, but he then wrote a book proving that he was absolutely sane. He was then sentenced by a court to pay a lot of his fortune to the Norwegian state.

In 1978 this national wound was reopened by the Danish author Thorkild Hansen in his book "Processen mod Hamsun" ('The Process against Hamsun'). Hansen argued that Hamsun had been deaf, so that he could not get proper information about the war. In Hansen's view the way the Norwegian government treated Hamsun after the war was a disgrace. He even wrote "If you would like to see idiots, then go to Norway". This gave rise to a big controversy in Norway which was repeated again in the anniversary of 2009.

I will in this paper argue that the national wound of Hamsun can be seen on the background of the nation-building process of Norway. Norway had been an independent nation only from 1905. Before that, the country was in a union with Sweden for about a hundred years. Before that, Norway had been a colony under Denmark for about four hundred years. Poets, novelists and playwrights played a very important role in the nation-building process, and this was expected to be the role of Hamsun as well.

I would suggest that young nations may be particularly vulnerable to this kind of national wound.

### Knut Hamsun

Knut Hamsun is one of Norway's three Nobel Prize winners in literature, and there is unison agreement that he must be counted as one of the countries leading writers at all times.



Internationally only *Henrik Ibsen* is more well-known.

Hamsun came from a family of small means and rambled much about until he in 1880 got his literary breakthrough with the epoch-making novel *Sult* ("Hunger") – one of the first genuine modern novels in European literature and a predecessor of the *modernism* of the 20th century (Rottem, 2001)

His authorship can be separated into three phases, a first "*new romantic*" and strongly subjective phase (1880 – 1898), a transitional phase where he tried out various attitudes, forms and genres (1898 – 1912) and a last, social critical phase of satirical novels about society.

Hamsun emphasized the unconscious spiritual life of contemporary man. A common character of his writing is the tramp, who gradually comes to be seen in contrast to the idealized farmer. Through the years, Hamsun appeared as a harsh critic of capitalism and *modern times* from an anti-liberal, anti-democratic and reactionary view of society, which in the 1930s led him to feel sympathy with nazist ideology (Rottem, 2001)

In 1882 Knut Hamsun travelled to the United States of America, first to New York which fascinated him deeply. Then he went to the Mid-West, worked in various jobs and held speeches on literary and religious topics. As a sympathizer of the Norwegian liberal party he got involved in the fund-raising campaigns of the Norwegian immigrant in the Mid-West for the case of impeachment in the Norwegian parliament in 1884. The case ended with a victory for the liberal party and the introduction of parliamentarism in Norway (at that time the country was in a union with Sweden). Hamsun returned to Norway in 1882. In 1886 he went back to America and worked for several months as a streetcar driver in Chicago. Then he went on to Minneapolis where he worked and held a series of speeches.

An interesting phase of his development of ideas occurred in the anarchist sympathies he developed at this time. These were strengthened when some American anarchists, probably wrongfully convicted, were executed. With a mourning band on his jacket in memory of this incident, he travelled back to Europe in 1888.

In 1889 Hamsun published his book *Fra det moderne Amerikas Aandsliv* ("The Spiritual Life of Modern America"). From the point of view of an intellectual aristocrat he here delivered a sharp criticism of American culture and politics. To Rottem (2001) the depiction is one-sided, prejudiced and strongly subjective, with sharp attacks on both poetry and journalism and with a basic scepticism of modern democratic ideas, as they were practiced in America.

In the late 1880s Hamsun made himself acquainted with the thoughts of *Schopenhauer* and *Nietzsche* who came to have great influence on his later literary development. Perhaps Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy of life appealed the most to him, at least in his later years, and he was the only philosopher Hamsun read through his whole life. In Nietzsche it was particularly *vitalism*, the emphasis on irrationality and the idea about "der Grosse Einsame" he felt attracted to.

In 1898 Hamsun received a scholarship and in 1899 he travelled through Russia, Caucasus and Turkey. In his account of the journey, called *I Æventyrland* ("In Wonderland"), 1903, one can find the first clear traces pointing to a new orientation in his life and writings. Here he contrasts eastern mysticism and wisdom of life, a life of austerity and contemplation, against western industrialism, materialism and an urban life at a hurried pace.

He finds himself "strangely well in spirit" in company of the farmers of Caucasus and the remote villages and the sight of the mountain tops reminds him of his childhood in northern Norway. Northern Norway has a spectacular scenery, but was in Hamsun's days traditional in ways of life, based on agriculture and fisheries, and premodern compared to the south of the country. Fantasy and myth are woven together about an initial form of life where people of the East and the ancient people of northern Norway appear as the carriers of the virtues that have been lost in Western civilization. The title of the book thus refers to both Caucasus and

northern Norway and the tension between a restless urban life and a quiet rural life. This theme became a fundamental one in much of what Hamsun later wrote. Personally for him, the encounter with Caucasus woke up a slumbering wish to settle down, become a farmer and return to northern Norway.

Before the dissolution of the union with Sweden the nationalistic Hamsun committed himself strongly to the struggle for an independent Norwegian state and wrote among other things poems in political pamphlets.

In 1907 Hamsun, who then had been married once, met the actress Marie Andersen at the National Theatre in Oslo. They got engaged after a short while and began an intense love affair that to a large extent was marked by the jealousy and possessive attitude of the 22 years older author. They were married in 1908 and Hamsun forced Marie to abandon her career as an actress and start a new life as a farmer's wife, first in northern Norway and then in the southern part of the country

In the novel *Markens Grøde* ("Growth of the Soil"), 1917, Hamsun describes his alternative to the modern, capitalist, urban society which he detested. The novel is a tribute to the satisfaction of living a working life in tune with nature and a song of praise to the farmer, with "a farming gospel put forward in a biblical figure of speech" (Rottem, 2001). The farmer Isak is glorified to a mythical character, he is the eternal farmer, a character risen from the dead and at the same time a man of our times.

In 1925 Hamsun, who was the greatest stock-owner, contributed strongly to the establishing of *Gyldendal Norsk Forlag* ("Gyldendal Norwegian Publishing Company") through the so-called "home-purchase" of the company. Norwegian stockholders managed to raise enough money to buy Norwegian authors' right from the Danish Company *Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag* in Copenhagen. This incident has been seen as a triumph of nation-building in the quite recently

independent Norway. In connection with the "home-purchase" a strong friendship emerged between Hamsun and the powerful president of the publishing company, *Harald Grieg*.

An increasing hearing impairment and trembling of his left hand started to afflict Hamsun in these years. He had long periods of depressions and began to isolate himself from society. He participated little in the public debate, disliked visits and many came to see him as a hermit.

After having published the trilogy *Landstrykere* ("Tramps"), 1927, *August* ("August"), 1930 and *Og livet lever* ("And Life goes on") 1933, Hamsun became one of Norway's most popular writers.

However, in the 1930s Hamsun again publicly expressed his political sympathies. He had a positive view of Hitler and the development in Germany, believed in a strong leader and imagined a German empire that could beat England and hold back communism in the east.

When Germany occupied Norway in April 1940, Hamsun soon expressed his support to the Germans.

In the spring of 1943 Hamsun visited the German minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, who was a great admirer of Hamsun. The admiration was mutual, and Hamsun sent Goebbels a letter of thanks enclosed with his own medal of the Nobel Prize. After having participated in a congress of authors in Vienna, Hamsun met Hitler at his holiday resort Berghof in Obersalzberg. But Hitler lost patience with the stubborn and stone deaf writer because he continued to insist that Reichskommissar *Josef Terboven* should be dismissed as commanding officer of Norway because of alleged brutality to the Norwegian population.

In 1945 after Hitler's suicide, Hamsun wrote an obituary celebrating Hitler as a courageous fighter for humankind.

In posterity a lot of discussions have been led about the background of Hamsun's statements and actions during the war. There can be no doubt about his political sympathies, but there has been disagreement about to what degree Hamsun knew the actual conditions. He was deaf, kept mostly to himself, had several brain hemorrhages that weakened him further, and he got most of his information from Marie and the rest of the family, who also were Nazi-friendly.

### **The Norwegian Treason Settlement**

The Norwegian treason settlement was a legal settlement with members of the National Socialist Party, NS, and German collaborators in Norway after World War II. The settlement began with extensive arrests after the German capitulation on May 8, 1945. The arrests resulted in court cases against about 92 000 accused of whom some 50 000 were punished, 45

received the death penalty, about 17 000 received prison sentences and the remaining were various fines. The Norwegian legal settlement differed from others in that it included large numbers of cases, but in return, most judgements were relatively mild.

The legal settlement was disputed at the time, and has also been criticized in retrospect.

In June 1945 Hamsun was arrested by Norwegian police and interrogated about his actions during the war. The Norwegian authorities were in doubt about how to handle the case against Hamsun. After some considerations the Director General of Public Prosecution decided to subject Hamsun to an examination of judicial psychiatry. The psychiatrists concluded that Hamsun suffered from "permanently impaired mental faculties", but that there was no "risk of recurrence of the punishable actions".

After having received the report, the Director General of Public Prosecution dropped the planned criminal case against Hamsun due to his old age. Instead, a civilian lawsuit was raised referring to his actions during the war and an economic compensation for the damage he had done to his country. He was sentenced to pay a compensation of 425 000 Norwegian kroner to the state. The decision was appealed to the Supreme Court who confirmed the sentence, but reduced the compensation to 325 000 kroner. In posterity there has been a lot of clashes about this court decision and the whole process against Hamsun.

While in custody for the court trial and at an asylum for mental examinations, Hamsun wrote a diary that eventually became a book about his experiences called *On Overgrown Paths*, published in 1949. This book may be taken as evidence of his functioning mental capabilities. Hamsun experienced the psychiatric examinations as destructive, insulting and unnecessary. In posterity many people have argued that the psychiatric examinations were commissioned by the Norwegian court authorities to avoid the uncomfortable situation of putting the Nobel Prize winner in jail. In Thorkild Hansens book this impression was also confirmed in an interview with the psychiatrist who examined Hamsun.

Hamsun's actions during the war disappointed the Norwegian people deeply, and the interest in his writings was strongly weakened. But already a short time after the war, several intellectuals began to defend Hamsun the author and maintained that his political mistakes should not overshadow the greatness of his writing.

Already in 1951 a new edition of his collected works were published, and when the war came at a distance he regained his position as one of the most widely read authors of the country.

But, from time to time, a new "Hamsun – debate" has flared up, among others with the publishing of the book *Processen mod Hamsun* in 1978 by the Danish writer *Thorkild Hansen*, when there was made a Tv-series based on the book in 1995 and finally at the 150th anniversary of his birth in 2009. His relations to nazism has been a main theme in all these debates.

## Norwegian Society

Norway has been characterized as a homogeneous and isolated country (Dahl and Vaa, 1980). Both characteristics derive from its geographic position as the mountainous western coast of the Scandinavian peninsula, and the traditional union with the Nordic southern flank, Denmark (from the 14th century to 1814) and later with Sweden (1814 – 1905). Norway has had few relations with the outer world except for the relations through the countries of dominance, Denmark and Sweden. The latter countries used to lie as a protective "inner ring" around their smaller and poorer province. Norway's status as a peripheral nation has been followed by a more equal status within the Nordic countries, although Norway as the least populated country plays a subordinate role under Sweden, Denmark and in most cases Finland.

Norway has less than 3 percent of cultivated land. This has from ancient times led to an extremely spread population. The farms were small in the valleys and fjords and seldom gave rise to large landed estates. Thus a lot of the small farmers used to be self-owning, often combining farming with fishing and work in the forests. Around 25 percent of the country is wooded land, mainly the eastern part, and there are traditionally good fisheries on the western and northern coast. In the middle-ages, Bergen, on the west coast, was the only important Norwegian town, founded on export of dried cod from northern Norway. This trade was dominated by the Germans of the Hanse league. From the 16th century exports of timber laid the foundation for a chain of small towns on the eastern and southern coast.

During the last half of the 19th century Norway became industrialized, mainly based on hydro-electric power of which there is plenty on the west coast. Great waterfalls were tamed, and this gave rise to ore-melting industries, industries for making fertilizers and paper-mills. However, the country had few capitalists, so the money for industrialization had to be borrowed from other countries. In the 1960s petroleum was found in the Norwegian sector of the North Sea and this gave rise to a big offshore oil industry, which is now the main industry of Norway.

But while southern Norway became industrialized and modernized, northern Norway continued to be pre-modern, marked by traditional farming and fishing. This lasted at least up to the 1960s and 1970s when the fisheries were industrialized.

## Social Classes and Politics

Aubert (1975) described the class structure of Norway in 150 years perspective. In the beginning of the 19th century, Norway was a society with a small upper-class of state officials and merchants with relatively high incomes and a very large

proportion of common people; peasants, small- holders, servants and workers. The urban upper-class of state officials consisted in 1825 only of 0,7 percent of the population.

When it comes to political influence, common people had from the mid 19th century a comparably good standing. Many people, who stood outside the economic upper-class, had a right to vote and thus the possibilities to influence political decisions. Compared to other European countries the egalitarian element in politics was strong from 1814 and onwards. Norway got a comparably democratic constitution in 1814. This in turn is connected to other egalitarian elements of Norwegian society at that time. There was no landed aristocracy nor any large agrarian proletariat. There was many small self-owning farmers and relatively modest differences between self-owners, tenants and small- holders in many parts of the country. This meant that at least one foundation for class- division, that had played a very large role in many other European countries, was less important in Norway. Especially for the relations of authority this was crucial.

The class structure was not the same all over the country. The class-differences and the class-contradictions were significantly larger in the rural areas of eastern Norway than in western Norway. In northern Norway a large part of the fishing population were under a kind of feudal system with marked class differences. Nobility was abolished in 1821. Although this was not much more than a formal confirmation of already existing conditions, it implied the removal of the formal norms confirming the faith in superior social abilities as inborn. The norms about power and prestige regarding the relations between a land-owning aristocracy and the agrarian proletariat have found less support in Norway than in most European countries.

This trait of Norwegian society has been strengthened by the political mobilization of the farmers from the late 19th century, and then in the political mobilization of the workers, small farmers and fishermen during the 20th century. William Lafferty (1983) has termed the Norwegian state of the second half of the 20th century "the social-democratic state". However, the foundation for this state had been laid by the political mobilization of the farmers. Lafferty has emphasized the ability of this state for democratic mobilization and pragmatic reforms for greater social and economic equality.

## **Norwegian Nationalism**

Norway is one of the youngest nation-states in Europe. The historian *Ernst Sars* (1835 – 1917) wrote in 1902 that the Norwegian state constitution actually was a "poetocracy". What was special about Norway was that in the development of a democratic public sphere, authors played a crucial role. Therefore Norway has become a nation with portraits of authors the money bills, and the country has authors' names on its oil platforms in the North Sea. Also, the capital of Oslo is not like other capitals, filled with statues of kings, princes and generals, but by authors (Aarnes, 1997).

The nationalist movement was a European phenomenon, but in Norway conditions were particularly favorable for this popular movement; the country had a certain degree of freedom and was in opposition to the dominant state in the union which, by and large, respected the rules of the political game. The social, national and cultural movement was more and more seen as sides of the same coin. Poets, novelists and other intellectuals participated with a sense of serious commitment.

In the 1880s Norwegian literature got a strong position in European literature. The rapid industrialization in the country and the social and cultural upheavals that followed in its footsteps, was experienced very intensely. The encounter between the old and the new social order became very condensed and was strongly experienced by novelists who wanted to mirror their time and put into words what happened in economic, social and cultural life.

### The Four Greats

The four greats was a concept coined by Gyldendal publisher to market four of its authors; *Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson* (1832 – 1906), *Alexander Kielland* (1849 – 1906) *Jonas Lie* (1833 – 1908) and *Henrik Ibsen* (1828 – 1906). They belonged to some degree the same generation and were trendsetting in realistic Norwegian literature between the 1860s and the 1890s. The concept has become rooted in national life and got a wider use to canonize an alleged golden age of literature. The concept had been further confirmed through a textbook by *Nordahl Rolfsen* (1848 – 1928) that all Norwegian schoolchildren had to read at least up to the 1950s. It has been suggested that Gyldendal had planned to make Hamsun the continuer of this heritage.

### The Process against Hamsun

When the Danish writer *Torkild Hansen* in 1978 published his book *Processen mod Hamsun* it created a heated debate in Norway. Hansen's view was that Hamsun had been deaf during the war and had been misled by his wife Marie, who had success in Germany reading from Hamsun's works. The debate centered around whether Hamsun could be seen as an "innocent genius" and to what extent it was possible to make a distinction between the author Knut Hamsun and the "politician". It was in this book Hansen wrote his later famous words: "if you would like to meet idiots, go to Norway". By this he meant that it was a disgrace to treat an old man the way the Norwegians had done with Hamsun. Tone Ingeborg Nilsen (1981) has in her Hamsun bibliography registered more than 100 articles and contributions in the largest national newspaper this year, while the journalist Simen Skjøsberg in *Dagbladet* suggested that hardly any Norwegian newspaper was without materials about Hansen's book at this time. Authors, critics, journalists and well-known academics, also abroad, participated

in the controversy. The debate also spread to other media, and only faded away in spring and early summer the next years. In an interview in *Arbeiderbladet* on the 23. of September 1978, the journalist and critic Kjell Chr. Johannessen stated that "it would have been mortally dangerous for a Norwegian to write this book on Hamsun".

The Norwegian-born professor of philosophy at Stockholm University *Harald Ofstad* (1920 – 1994) made a very strong impression on the Norwegian public in a TV-debate with Thorkild Hansen in 1978. Ofstad went to a moral frontal attack on Hansen and claimed that the book was false, apologetic and grossly irresponsible. This angry debate was something of the most spectacular showed on Norwegian TV until then, and spectators were obviously divided in their view of Ofstad's role. A lot of people felt the scathing criticism of Hansen was in its place, while others reacted negatively to the fierce behavior of Ofstad.

Ofstad's most renowned work in Scandinavia is the book *Vår forakt for svakhet*, 1971, where he dealt with the mentality and norms of nazism, arguing that the elements of nazism formed a clear pattern which is based on a fundamental human contempt for weakness.

On the other hand, professor *Johan Vogt* (1900 – 1991) at the University of Oslo claimed that "in this book we are presented with a image of ourselves, as most of us us were at that time, filled with hatred and vindictiveness, and without the noble mind the victor ought to have. Pity with the defeated was considered not only as a weakness, but as a sign of an indifference towards the crimes of nazi times. We can now, 30 years later, probably see this as a understandable attitude. No one would deny that. But we can not claim that our stern attitude then was a consequence of a heightened and praiseworthy morality" (my translation).

### **The 150 years Anniversary**

In an editorial in the newspaper *Fremover*, Narvik, northern Norway, January 7., 2009, the tune is set for the the Hamsun anniversary. The editorial is a bit satirical and catches to my mind the central points of the whole Hamsun-theme:

"After the celebration of Henrik Ibsen in 2005 and Henrik Wergeland last year, the turn has now come to Knut Hamsun. It is Hamsun-year, 150 years after the great author- genius and notorious national traitor was born. Such a jubilee must naturally cause a little hullabaloo, contrary to the two former. Thus its seems that we are not able to put our national Hamsun- trauma behind us.



Private businesses have not just stood in line to sponsor the anniversary. Additionally, the Hamsun-anniversary is held on a considerably more modest level than the Wergeland- anniversary, in spite the fact that Hamsun probably is the one of the two classics who is most widely read to-day.

But it is here in the north we mark the anniversary with fresh spirits. In august this year, as we know, the Hamsun-centre at Prestøy in Hamarøy will be opened, the construction is already set to work.

As a young nation we have a great need to mirror ourselves in the glory from our national icons, where they are the great authors, sports-stars or war-heroes. A good expression of this is the movie about the resistance symbol *Max Manus*, which now goes from strength to strength over the country.

Here the distinction between good and evil appears in sharp contrasts. But we have never managed to realize or "reconciliate" ourselves with the fact that Knut Hamsun both was a brilliant writer and national traitor.

Instead we have constructed myths for ourselves. Some have claimed that Hamsun's nazi-sympathies were artistic, almost mythical. Others have claimed that it is time to forget his unambiguous tribute to Hitler and nazism because it now is time for reconciliation. But the pathetic attempt to render harmless the nazi treason of the great author is the claim that he was too stupid or immature to realize what ideas he flirted with. This reached its macabre climax when he after the war was subject to extended observation by psychiatric experts to clarify if he was criminally responsible. They concluded that he, who through his writing had been able to penetrate deeper into the human mind than most others, had "permanently impaired mental faculties". This thus happened not very long time after Hamsun had written his famous obituary of Adolf Hitler in the newspaper *Aftenposten*. He concluded his tribute: "And we, his nearest followers, now bow our heads at his death".

It is time to realize that Knut Hamsun can not be cut up in two persons – an author declared as genius we would like to deal with and an unpleasant national traitor that we would not deal with. Of course, there is a connection between these two sides of his life course.

But it makes sense to honor his brilliant writings with thereby pay tribute to his twisted political sympathies. The Hamsun-anniversary will hopefully help us further on that road"(my translation).

Later on the leader of Trøndelag teater, *Otto Homlung*, declared his theater and its region in the middle of Norway a "Hamsun-free zone".

Crown-princess *Mette-Marit*, was appointed patron of the Hamsun-anniversary, and this has been referred to as controversial and interesting. Hamsun-biographer *Ingar Sletten Kolloen*, stated that the crown-princess was not "a patron for Hamsun the nazi, but as a representative of the contradictions in all of us". When *King Harald* quoted from *On Overgrown*

*Paths* at a Court dinner in October 2003, Kolloen claimed that Hamsun had been forgiven by the Royal Court, but there has been disagreement over to what extent this could be interpreted in this way. Queen *Sonja* made a statement at the official opening of the Hamsun- anniversary February 19th, that "one must be able to have two thought in one's head at the same time, and make a distinction between literature and the person. There is little doubt that Hamsun is one of the greatest artists of our country". However, this was also controversial.

Holocaust-organizations have reprimanded the Norwegian state and the royal family of Norway for contributing to the celebration of "a well-known nazi". To this, biographer Kolloen commented that the critics were not aware of "the Norwegian Hamsun – syndrome", the relationship between "Hamsun's lighter and darker sides". Kolloen claims that it has been thoroughly proven that Hamsun was a nazi, but that the debate on Hamsun and nazism is a Norwegian phenomenon: "abroad they don't care about the political side of Hamsun".

In June 2009 a Hamsun bust in Grimstad, where he lived for many years, was decorated with a swastika, and five Hamsun mail-boxes were vandalized.

## Concluding Remarks

I have tried to show that the young nation of Norway, with its emphasis on "poetocracy" was not able to handle the problem of Knut Hamsun, the great writer and the nazi national traitor.

This has ever since the war been a national trauma, at times dormant and at times awoken to stir heated and emotional debates all over the country.

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<u>Newsletter 1. December 2000</u>	<u>Newsletter 2. June 2001</u>
<u>Newsletter 3. February 2002</u>	<u>Newsletter 4. June 2002</u>
<u>Newsletter 5. November 2002</u>	<u>Newsletter 6. December 2002</u>
<u>Newsletter 7. June 2003</u>	<u>Newsletter 8. October 2003</u>
<u>Newsletter 9. January 2004</u>	<u>Newsletter 10. June 2004</u>
<u>Newsletter 11. August 2004</u>	<u>Newsletter 12. December 2004</u>
<u>Newsletter 13. February 2005</u>	<u>Newsletter 14. June 2005</u>
<u>Newsletter 15. August 2005</u>	<u>Newsletter 16. January 2006</u>
<u>Newsletter 17. May 2006</u>	<u>Newsletter 18. August 2006</u>
<u>Newsletter 19. September 2007</u>	<u>Newsletter 20. January 2008</u>
<u>Newsletter 21. September 2008</u>	<u>Newsletter 22. January 2008</u>
<u>Newsletter 23. January 2008</u>	<u>Newsletter 24. January 2008</u>
<u>Newsletter 25 November 2008</u>	<u>Newsletter 26. November 2009</u>
<u>Newsletter 27. November 2009</u>	<u>Newsletter 28. June 2010</u>