

The Fishermen and the Nation

The Identity of a Danish Occupational Group

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ABSTRACT The development of modern fisheries in Denmark meant a change in social identity for the fishermen from being an estate in a hierarchy to being members of an industry on an equal footing with the other industries of a modern nation. The fishermen of the 20th century have been strong supporters of modern development and seen themselves as partaking in it. Yet, they have maintained some distinctly non-modern views and practices. The article compares the fishermen's concepts of social categories and relations of exchange with the formal image of a modern nation and tries to demonstrate that informal aspects of modern social organization differing from the modern norm, are integral parts of modern society.

A directory of Danish fishermen was published in 1935-36. The title was *Dansk Fiskeristat* (Strubberg 1935-36). It has been of great use to fisheries ethnologists who in the two volumes would find biographical information on almost 5,000 fishermen and on the status of the industry in local areas. Instead of reading this treasure of information, one should contemplate the meaning of the fact that it has been published.

The term *stat* for this type of books is related to state and estate. It is a type of Who's who, and the mark of nobility qualifying for inclusion is that of belonging to the national fishing industry.¹ There is a tradition for publishing biographical calendars of the higher ranks, but Denmark in the 1920s and 1930s saw an almost epidemic publishing of such works on all kinds of professions: *Dansk Grossererstat* in 1925 (merchants), *Dansk Mejeristat* in 1931 (people and institutions in dairy production), *Dansk Håndværkerstat* in 1932-33 (artisan trades), *Dansk Skolestat* in 1933-34 (teachers), *Danske Værter* in 1934 (innkeepers), etc., and in 1935-36 the specified *Dansk Fiskeristat*.

In the biographical calendar of the dairy industry it is obviously the attachment to dairies that connects the people involved. There was no dairy population or dairy estate; for fishermen it is different. It made sense to speak of fisheries as a separate social segment, a population apart. A quick statistical calculation based on the biographies shows that 71 per cent of the fishermen were sons of fishermen and 75 per cent were living in the same or neighbouring parish as the one they were born in.

In the foreword A.C. Strubberg writes that the fishing industry led an unobtrusive existence: "It was known, I suppose, that we had an able and fearless fishing population, but generally little was known of its conditions of life" (1935, I: *Forord*).² Because of the development that had taken place and the economic difficulties of the thirties, he finds that

It is thus natural that the practitioners of the fisheries become more and more conscious of themselves as an estate and want to address the public saying: come and see who we are and learn what our conditions are (*ibid.*).

In this work the fishermen from the whole country effectively step forward in their Sunday dress or navy uniform to introduce themselves as an *estate* and an *industry* of the nation. In his own local context the individual fisherman might be a poor and peripheral member of a community dominated by well-to-do farmers or towns people. But, as biographed in *Dansk Fiskeristat* and as a member of his professional association, he would be performing on the national scene as an equal on a level with members of other industries.

The organization/association is, following the American anthropologist Jonathan Wylie, a characteristic solution to a characteristically Scandinavian problem. In a comparative perspective he finds that "an ethos of egalitarian individualism" (1989:7) is a prominent feature of Scandinavian culture. This creates a problem in the relationship between individual achievement and communal equality. The way of handling this dilemma is that "Scandinavians construe realms of social interaction hierarchically, such that individuals finding themselves unequal or dissimilar at one level may meet as equals on another, more comprehensive level of social organization" (*ibid.*).

In the *Dansk Fiskeristat* the fishermen are presented as a horizontal community on a national level, and they are collectively referred to as an *estate* and, simultaneously, an *industry*. Fishermen and their organizations have continually applied the term "estate" (*stand*) to themselves during this century, though gradually giving precedence to the term "industry" (*erhverv*). These categories imply two different ways of classifying the realm or the nation into subdivisions: "estate" situates horizontal collectivities in a ranked hierarchy whereas "industry" situates horizontal collectivities on an equal level. Both models seem to matter for the social identity of fishermen despite the anachronism of associating estates with a modern nation state. The publication of the directory of fishermen is a statement on the identity of a social segment as part of a whole, but it is a statement which is partly at odds with a modern nation state. The cultural categories and the relations of exchange that define fishermen's social identity have implications that challenge the concept of a modern nation state.

Fishermen in Denmark

Before the Fishing Estate

Johannes Steenstrup, a historian, in 1907 warned against the tendency to project contemporary concepts on the past (1907:141). In his day it was "justified to speak of the fishing population as an estate within society" (*ibid.*). This was justified because fishermen made up a considerable population segment (fishing earned a livelihood for 32,600 persons) and because of "that distinctive way of living which confers on this population its particular stamp and builds its

spiritual character, results in its own traditions and views and, in short, marks it off as an estate in its own right" (ibid.:142).

Steenstrup raises the question of whether the name "fisherman" in former days designated members of a population segment or an estate and not just people engaging in the activity of fishing. His answer: there was no fishing population. From old title deeds and cadastres it appears that "many a cloister had a man who was called its fisherman" (ibid.:143) while in the 16th century there were inhabitants of certain coastal hamlets who were called fishermen, a fishing population proper did not appear until the 19th century; the mediaeval and early modern fisheries in the Sound (herring) and in southwestern Jutland (cod) was practiced *seasonally* by all kinds of people (ibid.:153-58).³

Steenstrup was searching for a population which *per se* could be characterised as fishermen, but, even if he had found one that would not suffice for calling it a fishing estate. "Estate" does not just refer to the internal characteristics of a social segment. It is a relational definition of the place of a part in a whole, and the whole in the 16th century was different from that in the 19th. Despite Steenstrup's demonstration – that "fishermen" have not always been there – did include an account of the relational setting of the people who engaged in fishing; fishermen and fishing rarely appeared in historical sources because they were out of focus in a society organised around landed property. What mattered for social identity and for taxation was vertical social integration and property or use rights in real estate.

Fishing in mediaeval and early modern Denmark was not an industry or a trade in our sense of the words. It was not an independent sector in the economy of the realm. Fishing rights could be part of the land rights of shore- or coast-owners, and access to the sea invariably depended on the owner of the coast (Kudlik 1986:186, 189). If nobody else, the king would be the owner. Since, however, fishing involved only moveable property, the social identity of seasonal or occasional fishermen would be subordinate to their involvement with people or landed property and to their legal status.

Not until the 19th century did specialised, full-time fishermen become a component of society in their own right, entailing some idea of being a horizontal community. It makes no sense to interpret fishermen before that time as a horizontal collectivity or stratum just because they shared the activity of fishing. The hierarchy they were part of was not one of separate horizontal strata, but one of vertically integrated persons.⁴

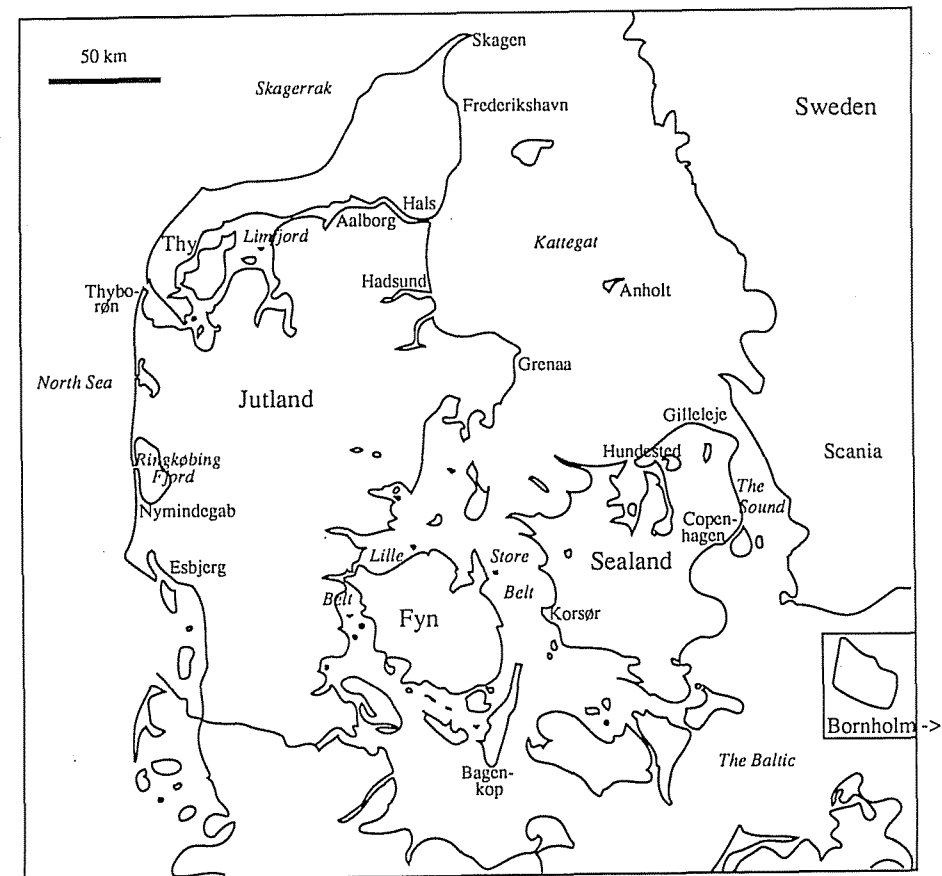
The 19th Century

"The fishermen" were dear to imagination before they became a sociological reality. The image of the brave and dauntless fisherman held by the educated public was assisted by a theatre play from 1780, *The Fishermen* by Johannes Ewald. This became very popular in the repertoire of The Royal Theatre. The plot referred to the heroic rescue by north Sealand fishermen of an English captain from a shipwreck. An account of this rescue was included in a patriotic and

edifying collection entitled *Great and Good Deeds by Danes, Norwegians and Holsatians* which was reprinted several times. In this account the fishermen were referred to as cottagers (Malling [1777]:21), in other words, they were not seen as a separate occupational category.

Around 1800 fishing was only of limited importance where good fishing opportunities joined forces with a lack of alternatives or easy access to markets. Given the limited means of transportation and the perishability of stock, fishing was largely for local consumption. The land reforms of the 1780s increased, moreover, opportunities in farming, which was apparently the preferred alternative.

At Nymindégab on the southern part of the West Coast seasonal cod and haddock fishing had survived as a part time occupation from the Middle Ages, and a large part of southern Jutland was supplied with fresh or dried fish from there (*Handels- og Industrie-Tidende* 1802:82-83). On the poor coastal fringe of West-



Map of Denmark

ern and Northern Jutland (Thy, Hanherrederne, Skagen) fishing was important for lack of good farming opportunities (ibid.:31920). In the Limfjord (by then still unconnected with the North Sea) there was an important herring fishery with pound nets and fykes not far from Aalborg (Holger Rasmussen 1968). This particular fishery was integrated in feudal forms of organization. Though unconnected with land, the sites for the standing gear were held as property, real estate, sharing much the same conditions for use as farm land. Along The Sound and in North Sealand there were also full-time fishermen supplying Copenhagen with fish. Lastly, in Store Belt there was a drift-net herring fishery in the autumn (*Handels- og Industrie-Tidende* 1802:178-80). The so-called "Belt boats" were, however, also used for freight transport. In 19th century sources the owners and the crew often hide behind such labels as "skipper" or "sailor" (Vårning 1984:22-23).

It is reported for a stretch of coast at the Store Belt that people "who have obtained plots of land for their houses after the enclosure have totally abolished fishing and prefer to earn a living from farming and day labour" (*Handels- og Industrie-Tidende* 1802:180). It almost amounts to a refrain in the reports of the *Handels og Industrie-Tidende* from all parts of the country with acceptable soil that "Fishing is not used as a way of earning a living since they all have cultivation and other such trades as prevent them from fishing" (ibid.:374). The reporter is especially alert to the innovative role of educated coast owners and does not expect much from the coastal commoners.

The 19th century was to change the fishermen's social identity and its context: the volume and the structure of the fisheries. While the wish to develop the fisheries was explicit around 1800, basic preconditions such as markets, transport and technology were still insufficient. During the 1800s population growth created bigger urban and rural markets and labour surplus (i.e. potential fishermen). Better means of transportation enabled the fishermen to reach wider markets. Well-smacks had been used from the 1750s, but from the 1820s they occupied an increasingly important role in fish the trade with cod, plaice and eels on Copenhagen, Kristiania (Oslo) and German Baltic towns.⁵ In 1860 the actor A. J. Smidth, conducting a survey for the Home Office on the status of the fisheries, complained that fishing was still neglected in favour of farming in many places (Moustgaard 1987), but from then on modern development gained momentum. In the 1860s the railroad network was greatly expanded and new harbours were built. The harbour in Esbjerg was particularly important for steam-ship connections with England. The railroads connected the main fishing areas of Jutland with the vast fish markets of Hamburg and Berlin, and regular shipping routes created stable opportunities for export by sea.

The growth in fishing effort and numbers of fishermen in the decades after 1860 show that it was not willingness that was lacking before, but markets and transport. It now made sense to intensify effort and take up new fishing technologies. The first expansive innovation in the fisheries of the Inner Waters was the Pomeranian drift seine for eels which was introduced in Denmark from the 1860s onwards (Hjorth Rasmussen 1988). In Kattegat, Skagerrak and the North Sea,

the ground seine – or so called Danish seine – formed the basis of sea-going expansion in the plaice fisheries from around 1870 to 1930. For the year 1885 Drechsel in his work on the Danish saltwater fisheries enumerates 635 fishermen working in the "large scale fisheries in Kattegat," three years later the figure was 1403 ([1890]: Table II & IIIa), and by the First World War there were more than 10,000 occupational fishermen in Denmark.

Only for a short interlude did modern development necessarily mean large scale fisheries. The eel seiners were small craft of 20-25 feet, but the plaice seiners of the late 19th century were sailing vessels of 30-100 gross tons, and demanded capital investments from non-fishermen. With, however, the advent of combustion engines around the turn of century, a new and smaller type of ground seiner – aided by improved opportunities for obtaining loans – largely brought ground seining back in the hands of fishermen.⁶ Since then Danish fishing has been dominated by moderate sized, fisherman-owned enterprises paying wages in shares of the catch. A wide variety of gear has been used in the varied types of what became traditional Danish fishing waters (seines, trawls, gill nets, fykes, pound nets) and adaptability to stock fluctuations and changing opportunities has been high.⁷

The Fishing Estate and the Nation

The growth of a fishing industry proper in the later half of the 19th century changed the wider social setting of the fishermen. The autocratic Denmark of 1800 was neither a consistent feudal hierarchy of personal relations, nor was it a nation of juxtaposed citizens. It was a combination: a nation of estates where each member was connected to the nation through membership of his estate. The spread of horizontal forms of community characterises 19th century Danish history. Estates were internally becoming horizontal communities, though ranked in relation to other estates; "Autocracy . . . had created forms of organization which channeled currents in society to decision makers through permanent estate organizations such as the Merchants Society, the Copenhagen corporations, the guilds and, for instance, The Royal Society of Rural Economy." (Wählin 1981:35).

There were preconditions for further expansion of horizontal forms of organizations in towns as in the countryside. In the 18th century most arable land was cultivated by middle sized farms which were to become freehold during the following century (ibid.:13). Towns were dominated by small to moderate scale trade; artisan enterprises and industrial production was mainly based on subcontracting artisans. The country was dominated by small-scale independent producers and businessmen who organised horizontally like workers, bourgeoisie and landlords were later to do. In the towns guilds were superseded by new forms of professional associations. In the countryside, where the farming community of villages was abolished with the enclosure around 1800, new forms of community grew up in the following century: insurance- and savings-associations, farmers associations, religious movements, cooperatives and the liberal farmers' party (ibid.:31-32).

The fishermen emerged as a separate segment of independent producers in the decades around 1900 (i.e., much later than the farmers). Efforts to create a horizontal community of fishermen were motivated by the same values and the same ideal model of the relationship between the nation and its constituent parts as for the rest of society. Fishermen should unite as a social and occupational community and as such partake in the development of the nation. Initially these were the values and ideals of the educated public, not of the fishermen. Like the farmers, who got their "peasant friends" in the 1840s, so the fishermen got theirs in the 1880s. Merchants, noblemen, academics and naval officers started the Danish Fisheries Association in 1887 for the noble purpose of promoting the fishing industry economically and socially (Christensen 1983; Hecht & Vestergaard 1987). From a slow beginning the number of local fishermen's associations under the aegis of the national association grew to 125 in 1912 and almost 200 in 1937 (Sølling & Thunøe 1937:35). As in farming, communal and cooperative enterprises followed in the wake: fish sales associations, fish auctions, harbours, etc. This process, however, did not really accelerate until the 1920s and '30s (Hansen 1952:35-40).

It was members of the elite who initially tried to organize the fishermen as an estate. What were hierarchical personal relationships in a local context turned into to a hierarchy of horizontal, occupational estates in the context of formal organizations. Yet, it was still members of the higher estates who represented the fishermen on higher organizational levels. The fishermen were held to be incapable of representing their own interests in a modern nation, and their protagonists did not see them as their equals. One of the devoted figures in the efforts to organise the fishermen and promote the fisheries could express sentiments like the following in a debate on fishermen's education:

It is a fact that here, as in other countries, fishermen generally lack the simplest qualifications for conducting their trade except for manual skills and knowledge of local circumstances. Therefore, it is very difficult to convey to them much of what could contribute to develop and promote their trade. They know almost nothing of the natural conditions of the sea, neither of the economy of its animal life, and just as little of the life of fish. They can manufacture their gear, occasionally build their boats, and they know that fish can be preserved for shorter or longer periods by drying, salting, icing; but they are ignorant of the basic principles of that technical treatment. They have but vague ideas of how they could profit from some knowledge in sanitary regards or on matters of society etc. Work at sea has exhausted them so much physically that their unexperienced capacity for thought is weakened further (Aarsberetning 1891:22-23).

But, in 1902 – the year after the introduction of parliamentarism – a similar "systems change" happened in the Danish Fisheries Association. The old board left the scene for a board composed of representatives from all parts of the country. By 1905 general rights to vote were introduced for all members. By 1907 fishermen held the majority in the board, and in 1913 the first fisherman (M. C. Jensen from Grenaa) took the chair. One of the contemporary advocates for fishermen's education, Andreas Otterstrøm, commented on the event saying: "The

fishing estate has laid its hand on the rudder" (Finsing 1964, I:451).

From Estate to Industry

During the first decades of this century the fishermen succeeded in winning themselves a valid place among the industries of a modern nation. That is what was celebrated with the publication of the national directory of fishermen in 1935-36. The status as an equal industry among industries was not a matter of course. Expressions showing the memory of hierarchy and estates often mix with expressions of equality and independence. They were not just memories of a past when the development of the fisheries was under the patronage of higher estates, but continued to be a matter of actual relevance in many local contexts and to form part of fishermen's interpretation of social relationships despite the fact that self-reliance and independence were core values.

Locally many forms of hierarchical social relations were still to be felt. Until 1958 the use of several forms of standing gear on the coast depended on the "eel weir privileges" of the coast owners. The fishermen had to rent the fishing sites or the owner might use them himself (Betænkning 1955; Vestergaard 1985; Warming 1931). Harbours and landing places were frequently dependent on landlords or community councils dominated by farmers. In the fishing village of Lundeberg on Fyn the fishermen in 1931 took over the harbour facilities from the manor Broholm. The lord of the manor used to be a reasonable patron who granted the fishermen access to the harbour, some of its buildings and drying places for nets on very lenient terms. When after 1931 the fishermen applied for public subsidies to repair some quays they were initially met with comments like the following from a farmer: "I cannot understand that you can bring yourself to beg for money to have your boats lying in the harbour. If I needed a garage for my car I would certainly build it myself" (Interview, Lundeberg 16.8.1989). The farmers did not feel obliged to be patrons though they sat in power in the community council.

In parts of Sealand a form of patron-client relationship was long maintained between farmers and fishermen. Most of the fishermen in Gilleleje in Northern Sealand had a particular patron farmer (*venningsbonde*). Their relationship involved the exchange of fish and farm products. Occasionally the fisherman would work for the farmer digging peat or otherwise, and the fisherman would buy potatoes from the farmer which he would take to Copenhagen in his herring drifter during winter. There could, moreover, be some expectations that the fisherman would vote for the farmer or his candidate at elections. The potato freights from Gilleleje to Copenhagen continued until around 1960, when their vessels could still be seen at the quays of Nyhavn (Interview, Gilleleje 28.1.1983).

This type of vertical social ties were much less prominent in large, new ports that were socially less integrated with the surrounding countryside. Fish auctions and cooperative fish sales associations are measures liberating fishermen from the dependence on particular fish buyers. Their spread correlated with the size of the fishing ports and with the separation between fishermen and the sur-

rounding community. Cooperative sales were established already from the first decade of this century, particularly in moderate sized fishing ports with homogeneous fishing populations (e.g. Anholt, Hals, Hundested, Korsør, Bagenkop) and fish auctions were established from the 1920s onwards in fishing harbours of sufficient size (e.g., Esbjerg, Thyborøn, Frederikshavn, Skagen). Locally, however, the idea often met opposition from fishermen who were unwilling to renounce the safety involved in mutual social obligations between fish buyer and fisherman.

Partaking in the progress of a modern industry was an advance in social status, it motivated support of modern individualist values (self-reliance, independence, freedom), and gave emphasis to the value of community between members of the same industry. This is no contradiction: the community in question is that of free, individual fishermen. It seems more contradictory that some statements imply that hierarchy is a negative aspect of the social order while others imply that it is positive. This difference, however, is related to whether the issue is downward social mobility and inequality among the fishermen themselves (negative) or upward social mobility of the fishermen collectively and vertical ties of solidarity (positive).

At the 50th anniversary of the Danish Fisheries Association in 1937 the chairman of the meeting, L. Pedersen, stressed the importance of "solidarity with the estate" and said that fishermen should "grow together and elevate the estate" (*Dansk Fiskeritidende* 1937:286). On the other hand, the eel weir privileges were offensive vestiges of a feudal past. But then, unlike the idea of an estate, these rights implied inequality among the fishermen themselves; "The fisheries must be a free industry. When I refer to the fisheries legislation as hopeless, it is the section on eel weirs I have in mind. That is the greatest disgrace in the fisheries laws" (Chr. Meyer, Korsør, *ibid.*:300). Yet, the same Meyer had his reservations when it came to freedom saying that it was "terrible times for the fisheries being exposed to a laissez-faire economy" (*ibid.*:290). Here he was thinking of the price formation on fish in the 1930s, which gave another fisherman, Johs. Larsen, Hadsund, occasion to complain that "fishermen have sunk to the same level as farm labourers and proletarians" (*ibid.*:299). The economic difficulties of the 1930s did not, nevertheless, stop the fisheries from becoming an independent industry and the fishermen from becoming an occupational community. Vertical ties between persons and between estates were giving way to mutual independence.

The Modern Fishing Industry

The period from the 1920s to the 1960s was the heyday of what you could call traditionally modern Danish fisheries. Stock fluctuations, changing adaptations and technical innovations were integral parts of a stable order, where problems could be solved and growth secured within the frames of private, moderate scale enterprises. Modernization made sense as a beneficial process leaving the poverty and dependence of former times behind without affecting the social organization of the fisheries.

In 1964, at the summit of uncontested modernization, a new national biographic directory of the fishing industry was published: *Danmarks Fiskerierhverv* (Finsing 1964). This differs in several respects from the old directory. Instead of giving local accounts of the fisheries connected with local collections of biographies, general accounts of the Danish fisheries are kept in one volume while all biographies have been listed alphabetically in the other volume. The directory has been modernised, brought into line with the idea of a nation state.

In the *Danmarks Fiskerierhverv* the fishermen are not particular members of a local context, but general representatives of a national industry (including fish farming and fish trade). The old directory had a hierarchy of levels: each fisherman belonged to a local community and the local communities formed parts of a national fishing estate/industry. The new directory has one level: individuals associated with the Danish fishing industry. The intention behind this publication was not to introduce the estate to the public, but to provide background information on individuals to people conducting business with the fishing industry (Finsing 1964, *bd.* 2:7-8). The form of this work corresponds to the nation state as a society of separate individuals (cf. Dumont 1986:10). Liberal ideals of independence figure prominently, even to the extent of belonging to fishermen's inherent nature (Finsing 1964, *bd.* 1:50). The ideas on the relations between parts and whole in the nation have, nevertheless, retained certain hierarchical implications. The horizontal community within the nation remains important, which is maybe not surprising in a country where even the nobility has founded a union (Rosenkranz 1932). But, the term estate is still in use (Finsing 1964, *bd.* 1:37, 449, 459),⁸ and there are strong notions of vertical solidarity between fishermen and higher levels of organization in society.

Fr. Lodberg Jensen from Esbjerg expresses the wish that "the sons of the sea [may] always consider it an honour to be a free and self-reliant industry" (*ibid.*:52-53). This is supplemented by the value implications of statements on, for instance, the catches which the fishermen "bring home to the household of our society" (*ibid.*:59). "Economy" literally means "household management," not "market." *Bringing fish home to the household* depicts the fishermen as subordinate contributors to a hierarchical whole rather than just suppliers to a market.

During the 1980s the viability of the traditionally modern model of Danish fisheries has been threatened by a serious crisis. The fishermen have difficulties earning enough to cover their costs. The number of fishermen has slowly, but steadily declined since after the Second World War, and during the last decade the pace has accelerated. The size of the fishing fleet has been falling since 1976 from 3,756 vessels over 5 GRT with a total gross tonnage of 141,928 to 3,007 with a total tonnage of 121,602 in 1988.⁹ This has not been enough to solve the problems which are owed to a complex of reasons: stock decreases, the Law of the Seas, political interference, seasonal oxygen depletion, etc. Danish quotas have gradually been reduced, sometimes corresponding to declining stocks, sometimes contrary to fishermen's experience of the stock situation. Bankruptcies and economic difficulties are no longer limited to incompetent fishermen and

bad administrators. Successful fishermen see their closest rivals surrender. Regulations, quotas and limited access to traditional – now foreign – fishing waters interfere with the usual strategies of finding a way out of economic difficulties: switching of species, technology or fishing water. This situation has even made fishermen's wives stand up to engage in public debates in the press in defense of their husbands and families.

Traditional and Modern Identities

Part and Whole in Society

Social identity concerns the place of parts in a social whole. The whole, its constituent parts and the relations between them, are shaped by social exchange and cultural classification.¹⁰ Possessing an identity means to identify with a category and to be confirmed in belonging to it in social exchange with others. Social relations and communities depend on memory or imagination for their maintenance (Anderson 1983:15), and they are imagined differently in different cultures.

From widely different starting points Benedict Anderson and Louis Dumont have given very similar descriptions of different cultural ways of ordering the relations between parts and whole. Anderson (1983) deals with the specific way the nation state imagines itself as a community in contrast to the ideas of the social order before the nation state. Dumont ([1966]; 1986), for convenience generalised to traditional and modern societies, compares Hindu society with the modern West. I do not think it does serious injustice to the authors to sum up their contrasts thus: on the one hand, a social order where the parts are seen as relating to the whole through a hierarchy of concrete relations of social exchange, on the other hand, a social order where the parts are seen as a collection of separate entities with inherent identities while the whole is nothing but the sum of parts, something individuals relate to through the abstract act of identifying with it – not clientship that links you to the nation, but citizenship that identifies you with it.

Dumonts frame of comparison is an objective, universal principle which transcends the difference, the principle of *hierarchy* (Dumont [1966]:66; 1986:227, 247). Any relationship between part and whole is hierarchical since the whole encompasses the parts and implies a ranking of orders. This applies to ecosystems as to societies even if particular societies imagine it differently. So, in an objective way, modern society is a variety of traditional societies, a variety that tries to neutralise hierarchy.

The Neutralization of Hierarchy

The fishermen subscribe to being members of a modern nation. Their relations to that whole (as judged by themselves and by others) are in important respects those of a nation that has been very keen on neutralising hierarchy.

In general, an ideology hostile to hierarchy must obviously dispose of a whole battery of devices for neutralizing or replacing the relation in question . . . The first consists in avoiding the point of view in which the relation would appear . . . A second and very important contrivance lies in the absolute distinction we draw between facts and values" (Dumont 1986:227).

To separate fact from moral value is to say that social facts are not total social facts in Mauss' sense.¹¹ It has been common to distinguish modern from so-called primitive society by its separation of economy, politics, etc., into distinct spheres. Exchange relations may thus be seen as functions that concern only their stated purposes without involving total persons. This is a denial of the social dimension of value and of the ranking which is produced all the time when exchange is based on the principle of reciprocity. Market transactions are not supposed to create moral bonds between a particular buyer and a particular seller, they do not rank exchange partners morally according to who gave the most, and attempts to maximize profits at the expense of your exchange partners are not morally condemnable. After the act exchange partners remain intact as separate individuals without particular ties between them (Anderson 1983:15-16). The focus is elemental, not relational.

The denial of total social exchange and of hierarchy deprives the modern social cosmology of moral bonds between part and whole, citizen and nation, except for abstract identification. The highest value in Dumont's traditional society pertains to the whole and is something you link with through social connections (Dumont 1986:20-28, 40; Anderson 1983:40). The highest modern value is the individual which is not an entity to relate to, but to *be*. Each individual incarnates the nation or mankind or whatever whole is in question, instead of relating to it through social exchange.¹²

Western political systems depend on the conception of society as composed of separate free citizens. As citizens we are similar. The division of labour in modern society rests, nevertheless, on complementary differences in society. This does not contradict the political order because the differences are not ranked. The division of labour is not a total social fact, but merely an economic fact without implications of social value differences. The values involved are economic, factual and not social or political. It is statistics and not theology that is relevant to the interpretation of the values involved in exchange in modern society. Statistics conjure up a social space full of comparable units, none in itself of any unique importance, but all representative of a type of phenomenon (cf. Anderson 1983:35). The fact that industries contribute differently to the national product does not rank them socially. The value dimension is not relevant as a hierarchical differentiation of persons. In the modernist model the "good" of being a fisherman is not seen as depending on social links to a hierarchy; it depends on the identification of fishermen with a modern industry. Partaking in modern development is good and meritorious as such.

As suggested by Wylie (1989) organizations and associations in Denmark are devices that handle the problem of equality versus hierarchy. Here the neutraliza-

tion of hierarchy is not an effect of separating moral value from factual relationships, but of "avoiding the point of view in which the relation would appear." When fishermen have to negotiate with representatives from other industries or estates this is handled by their associations. The organizational hierarchy of the associations has created forums for horizontal exchange at higher levels where fishermen are still be represented by fishermen or by administrators employed by them.

The Heterogeneity of Modern Society

To a considerable extent modern, industrial nation states manage to function as if social hierarchy and total social exchange were neutralised. Modernization theory expected such traditional components to disappear. But so far, heterogeneous forms of organization and exchange continue to be at work in actual modern societies, and some of these forms differ much from the modern norm. It seems, furthermore, a vain belief that the internal heterogeneity of industrial nations should give way to homogeneity in a convergent development of all industrial nations (cf. Berger and Piore 1980:1-4). Berger and Piore emphasise that among the resources applied in the solution of present problems are past values, choices, practices, and institutions, which are continuously being integrated into new patterns, even in the most leading of industrial nations (ibid.:8). "Traditional" components are parts of contemporary societies. What qualifies them for the label "traditional" seems not to be age, but that they do not harmonize well with the formal image of a modern society although they may be important preconditions for its maintenance and success.

Despite the denial of hierarchy nation states do have objective hierarchical dimensions. Modern nations do contain different levels of organization, subsystems that are ranked. They do contain people (probably most people) who find their social identity dependent on participation in social exchange, people whose value – in their own eyes and in those of others – is not exhausted by their abstract identification with a category in a social classification scheme, but requires that they relate to the whole through concrete social exchange. The Danish fishermen are a case in point even if, at the same time, they subscribe to modern interpretations.

Fishermen's Identity

In the 1930s and in the 1960s the terms and expressions for fishermen's place in society in part confirm and in part contradict the idea of the nation state. Fishermen saw themselves, and were seen, as members of an industry, a category of citizens earning their living in a similar way. The differences between industries were defined in terms of relations to different resources, and not in terms of ranked social relationships – the modern. Simultaneously the fishermen saw themselves, and were seen, as an estate, a social entity in a morally ranked context. This was not modern. In the 1960s the distribution of emphasis on industry

and estate had moved in favour of industry, but the framework remained the same.

The fishermen accept the nation state interpretation of their relations with society. It confers value upon them by making them participants in progress. It has created distance to a socially more humble past, and has abstractly identified them with the nation, a whole that is a sum of individual citizens. At the same time, their own interpretation of social relationships implies a hierarchical, relational order which the nation state sees only as a memory about the past.

Modern outsiders may hold the view that fishermen relate to one another in correspondence with the economic theory of common property resources: they are competing rivals for the same resource, united and divided by their similarity in relation to resources.¹³ But, seen from the inside this is not the whole truth. There is one type of complementary difference between fishermen that gives them reasons for reciprocal exchange, namely the differential experience which is continuously renewed through the daily work of each unit and which is potentially useful information to other fishermen. This information is not exchanged for money, but as reciprocal gifts creating social connections, giving prestige and confirming the value of the participants as members of the community (Vestergaard 1989a and 1989b).

As to the relationship between fishermen and fish buyers or net dealers it is obviously one of market exchange; but, particularly when private fish buyers were involved, these relationships have commonly been modified considerably by social exchange of favours, gifts, credit and some protection against the full impact of market prices. At the same time the fish buyers or net dealers have commanded more resources than the fishermen and represented higher levels of integration in society providing for patron-like relationships with the fishermen.

Official fisheries authorities like the fisheries minister and his officials have definitely been seen as representatives of higher levels in a hierarchy however much they represent a democratic government. But, the spirit of the relationship has generally been one of positive solidarity. The fishermen see fishing as a noble task, one appreciated by the state "household" as a valuable contribution. Conversely the duty of the head of the household as represented by the fisheries minister must be to solve higher level problems in return. This places the fisheries minister in the position of a patron obliged by social relations of exchange with his clients.

Hierarchical Antagonism

There are occasions when hierarchical social relations do not involve protection but conflict. This occurs in the relationship between fishermen and fisheries biologists. Fisheries biologists have a higher education and are employed by authorities at a higher level in society. They represent a relationship of learned men to laymen which has not been forgotten. When involved in fisheries regulation they do not represent a complementary authority to the fishermen's domain,

but a rival competence in knowledge of fish stocks. This turns into a problem when fishermen and biologists disagree.

The results of biological research can be disputed, but they cannot be negotiated through the fisheries organizations. Not until political decision making takes place on the basis of biological advice will there be opportunities to ward off or mitigate the consequences of the disagreement. It is not only disagreement on factual matters that separate fishermen and biologists, but also the violation of social taboos: a hierarchical social relation that cannot be avoided, neutralised or turned into social exchange. The relationship exposes an antagonistic, unequal relation of power, a combination of rivalry with inequality in relation to an administrative hierarchy and unequal claims to objective truth.

The fishermen's knowledge of marine resources is mostly concrete, time- and place-bound, and of unique relevance to each fisherman's evaluation of fishing opportunities. The importance of fishermen's social exchange of information has increased in Denmark during this century. Its practical utility has increased with the increased switching behaviour (geographically and stockwise) of individual fishing enterprises. One should not underestimate the capacity of this social exchange system to mobilize and coordinate dispersed knowledge of fishing opportunities despite the secrecy game that is part of it. With the expansion of the information exchange beyond the local community the social spheres of the fishermen have increased correspondingly.¹⁴ Aside from being a community of occupation and a sphere (or overlapping spheres) of social exchange, the fishermen are also a knowledge community. Their knowledge is of matters invisible, which accentuates their separateness as a community or even secret community (cf. Vestergaard 1989b:94-98).

To the extent fishermen's knowledge is accessible to the authorities the latter have difficulty in making it useful. The fisheries authorities need modern data, which are comparable and can be handled statistically providing the basis for general guidelines.¹⁵ The relationship between fishermen's and biologists' knowledge of fish is not one of hierarchical integration but of hierarchical separation between domains only one of which is compatible with the requirements of state administration.

The relationship between formal and informal rights represents a comparable schism. This distinction cannot make the same sense in the feudal model where the whole is a hierarchy of social exchange that can accommodate both traditional rights and written, legal rights in the same structure. The modern model would have to neutralise rights associated with social exchange. Such rights can either be left as harmless informal rights as in gift exchange for birthdays or obligations between members of a family enterprise, or they can be criminalized as when classified with underground economy, corruption and nepotism.¹⁶

The Crisis in the Fisheries

During the 1980s the fishermen's view of their place in the world has been seriously troubled. The crisis in Danish fisheries has not only consisted in traditional

difficulties. It is also a breakdown of the social identity of fishermen who have come to feel like a dying species.

Even fishermen who used to have a reasonable economy can do nothing but watch while the cartload is tipping over. His whole life – it is an attitude to life being a fisherman – not only his material values is he losing, but also the purely human values (from the general meeting in *Aarhus Fiskeriforening* 1990, quoted in *Dansk Fiskeritidende* 1990, nr. 7:10).

Individuals and the whole industry have often experienced economic crises due to catch or price fluctuations. With, however, the EEC fisheries policies, quotas and regulations of the last decade the basis of vertical solidarity between fishermen and authorities has broken down. The authorities might not know that they were expected to act as reciprocally obliged patrons, and in the experience of the fishermen the authorities can no longer be interpreted that way. The fisheries minister is no longer seen to act as a complementary supporter of the fishermen's cause, but as an antagonist, someone who is unable or unwilling to protect the fishermen against onslaughts from outside, or as the partial protagonist of some fishermen against others.¹⁷

The fishermen feel let down.¹⁸ The experience that their gift to the "household" is unwanted implies that their social value is rejected. The wish that "we should like to be law-abiding," is sometime expressed. This is a wish to be restored in a position as citizens pursuing what they find is their rightful business and as valued contributors to a hierarchical household. The fishermen's image of their place in the whole, their identity, is in jeopardy, and the options of being law-breakers or registering their boats in foreign countries tend to become morally justifiable.

The crisis has affected the relationship between fishermen and society. The severity of the economic problems effects their internal solidarity, too. Knowledge of fishing opportunities becomes so economically valuable that it is tempting to increase secrecy and reserve useful knowledge for one's own purposes or keep it within narrower circles protected by the increasing use of radio scramblers. The increased knowledge of disappearing opportunities is worth nothing as a secret and as a shared reference of identity for a community.

Conclusion

The Danish fisheries are presently a depressing example of traditional social components in modern society. It is, nevertheless, an example of a social segment in modern society whose identity, particularly as seen from within, is not at all exhausted by their place in a modern interpretation of the relationship between society and its parts. It is definitely unpleasant to fishermen to be the object of policies based on the modern interpretation of their identity, which sees them only as uncoordinated competitors that need regulation and who have no claims to protection by patrons in power. Yet, it would be equally unpleasant if the social order was rearranged to forget the distinction between facts and moral value in

the formal sphere since that distinction is the precondition for the independence of the fishermen as for the integrity of citizens generally. The point of these reflections on fishermen's social identity in a modern society has been to show that informal or traditional dimensions which cannot be integrated into the formal image of a modern society are none the less integrated parts of its reality. Modern society has been based on abstracting from hierarchy and social exchange that was actually there. Modern society is a variant of traditional societies, and it must be part of its definition that it could believe this was not the case.

Notes

1. A note on translation: The meaning of the term "erhverv" can only partly be rendered by the term "industry". "Erhverv" means a way of achieving a living and covers both a branch of trades and individual occupation. The term has stronger connotations of independent enterprise than of wage labour. Referring to a branch of trade and its practitioners it bears a formal resemblance to a category as "nation", i.e., comprising a quantity of separate, equal members.

2. Quotations from Danish are translated by the author.

3. John Kudlik's research on mediaeval fishing stations in eastern Denmark suggests that fishing prior to 1500 was not practiced by specialised fishermen, but as an activity among others which was quite important in certain parts of the country (1986:123). It also suggests that the prominence of maritime components in tradition was on the vane around 1600 (*ibid.*:199). Anecdotal evidence from the 19th century speaks of the former importance of geographically mobile fisheries (*Handels- og Industrie-Tidende* 1802:373-376, 378-384; E. Tang Christensen 1891:17, 19).

4. Benedict Anderson (1983:16) remarks on the French aristocracy under "l'ancien regime" that it was not imagined as a class but as particular persons in particular positions in relation to other persons. Nicholas A. M. Rodger (1989) describes the change in the social system of the British navy from 1750 to 1800 as a change from hierarchical social integration through reciprocal social relationships to class stratification. In the beginning of this period it was common for officers to bring crew members from their home area, to bring these men along when moved to another ship, and to accept respectable mutinies according to tradition as a legitimate way of complaining over specific matters or persons. At the end of the period officers and crew had become socially separate groups without mutual personal relationships and mutiny was interpreted in the image of the French revolution as threats to the social order rather than to persons.

5. Skippers from Bornholm in the Baltic had run well-smack enterprises for transport of cod since around 1760. A pharmacist in Frederikshavn in Northern Jutland started a well-smack enterprise before 1820 taking live plaice to Copenhagen (Krøyer 1866:116 ff.). This traffic expanded and continued until around the Second World War. Live fish trade with plaice, cod and eels became an important component in Danish fish marketing. For small cod this lasted until around 1960 and for eels it is still the case.

6. Poul Holm (1990:57), referring to Odd Vollans description of Western Norwegian fisheries, mentions a similar effect of the introduction of engines.

7. Examples of different Danish fisheries in the 20th century can be found in Moustgaard and Damgaard (1974) and Moustgaard (1984) (gillnets), Vestergaard (1985) (pound nets) and Wohlfahrt (n.d.) (mainly small trawlers).

8. The term estate (stand) is still in common use to designate the community of certain professions, e.g., physicians, teachers, clergymen.

9. Fiskeriberetning (1977, Table II-4) and Fiskeriårbogen (1989:394).

10. Classification and exchange may be reckoned as core issues in 20th century anthropology.

Cf. Durkheim & Mauss ([1903]), Mauss ([1925]), Lévi-Strauss ([1949]) and ([1962]), de Josselin de Jong (1977), and - to name a specific study - Platenkamp (1988).

11. "... in these 'early' societies, social phenomena are not discrete; each phenomenon contains all the threads of which the social fabric is composed. In these *total* social phenomena ... all kinds of institutions find simultaneous expression: religious, legal, moral, and economic" (Mauss [1925]:1).

12. In Oslo, Norway, a poster was placed over one of the streets in 1984 which could illustrate the conception of the relationship between citizen and nation state. It said: "If you violate the law you commit a crime against yourself!" It is the same configuration which enables anti-whalers to say: "It is an offence to my dignity as a human being that people kill whales!" This is based on the abstract identification of individual, not with nation, but with humanity. Humanity is supposed to be composed of separate, similar individuals displaying the same features of humanness as oneself. Hierarchization creeps in all the same, but in a form which segregates superiors and inferiors instead of connecting them in relations of social exchange. In consequence the others are either non-human, in need of improvement or they must be cleaned out. The modern way of imagining community has an inherent potential to pervert individualism into totalitarianism. Dumont explains modern racism in a similar way in distinction from traditional socio-juridical differentiation of population segments like castes in India ([1966]:254-55, 1986:256).

13. On the economic theory of common property resources, see Andersen (1982), Cunningham et al. (1985, ch. 2), Scott Gordon (1954), Vestergaard (1989c:158-60), Warming (1911, 1931).

14. Mobility applies to seasonal moves to different waters and to some extent to residential mobility. In the biographies of *Danmarks Fiskerierhverv* from 1964 the percentage of fishermen's sons was as high or higher than in 1935 (75 per cent), but the percentage of fishermen living in the parish where they were born or in one of its neighbouring parishes had shrunk to 57 per cent from the 75 per cent of 1935.

15. It would be relevant to compare social exchange among fishermen with the market as an information mobilizing device. Despite important differences of principle both are spontaneous forms of order mobilising dispersed knowledge, and they differ in a similar way from classical modern science: "The difference between economic competition and the successful procedures of science consists in the fact that the former is a method of discovering particular facts relevant to the achievement of specific temporary purposes, while science aims at the discovery of what are sometimes called 'general facts', which are regularities of events" (Cf. Hayek 1984:256).

16. "A significant reason for underground economy is often that 'you have always done it that way'" (Toldvæsenets 1983:26). The crisis in Danish fisheries since the 1980s has, among other things, resulted in reader's letters from fishermen and their wives seeing the formal rules as violations of the "rights" of fishermen (e.g., *Dansk Fiskeritidende* 1990, nr.6:2).

17. The strained relations between the fishermen and the fisheries minister were relieved to a certain extent in the end of 1989 when a fisherman, Kent Kirk, became fisheries minister. But the new fisheries minister is more vulnerable to accusations of favourizing some fisheries at the cost of others than was his predecessor who was not a fisherman.

18. It is particularly demoralising to compare the size of fines and confiscations for even minor offenses of fisheries regulations with for instance fines for industrial pollution or illegal trade with South Africa. It is not uncommon for fishermen to be fined up to several hundred thousand Danish Crowns to be paid out of an individually owned small-scale enterprise (see for instance *Dansk Fiskeritidende* 1989 nr. 36:5 & 6, nr. 42:2; 1990 nr. 6:2, nr. 10:3).

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