

Politics Gone Fishing

A study of the Faroese fishery experience and its political implications



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Abstract

This thesis examines the experience of fishery in the Faroe Islands (The Faroes), and its influence on Faroese politics. Political decisions regarding fishery management in The Faroes are regularly seen to be at odds with economic advice, and the political debate is characterized by frequent historical and cultural references. This suggests that Faroese fishery politics are, to a significant extent, historically and culturally motivated. The analysis is inspired by the genealogical method presented by Michel Foucault, which involves a study of the historical lineage of the contemporary fishery experience. The purpose of genealogy is to produce a history which may impact the present. This thesis therefore involves an ambition to query prevalent ways of thinking about fishery in The Faroes, especially since the effects of history and culture on contemporary Faroese fishery politics is deemed to be a neglected issue. The analysis reveals that fishery as an *experience* is a patchwork of a variety of historical elements, and that the contemporary experience of fishery should therefore be viewed as having emerged, not through inevitable or natural progression, but through an erratic and coincidental process. Notably, Faroese fishery seems to have obtained an *epic* dimension not afforded to other commercial activities. Faroese industrialization in the 20th century has entailed an intensification of this epic dimension, largely fuelled by the experience of fishery as both lucrative and dangerous, and of fishermen as skilled, brave and self sacrificing individuals. The epic experience of fishery materializes as an epic fishery discourse, and imposes itself on the way fishery is perceived in contemporary Faroese society – that is, as an impressive and heroic activity, and as the bedrock of Faroese society. This idea influences the way Faroese fishery politics are carried out. The importance of fishery to the survival of the nation – a point regularly emphasized by politicians – leads to a considerable preference for fishery compared with other activity. Furthermore, the epic fishery discourse leads to politicians disregarding advice given by those not involved in fishery, including scientific or academic advice. An awareness of the historical emergence of the contemporary fishery experience and its consequences would encourage political authorities to be wary of an otherwise unseen partiality towards fishery, and enable more proficient decision making based on pertinent factors.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1. Problem Area	1
1.2. Problem Definition.....	2
1.3. Problem Formulation	4
1.4. Thesis Outline.....	4
2. Theory	5
2.1. Epistemological Foundation.....	5
2.2. The Genealogy of History.....	8
3. Background	14
3.1. The Faroes in brief	14
3.2. A History of Faroese Fishery	14
3.2.1. Household Fishery	14
3.2.2. Commercial Fishery.....	15
3.2.3. Smack Fishery.....	18
3.2.4. War and Crisis	20
3.2.5. Closer to Home	22
3.2.6. Boom and Crisis.....	24
3.2.7. Aftermath.....	27
4. Analytical Strategy	30
5. Analysis	33
5.1. A Genealogy of the Fishery Experience.....	33
5.1.1. Household Fishery Experience.....	34
5.1.2. Commercial Fishery Experience.....	38
5.1.3. Epic Fishery Experience	44
5.1.4. Fishery Ethos	53
5.1.5. Epic Fishery Discourse.....	56
5.2. Discussion	61
5.2.1. Political Implications in Practice.....	61
5.2.2. Reflection on the Analysis	68
6. Conclusions	73
7. Afterthoughts	75
References	78

“Føroyingar eru føddir við ár í hond”
“The Faroese are born with oar in hand”

Old Faroese proverb

1. Introduction

1.1. Problem Area

This thesis deals with the issue of Faroese fishery and its historical, cultural and political significance. The political debate in the Faroe Islands (The Faroes) is very much concerned with the exploitation of marine resources. Fishery¹ is not only a lucrative extraction of such resources; it has for the past hundred years represented the bulk of Faroese exports and is as such recognized as the pivotal factor behind Faroese industrialisation in the 20th century. The Faroese fishing fleet is regarded as the most technologically advanced in the world, and Faroese fish products have a reputation for being of a high quality. Fishery is an integrated part of media coverage, where, on a regular basis, different features from the industry are broadcast to the general public, depicting, among other things, hard working fishermen and trawl nets bursting at the seams. Routine broadcasts on the national radio include news about fish sales, with details such as the price, type, size and amount of fish sold, as well as wind, visibility and wave forecasts at fishing banks scattered across Faroese territorial waters. Some of the daring activities of past fishermen have passed into Faroese folklore, and the significant number of deaths at sea is commemorated by a national holiday on 1 November². Every summer, the fishery festival, Føroya Sjómannadagur (Faroe Fishermen’s Day), is held in the fishing community of Klaksvík. Its purpose is to “encourage and maintain interest for fishery on sea and on land, and to arouse interest in that which has to do with the sea” (Nevndin fyri Føroya Sjómannadag, 2009). The event includes different kinds of fishery related entertainment and contests, and has been highly popular since its launch in 2009. The Faroese language has a plethora of words and metaphoric phrases originating in fishery and day-to-day conversations are regularly accompanied by contemporary and historical anecdotes passed on from the experience on board fishing vessels. In addition, the subject of fishery can

¹ Although in the English language “fishery” may refer to both the capture of wild fish as well as fish farming, this thesis will use the word only for reference to wild fishery, as is customary in The Faroes.

² 1 November, All Saints’ Day, is the commemoration day for lives lost at sea. Adopted by the Løgting in 1949.

be found in the fine arts, several literary works and a great number of songs. Daily political discussion – whether in the media, in the Løgting (the Faroese parliament), in the workplace or in private settings – inevitably involves fishery and the management thereof. Its significance in Faroese politics was recently demonstrated by the parliamentary election in October 2011, which was almost completely dominated by the issue of fishery management, and 16 November 2012 saw the first launch of a Fiskivinnuting (Fishery Assembly); an open forum for the overall improvement of Faroese fishery.

1.2. Problem Definition

Fishery is commonly viewed as the embodiment of Faroese industry. From an economic point of view this is understandable, bearing in mind that it has consistently accounted for around 90 per cent of Faroese exports for more than a century. The overall economic success of Faroese fishery, then, cannot be disputed. However, there have been a few setbacks, of which one was particularly serious. In the early 1990s, The Faroes was hit by a devastating economic crisis, which crippled its financial and industrial sectors, and caused a large part of the population to emigrate. In the years leading up to the crisis, there had been numerous warnings by advisers about the recklessness of Faroese economic policy, especially with regard to fishery. After the crisis, several reports were published, both in Denmark and in The Faroes, detailing the events and decisions which had caused the collapse of the Faroese economy. There was widespread consensus – and still is – that the crisis was in large part due to the mismanagement of fishery, and that numerous decisions made on fishery by the Faroese government during the 1970s and 80s had been far from economically founded. Although the crisis prompted several changes to the way fishery is managed, most of these changes were a requirement by the Danish government in return for rescuing the Faroese economy. Today, many Faroese politicians continually reject advice given by economists; even that provided by their own Council of Economic Advisors (CEA)³. For example, ship owning companies have for a number of years experienced a slump in profits. Therefore, the CEA, along with several independent economists, has argued that the fishing fleet holds a significant excess capacity, and that a smaller fleet would be able to fish the same amount, only with a better profit margin for the companies involved. Moreover, the CEA has argued

³ The CEA (Búskaparráðið) was first established by the Faroese government in 1963 and reformed in 1995. Its purpose is to follow the economic development in The Faroes and to give advice on economic issues. The CEA does not have regulatory power; its influence on political decisions lies purely in the persuasiveness of its recommendations.

for a democratization of the allocation of fishing licenses, which would improve universal access to fishery for Faroese citizens and (at least partly) solve the problem of limited profits faced by ship owning companies (Búskaparráðið, 2000, 2012; J. Jacobsen & í Skorini, 2010; J. Jacobsen, 2000). The way these recommendations have been received by politicians is comparable to the 1980s, that is, they have so far been either ignored or directly opposed.

This is not an endorsement for these particular economic recommendations or a call to arms on behalf of economists or economic science in general. On the contrary, it is the result of an ongoing mystification about Faroese fishery, based on the following reasoning: Firstly, assuming that one would primarily consider fishery an occupation or an industry, that is, an economic activity, it is somewhat puzzling that certain important aspects of its management are so far from economically founded as those claiming to be economic and industrial experts say they are (regardless of whether they are correct or not). Secondly, assuming that the conclusions made about the crisis in the 1990s and the contemporary criticisms of political management of fishery are correct: that a significant part of Faroese fishery management has not been, and is still not, economically founded, there must be an alternative rationale to economics acting as the basis for its decisions. Thirdly, this alternative rationale in fishery management is, to this point, an unexplained feature of Faroese society, and should be unveiled. Fourthly, considering the sheer volume of cultural and historical references to fishery in contemporary Faroese society, it is plausible that this alternative rationale of fishery management is not technical or scientific, but is rooted in Faroese history and culture. It is undoubtedly because of its relatively long (and successful) history that Faroese fishery seems to have obtained an elevated cultural status, which is not afforded to other commercial activities currently carried out on the islands, such as fish farming, tourism, clothes manufacturing etc. Fifthly, a study of the historical lineage of this contemporary cultural prominence of fishery, and the ways it influences politics, should be carried out.

This thesis will challenge the cultural feature of fishery as a matter of course, and question the conventional perspective of Faroese industrial history, in which the gradual replacement of agriculture by fishery and subsequent developments are viewed as natural and inevitable historical “progress”. By applying the historiographical approach of Michel Foucault, it will look at the different ways in which fishery has been experienced in The Faroes. Thus, it will reveal how the contemporary experience of Faroese fishery has emerged, and how it may impact Faroese politics.

1.3. Problem Formulation

This thesis will respond to the following question:

How has fishery been experienced in The Faroes, and how does this experience influence fishery's cultural status in contemporary Faroese society and the practical functioning of Faroese politics?

Within the framework of this problem formulation these questions will be answered:

1. How has fishery been experienced in The Faroes?
2. How does the experience of Faroese fishery impact the cultural status of fishery in contemporary Faroese society?
3. How does the experience of fishery influence Faroese politics in practice?

1.4. Thesis Outline

Chapter 2 is a presentation of the theoretical concepts and notions used in this thesis. In order to give the reader some sense of context and to present a platform for analysis, chapter 3 provides a historical background for fishery in The Faroes. This is by no means an exhaustive account, but a rough narrative dealing only with the points relevant for the understanding of the analysis in chapter 5. Chapter 4 provides a link between theory and analysis; that is, it explains how the chosen theoretical concepts and notions are construed and applied to the analysis. Chapter 5 analyses the experience of Faroese fishery and discusses its cultural status and its effects on Faroese politics. Chapter 6 sums up the central arguments of the thesis, including how the problem formulation has been answered, and chapter 7 presents an alternative analytical approach, which could be applied to an examination of the Faroese fishery experience and its implications.

2. Theory

2.1. Epistemological Foundation

Any endeavour to explore the politics of a particular society should explicate its philosophical premise for using such terms. This premise involves the acceptance of two intersecting concepts called *the social* and *the political*. Since the analysis in chapter 5 will be based on the theoretical perspectives of Foucault, who can be considered part of a poststructural tradition,⁴ this thesis adopts a poststructural view of society and politics.

Poststructuralism denotes a particular philosophical perspective concerning the practice of making and reproducing meaning (Belsey, 2002). The term poststructuralism emerged in the 1960s as a critique of – and in response to – the philosophy of *structuralism*. The ground breaking characteristic of structuralism, which has its roots in the early 20th century linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure (2000), is its emphasis on language as a productive force in the generation of meaning. The first structuralists argued that the majority of traditional western scientific thinking was based on a dialectic between the material and psychological world, thus confining language to a passive role as a vehicle of meaning (Esmark et. al 2005). According to structuralism, language should be seen, not simply as a device through which meaning can be transmitted, but as a structure that intervenes in the relationship between human beings and their world (Belsey, 2002). Thus, it rejects the traditional nominalistic perception of language as a purely functional reference system.

According to Saussure, a structure consists of different elements called “signs”. A sign can be defined as the unity of the distinction between a “signifier” and a “signified”. For example, the “signifier” may be the composition of the word “shoe”, whereas the “signified” may be the envisaging of an object commonly worn on one’s feet. Together, the signifier and signified make up a sign that takes on a particular meaning within the structure. The central point for Saussure is that the connection between a signifier and signified is coincidental. There is, in other words, no natural reason why the idea of footwear has been attached to the word “shoe”. In light of this arbitrary arrangement of signs, objects cannot exist prior to ideas, but obtain their meaning within the relational and differential structure of language. But Saussure was not content with studying language. He claimed that a “science that studies the

⁴ It is worth mentioning that Foucault himself explicitly dissociated himself from the label “poststructuralism”. He is, nevertheless, widely regarded as one of the first and one of the most prominent poststructuralists.

life of signs within society is conceivable.” A structure of signs should therefore include all kinds of signification, of which linguistics is only a part. This broader study of signs is called *semiology*. Saussure claimed that “[b]y studying rites, customs, etc. as signs, I believe that we shall throw new light on the facts and point up the need for including them in a science of semiology” (De Saussure, 2000). Semiology, then, looks broadly at all kinds of symbolic representation, and the structuralist notions used for the study of linguistics should be applied to the generation of meaning in society as a whole, where thoughts, concepts and ideas are connected with physical objects through the semiotic structure.

The idea of this intervening structure of signs was further developed by a number of French thinkers in the 1960s. Some of these developments marked a philosophical critique of structuralism, which later came to be known as poststructuralism (Bensmaïa, 2005). Poststructuralism retained the structuralist view of “language as structure”, but differed significantly from structuralism regarding the characteristics of signs within the structure. On the one hand poststructuralism maintains Saussure’s central argument about the arbitrariness of signs and that objects cannot exist prior to ideas. On the other hand it rejects the structuralist idea that language is an unalterable structure containing a centre from which meaning can be ascribed. The chief claim of poststructuralism is that the structure of signs is without a fixed centre. Such a decentred structure is what poststructuralists call *discourse* (Esmark et al., 2005). In the poststructural understanding of discourse, signs do not have a fixed meaning, but may slide in relation to each other. The discursive structure is not fixed but fluid; it may be broken, making way for new constellations of meaning (Dreyer-Hansen, 2004; Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999). Due to the never ending movement of signs, poststructural discourse analysis dissociates itself from a positivistic, ontological outlook, where the object of analysis is given an essence or a value in and of itself, which the scientific observer – with the correct method – may “locate”. In other words, poststructuralists hold that structuralism has not adequately challenged the metaphysics of traditional western scientific observation, which presupposes the existence of discoverable truths. Poststructuralism rejects the scientific ambition of finding the “truth”, and celebrates the impossibility of such a mission (Esmark et al., 2005). Poststructural analysis constantly questions anyone’s (including its own) claim to “know” things. This epistemological outlook is central to the poststructural ambition: that taken-for-granted truths should be stripped of their stable familiarity, and that their contingencies should be exposed, so as to reveal their idiosyncratic otherness.

Poststructuralism is, as Catherine Belsey has said, a move “away from depth and universality towards the contingency of history and the specificity of the signifier. Towards, that is to say, difference” (2002, p. 47). A good illustration of the poststructural rejection of the idea of universal truth and its focus on difference can be found in its study of language and text, where – in the context of meaning – focus is shifted from the author to the reader. In a famous essay titled “The Death of the Author” Roland Barthes announced a proliferation of meaning, which simultaneously marked the “birth of the reader” (Barthes, 1977). Similarly, in his essay “What is an Author?” Foucault shifts the role of the author from that of a “person” to what he terms an “author function”, which reveals “the manner in which discourse is articulated on the basis of social relationships” (Foucault, 1984a, p. 119). Whereas traditional textual analysis would concentrate on *the* meaning of the text – that is, the one “intended” by the author – poststructural textual analysis renders the author irrelevant by emphasizing that different readers may relate to a text in different ways, which, in principle, may produce a meaning unique to each reader. This makes the idea of “true” meaning untenable.

Outside textual analysis, this arbitrary conception of meaning is generalisable to any situation where subjects perceive signs. For poststructuralists, truth and knowledge do not exist on an objective level, but at the level of the signifier. What *actually* exists is irrelevant; the issue is what we can accurately *say* exists (Belsey, 2002). This does not mean that knowledge or truth is subjective in the sense that different subjects in some way “possess” different ways of viewing the world. Subjects are not sources of meaning; they are not wilful, conscious or separable from social contexts. Subjects emerge through the signifying practices within the structure of discourse (Andersen, 1999; Dreyer-Hansen, 2004). As such, they may be more accurately called *subjectivities*.

So, what are the consequences of the poststructural understanding of meaning for the concepts of the social and the political? *The social* refers to meaning insofar as it is being shared, and should therefore be understood as a specific reference to the relations between human beings based on what is commonly known as communication. In poststructural analysis “communication” is replaced by the concept of the *discursive field* as the underlying structure for all meaning. As mentioned earlier, this structure is not merely a tool, by which meaning is conveyed, but plays an active role in shaping the social. The social is constituted by discourse and human beings may only observe and experience the world through discourse. The fluid character of discourse means that there is no objective level, at which true

causal explanations for social phenomena may be found (Dreyer-Hansen, 2004; Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999).

Building on the recognition of the concept of the social, *the political* refers to the occasions on which difference becomes visible within the discursive field. An important distinction should be made between “the political” and “politics”, the latter of which almost always refers to a sphere of social life comprising elections, political parties, the doings of governments and parliaments, the state apparatus etc. “Politics” should therefore be understood as a reference to empirical events, whereas “the political” – a much more comprehensive term – refers to “the moment of openness, of undecidability, when the very structuring principle of society, the fundamental form of social pact, is called into question” (Žižek, 2008, p. 195). Since the discursive field comprises different signs, each signifying act involves the inclusion of certain signs and the exclusion of others. In conventional terms, this means that a statement is always an emphasis on something and an omission of something else. Therefore, the potential divergence between statements of different logics within the discursive field is unavoidable, which makes it possible for these moments of undecidability to occur. The concepts of the social and the political are in this sense necessarily linked in order to explain the mechanisms of the discursive field, although an emphasis on the latter is more useful in examinations of the functioning of power. What follows is a presentation of Foucault’s historiographic approach to the study of power formations.

2.2. The Genealogy of History

The analysis in this thesis is inspired by a particular aspect of Foucault’s work called *genealogy*. Since this thesis deals with fishery *experience*, i.e. the history and culture of fishery, and its political implications, genealogy is considered highly appropriate, because it employs historical investigation in its explanation of contemporary power formations. Genealogy is not in itself a theory of the social world, but a systematic way of analysing formations of power by combining history and abstract theoretical concepts. Genealogy is intended as a “history of the present” (Foucault, 1995, p. 31). Put crudely, this means that it deals with the present in relation to the past. It seeks an explanation for how the present, or a certain aspect of the present, has become what it is. For Foucault, the crucial effect of history lies in its capacity to show how

“that-which-is has not always been; i.e., [...] the things which seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances, during the course of a precarious and fragile history. What reason perceives as *its* necessity, or rather, what different forms of rationality offer as their necessary being, can perfectly well be shown to have a history; and the network of contingencies from which it emerges can be traced” [emphasis in original] (Foucault, 1988, p. 37).

This relates to the poststructural view that there is no such thing as objective truth, but that what we perceive as truth has been formed by practices of signification, i.e. language or semiosis (cf. chapter 2.1). In light of this, any attitude or practice, which may seem fixed and natural in the contemporary, or which may seem like it has been reached via orderly and even strategic historical processes, should be viewed as the result of coincidental convergences of different phenomena. The task of genealogy is to locate the junctions at which such convergences have occurred. In his own work, Foucault applies genealogical analysis to the emergence of a variety of social institutions, such as medicine, psychiatry and the prison system, as well as conducting historical examinations of concepts such as madness and sexuality. What all these works have in common is an intention to denaturalize that, which is taken for granted in the present, through rigorous excavation of historical documents (Ransom, 1997).

A genealogical analysis involves the study of systems of thought, i.e. *discourses*. It is carried out by making a series of incisions or *archaeological* excavations in history, in order to expose the conditions through which discourses emerge. On the most fundamental level, discourse is a reference to material verbal tracks left by history, but it may also be understood as a particular “way of speaking” (Foucault, 1997). This is a reference to speech in an abstract sense, as discourse comprises ideas, attitudes, beliefs and practices, all of which may be encapsulated in Foucault’s definition of *knowledge*. For Foucault, one of the most important traits of history is “its affirmation of knowledge as perspective” (Foucault, 1984b, p. 90). Therefore, knowledge does not refer to actual fact, but to what subjectively may be viewed as true. Foucault uses the word *episteme* to describe the underlying structure, which shapes knowledge and discourse and represents their conditions of possibility within a particular epoch (Foucault, 2002). In one of his later writings Foucault defines the episteme as

“the strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable within [...] a field of scientificity, and which it is possible to say are true or false. The episteme is the ‘apparatus’ which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may from what may not be characterised as scientific” (Foucault, 1980a, p. 197).

An episteme can thus be understood as a regime of truth; a collection of rules, which determine the legitimacy of certain forms of knowledge at certain points in time. Foucault’s notion of *power* is important here, because he views it as relational – that is, as something, which cannot be acquired or possessed but which emerges in the interaction between individuals. Power is not exerted on individuals, but on their actions. Therefore, no one can be said to “control” an episteme. Foucault’s epistemes are the epistemological unconscious of an era. The internalization of knowledge occurs surreptitiously, because the constitution of knowledge in a particular episteme is based on a set of fundamental assumptions that are so basic, that they are rendered invisible to people operating within it. The notion of episteme can be linked with the idea of *the political* because it legitimizes knowledge; it displays a preference to certain forms of knowledge rather than others, and is as such what shapes the political within a discursive field.

Foucault places great importance on the notion of the *statement*, because he views it as the fundamental unit of discourse. Within discourse a notion of truth appears, when a group of statements are sanctioned by society and adhere to a set of rules by which other statements are judged to be true (Kritzman, 2005). A discourse materializes when such a group of statements emerges from a single episteme. An episteme is a system of dispersion, because the statements governed by it are simultaneously irregular and regular in relation to each other; irregular, because they are different from each other, and regular, because they also display some form of cohesion. The study of statements makes it possible to define the limits of a particular discourse.

A genealogy sets out to conduct archaeological excavations, but also to stitch them together in a way which may unravel the seemingly inherent “origins” and logics of discourses. The motivation behind this form of historical analysis lies with a philosophical

displeasure with metaphysical notions, such as “origin” and “essence”. Here, Foucault is inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche and his fervent opposition to metaphysical history, that is, a history which assumes that objects contain a “primordial truth” or an “original identity”, which may be disclosed if one looks hard enough. By rejecting the metaphysical approach a genealogist will find something completely different in his examination of history, “not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that [there is] no essence or that [the] essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms”. For Foucault, the notions of “essence” and “truth” should be viewed as “errors”, which are often difficult to refute, because they have been “hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history”. Foucault subscribes to Nietzsche’s view, that these errors arise with the belief in an “origin” or “birth” of things, and that we tend to consider this fictional starting point as the “moment of their greatest perfection” (Foucault, 1984b, pp. 78–79). Genealogy is not a quest for origins of things, but rather an investigation of the *descent* and *emergence* of discourses. An examination of descent allows for a discovery of numerous events, through which contemporary peculiarities or concepts were formed. As Foucault says, genealogy “does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things”. To investigate descent is to

“maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being does not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents” (Foucault, 1984b, pp. 80–81).

Where conventional history establishes an unbroken continuity, the genealogist thus engages in a conscious exposition of *discontinuity*, by studying accidents and minute deviations. However, when mainstream history tries to convince us that we have surpassed the “inhumane”, “uncivilized” and “irrational” practices of earlier periods, the genealogist seeks to demonstrate *continuity* between our “enlightened” humanism and its “primitive” past (Villadsen, 2004). On the whole, then, a genealogist makes use of a kind of devil’s advocate

approach, since he wants to generate a *counter-memory* in relation to established, taken-for-granted historical perspectives (Foucault, 1984b).

The idea of emergence refers to a “moment of arising” of a formation of accepted knowledge. It marks the “entry of forces; [...] the leap from the wings to center stage” (Foucault, 1984b, p. 84), which makes itself known through the enforcing of a particular set of rules. Crucially, no one can claim responsibility for an emergence, because the forces in question are neither controlled by destiny or regulative mechanisms, but “respond to haphazard conflicts” (Foucault, 1984b, p. 88). Therefore, epistemes and discourses do not take shape as a result of natural progression; they are coincidental. The contemporary should not be seen as an end product; as a culmination of history, but merely as an episode in an unceasing chain of events. A genealogist thus seeks to highlight the “vicissitudes of history”, i.e. “the details and accidents that accompany every beginning”, and recognizes that his own present is only part of an erratic and coincidental process.

“If interpretation is the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules, then the development of humanity is a series of interpretations. The role of genealogy is to record its history: the history of morals, ideals, and metaphysical concepts, the history of the concept of liberty or of the ascetic life; as they stand for the emergence of different interpretations, they must be made to appear as events on the stage of historical process” (Foucault, 1984b, p. 86).

To sum up, genealogy should be understood as a history of the multiple transformations or mutations of knowledge. These transformations correspond to the recycling of morals, ideals and concepts. The word “recycling” is useful here, because it refers to a paradoxical process; a transformation of something into something else, although the original object has not entirely disappeared. In the context of research this is best understood through the relationship between continuity and discontinuity. In order to disentangle the threads, which at some point lead to the establishment of widely recognized “truths”, genealogy wants to demonstrate discontinuity where conventional history shows continuity, and continuity where conventional

history shows discontinuity. Most important to genealogical analysis is its rootedness in the present; it is not history for history's own sake, but history, intended to influence and unsettle dominant ways of thinking in the present. Although the purpose of genealogy is to create a counter-memory to conventional history, it does need a "scaffold" from which analysis can be carried out. The following chapter sets the scene, so to speak, for a study of the Faroese fishery experience, and is intended to enhance the reader's understanding of the analysis in chapter 5.

3. Background

3.1. The Faroes in brief

The Faroes is an archipelago of seventeen inhabited and one uninhabited islands, located between Scotland, Norway and Iceland. It comprises a land area of 1,400 square kilometres, a sea area of 274,000 square kilometres and the population as of July 2012 is 48,459. The Faroese language derives from Old Norse, and is spoken by the majority of the population on a first language basis. It is most similar to Icelandic and west coast Norwegian dialects. The Faroes was first settled in the pre-Viking era by what is widely believed to have been monks or other Celtic people from Ireland and Scotland. Vikings are believed to have settled early in the 9th century, and from the 11th century the community was under Norwegian rule. The Faroes, which was still considered a Norwegian province, was part of the Kalmar Union from 1397 and then of the Danish-Norwegian Kingdom from 1536. In 1814, Norway left this union, but the western territories of Greenland, Iceland and The Faroes remained under the Danish crown. In 1948 The Faroes was given home rule, which made it a self governing nation under the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Denmark. This involved the exclusive authority to legislate and govern independently in a wide range of areas, including the management of marine resources.

3.2. A History of Faroese Fishery

What follows is a brief historical account of Faroese fishery based on the way it is told in conventional history books. It begins at a time when fishing is considered a secondary and supplementary activity, and finishes in the late 20th century several decades after fishery has become the dominant issue in Faroese politics and society as a whole. The purpose is to present a relevant backdrop for the analysis in chapter 5.

3.2.1. Household Fishery

Until the 19th century, The Faroes was a relatively dormant agricultural society. In 1327 the population is estimated to have been between 2,500 and 4,000, and a census in 1769 shows a population of 4,773 (West, 1972, p. 8). There is limited evidence concerning Faroese practice and customs prior to the 16th century. However, history books tell us that a rigid economic structure was in place, involving landowners (farmers) and landless farm labourers. From

1777 the latter were forbidden to marry and have children, so as to ensure cheap unmarried labour on the farms. In addition to regular farming work, labourers would commonly participate in the farmers' hosiery production. Woollen goods were the most common export product in The Faroes and therefore contributed to the farmers' income. This system made it nearly impossible for alternative occupations to appear, and fishing was therefore a small scale household activity well into the 19th century. Every village was located by the sea, and fish offered a welcome supplement to the relatively meagre resources provided by the soil. Fishing was overseen by the farmers who owned the boats, and according to an ancient custom each farm was attached to its own particular boat. In addition to being bound to servitude on the farms, labourers were also subject to what in Faroese is called *Bátsbandið*, i.e. the "boat bond", which entailed that males of the village were duty bound to crew their designated boat, whenever the farmer so required. This system of boat tenure had worked well, also for the labourers, who would always get a share of the catch. However, *Bátsbandið* was abolished in 1868, when a conflict arose between private interests and the collective principles, which had dominated village life for centuries (J. P. Joensen, 1993). The abolition of *Bátsbandið* can be seen as a reflection of a general decline in the dominance of land owning farmers in Faroese society. This was in large part due to the rise of fishery as a commercial activity.

3.2.2. Commercial Fishery

Because of the relative mediocrity of Faroese fishing equipment and methods along with the importance of fish as a food resource, the export of fish prior to the 19th century happened only sporadically and in insignificant amounts. In the years between 1768 and 1788 a Danish merchant named Niels Ryberg had obtained royal permission to set up a smuggling depot in Tórshavn, which temporarily made The Faroes a transit trade station. In this context, he tried to teach the Faroese the processing of klipfish and salted herring. Ryberg's intention had been to assist the Faroese in developing fishery with decked vessels, but, as strange as it sounds, the local Faroese did everything they could to prevent these attempts (Nolsøe, 1963). The fish processing skills learned during this period were therefore soon forgotten and would later have to be re-learned. Open boat commercial fishery began to increase in the 1830s and 1840s. However, woollen goods continued to form the majority of Faroese exports until the 1850s (West, 1972).

A significant obstacle to the selling of fish overseas was the Danish trade monopoly, which had been in place on the islands for centuries. In some ways, the monopoly was useful to the Faroese, because it guaranteed the availability of certain goods. For this reason, a large portion of the locals opposed its abolition. However, the monopoly was an impediment for economic development, since it prevented the practice of any other trade, including with foreign ships, which frequented the islands from time to time. Furthermore, the monopoly trading station in Tórshavn preferred woollen goods over fish products in its dealings with the locals, which stalled the development of fishery as a trade. This point was observed by several Danish officials at the time. In the early 19th century, several of the *Amtmænd*, i.e. County Governors, were dedicated to the economic development of The Faroes and continuously called for the introduction of free trade (H. J. Debes, 1982). The eventual abolition of the monopoly in 1856 is generally viewed as a pivotal event in Faroese economic history, because it is seen as enabling a transition from subsistence agriculture to commercial fishery.

Period	Raw Wool	Woollen goods	Tallow and Sheepskins	Fish	Other sea products	Butter and feathers	Total
1712-21	14.8	67.2	6.4	5.2	3.7	2.7	100.0
1767-76	0.1	92.5	4.3	1.2	0.5	1.4	100.0
1792-1801	-	78.6	11.1	5.8	3.9	0.6	100.0
1841-50	-	55.1	4.2	19.3	19.7	1.7	100.0

(Source: West, 1972, p. 74)

The latter half of the 19th century saw a rapid development of commercial fishery. This was not merely due to the introduction of free trade, since fish exports had already started to increase before the abolition of the monopoly (cf. table 1). The development of commercial fishery was also a result of a sudden population increase in the early 19th century, which necessitated alternative livelihoods to that of farming. The population rise compelled a growing number of landless Faroese to turn to the sea for a living. Moreover, it is conceivable that the close contact with Shetlanders who fished around The Faroes, induced a change in the mentality of the Faroese towards fishery (J. P. Joensen, 1993; R. Joensen, 1992).

In spite of this early growth, the introduction of free trade in 1856 provided the setting for a much quicker and extensive growth of commercial fishery than what would have been the case under the trade monopoly. Before long, a number of trade merchants appeared

in the large villages, and grocer shops could be found in almost every village (H. J. Debes, 1982; J. P. Joensen, 1993). It was now possible, throughout the islands, to sell one's catch immediately after it had been fished. All of a sudden, the appeal to earn one's living through fishery instead of farming was greater and more widespread.

During the first two decades of free trade, fishery was almost exclusively carried out by what the Faroese call "rowing out", that is, fishing from open boats in close proximity to the islands. This was how it had been done for centuries. However, the fishing methods learned from the Shetlanders were becoming more widespread, which led to a significant improvement in productivity. The most important of such advances was arguably the introduction of longline fishing in the middle of the 19th century (J. P. Joensen, 1993; R. Joensen, 1992; West, 1972). The conventional handline used on Faroese boats allowed one hook per man. In comparison, the longline allowed a small crew to operate several hundreds of hooks. At first, the longline was expensive to purchase and maintain, so few could afford it. The handline fishermen initially opposed longline fishing, because it was believed that it would wipe out the fish stocks. Gradually, however, the longline would become more popular. Another reason for the speed with which Faroese fishery developed during this period was a long term tendency for fish prices to increase throughout Europe.

Period	Klipfish	Salt fish	Stockfish	Sweaters
1841-50	21	-	186	51
1858-65	581	-	163	?
1866-75	1,520	71	50	46
1876-85	2,023	42	49	52
1886-95	2,510	183	32	42
1896-99	3,869	338	6	39

(Source: West, 1972, p. 97)

The dramatic rise in fishery is illustrated in table 2 and 3. The most commonly exported land product, sweaters, formed a considerable part of Faroese exports prior to the

Average during period	Land produce	Sea produce	Total
1712-1721	91.1	8.9	100.0
1767-1776	98.3	1.7	100.0
1792-1801	90.3	9.7	100.0
1841-1850	61.0	39.0	100.0
1895-1899	6.3	93.7	100.0

(Source: West, 1975, chap. 2)

abolition of the monopoly in 1856. Only a decade after the introduction of free trade, land products had become a marginal part of Faroese exports. During the period 1841-50 fish and other sea products accounted for 39

per cent of total Faroese export compared with 61 per cent conventional products such as knitted woollens. By the end of the century – even if the amount of exported land products had not decreased significantly – fish and other sea products constituted 93.7 per cent of exports.

3.2.3. Smack Fishery

The emergence of smack fishery marks the beginning of a period from 1900 to 1928, which has been called the “Faroese industrial revolution” (West, 1972, p. 130). The first smack came to The Faroes in 1872, and its immediate success led to a few other purchases. From around 1890 the price of fish in Europe began to increase even faster than it had done in previous years. At the same time smacks were becoming cheaper, because of a major fishing fleet renewal in Britain. The British were increasingly building and purchasing steam driven trawlers, and selling off their wooden smacks. These things put together resulted in a much higher cost effectiveness of investing in smacks, and many were picked up by Faroese buyers at a low cost. From around 1900 Faroese smack fishery became much more capitalized and structured, hence the above reference to an industrial revolution. In 1890 there were fourteen smacks in The Faroes. By 1910, there were 137 and by 1932 there were 186 (H. J. Debes, 1982; E. Patursson, 1961; West, 1972).

The arrival of so many fishing ships in a relatively short space of time completely transformed Faroese society. Smacks allowed for the exploitation of rich fishing grounds far out to sea, which gave the economy a considerable boost. From 1901 to 1930 the total amount of fish caught by smacks was multiplied by five (E. Patursson, 1961). During this same period, the inshore fishery, that is, the open boat fishery, which had been a significant part of the economy for the greater part of the 19th century, declined considerably. Faroese territorial waters were being invaded by British steam trawlers, whom the Faroese believed were overfishing and depleting fish stocks, and operating trawls with no regard for the Faroese longlines (West, 1972). This meant that it was more lucrative for Faroese fishermen to seek out alternative fishing grounds using ocean going vessels. Iceland was already visited regularly by Faroese smacks, but from the turn of the century it became the place where the majority of Faroese ships carried out their fishing. In the early 1920s the catch off the coast of Iceland amounted to 98,4 of all Faroese fishery (E. Patursson, 1961). In the late 1920s and 1930s Greenland would also become an important fishing destination for Faroese smacks. By

the early 1930s most smacks had been fitted with engines, which made distant water fishery somewhat safer and more profitable. Life on board the smacks was tough. When the weather was good, the men would be working around the clock. In bad weather they would be confined to extremely cramped quarters. Meals were hasty and, more often than not, of a low quality. Wooden smacks dominated Faroese fishery until World War II. They would turn out to be very durable and cost effective. Many of them were still operating during the 1950s and some of them lasted into the 60s and 70s (West, 1972).

The emergence of distant water fishery did not only have an impact on the Faroese economy, but also a major influence on everyday life. Smacks would leave in February-March and return in September, so the fishermen would not return home regularly to take part in village and family life, as they would after inshore fishing trips. At the height of smack fishery in the 1920s and 1930s almost two thousand men aged between 14 and 40 years – a substantial part of a population of just over 20,000 – were away during the summer half, and were unable to participate in conventional Faroese village work. As Joensen argues, smack fishery caused fishermen to lose “interest in farming and other work of the farmer. They assumed the mentality of seamen” (J. P. Joensen, 1993, p. 15). This also had noteworthy consequences for home life, since families had to get used to the absence of husbands and fathers and a greater workload in the household. Fishing had always been considered dangerous, even when it had been carried out off the Faroese coast. In the past, certain villages had been so badly hit by accidents related to inshore fishing that they had never quite recovered. When there was bad weather, people would immediately worry about the fishermen out on the sea. However, the distances and length of time involved in smack fishery meant that people at home had to deal with the added dimension of not hearing from the fishermen for several months. Smack fishery was exceedingly dangerous and in the decades leading up to World War II hundreds of Faroese fishermen perished, most often in storm related accidents. Uncertainty and fear, which had always been present while men were out fishing, went from being intermittent to being a persistent feature of Faroese everyday life. According to one historian, smack fishery completely transformed Faroese way of life and “the consciousness of the people in The Faroes regarding the great existential questions became different” (Sølvará, 2009). Therefore, even if it would be tempting to view smack fishery as an upgraded version of inshore fishery, which simply went further, fished more and

yielded better economic value, it is important to appreciate that it also involved an entirely different social experience.

The development of fishery influenced Faroese society in a great variety of ways. An improving standard of living continuously propelled the growth of the population. At the turn of the century the population was 15,000 and by the eve of World War II it had nearly doubled. According to historians there was a clear connection between the rise of fishery and population growth, since it “created a means of existence for far more people than the traditional economy could support” (J. P. Joensen, 1993). The fish was usually landed in The Faroes and this created another significant occupation, namely the processing of *klipfish* (dried salt cod). This was usually carried out by *fiskagentur* (fish girls), who would lay the fish out to dry on stone paved grounds. Klipfish was the most common Faroese export product and was sold, for the most part, in southern Europe.

Fishery also caused a surge in the number of institutions and other organisations. Insurance unions had been founded in the late 19th century, and in 1903 *Føroya Banki* (Bank of The Faroes) was established. In 1909, the employers’ union was founded, followed by the fishermen’s union in 1911. Later, several other labour groups became organized (H. J. Debes, 1982; J. P. Joensen, 1993). The rapid increase in ships also created a demand for skilled navigators. In 1892, the law regarding the certificates needed by fishing skippers, which had been needlessly strict, became more lenient (West, 1972). In the following year, courses and examinations in navigation commenced in Tórshavn. Within a decade several such “skipper schools” had been set up around the islands (Olsen, 2005). The economic changes along with several other factors gave the Faroese a heightened sense of cultural awareness, which would later develop into a national awareness (H. J. Debes, 1982; J. P. Joensen, 1993).

3.2.4. War and Crisis

On 9 April 1940, Denmark was invaded by Germany. Only four days later, Britain commenced its occupation of The Faroes, which would last until the end of World War II. Connections with Denmark and the European mainland were completely severed and the circumstances for fishery became fundamentally different. In the summer of 1940, the smacks departed for their regular fishing grounds in Iceland and Greenland. However, within a year most of them had converted to a lucrative, albeit highly dangerous, transport trade. In neighbouring Britain, trawlers and other fishing ships had been rebuilt for military service,

which resulted in a great demand for fish products, especially iced fish. In 1941, Icelandic fishermen decided that sailing to Britain with

Table 4 <i>Faroese exports to Britain between 1940 and 1945</i>						
Year	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945
Million Danish kroner	13,2	33,4	44,1	41,4	49,3	30,2

(Source: Hansen, 2006, p. 35)

cargoes of iced fish had become too dangerous. Lured by the soaring fish prices on the British market, Faroese ships soon began to purchase iced fish in Iceland, which would then be ferried to Britain. This activity increased dramatically in the beginning of the war (cf. table 4), and by the end of the war, Faroese vessels had made 522 trips to Britain with a total of 33,000 tonnes of iced fish. This amounted to more than one fifth of all the fish eaten in Britain during the war (J. A. Hansen, 2006; West, 1972). Transporting fish from Iceland to Britain was extremely dangerous. During the five year period between 1940 and 1945, twenty-five ships were lost because of air attacks, mines, U-boat attacks and other unknown causes. The number of fishermen killed as a result was 132, almost 0.5 per cent of the Faroese population (J. A. Hansen, 2006; West, 1972).

After the war, the size of the fishing fleet had been reduced by about a third. However, the financial rewards from the war were considerable. From 1940 to 1945 Faroese receivables in British banks had increased from 248,000 to 2,792,000 pounds sterling. The increased liquidity along with the belief that fish prices would continue to be favourable, meant that there was great eagerness to buy new ships. Around eighty ships were purchased immediately after the war. In 1948, the Faroese fishing fleet included thirty-eight trawlers, which was the largest trawler fleet in Scandinavia (J. A. Hansen, 2006; West, 1972). Since many of the shipping companies were new and inexperienced, several of them purchased old and worn out steam trawlers from Iceland and Britain, sometimes without proper inspection. Many of the ships had been used for military service and had to be modified in order to return to fishery. A majority of these investments would turn out to be unproductive and many of them disastrous. The post war boom only lasted two or three years before numerous Faroese ship owning companies went bankrupt. *Sjóvinnubankin*, that is, the bank, which had financed many of the ships, could not withstand the pressure and came to the brink of bankruptcy on two occasions before it was rescued by the Danish government.

Several things went wrong for Faroese fishery and economy after the war. The recently acquired fleet was in a much worse condition than previously anticipated, and repairs

were not properly carried out. Most of the deficiencies were engine related, and it did not help that there was a shortage of engineers in The Faroes at the time. To make things worse, the industry was hit by several ferocious strikes in the early 1950s. The challenge faced by operators of steam driven ships was exacerbated by a dramatic increase in the price of coal in 1950 (J. A. Hansen, 2006; West, 1972). In 1951, a committee was assigned by the Løgting, to assess what types of vessels were best suited for Faroese fishery. In 1953, the committee presented its recommendations, which would be closely followed for several years, and in 1955, a law on the modernization of the fishing fleet was passed. The eventual recovery of the fishing fleet, which would go on into the 1960s, was also made possible by the establishment of Færøernes Realkreditinstitut in 1955. Its purpose was to provide loans for private companies and individuals. It was funded by the European Recovery Program (better known as the Marshall Plan) and an interest free loan from the National Bank of Denmark (West, 1972).

3.2.5. Closer to Home

After World War II, strategies pursued by most fishing nations became increasingly expansionist. This led to much heavier exploitation of marine resources. From the end of the war until the 1960s the catches on a world wide basis grew on average by around 7 per cent each year (Justinussen, 1997). This inevitably resulted in a more intense competition for resources. In the late 1950s, the competition for resources around The Faroes led to direct confrontation between British and Faroese fishermen. The British, who had been fishing around The Faroes for decades, believed that they were simply exercising a historical right, whereas the Faroese believed that their national rights were being violated.

In the early 1970s the joint ICNAF-ICES⁵ Committee on the Cod Stocks in the North Atlantic deemed that the North Atlantic fishing fleet possessed an excess capacity of around 40 per cent; that is, it was 40 per cent larger than what was necessary for maximum returns from fishery. This excess capacity and the resultant over exploitation of fish stocks threatened the long term profitability of fishery itself. It was clear that the growing exploitation and competition for marine resources was an unsustainable development in the long term. Therefore, international and national regulation of fishery became a central theme during this period. However, the sea was still considered common property, which made international

⁵ ICNAF: International Commission for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries. ICES: International Council for the Exploration of the Sea

regulation difficult. Separate states therefore found it necessary to take on this responsibility and make fishery regulation a national issue (Justinussen, 1997).

After a while, several coastal states proclaimed their exclusive right to resources within 200 nautical miles of their coast. The nationalization of the oceans had begun, and by the middle of the 1970s the majority of coastal states had made such declarations regarding their territorial seas. This led to disputes and, in the case of Iceland, recurring confrontation between the coast guard and British trawlers. In 1977, the right of individual states to a 200 nautical mile zone, officially known as an Exclusive Economic Zone or EEZ, was ratified by the International Court of Justice in The Hague, which put an end to the disputes.⁶ Within a year, The Faroes extended its fishery limit from twelve to 200 nautical miles (Justinussen, 1997).

The expansion of the fishery limits to 200 nautical miles (cf. figure 1) was a “double edged sword” for The Faroes. The removal of foreign ships from Faroese territorial waters meant that the prospects for nearby fishery were significantly improved. However, free access to lucrative fishing grounds further away in the North Atlantic came to an end, and the no-holds-barred distant water fishery, which had been the most important source of income for

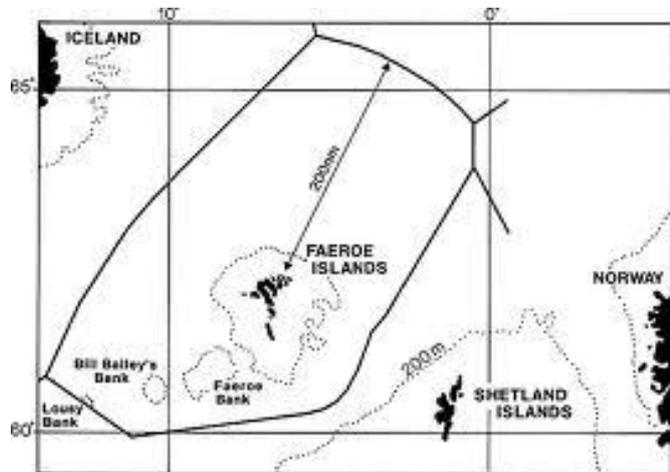


Figure 1. Exclusive Economic Zone of The Faroes since 1978 (Source: Guttesen, 1980)

several decades, became a restricted activity, subject to specific international agreements. Faroese fishery had in reality become “trapped in its own aquarium” (Justinussen, 1997, p. 91). From an economic point of view, the incorporation of the EEZs indicated the finitude of fishery as an industry, and was therefore at odds with the expansionist strategy pursued since World War II. However, in spite of the completely transformed geopolitical circumstances, the relentless determination by Faroese officials and industrialists to further expand fishery did not come to an end. The Faroese population was growing rapidly and making ever greater demands of an emerging welfare state (Justinussen, 1997). The large vessels that had been

⁶ The EEZs were formally adopted with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in 1982.

fishing freely in the North Atlantic were deployed for fishery off The Faroes. “What had been lost abroad would be gained at home” seemed to be the overarching philosophy. In its eagerness to force this development, the Faroese Home Rule government became increasingly involved in industry, especially fishery. So much so, that it developed its own distinctive brand of “corporate planned economy” (J. A. Hansen, 2007). This political strategy was doomed from the outset, and would eventually turn out to be devastating for the Faroese economy. The functioning of the Faroese corporate planned economy in the 1960s, 70s and 80s and its repercussions will be explained on the following pages.

3.2.6. Boom and Crisis

In the 1960s, the Løgting passed a variety of new laws on state aid, which made it possible for the government to provide guarantees for the repayment of loans to the fishing industry. In the 1970s and 80s this trend continued as several other laws were passed, authorizing the government to provide subsidies and loan guarantees on a vast scale. As a result the number of large fishing vessels increased dramatically. Between 1975 and 1985 the number of iced fish trawlers rose from 1 to 70. According to the new laws, the government had authority to give loan guarantees for up to 50 million Danish kroner (DKK). Nevertheless, during the period when this loan guarantee system was in force, the government provided loan guarantees for approximately 2.3 billion DKK (J. A. Hansen, 2006, 2007).

The founding of *Ráfiskagrunnurin*, (which can be translated directly, and rather clumsily, into “the unprocessed fish fund”) in 1975 was a state aid initiative, which would prove very costly to the Faroese economy. The purpose of *Ráfiskagrunnurin* was to regulate the price of fish, so as to provide stability in the running of ship owning businesses. This stability would be accomplished through a system of compensation depending on the difference between a fixed sale price determined by the fund and the actual payment received by businesses for the selling of unprocessed fish to processing factories in The Faroes. For example, if the price of herring set by *Ráfiskagrunnurin* was 1.90 DKK per kilogram, and a ship owning company sold herring at a price of 1.50 DKK per kilogram, *Ráfiskagrunnurin* would reimburse the company 0.40 DKK per kilogram. If, however, the company sold herring at 2.30 DKK per kilogram, it would have to pay *Ráfiskagrunnurin* 0.40 DKK per kilogram. In effect, this meant that market forces were removed from the operation of fishery, because the industry could always rely on public compensation, if the price of fish was so low that they

did not make a profit from selling it. The intention was that Ráfiskagrunnurin would be self financed, because it was assumed that prices would fluctuate in such a way, that times of economic upturn would counterbalance times of economic downturn. This, however, turned out not to be the case. Most of the individuals in Ráfiskagrunnurin's management board were themselves directly involved in fishery. The fund was therefore extraordinarily open handed regarding state funds, and therefore too much was handed out and too little taken back in. Before long, Ráfiskagrunnurin had developed into a self service, as it came to administer enormous subsidies for fishery and fish processing (J. A. Hansen, 2006, 2007).

Subsidies were given through other institutions as well. *Lønjavningargrunnurin* ("the wage balancing fund") provided fishermen with minimum wages and supplementary earnings from the state exchequer. The year 1985 saw the founding of *Stuðulsnevndin* ("the subsidies committee"), whose task was to oversee various subsidization schemes for fishermen and ship owners. The combined subsidies given to fishery operations through Ráfiskagrunnurin, Lønjavningargrunnurin and Stuðulsnevndin reached absurd amounts. At the same time the operations subsidies and loan guarantees became a basis for massive new investments in new ships and factories. During this period, the capacity of Faroese fishing industry would outstrip the amount of marine resources available by a long way (J. A. Hansen, 2007).

In 1948, the cooperative *Føroya Fiskasøla* (Faroe fish export firm) had been established and had been given exclusive rights by the Løgting to export salt fish and klipfish from The Faroes. "Fiskasølan", as it was usually called, would attain a very powerful position in Faroese fishery. It would gradually lose what one would normally consider characteristics of a cooperative. At the height of its power, in the late 1980s, it would be responsible for 75 per cent of all Faroese exports. But Fiskasølan was more than simply an export company, as it also dictated which products should be sold, and therefore how production should be carried out by its members. Crucially, Fiskasølan did not distinguish between high and low quality products created by its members. Everyone got the same price per kilogram, whether it was the company producing the pricey five pound filet or the company producing fish in frozen blocks; a significantly cheaper product. Clearly, the fact that Fiskasølan represented such a large part of Faroese fishery gave it a strong influence on export markets. However, along with Ráfiskagrunnurin, Fiskasølan contributed to a situation, where ship owning companies and processing factories completely lost their orientation regarding prices on export markets.

The market prices were not at all reflected in prices assigned by these two institutions, which made it difficult for Faroese companies to maintain a foothold in reality (J. A. Hansen, 2007).

Driven by subsidization schemes, a dramatic increase in investments led to an unprecedented economic boom in the 1980s (J. A. Hansen, 2006, 2007). In 1985, the Finance Committee in the Løgting agreed to let the government provide subsidizing loans and loan guarantees to 16 new fishing vessels at a total value of 1.5 billion DKK in what has infamously become known as *skipapakkin*, i.e. the ship package. (Jespersen & Nolsøe, 2000). This was the most generous decision made by Faroese politicians during the 1980s (J. A. Hansen, 2006). Loans provided by the government in the 1980s were characterized by the fact that although the word “loan” was used, borrowers were not required to pay instalments or interest. At least this was what happened (J. A. Hansen, 2006). The subsidies for fishery grew by about 400 to 500 million DKK each year, and in 1984 it amounted to one third of the total state budget. Furthermore, a significant part of the money spent on subsidies was borrowed by the government from abroad. From 1980 to 1990 Faroese foreign debt rose from 1 to 8.5 billion DKK (Jespersen & Nolsøe, 2000). By the end of the 1980s, fish stocks and fish prices were on the decline and the Faroese economic and political system was in no shape to deal with any setbacks. The running costs of the large Faroese trawlers had far exceeded their income. The continually widening difference between actual price and fictitious price, which was sponsored by Ráfiskagrúnnurin, put increasing pressure on the exchequer. The reimbursements had gone far beyond measure. There was no money left and any further attempts to borrow money from abroad were flatly refused.

Given the scale of mismanagement involved in the corporate planned economy, the collapse of the Faroese economy in the early 90s was unavoidable. Although the warning signs had been evident several years earlier, it was not until 1989, when the signs of economic decline had become unmistakable, that politicians took a series of measures to limit the damage. An abolition of subsidization schemes, including Ráfiskagrúnnurin and Stuðulsnevndin, was implemented in 1990. In October 1992, the economy reached a dead end, as two of the largest Faroese banks, Føroya Banki and Sjóvinnubankin, collapsed. They would eventually be rescued by loans from the Danish state and then merged into one bank. During 1992, the phasing out of subsidies and loan guarantees accelerated. But it was too late. The consequences of the crisis for Faroese society would turn out to be disastrous. Activity on the islands plummeted. From 1988 to 1994, the Gross Domestic Product was reduced by more

than 25 per cent. The number of people employed in industry was reduced by about a third. In 1992, unemployment had reached 20 per cent. Even worse, house prices decreased by more than 50 per cent in the early 90s, and numerous households could not cope with their loan burdens. Many people lost their homes, and as a consequence, around 5000 people of working age, corresponding to almost 10 per cent of the population, emigrated (Jespersen & Nolsøe, 2000).

3.2.7. Aftermath

It was clear that the crisis had in large part been caused by economic mismanagement related to fishery. The expansion of the EEZs, which had become effective on 1 January 1978, had led to forced excess fishery around the islands. Despite this, the number of fishing vessels and fish processing factories had escalated dramatically. Far too many investments during the 80s had been based on guarantees and subsidies rather than potential future profitability. The subsidies and loan guarantees had lulled the industry into false security, with no incentives to change its existing methods of production or general business activity. The Faroese fishing fleet, which had completely outgrown feasible catches in Faroese territorial waters, was reduced by about a third from 1992 to 1995. When the crisis reached its peak in 1993, the vast majority of fish processing factories had been declared bankrupt. Many new and large ships, which had been built with poor or non-existent equity, were claimed by foreign creditors. The cost for the Faroese government, which had provided guarantees for most of the loans, was enormous (J. A. Hansen, 2007).

The previously mentioned bank collapses in October 1992 turned out to be a watershed event for Faroese fishery. The loans provided by the Danish government in order to rescue the banks had certain strings attached, which meant that The Faroes and its fishery was effectively put under administration. Fishery was specifically required to become subject to a number of new rules and regulations. *Føroya Fiskasøla*, the epitome of the Faroese corporate planned economy of the 1970s and 80s, barely survived the crisis by transforming from a cooperative to a joint stock company in 1993. In this process it lost some of its previous capacities. It was the beginning of the end for *Fiskasølan*, which would eventually be closed down in 2005. During the crisis, creditors took over the fish processing industry and founded the company *Føroya Fiskavirking* (Faroe Seafood) in which nineteen salvaged processing factories would be placed. Faroese fishery would recover slowly in the following years and in

1997, Føroya Fiskavirking would make a profit for the first time. In 1994, the Commercial Fishery Act was passed in parliament, making way for a new quota system. The system did not manage to gain popularity before it was replaced by a fishing days system in 1996, which would regulate fishing effort rather than catch sizes. The uninhibited, subsidized overfishing was thereby brought to an end. As the Faroese economy recovered in the following years it was clear that the strategy of previous decades had been economically unsustainable. By the end of the 1990s, things were looking up. The foreign debt was relatively quickly paid and certain checks and balances were incorporated into the management of fishery, as had been demanded by the Danish government. Consequently, some key actors of the corporate planned economy – most of whom have been described in this chapter – had to relinquish their control over the industry, and assign it to the conditions of the market (J. A. Hansen, 2007).

However, in 1994 a new paradox was incorporated into Faroese fishery management. The new Commercial Fishery Act of 1994 included the proclamation, that marine resources in Faroese territorial waters “are the property of the people of The Faroes” and that fishing licences allocated according to law “do not give individual groups or persons the right of property to marine resources” (Føroya Løgting, 1994). However, on 1 March 1994, ship owners who had survived the crisis were given free fishing licences by the government, which in turn – and with the help of some significant gaps in legislation – would let them conduct a dubious activity of buying and selling licences, if they so wished. After a while, this led to unrestrained privatization and capitalization of marine resources, because the right to fish gradually came to be in the hands of fewer ship owning companies. There are examples of ships being sold at four or five times their value because of fishing licences attached to that particular ship. Legislators were, as Hansen put it, “overtaken by reality”, as the speculation in fishing licences led to the emergence of “quota barons” (J. A. Hansen, 2007, p. 7). In 2000, the general debate concerning the overall management of fishery was intensified, as the CEA published its spring report, proposing a fundamental re-organisation of Faroese fishery in the form of a new system of fishing licence allocation. The system would, in accordance with the Commercial Fishery Act, be a democratization of fishing licenses, since it would involve the repossession of all fishing licenses by the Faroese state and the setting up of fishing licence trading on an open “fishing days market” (Búskaparráðið, 2000). This would, as mentioned in chapter 1, make it easier for start up businesses to engage in fishery. It would also help reduce

the overcapacity in the fishing fleet, and thereby alleviate the problem of limited profits for numerous ship owning businesses. It would, as was argued, make fishery more efficient and sustainable in the long run. Since then, repeated proposals by the CEA and others to radically re-organize Faroese fishery in this way have prompted numerous repudiations and fiery political debates in Faroese society in general. This issue is yet to be resolved, and is still a major concern for those engaged in the fishery management debate. This chapter has provided a brief overview of the history of Faroese fishery. The following chapter explains how the theoretical concepts in chapter 2 are analytically applied to the subject of Faroese fishery.

4. Analytical Strategy

Analytical strategy refers to the choosing of a perspective and the accounting for its consequences in relation to the way the world is seen (and thereby, how it is not seen) through that perspective. It is, in the words of Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, about making “observations of observations *as* observations [which are] contingent upon the chosen perspective” [emphasis added] (1999, p. 152). An analytical strategy is therefore both a construction of an analytical perspective and a reflection on the usefulness of that construction. The choice to conduct a study of the Faroese fishery experience is rooted in a continual mystification regarding actions and inactions related to Faroese fishery management. Since history and culture are regularly referenced in in the fishery debate, the point of departure for the analysis is that Faroese fishery politics are, to a degree, historically and culturally motivated. Therefore, the choice to apply Foucaultian genealogy to this subject seems appropriate, since it allows for a detailed *and* focused examination of the historical emergence of power formations. It is, in other words, an analytical strategy, which includes historical research rooted in a contemporary problematic.

The presentation of theoretical concepts in chapter 2 is an expression of the author’s understanding of poststructural thinking and of the work of Foucault, and should be seen as an attempt to “demystify” the theory, so as to make it applicable in an analysis of the relevant empirical data. The presentation of Faroese fishery history in chapter 3 is, similarly, the author’s interpretation of the important elements of that topic, and always bearing in mind that it serves primarily as an overview, which enhances the understanding of the analysis in chapter 5. The analytically strategic choices relating to this thesis have been made on what was deemed best suited to tackle the discursive problem, which has been presented in the introduction, and which was the initial spark for this thesis.

What follows is a presentation of the analytical procedure. This involves a specification of the various steps included in the analysis, and, therein, of the way in which the theoretical concepts will be applied to the empirical data. The analysis applies a genealogical approach to the study of Faroese fishery. Genealogy is a history of the present, and therefore, the analysis is motivated by a desire to have an effect on contemporary Faroese politics. It is what John S. Ransom has labelled a “political genealogy”, because it seeks to “incite the creation of new power-knowledge circuits that can compete with and supplant old ones.” It involves the establishment of a “we”, which is “characterized by a distinct manner of

looking at the problem” – in this case of Faroese fishery – and which attempts “to do battle with and supersede the dominant perspectives of the day” (Ransom, 1997, p. 96). This is done through a systematic inspection of historical documents relating to Faroese fishery, so as to reveal the contingencies of a dominant perspective of the day, i.e. to expose the coincidental emergence of a particular political discourse of fishery. The point of departure is the analysis of historical elements, which have made possible the emergence of contingent objects, i.e. objects that could have had a different development and, therefore, whose present form *could have been different*. Genealogy is not comprehensive, but selective in its analysis of empirical material. It may prioritize events, which have not been given considerable importance in conventional history. The choice of material is influenced by the relevant problem, rather than by the desire to produce a wide ranging history of events (Villadsen, 2004, 2005). This also means that it is neither neutral nor objective, but entirely conditional on the knowledge and judgment of the researcher. In line with poststructural thinking, an analysis cannot produce absolute “truths” about the issue of Faroese fishery and politics. What is important, as Foucault would agree, are the “effects of truth” generated by the analysis (Foucault, 1980b, p. 118). It is not about what is actually “true” or “false”, but about the capacity to destabilize dominant ways of thinking.

Although the analysis utilizes theoretical concepts of Foucault (cf. chapter 2), the concrete steps of the analysis are inspired by (but do not strictly adhere to) an analytical framework laid out by Lilie Chouliaraki and Norman Fairclough in their book *Discourse in Late Modernity: Rethinking Critical Discourse Analysis* (1999, chap. 4). The analysis starts with a problem, which has been presented in chapter 1: that Faroese fishery management contains a non-economic rationale, which is assumed to be historically and culturally determined, and whose explanation has so far been neglected. This is a discursive problem; it is not about the practice of fishery per se, but the way in which fishery is represented or *signified* in politics. On this premise, the analysis takes the following five steps:

Firstly, it performs a fragmentation, i.e. it specifies the “configuration of practices [or experience] which the discourse in focus is located within” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 61). Secondly, it analyses the conjuncture of fragmented elements represented as an epistemic foundation (episteme) for the emergence of the discourse in focus. This involves an explanation of how past experiences have been recycled; how contemporary experience and discourse has been made possible through a paradoxical process involving both continuity and

discontinuity. Thirdly, it analyses the interactive substance of the discourse, i.e. the semiotic display, without which a discourse and associated episteme could not be observed. Fourthly, it looks at the way in which the discursive problem has a function in practice, that is, how the experience of fishery has an influence on Faroese politics. This involves a shift in the analysis, because it moves from an investigation of discursive representation of fishery to an examination of its implications in practice. It is worth noting, that this practice does not involve fishery itself, since discourse has a marginal role in the activity of fishery. Therefore, the word “discourse” relates to the problem of overall political management of fishery. In other words, it is about the operation of fishery politics rather than the carrying out of fishery itself. This section also involves suggestions as to how the implications of the discursive problem should be dealt with. Fifthly, the analysis analyses itself retrospectively. It reflects on the perspective applied in the analysis and the consequences that perspective turned out to have.

The empirical data used in the analysis ranges from the 17th century to the present day. However, since early written material about The Faroes is in short supply, it will mainly engage with the 19th century and onwards. The analysis deals with historical documents and other semiotic material as “events”, which are not interpreted retrospectively, but are analysed in their own context. To use Foucault’s words, they are maintained in their “proper dispersion”, so as to avoid the impression of unbroken continuity from the past to the present day (Foucault, 1984b, p. 81). (cf. chapter 2.2). Predictably, the availability of primary sources differs from one period to another. The analysis makes use of different types of documents and other semiotic material, i.e. life stories, newspaper articles, official documents, fictional literature, poems, works of art, and more, so as to demonstrate the pervasiveness of the experience and discourse in focus. Documents referred to in the analysis have been chosen in terms of their representativeness in relation to the Faroese experience of fishery at the time of their publication or utilization. The following chapter analyses the Faroese historical and contemporary fishery experience and discusses its consequences for Faroese politics.

5. Analysis

What follows is an analysis of the Faroese fishery experience. The first part is a genealogical analysis of that experience, and the second part is a discussion of its political consequences and a reflection on the analysis.

5.1. A Genealogy of the Fishery Experience

This chapter has three objectives: firstly, to analyse the conjuncture of the Faroese fishery experience. This involves a fragmentation and specification of the different experiences in which the contemporary experience, and discourse, of Faroese fishery is located. The first three subchapters (5.1.1, 5.1.2 and 5.1.3) will look at each of these experiences in turn. Secondly, it is an analysis of the epistemic foundation, i.e. the flowing together of the different types of historical experience, which represents a particular sphere of knowledge about fishery, and which has made a contemporary experience and discourse of fishery possible (chapter 5.1.4). Thirdly, it is an interactional analysis of the discourse itself, that is, a demonstration of a particular way of speaking about Faroese fishery in the present⁷ (chapter 5.1.5).

Before an analysis of conjuncture of the fishery experience it is necessary to fragment that experience into smaller elements. In this context, three types of experience, which are considered important to the contemporary Faroese fishery experience, are analysed: *household fishery*, *commercial fishery* and *epic fishery*. The reason for this particular arrangement of modalities is the pervasive enunciation and implicit allusions to these experiences in Faroese public life. Although the three modalities may appear as three stages in a chronological development, the intention is rather to view them as different and overlapping experiences, which have more or less characterized certain periods of Faroese history. Dividing the Faroese fishery experience like this makes it possible to evaluate the reproduction and transformation of experiences from one period to another. This will demonstrate *continuity* between the present and the past, i.e. that the present is related to the past, but it will simultaneously reveal the *discontinuities* in the history of fishery, by showing the coincidental convergences, which have allowed the contemporary fishery experience to

⁷ The word “speaking” should not be taken literally, however. In this analysis speech is synonymous with any type of signifying practice, i.e. the application of a variety of texts and symbols.

emerge. Thus, it will be possible to challenge a view of fishery development as natural and inevitable “progress”.

Although, the three mentioned types of fishery experience are interrelated, as will be explained later, the following three subchapters will explain each of them separately. The final two subchapters will analyse the emergence of a particular Faroese fishery ethos and epic fishery discourse. In other words, this chapter looks at the way in which contemporary experience of fishery has been made possible through the convergence of three types of fishery experience, which has formed a particular knowledge about fishery and which feeds into the way fishery is articulated.

5.1.1. Household Fishery Experience

“Seyða ull er Føroya gull”

“Sheep’s wool is Faroes’ gold”

“Ít er at hava hjallin í sjónum”

“It is difficult to have the storeroom in the sea”

Old Faroese proverbs

This chapter deals with the experience of fishery as a household activity, i.e. as a means of “putting food on the table”. The two proverbs above are part of an old Faroese oral tradition. They may still be familiar to many Faroese today, although they probably do not seem applicable to the society of the modern Faroese. They can, however, be said to encapsulate the way in which Faroese society and its economy is experienced prior to the commercialization of fishery; that is, in a society where they are considered valid. The former proverb highlights the importance of farming and wool as a commodity, whereas the latter points out the difficulty in getting hold of fish on a regular basis. The relationship between these two activities is important in the pre-commercial era, as there is a constant balancing to be made between farming activities and “rowing out”, as the Faroese call open boat fishing. However, because of the vagaries of fishery as a source of food, farming is relied on as the primary household activity.

The first printed book about The Faroes is written by the priest Lucas Debes and published in Danish in 1673. The book, whose English title is *Færoæ et Færoa Reserata: That is, a Description of the Islands and Inhabitants of Foeroe* (1676), is a general description of Faroese natural and social life, although the practice of fishery gets very little mention. Fish is, nevertheless, mentioned as a regular part of the Faroese diet, which indicates that fishery must also have been a fairly regular activity. A letter to the Danish king, Christian IV in 1617 from the Løgting seems to indicate the importance of fish as a food resource to the Faroese in the early 17th century. The letter complains to the king about the intrusion of Scottish fishermen who “fish and harrow within the fjords and outside them the poor livelihood which we poor folk with our small boats are able to attend to in such places just as on all our fishing hills and banks” (Wylie, 1987, p. 30). The mention of livelihood and fishing hills and banks reveals that fishery is a fairly established part of Faroese living.

On 2 April 1781, 108 years after the publication of Debes’ account, Jens Christian Svabo is commissioned by the Royal Exchange (Det Kongelige Rentekammer)⁸ to gather material for a “physical economic description” of The Faroes. In trying to persuade the Royal Exchange to fund his project Svabo has lamented the absence of an updated account of the islands, since nothing has been written since *Færoæ et Færoa Reserata*. Based on his tour of the islands in 1781 and 1782, Svabo’s account describes numerous aspects of Faroese livelihoods, landscape and wildlife, and, with considerable detail, includes his thoughts and specific recommendations for improvements of the islanders’ everyday lives. His report on fishery argues that it is an unreliable pursuit, because it is “not stable, even though it sometimes, when it sets in, can be considered very good.” Although many factors may influence this instability, the unpredictable weather is given as its chief reason. Fishing is only practically possible at what the Faroese call *fiskimið* (small fishing grounds). The environmental conditions are therefore challenging, because the fish, Svabo says, “seek banks and shallows where the sunrays may work on the development of its eggs. This migration occurs during the stormiest time of winter” (Svabo, 1959, pp. 86–87). The harsh weather and its effect on fishing conditions is also mentioned in the diary of the German traveller Carl Julian Graba, a lawyer from Kiel, who visits The Faroes in 1828. The fisherman often works “for twenty-four hours, wet through from rain and dashing waves, and in constant danger of being surprised by a storm... but [...] how seldom does the stormy sea permit going fishing!

⁸ Det Kongelige Rentekammer was an administrative branch of the Danish state responsible for economic and material matters. It existed from 1660 to 1848.

More than twice a week we could not easily obtain fresh fish, and this is the best season” (Graba, 1987, p. 23; English translation borrowed from Wylie, 1987, p. 120).

Svabo, writing in 1781-82, views fishery as infused by randomness and uncertainty. The labour structure on the islands is given as another reason for the inferior role of fishery to agriculture. Since The Faroes is a population of farmers, fishery as a trade is not viable, because that would mean replacing a consistent source of provisions for one characterized by uncertainty. Faroese fishery, according to Svabo, should be viewed as a household activity and is not feasible for trade. “It will always be true, that when farmers and farm labourers are fishermen, and when farming is never as doubtful as fishery, then the latter should always be *subordinated* in relation to farming” [emphasis in original]. Svabo goes on to say, that the conditions for both farming and fishery would be improved “if the farmer was not a fisherman, and the fisherman not a farmer”. However, the “current population scarcity, does not seem to allow, that these trades are separated” (Svabo, 1959, pp. 110–111).

The randomness and uncertainty of fishery is also demonstrated in Faroese oral tradition. Along with the proverbs already mentioned, a great number of folktales were preserved, until they were finally written down during the 19th and 20th centuries. One of them, “Dánialsmiðið”, deals precisely with the ambivalence referred to by Svabo: that fishery is unreliable, but can also be very good, if one is fortunate. The tale of “Dánialsmiðið” goes like this:

“An excellent fishing ground is located off Kallur (north of [the island of] Kallsoy). It is called *Dánialsmiðið*.”

“Dánial from Fuglafjørður in Eysturoy had broken the law and was sentenced to death by the Chief Justice in The Faroes. He took a boat and set out to sea with three boys; the plan was to go to Iceland. Having come three and a half miles from the shore, he saw a black backed gull sitting on the sea surface. He had hand lines, hooks and bait with him, and he told the boys to cast their lines where the gull was floating. They did so, and hit on so much fish, that they filled the boat to the brim and went back ashore. It was a period of famine in The Faroes, and there had been no fishing for a long time. News of this fine catch got about, and soon reached the public officials in Tórshavn. They wanted him to tell them where he had

obtained so much fish, but Dánial set the condition, that if he was given life and mercy he would tell them; otherwise he would not. The Chief Justice then promised him life and mercy, and Dánial showed the Faroese the location of the fishing ground. There was so much fish that there would be no more hunger that time around. But the fishing ground was named *Dánialsmiðið* after the one who had found it” (Jakobsen, 1984, p. 124).

This story portrays a good fishing ground as a life saving thing, both in relation to the central character, but also in relation to Faroese society in general. There has been no fishing for a long time until the fortunate discovery of a lucrative fishing ground exonerates Dánial and saves the needy islanders from starvation. Fishery seems to be depicted as an unstable endeavour dependent on coincidence and providence – the spotting of a black backed gull being the case in point – rather than being a regular, methodical and organized activity. Christian Matras’s description of old fishing related superstition also demonstrates this dependence on chance and fate in Faroese household fishing. It explains how, among other things, a man must not touch female clothing prior to “rowing out”, that a sanitary woman will never have a successful fisherman, how meeting a woman by a food trough is a good omen for fishing, while meeting a woman by an ash bucket is a bad omen for fishing, and other things involving such things as the moon, and the behaviour of the house dog (Matras, 1925).

Fishing in the pre-commercial era is an opportunistic activity with the clear purpose of putting food on the table. Its prospects are severely limited by external conditions, such as the weather, and therefore subject to coincidence and luck. Until the abolition of *Bátsbandið* (cf. chapter 3.2.1) in 1868, the males of the village are always ready, should the farmer decide to call on them. The farmer, who on fishing trips is called the boat foreman, decides when rowing out is appropriate, and he will simply summon his labourers for a fishing trip, whenever he finds it necessary. An 1897 issue of the Danish periodical *Nordstjernen*, contains a detailed account of a fishing trip in the 1840s, where we get some sense of the experience of *Bátsbandið* and of the impulsiveness of household fishery:

“Boat foreman Jógvan [...] put his head out of his door several times during the night in his bare woollen sweater to look at the weather and the stars.

From the latter's position he saw how far the night had come [...]. When the time was around 3 [in the morning], he got dressed and went out to call on his seven boatmen. The doors were unlocked, so he was free to tiptoe into the living rooms and towards the beds, where he, partly by whispering, partly by grabbing hold of the person in question, managed to wake up his crew without disturbing too many of the household's other residents in their sleep. The crew was quickly on their feet, and [...] got hold of their leather clothes and food bags [...]" (Poulsen, 1897, p. 255).

The experience of fishery in The Faroes until the middle to late 19th century is characterized by a considerable element of unpredictability. It is looked upon as a blessing when it is successful, but the relative uncertainty regarding success and the treacherous conditions in which it is carried out means that it is secondary to agriculture. Fish as a food resource is highly sought after in this period, but fishery as an activity is known as a sporadic and impulsive extension to the daily routine.

5.1.2. Commercial Fishery Experience

This chapter will describe the experience of fishery as a profession and as a money making activity. Although commercial fishery is not a wide ranging activity in The Faroes until the late 19th century – and especially following the abolition of the monopoly in 1856 and the ending of BÁTsbandið in 1868 – the belief that the Faroese could engage in such an endeavour, and that fishery should be the primary occupation in The Faroes, exists several decades earlier. As mentioned in chapter 3.2.2, the Danish merchant Niels Ryberg tries to develop the fishing skills of the Faroese already in the late 18th century, but this attempt fails due to a complete lack of cooperation on the part of the locals. In the early 19th century the belief in a commercialization of fishery is observable in comments made by Danish officials. In 1839 the County Governor (amtmand) of The Faroes, Christian Pløyen, is granted permission from the Royal Exchange in Copenhagen to commence an expedition from The Faroes to Shetland, accompanied by three Faroese. The purpose is to “become acquainted with such improvements as might be available.” The impression that the Faroese may have something to learn in Shetland comes from the somewhat regular Faroese contact with Shetlanders, who

have been fishing around The Faroes for a number of years. In his travel account, published a year later in 1840, Pløyen writes that

“[w]hen one has lived for a considerable time in the Faroe Islands so as to have become thoroughly acquainted with the resources of the country and the way in which the people gain their livelihood, the desire is natural to be able to contribute in some measure to the improvement of their condition; for everything there is in the same state as it was centuries ago; but the race are bright and intelligent, and will soon progress when the first difficulties are overcome” (Pløyen, 1896, p. xiii).

The specific choice of Shetland as a destination for enlightenment, stems from Pløyen’s conviction that “there is great similarity of soil and climate in the two groups, though Shetland has reached a higher state of development” (Pløyen, 1896, p. xiii). He is especially mindful of the methods and equipment of the Shetlanders relating to fishery. Fishery in Shetland is already at an industrial scale at this time, and Pløyen feels strongly, that The Faroes should be similar in this regard. As their ship approaches Shetland, the spectacle of busy fishing vessels only serves to intensify this feeling:

“As we neared the land, I saw between Sumburgh Head and Fair Isle – a small island half way between Orkney and Shetland – a numberless multitude of small sloops and large two-masted boats, which all lay-to and fished; nearer the coast, there were many common boats all busy in the same way. This is just the manner in which I think the Faroese should work, and though the fleet of small craft before me was a pleasant sight, it gave me a certain pang to remember how far short the Faroe fishing falls, and how many difficulties must be met and overcome before it reaches the point it might and ought to do” (Pløyen, 1896, p. 3).

The expedition is thus an attempt to improve the equipment and methods of Faroese fishermen; that is, to eradicate the uncertainty associated with fishery; to make it better organised and more efficient. The experience in Shetland appears to be as exasperating as it is

instructive for Pløyen and his companions. Several potential improvements are observed, such as “the manner in which the Shetlanders manage their sails,” which is “beyond question much better than ours.” Pløyen solemnly remarks that he has “little doubt that many a Faroese boat has been lost, that might have come through in safety, if the Shetland plan of managing the sail had been known and employed” (Pløyen, 1896, pp. 24–25). The pervasive use by Shetlanders of the longline is perhaps Pløyen’s most hands on illustration of the backwardness of Faroese fishery:

“Each line is 42 fathoms long, and is furnished with 10 hooks, but a boat has 120 lines, which are fastened together, and thus a complete long line has 1200 hooks, and when it lies at the bottom of the sea it covers an extent of 5040 fathoms. It is easy to see how superior such an implement is to the handline in use with us. Six men in Shetland present at once 1200 hooks to the fish, six men here [in The Faroes] only offer five hooks, for the sixth man must keep the boat in motion, or “ando,” as the fishermen say – nay, often when the wind is strong, it takes two men to do it” (Pløyen, 1896, p. 36).

Moreover, the mentality of the fisherman in Shetland is considered to be better than that of his Faroese counterpart. “[T]hey are more successful than the [Faroese], because they are experienced seamen and do not lose heart when the fish do not bite at once, and do not run constantly into harbor and lose many chances.” A decisive moment of the Shetland expedition is when Pløyen and his companions are given a tangible display of what Faroese society is missing out on:

“I shall only cite one example of what return fishing with decked vessels may make. Whilst I was in Shetland one sloop came twice into Scalloway [...] and sold her raw fish [...]. The first time she had 9000 cod, the second 5000, all caught in less than a month, in the neighbourhood of Suderoe, south-west from Faroe. The crew, if I rightly remember, was eight men, who had come from London to our banks to fish for this Shetland firm, and could do so with profit to both parties, whilst we sit calmly by with our

hands in our bosoms vainly complaining that we catch nothing. I must own that every drop of patriotic blood within me tingled when I heard this, and my Faroese were even more mortified than I, for they [...] saw with their own eyes that the sloop in question, within a very short time, brought 14.000 cod to Scalloway, and even heard that the cod were taken on their own fishing ground. We all felt that we shamefully neglect an abundant source of wealth and prosperity given to us by Providence, but we also feel that improvement is impossible, whilst the bondage of Monopoly remains” (Pløyen, 1896, p. 29).

Pløyen’s final remark about the trade monopoly illustrates not only his opinion about the inability of the Faroese to trade freely, but also his belief that fishery should not only be a source of food for the individual Faroese households, but also a source of profit and economic growth for the whole society. Although Pløyen’s Shetland account describes the experience of four men, and his own in particular, it demonstrates a belief in Faroese commercial fishery at a time when fishing in The Faroes is still predominantly a subsistence activity.

A few decades later, commercial fishery is on a dramatic rise in The Faroes, and fishery is also generally viewed as a viable full time occupation. The experience of fishery as a professional trade is manifested in statements involving an unmistakably microeconomic logic. A reader’s comment published in an early edition of the newspaper *Dimmalætting* in January 1878, illustrates this somewhat different and new way of experiencing fishery.

“Fishery with decked vessels. Since I am convinced, that it would be of great benefit to us Faroese, if we put more focus on fishery with decked vessels than we have done so far, I will to this regard inform of my situation since I in 1872, along with my brothers, commenced fishery with a ship, following many years of [open] boat fishing.”

“Many years have passed since we aimed [...] to obtain a ship for fishery, since we observed daily, how Shetlanders, Belgians and Frenchmen with their fishing ships, often in only a few years, managed to recover the capital placed in their ships, through fishery off these islands, while we Faroese had to go out of our way, by boat fishery, to earn a little

more than the bare necessities. In 1872 we bought [...] a ship in England for about 7000 kr. [DKK] This was by no means among the best fishing ships, but since it was cheap, and we needed not afford much capital, we had to make do with this temporarily.”

“Apart from one year [...] when we had significant expenses [...] we have each year had good returns, and still growing, so that we last year had a profit margin of 35 per cent. We have already [...] recovered one third of the working capital, and also we have, as fishermen on the ship, had a greater income than we would ever achieve as boat fishermen.”

“Certainly, ship fishery is a challenging operation, since it must give [a] satisfactory profit. But boat fishing [must also] give a good profit, and this can never become so considerable, namely because of the low tonnage in proportion to its crew [...] and the exhausting rowing to and from the fishing grounds. Add to this that it very often happens that boat fishery goes wrong. Fishery by ship off these islands can also be inopportune but [...] a fishing ship [is] not bound to a particular fishing ground, [it is possible] to search for the fish, where it can be found, and [...] move the fishery to Iceland, where it would be unusual not to [...] encounter large shoals of fish.”

“If these lines may work towards [a situation in which] we Faroese, more than until now, would engage in fishery with decked vessels, then they have achieved my objective.”

“Torshavn 10 January 1878.”

“D. Haraldsen”

The author of this attempt to persuade the Faroese to turn to smack fishery is one of the purchasers of the first Faroese smack in 1872 (cf. chapter 3.2.3). The way it is written, with its references to capital, income and satisfactory profits denotes a way of speaking about fishery, which did not exist a century earlier. It seeks to persuade people, by means of microeconomic argumentation, to join in an overall attempt to make Faroese fishery bigger, better organized and more profitable. Clearly, the author does not experience fishery merely as a way of

putting food on the table, and neither does he perceive it as a particularly unreliable activity. On the contrary, he is arguing that it is possible to engage in a reliable and highly productive type of fishery.

If we turn to the period when smack fishery is at its peak – in the 1920s and 30s – the experience of fishery as a full time occupation has become commonplace. Moreover, fishery is now perceived as much more reliable. In fact, it is viewed as that which the whole society relies on. In 1928, the Faroese poet, Mikkjal á Ryggi writes: “If someone asked 60-80 years ago what the Faroese live off, then the answer would be: off the soil. Back then men could not only live off the sea. [...] Then a new period arrived. Now the Faroese live mostly off the sea. [...] The fishing ships got The Faroes on its feet”. A year later, the historian Anton Degn claims that the contemporary Faroese person is entirely uncomprehending in relation to the proverb “sheep’s wool is Faroes’ gold”, even if it is only recent that this “old truth became outdated”. Fishery is, as Degn indicates, “by far the most important occupation in The Faroes” (1929). His colleague, Daniel Bruun (1929) goes into a bit more detail. “When travelling in The Faroes and the seas surrounding it, you get a vivid impression of the big role the **fisheries** play for the inhabitants: On the sea you encounter rowing boats, motor boats, cutters and maybe steam ships [...] and on land you are [...] a witness to the villagers’ fiddling with boats, fishing tools or the processing of fish [emphasis in original]. At the eve of World War II a report commissioned by the Ministry of the State of Denmark (Statsministeriet, 1938) on Faroese industry states that “fishery is for The Faroes today the unquestionable main livelihood”.

However, even if the advent of commercial and professional fishery in The Faroes seems to indicate an increasing economic logic regarding fishery, this does not bring an end to uncertainties, traditions, and superstitions characteristic of previous centuries. For example, it has been demonstrated that the smack fishermen employed supranormal aspects into their work in addition to geographical and biological considerations, for example, in relation to the localization shoals of fish (J. P. Joensen, 1975). Similarly to the superstitious beliefs of the inshore (household) fishermen described in the previous chapter, smack fishermen had an extensive system of superstitions, which they employed in their work. For instance, spotting driftwood or a seal was a bad omen for some, singing songs about death or anything relating to the sea was ill advised. There was widespread belief in the phenomenon of “the man on board” or the “dream man”; ghostlike figures who would appear from time to time to give

advice regarding storms and other dangers and to forebode successful fishery; among a host of other things. Even more recently, there are examples of skippers making decisions based on such beliefs. As former skipper Hans Pauli Johannesen – whose career as a skipper lasted into the 1970s, says, “those times when my mother came to me in my dream, a good catch was certain” (Breckmann, 1989, p. 244).

This chapter has described the belief in and the experience of fishery as a full time occupation and as a business activity. This experience is believed to have emerged in the early 19th century and to have become commonplace approximately one century later. It should be noted that the commercial fishery experience was by no means a replacement for the household fishery experience, since the catches from many fishing trips were – and still are – partly sold and partly used by the fishermen involved. Subsistence fishery continued as a separate activity, and is still a significant contribution to many households in The Faroes today. Moreover, although the introduction of commercial fishery can be seen as a relative rationalization of the fishery experience, there are indications that some aspects of the mentality and culture of inshore fishing, such as ritual and superstition, was carried on or recycled in long distance fishery. The commercial fishery experience should thus be seen as a mutation of the Faroese fishery experience, which added new features, but also retained and reformed aspects of traditional inshore fishing.

5.1.3. Epic Fishery Experience

This third type of fishery experience refers to the perception and estimation of fishery as a heroic and impressive activity. The perception of fishery as heroic is linked to the fishermen themselves, which are widely considered to be brave, self sacrificing and skilled individuals. As Sverre Patursson (1901) writes, the Faroese are known as “hard working and diligent sailors, whom the country can be proud of. Far away from the Faroes, they are famed for being among the best fishermen there are. They do not have the newest and best equipment, but no one can match their pliability, capability and dexterity in using the equipment at hand” (translation borrowed from Gaini, 2011, p. 170).

Fishery is carried out in extreme physical circumstances both in relation to the natural environment and with regard to the long periods of isolation on board a ship. Fishery involves the fisherman’s departure from his family, and village life in general. Those whom he leaves behind are forced to await his return without being entirely certain that he will

survive. This is true of both inshore fishery and, later, distant water fishery, although the latter, as was touched upon in chapter 3.2.3, involves the added dimension of not hearing from the fishermen for many months. Therefore smack fishery does not replace one form of fishing for another, more economically advanced, form. It becomes a dominant activity, which carries significant social and cultural reverberations throughout Faroese society. This experience of prolonged uncertainty and fear relating to the fishermen is undoubtedly an important factor in the eventual experience of fishery as epic. Already at the beginning of the smack fishery period, the Faroese newspapers often include short comments on the events relating to ships. For example, around the turn of the century, all editions of the newspaper *Tingakrossur* have a column titled, “From the sea”, where news of the doings and whereabouts of Faroese ships are reported:

6 February 1901

“From the sea”

“The fishing smack “Dart”, which departed Vestmannaeyri on Sunday the 27th of January, has still not reached its destination, Klaksvig. It was seen sailing through Nólsoyfjard the same afternoon.”

“Since the ship was poorly supplied with provisions and water, and also did not have a map, there is reason to be worried, although the possibility that it has reached Shetland safely is not ruled out. Last night, the station ship “Beskytteren” went out in search for it.”

[...].

“The steam ship “Mjølner” was recently grounded off Iceland and has sunk. The entire crew was saved” (Tingakrossur, 1901a).

13 February 1901

“From the sea”

“According to the fishing steamer “Frolic” from Grimsby, the smack *Dart*, which was feared to have sunk, has been taken into *Walls* in Shetland. The sails were in pieces, but otherwise everything was alright” [emphasis in original] (Tingakrossur, 1901b).

Such entries are characteristic of the period, and will become even more frequent as the number of ships increases in the first half of the century. Readers of the newspapers are therefore duly informed about the activities of vessels associated with their family members or village, and also of other Faroese vessels. Not all the stories end on such a light note, however. In February 1920 the smack *Kristina* goes on its first fishing trip to the south of Iceland with a crew of sixteen young men. Nobody ever hears from the ship again. One of the owners of *Kristina*, Jógvan Kjølbro, later recounts his own experience regarding its disappearance. “Mothers and fathers and other relatives would almost daily come into the office to ask for news [about *Kristina*]. It was a dreadful time” (J. S. Hansen, 1983, p. 8).

By the 1930s accidents on the sea have become an ingrained element of Faroese everyday life. In the context of the departure and long absences from his family, and the associated fear and uncertainty, there is a striking similarity between the smack fishermen and soldiers of war. Both fishery and war can, at least until the latter half of the 20th century be categorized as extreme and dangerous occupations, performed out of a sense of duty and/or necessity. In a feature article in the Danish newspaper *Politiken* in 1930, the Faroese author Jørgen-Frantz Jacobsen neatly describes the war like role of fishery in Faroese society. He observes that:

“The Faroese make up ½ per cent of the population of the Danish Kingdom. But they are capable of fishing 40 per cent of the fish caught in the Kingdom. Of a population of 23.000 people, 3000 men [...] are currently away from home [...]. That is almost the whole able bodied workforce – and more. Many depart already when they are 14-15 years old.” [...]

“*This* is fishery. This is a popular movement, a war. It is repeated every year in two campaigns: The spring fishery February-May off south Iceland and the summer fishery June-October off east Iceland, and now mostly off Greenland. Like all wars, this one also costs lives. In 1920 the Faroese lost 62 people on the sea; that is 2 per cent of the total number of fishermen” [...].

“Fishery is also of interest and esteemed by the whole Faroese population. Everyone understands that it is that [fishery], which carries the nation. Good fishery spells good years and happiness for practically

everyone, and the talented skippers are popular, just like the generals in a victorious war. For the young men it is important to get into their service, while others have to limit themselves to the newspapers, in order to follow their triumphal progress” (J.-F. Jacobsen, 1943, pp. 69, 71).

Fishermen are perceived as diligent and persevering characters, who perform their perilous duties in a disciplined fashion for the good of the rest of their society. The epic experience of fishery is often inferred in stories of fishermen’s courageous and sometimes futile struggle against the forces of nature. The North Atlantic is “one of the world’s most stormy and dangerous seas”, and the fishermen must endure “months of storm, snowdrift and limited visibility under south Iceland’s godforsaken and treacherous coast” (J.-F. Jacobsen, 1943, p. 69). The reason why the Faroese fishermen suffer this drudgery on a regular basis is because it “has become a passion” for them. Although it is “poverty, which has initially driven them to it” they have, in time “obtained such a flair for it, that they have become completely absorbed, and now it almost involves a sporting interest”. In The Faroes nobody thinks he is “too good to be a fisherman”. On the contrary, it is a matter of fact “that farming is being neglected because the whole workforce is at sea”. Faroese men seem to have strong preference for the “pulsing unfolding of energy, the hard and exciting turn in the summer, and the passive rest in the winter. An element of Viking psychology has re-emerged here” (J.-F. Jacobsen, 1943, p. 71). Incidentally, a book describing the life of Faroese sailors during World War II is titled *Víkingasynir* (Viking Sons) (J. Joensen, 1947). One former skipper, who starts fishing with the wooden smacks in the 1930s later says that although “the ships were of a bad quality, the crews were outstanding. In short, they were iron men on wooden ships” (Breckmann, 1989, p. 49).

The mention of fishermen as iron men and reincarnated Vikings is a clear suggestion that fishermen are perceived as heroes on some level. And although it is plausible that the long distance fishery serves as an intensification of the epic experience of fishery, there are indications that it is also associated with earlier periods. Words such as *fiskiklógv*, which refers to a “man who is good at fishing” and *miðamaður*, which refers to a “man who is skilful at positioning himself on fishing grounds” (Sprotin & Orðabókagrunnurin, 2012), demonstrate the precious skills of the premodern hunter. Incidentally, Sigurð Joensen’s poem “Miðamaðurin” declares that “The Faroes expanded in scope and glory with the work and

science of the *miðamaður*” (translation borrowed from Gaini, 2011, pp. 168–169). The competence of fishermen and the perils of their work are recurring themes in Faroese descriptions of fishery. Sofus Pedersen writes that “The Faroese have always lived a hardy life both on land and on the sea. Many a bitter and sad event has passed in the struggle with the mighty forces of nature. Those of us, who have experienced and lived in a time when no ships or boats had engines, can tell of many incidents, where there has been little hope of survival” (Pedersen, 1970, p. 97). The distress caused by such events is exemplified by the following newspaper report on a sea accident in 1913.

24 December 1913

“Horrific sea accident”

“Late yesterday evening the telephone brought the dreadful news that three fishing boats from the Northern Islands, each with six men on board, had gone missing, and since the weather was very bad, it was assumed that there had been an accident.” [...].

“The storm came without warning with winds from Northeast, and all boats immediately had to try and get home; many of them were forced to leave their [long]lines. [...]. It was out of the question for row boats to survive in such weather.”

“If it is the case that the 6 men from Skard have passed away, this village has now lost the whole of its adult male population” (Dimmalætting, 1913).

A few years after this accident, in 1917, one of The Faroes’ most renowned poets Janus Djurhuus composes a poem, which is an implicit reference and tribute to the fishermen lost on 23 December 1913. Although a direct translation of the poem to English seriously undermines its linguistic qualities, the following rendition of the last two verses is an attempt to give the reader some sense of its epic sentiment:

“Thus is legend, that The Faroes lie north up there in the Atlantic sea,
where in antiquity lay those mythic lands,
and the priestess of Atlantis, clad in Northeast and wind,

on moon silvered nights she extends her white hand.”

“Thus is legend, that those who see the priestess of Atlantis,
follow her into deep blue dream covered worlds,
and she smiles to them in their sleep and wreathes them in eranthis
while relatives and friends cry and grieve them.”

(J. Djurhuus, 1988)

J. Djurhuus is not the only Faroese artist, who employs the combined theme of death and the sea in his work. And he is certainly not the only one to bring forward an epic experience of fishery. Another significant example is the work of painter Sámal Joensen Mikines. The childhood and youth of Mikines, in the early part of the 20th century, are marked by shipwrecks and other disasters. In 1934, nine men from his village are lost at sea, many of whom are his friends and family.

The presence of death and the danger posed by the sea has a profound impact on Mikines’s body of work. A unique melancholic atmosphere is present in most of his paintings, and several of them depict the sea as dark and ominous. One such picture is a distinctively Faroese inter-



Figure 2. Sámal Joensen Mikines – *Jesus on Lake Genesareth*

pretation of the biblical account of Jesus on the Sea of Galilee (figure 2). The disciples of Jesus are Faroese boat men placed in what is quite clearly a Faroese row boat. Jesus can be seen walking on the water next to the boat. Djurhuus and Mikines’ use of Greek and Christian myth in relation to fishery and the sea represents an allusion to the self sacrifice and the defiance of danger associated with seafaring activities.

Other paintings depict the sadness associated with the departure of fishermen. One of them portrays the parting of fishermen from their loved ones at the landing place in a little village (figure 3). The mail boat will ferry them to a larger village where they will sign on a fishing vessel. A contemporary interpretation of this picture describes it as a “fate-laden



Figure 3. Sámal Joensen Mikines – *The Farewell*

Figure 4. Sámal Joensen Mikines – *Departure*

moment in dramatic colours and composition.” The sadness of the departure is exacerbated by the natural surroundings and by the characteristics of the mail boat crew: “the sea is a black-green bottomless pit, the sky dirty grey and the horizon a menacing reddish-brown [...]. Like messengers of destiny two oilskin-clad men are launching the boat” (B. Jákupsson, 2007, p. 36). Another one of Mikines’ paintings portrays a lone woman standing on the edge of a cliff glancing out to sea at a departing ship (figure 4); a painting which, in the Danish newspaper *Kristeligt Dagblad* has been referred to as “longing on a canvass” (Bach-Nielsen, 2007). The brother of J. Djurhuus, Hans Andrias Djurhuus, is equally keen to underline the skill and death defiant heroism of fishermen:

Sing now, sea of Faroe, sing pretty song tonight,
sing of toil and peril and then take your fee,
Fostered by the surf and by the cliff at once
we peer into the storm we skilled men of the sea.

“We have heard the roar of sea from our infancy;
and in case we are carried out into death’s long sleep,
we listen to the whirlpool surf and surge of tidal stream;
we have grasped the potent might of the raging sea”

(H. A. Djurhuus, 1970a).

As we can see, the poems of the Djurhuus brothers and the paintings of Mikines as well as other Faroese work of art often highlights storms and natural forces as the source of danger; nature is a kind of enemy in this epic experience of fishery. However, the outbreak of war in 1939 further intensifies the Faroese experience of fishery as perilous and heroic. In addition to familiar natural forces, fishermen now have to contend with a more tangible enemy. The dangers of sailing are ever present, even when the weather is good, which is something the Faroese are not entirely used to. As a result, the sentiment towards fishermen as brave and self sacrificing members of society becomes even stronger. In the autumn of 1942 the newspaper *Føroyatíðindi* reports on the sinking of the steam trawler “Tór II” by a German U-boat off the south coast of Iceland:

“Tór II sunk.”

“Sad news arrived last Saturday, that “Tór II” had been sunk [...] and that only three of the crew, which was 21 men, were rescued; 18 were killed.”

[List of crew members].

“Captain Corbett, R.N., N.O.I.C., sends these words to the people of The Faroes:”

“It was with great sorrow that we heard of the loss of the fishing vessel “Tór II” because of enemy attack near Iceland. The loss of this excellent craft is serious enough, but the loss of many good men is sorely regrettable and our condolences go out to their relatives.”

“It is very sad that the horrors of the war have come so near the islands of the peaceful Faroese, but this is part of the expense, which the free people of the world must pay to escape the Nazi tyranny” (Føroyatíðindi, 1942).

In light of the significant losses resulting from German attacks, the Faroese fisherman is not only a soldier of war in a metaphoric sense, such as J.-F. Jacobsen explains in his article (cf. page 46-47). He is now a genuine contributor to the mission of bringing down Nazi Germany, by providing food provisions to the free people of Great Britain (cf. chapter 3.2.4). Indeed, although attempts to locate the original source have been unsuccessful, it is a case in point,

that Faroese people regularly quote Winston Churchill as having said that the “Faroese efforts [during World War II] shall never be forgotten” (Neystabø, 2011).

During and following the smack fishery period and World War II, there is a significant monumentalization of Faroese fishery and fishermen. Physical monuments are constructed in a great number of villages (cf. figure 5), and the annual commemoration day for lives lost at sea (cf. chapter 1.1) becomes the occasion on



Figure 5. Monument in the village of Tvøroyri; one of many monuments dedicated to Faroese fishermen. (Photo: Eileen Sandá).

which villagers congregate at these monuments, paying tribute to their lost sailors. Linguistic monuments, of which some have already been described, are created already from the beginning 20th century. Much of Faroese poetry, song writing and fictional literature includes fishery as its central theme. In H. A. Djurhuus’ short story “Eitt ár til skips”, the main character, and narrator, has no doubt that a “sailor is what [he] will become.” He declares that “often I stood still [...] staring out on the bay where the ships lay. And in the evenings, when the sailors came ashore and walked around in the streets, I could not get my eyes off them” (1970b, p. 5). In Heðin Brú’s novel *Fastatøkur* the protagonist, Høgni, is on a fishing vessel and is anxious to show his worth as a fisherman:

“He imagines the moment when he will cast for the first time, sees two shiny fish emerge from the sea and is happy. The competitive spirit tickles in his bosom. This, the chance to try his hand amongst men, quickens his heartbeat and makes him shift restlessly in his seat. He wants to sit no longer, he wants to pull fish, lots of shiny fish, as many as the others, more than the others; he wants to be the best. [...]. “Diligent man, Høgni, a special man, Høgni” – that is what it will sound like back ashore. That’s what he wants, that is life, that is manhood (Brú, 1965, pp. 15–16).

To be a good fisherman is something to be proud of, and something young boys should aspire to become. The asceticism associated with fishery is expressed by Venceslaus Ulricus

Hammershaimb in 1891, as he states that young boys “are often, from a young age, brought along for fishing trips, so that they can get used to the sea early; – it is, needless to say, the most important and the best life for the Faroese” (1891, p. 412). The following passage from Magnus Dam Jacobsen’s book *Í Grønlandi við Kongshavn* (1976), which is partly a novel and partly a memoir, describes the daily life of Faroese fishermen off Greenland in the 1960s. In one of several contemplations on life, poetry and work he says:

Sitting on the bench. Looking at the foreman. Under such conditions you see man’s worth. He is steering. The tiller is locked under his left arm. He has taken off his glasses. He is soaking wet from sea water. The clothes glistening, wrinkled [...] This is the fisherman, our *miðamaður* [added emphasis]. He who knows the ocean and currents [...] And, now, I understand the values of our ancestors. Their mentality, knowledge and culture. Their modesty, gentle behaviour and patience (translation borrowed from Gaini, 2011, p. 177).

As with J.-F. Jacobsen’s earlier reference to the re-emergence of Viking psychology, this is also a reference to a reincarnation of the past. The modern fisherman is a personification of his fishing ancestors, who also knew the fishing grounds, the oceans and currents. Although technology has allowed for voyages to distant fishing grounds in Greenland, the mentality, knowledge and culture, and the modesty, gentle behaviour and patience is unaffected. Among the discontinuity, i.e. the obvious technological, economic and societal changes fishery has undergone, there is an experience of continuity; of a clear link between the contemporary and the ancient fisherman.

5.1.4. Fishery Ethos

The three chapters describing the different types of fishery experience should be viewed as one way of typologizing the cultural history of Faroese fishery. This view is incomplete, and alternative perspectives may well also be potent in an analysis of the Faroese fishery experience. This particular categorization demonstrates three different forms in which knowledge of fishery may appear. Although a categorization in itself suggests different experiences, it is important to note, that these experiences also converge into a contemporary

understanding or knowledge of fishery, and may therefore be seen as a single experience (for the specific definition of “knowledge” used in this thesis cf. page 9). This amalgamated experience or knowledge of fishery can be explained as a particular Faroese *fishery ethos*. The fishery ethos is a structural foundation of discourse, i.e. an apparatus, which separates “true” knowledge from “false” knowledge and thereby creates an unconscious taken-for-granted knowledge about fishery. The fishery ethos is therefore what Foucault calls an *episteme*, because it shapes knowledge and discourse (cf. chapter 2.2) and determines the conditions of possibility for how fishery is known and signified in The Faroes. Signification practices regarding fishery include an *epic* dimension, which is regarded as a central feature of this analysis, because it can be used to explain the “prominent cultural status” of fishery mentioned in the problem formulation (cf. chapter 1.3). The epic experience of fishery, which materializes as an epic fishery discourse, shall be further explained in the chapter following this one. It is important to note, that household, commercial and epic fishery experience are interrelated. As was shown earlier, household fishery experience relates to commercial fishery, since open boats and hand lines continued to be the principal tools long after the abolition of the monopoly in 1856. But also, and more importantly, commercial fishery did not do away with superstitions and traditions, which existed in the pre-commercial era. There is an element of continuity, then, between the two experiences, which, in many other ways were discontinuous. This illustrates, that an experience of fishery, at any given time, is marked by *contingency*, that is, it is the result of “accidents” or “minute deviations” (Foucault, 1984b, p. 80). Therefore, there is no “essence” to be found in the Faroese fishery experience; its development is not inevitable, but *could have been different*. The fishery experience in its contemporary form is, Foucault would say, not a “simple configuration where events are reduced to accentuate their essential traits, their final meaning, or their initial and final value. On the contrary, it is a profusion of entangled events (Foucault, 1984b, p. 89).

Since the epic dimension of fishery is the object of analysis in this thesis, the inclusion of the other two types of fishery experience – household and commercial – represents an attempt to explain the cultural and economic “surroundings” in which epic knowledge about fishery has come forward. It is obvious that during, say, the 18th century, fishery as an activity does not have an epic status to the same degree as it does in the 19th century and later. The experience of fishery during the pre-commercial period is one of unreliability, which gives rise to such proverbs as “it is difficult to have a storeroom on the

sea.” It is also likely – as Degn proposes (cf. page 43) – that a more prevalent “truth” during earlier periods is the notion of “sheep’s wool as Faroes’ gold”, i.e. that the Faroese household and economy was mainly dependent on the production of textiles. On the other hand, the existence of such words as “fiskiklógv” and “miðamaður” (cf. page 47) and of legends, such as the tale of “Dánialsmiðið” (cf. page 36-37), indicates – if not a view of fishery as a dependable activity – a perception that it is highly appreciated, at least on those occasions when it is successful. “Dánialsmiðið” is a story of a villain turned hero, because the protagonist has the fortune to stumble upon a fishing ground, which eventually exonerates him and saves the whole Faroese population from starvation. In light of this, it may be precisely because fishery is unreliable that it comes to attain a celebrated and almost mythic status in Faroese society. The continual presence of fishery in poetry, fine art and other cultural monuments is a perpetuation of its seemingly enchanted quality, which means that scientific and technical rationalities, may only gain a partial foothold in the fishery experience. If successful fishery is seen (at least partially) as a result of providence, it may be that such sentiment endures in a period when fishery has become considerably more reliable. In other words, it is possible that the cultural experience of fishery – as determined by good fortune – is not eradicated simply because technological and economic advances have made fishery more rational. If the Faroese experience of fishery does not follow the path of other developments, such as technological and economic progress, the rapid growth of fishery in the 19th century and early 20th century is likely to create some sort of void between ancient and modern experience, as customs and traditions offer a form of resistance to a scientific rationale. This is a likely explanation for the paradoxical relationship between rationalism and irrationalism, which is demonstrated in chapter 5.1.2 as a relatively new microeconomic logic on the one hand, and the persistence and recycling of superstitious beliefs on the other.

The convergence of the household, commercial and epic fishery experiences is still present in contemporary Faroese fishery experience. The epic experience of fishery is observable in written documents from the late 19th century, and undergoes a significant intensification in the middle of the 20th century. It cannot be separated from the household and commercial experiences, because it is the combination of successful performance of fishery – whether in the shape of subsistence fishery or professional fishery – and the hostile environment they carry out their work, which leads to its emergence. As Firouz Gaini has said, the work of the fisherman is carried out in a “sacred landscape full of perils” (2011, p.

169). Principally, it is the defiance of danger and self sacrifice for the better of their community, which should be viewed as the basis for the affection and esteem afforded to fishermen. The fishery ethos is thus a convergence of these three experiences; a flowing together, which makes possible a way of speaking about fishermen as brave and heroic, and, more importantly, fishery as an activity on which the whole of Faroese society depends. This epic discourse or epic way of speaking about fishery is not only observable in historical documents, but is also an everyday feature of contemporary Faroese society and politics. It is to the contemporary materialization of this epic fishery discourse, which we now turn.

5.1.5. Epic Fishery Discourse



Figure 6. Sámal Joensen Mikines – *The Farewell* (stamp version)



Figure 7. Sámal Joensen Mikines – *Departure* (stamp version)

Epic fishery discourse refers specifically to a “way of speaking,” which attempts to reproduce history and culture in order to articulate or signify fishery as an impressive, respectable, agreeable or beneficial activity in itself. The images above (figure 6 and figure 7) are good examples of how the epic fishery discourse should be understood, since they represent a recycling, so to speak, of two Mikines paintings from the first half of the 20th century into stamps (both were introduced in the 1990s). Similarly, the giant fishing hook erected in the fishing community of Klaksvík in 2010 (cf. title page) serves as a reminder of the heroic sacrifices made by an earlier generation of “fisherfolk” in a defining period of Faroese history. The speech given in connection with the uncovering of the fishing hook, ended with the following words:

“This statue, which is revealed today, is a tribute to all those who went before us, and to all those who have enriched our society, and made us what we are today. But this statue is also a tribute to all those, who still work and toil on the sea.”

(N. H. Jákupsson, 2010)

The epic fishery discourse of the present, which is demonstrated in this chapter, functions precisely as such a reminder. It is a mobilization of history and culture, with a view to attach a specific identity to contemporary Faroese society. It is, loosely described, a historical and cultural glorification of fishery for fishery’s own sake. Epic fishery discourse should be understood as a particular regularity in the material trail left by the fishery ethos. It is the interactive substance of the epic fishery experience. In The Faroes, epic fishery discourse mainly takes the form of an explicit emphasis on the importance of fishery for the survival of the nation, or as an implicit reference to the contemporary importance of fishery through historical and cultural allusions, such as those described in chapter 5.1.3.

A few years after the collapse of the Faroese economy (cf. chapter 3.2.6), the then Prime Minister, Edmund Joensen, says, the “Faroese have great hopes for the possibility of an oil industry. Hopefully it will become a reality; but we should be aware, that an oil industry comes and goes. The Faroes is and will be principally a fishery nation” (E. Joensen, 1996). This statement reveals that even shortly after the economic turbulence of the early 1990s, which, one would think, has exposed the uncertainties of fishery as an industry, a perception of fishery as reliable and as the embodiment of Faroese industry persists. A potential oil industry, on the other hand, is regarded as unpredictable. This unexplained preference for fishery can also be observed in a report by the Løgting in 2000, whose purpose is to set out a new course for fishery politics.

“This report is intended as a platform for the future, which along with the parliamentary discussions will be the basis for the direction of fishery politics going forward [...]. The sea owns the life of the Faroese. The Faroese has earned his living from the sea; from the eight oared boat, about which Mikkjal á Ryggi wrote, and now with fishing vessels, which represent

the present and future, along with all the facilities provided by modern technology.

(Fiskimálaráðið, 2000)

Here the importance of the sea for the survival of The Faroes is supported by a nostalgic reference to historical open boat fishing. Epic fishery discourse also makes use of a particular network of concepts, such as the word “garpur”, which means “warrior, hero; strong and brave man” (Sprotin & Orðabókagrunnurin, 2012). During a parliamentary session on 10 November 2010 on safety and emergency preparedness, Member of the Løgting Kári P. Højgaard makes the following statement:

“The Faroes is a fishery society. Few countries in the world are so closely tied to the sea as The Faroes, and fish and fish products will continue to be our principal industry. All Saints’ Day is behind us; the day when we are reminded, once a year, that the sea gives and the sea takes. The price is high and it has often been *garpar* in their best years that have taken their last breath on board a ship, or have been given a cold and wet grave” [emphasis added] (Højgaard, 2010).

This comment illustrates the experience as a conjuncture between the historical ties to the sea, the reliance on fishery for economic benefit, and crucially, the strength, bravery and self sacrifice of those who carry out the fishery. The epic fishery discourse serves to strengthen Højgaard’s initial declaration that The Faroes is a fishery society. This is a common way of speaking about fishery in Faroese society and politics. In December 2011 an anonymous reader makes the following comment in *Dimmalætting*: “It is, after all, these *garpar* [fishermen], who keep the



Figure 8. Faroese Minister of Fisheries, Jacob Vestergaard, with a painting of a smack in the background (source: Haanes, 2012).

country running, and who do the heavy work in good as well as bad weather” [emphasis added] (Anonymous, 2011). Fishermen are described as *garpar*, and are given credit for the survival of Faroese society. As has been mentioned, fishery is not only hailed as a respectable activity, but as a foundation on which Faroese society is built. On 16 March 2012 the Minister of Fisheries, Jacob Vestergaard, says to a Norwegian newspaper that “we build our existence on fish” (Haanes, 2012). Incidentally, the article pictures Vestergaard in his office and a painting in the background of a smack braving a vicious storm (figure 8). A similar epic reference is made by the Prime Minister Kaj Leo Johannesen, in a speech given on the commemoration day for lives lost at sea on 1 November 2011. He declares that

“it is from the sea that we must earn our keep. This is the reality Jákup Hansen refers to in his song about the small boy who looks forward to growing up:

Then I get boat and boathouse alike
handline, longline and hook
summer, winter, spring and autumn
I’ll carry the fish ashore” (J. Hansen, 1907, pp. 12–13).

As we all know, it is fish, which is the basis for living conditions for us Faroese” (K. L. Johannesen, 2011).

Epic fishery discourse involves a mobilization of history and culture with a view to emphasize both the asceticism associated with fishery, but also the importance of fishery for the survival of The Faroes. It involves the idea that not only *is* fishery important at present, but also that it *should* be the bedrock of Faroese society in the future. Here, we see the epic experience of fishery as a part of political ambition.

Epic fishery discourse is a glorification of fishery armed with a particular way of speaking and concepts, such as “*fiskiklógv*”, “*miðamaður*” (cf. chapter 5.1.3) and “*garpur*”. The fisherman represents the quintessence of Faroese identity. Epic fishery discourse establishes a difference and is therefore fundamentally political, because it seeks to highlight the heroism and bravery of fishermen as an argument for political ambitions or decisions (cf.

chapter 2.1 for a definition of *the political*). This particular way of speaking has been allowed to emerge, because of a consensus on “the way things are” in The Faroes, i.e. the “knowledge” that it is a fishery society at the core of its being and that its inhabitants are, in essence, fisherfolk. Similarly to the way patients are the subjects of the “truth” of the discipline of medicine, the inhabitants of The Faroes can be viewed as the subjects of the “truth” implicit in the epic fishery discourse. Epic fishery discourse thus creates its subjects or subjectivities (cf. page 7) through a surreptitious process through which the idea of a “fishery society” and “fisherfolk” becomes internalized as objective truths. This “knowledge” is so basic and self evident that it represents an epistemological unconscious or regime of truth regarding fishery, maintained by the epic fishery discourse.

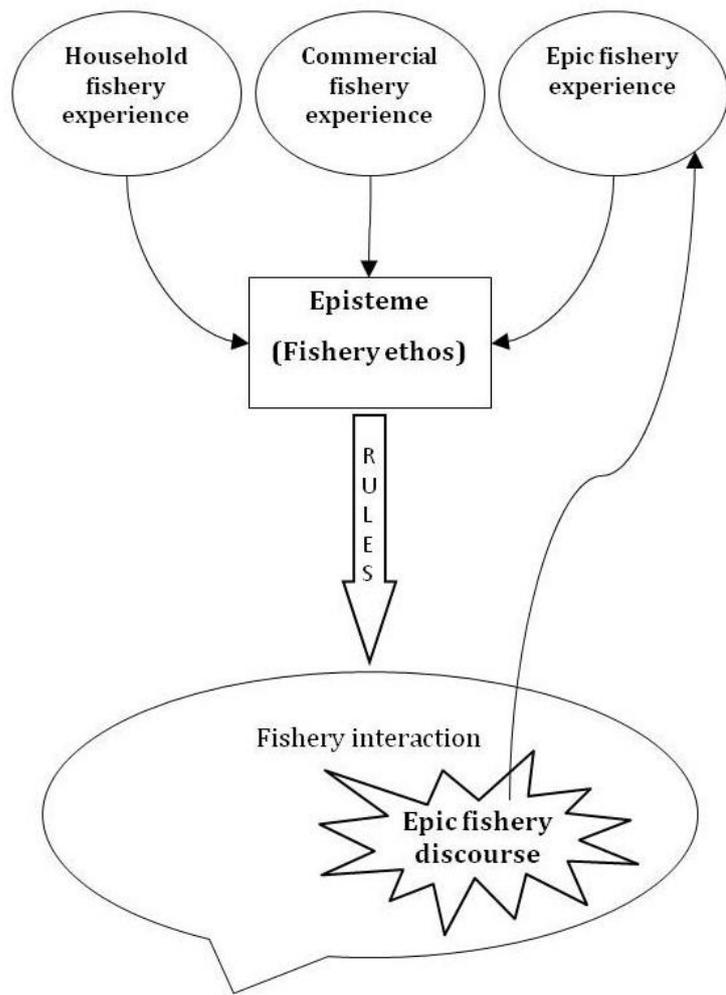


Figure 9. The reproduction and transformation of epic fishery discourse.

The examples of statements of epic fishery discourse above, represent a common way of speaking in The Faroes and may therefore be viewed as a dominant discursive representation of Faroese fishery. Crucially, the fishery ethos and epic fishery discourse should be viewed as having both a reproductive and transformative relationship, such as it is illustrated in figure 9. The three different types of fishery experience flow together into an amalgamated knowledge of fishery, i.e. the fishery ethos. The fishery ethos creates the rules to which interaction on fishery must adhere. One of the dominant discourses sanctioned by

the fishery ethos is the epic fishery discourse, which in turn may act upon the way in which fishery is experienced.

This chapter has explained how fishery is represented as an epic activity in contemporary Faroese society. This discursive representation also creates limits for the way in which fishery can be politically acted upon. The following chapter will discuss how the epic fishery discourse influences Faroese politics, and how this particular analysis contributes critically to a political debate about Faroese fishery.

5.2. Discussion

This chapter will express two types of consequences. Firstly, it will discuss how the epic fishery discourse influences recent political decisions in The Faroes. Secondly, it will discuss the critical input of this thesis for the way Faroese fishery politics are carried out.

5.2.1. Political Implications in Practice

It may be argued that by exposing the contingencies of a contemporary epic fishery experience, this thesis has already, albeit indirectly, described the political implications of that experience. However, such an exposition of contingencies only deals with political implications on a level of ideas and perceptions. It would be impossible to fully determine how, and the degree to which, a discursive representation of Faroese fishery is a direct influence on concrete political decisions. However, this chapter will validate the plausibility of this connection. It will give a few examples of the way in which a habitual deference for fishery, and those involved in fishery, is likely to influence political decisions.

The representation of fishery as the embodiment of Faroese industry, and the associated representation of The Faroes as a “fishery society”, involves an unconscious agreement about the “essence” of Faroese society, which often materializes through statements and actions of politicians. This representation has descended from past experience of fishery, but, through its ability to reproduce itself, has ongoing and, perhaps, future implications for Faroese economic and industrial policy. The epic fishery discourse, which is frequently represented by political actors, assumes that the rise of the “fishery society” was an inevitable “discovery” of the “essence” of Faroese values. The discovery or re-discovery of this essence or, daresay, “Faroeness”, is maintained by a continual employment of epic fishery discourse, and leads to a preservation of the “fishery society” at all costs. As a consequence, there have been innumerable occasions when politicians have sought to expand

fishery in the belief that more fishery equals a better society regardless of the economic consequences. This led to a reckless policy of subsidization and loan guarantees for fishing related projects in the 1980s, culminating in the worst economic crisis in Faroese history in the 1990s (cf. chapter 3.2.6). Practical effects of the epic experience of fishery can arguably be observed already in the expansionist fishery politics in the 1960s and 70s (cf. 3.2.5).

The absence of an economic rationale during the 1980s is well documented. Several years before the crisis in the early 1990s, the Danish government's advisory committee regarding The Faroes repeatedly pointed out that the operation of Faroese fishery was carried out with significant losses, and that a further expansion of the fishing fleet would only exacerbate this problem. The advisory committee also argued that the record amount of subsidies and loan guarantees provided by the Faroese government did not offer any prospects of future profitability. The recommendations made by the committee were not acted upon, as can be observed by the repetitiveness of its proposals from one year to the next (Rådgivende udvalg vedrørende Færøerne, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989). These points were later backed up by retrospective investigations of the crisis, carried out in the mid to late 1990s. A Danish committee of independent economists declared in 1994 that it had been "the industrial policy [of the Faroese government] more than any other circumstance, which has caused the crisis in The Faroes" and that this industrial policy had been characterized by "non-optimal regulation of fishery [...], a widescale use of loan guarantees, which effectively sidelined market mechanisms, and which automatically led to over investment [...], and a considerable use of subsidies, which caused prices to lose their signal value, and which led to over investment and overfishing" (Rapport fra det af landsstyre og regering nedsatte uafhængige udvalg af økonomisk sagkyndige, 1994, p. 111). A report published by a Faroese parliamentary committee in 2000 points out that on countless occasions, applications for subsidies and loan guarantees had been labelled economically unsound by the CEA (cf. page 2), after which they were accepted by the Faroese government regardless of this advice. One former official, who had been employed by the government in the 1980s, and whose explanation appears in the same report, says that "the Løgting and government wanted **activity**, almost at any cost [emphasis in original]. Whether it resulted in economic profit was less interesting. [...] sophisticated preliminary calculations were maybe regarded more as a hindrance than as a help." It seemed that "the greatest obstacle was the attitude, which was still coloured by the good old days, when one could fish freely on all the seas" (cf. chapter 3.2.5 for an explanation

of the establishment of EEZs) (§19-nevndin, 2000, pp. 198–200). Another former official says that he especially paid attention to “the lack of economic treatment of issues regarding [fishing] vessels” and that the “economic aspect of the administration of ship purchasing had been weak” (§19-nevndin, 2000, pp. 221–228).

There are undoubtedly a great variety of underlying motivations for the decisions, which led to the crisis in the 1990s. It has, for example, been argued that politicians’ willingness to develop their own local area was a major reason for the pervasive investment in fishing vessels, fish processing factories and infrastructure in so many different Faroese villages (Justinussen, 1997, chap. 5). This may well be the case, although this reasoning does not explain the widespread *preference* for fishery related investments to investment in other types of industry. It is in relation to this exaggerated political preference for fishery, where the epic fishery discourse becomes relevant in practice. Jóannes Jacobsen & Stefan í Skorini claim that one of the main reasons for the preference towards fishery, and the difficulty in introducing changes to Faroese industry is that the

“idea that the Faroese ‘live off fishery’ is widely accepted in The Faroes. This is then linked with the conception that the more people work in fishery the better. The perception of fishery as the cornerstone of the whole of Faroese society has given it [fishery] an argument for demanding preferential treatment by the political system” (J. Jacobsen & í Skorini, 2010, p. 38).

This political preference for fishery is also the theme of Jens Christian Svabo Justinussen’s (1997) thesis titled “Fanget i fisken?” (“Caught in the fish?”). Justinussen analyses the internal dynamics in The Faroes that contribute to the reproduction of a one sided export and thereby to a structural weakness in the Faroese economy. One of his conclusions is that there is no reason why The Faroes should not be able to export other products than fish. The perception of The Faroes as a fishery society, continuously consolidated by the epic fishery discourse, thus leads to an unwarranted preference to fishery as an industry, and may therefore be a hindrance for overall future economic development.

Although many politicians today seem to have learned from the mistakes, which led to the crisis of the 1990s, the belief in fishery for fishery’s own sake still persists. It is

reflected in a number of political decisions regarding the largest industry in the Faroes, where, ironically, an economic rationality is marginalized and, on some occasions, entirely absent. It is still the case, argue economists, that the fishing fleet is too large compared with what is economically viable to fish around The Faroes, and that this is the main reason for the limited profits made by a majority of vessels. Although this is no attempt to propose the universal truth of economic science, its absence in relation to one of the major economic activities in The Faroes is, to say the least, mystifying. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the relative absence of an economic rationale in decisions regarding an economic activity such as fishery indicates that there is another rationale playing an important role in these decisions. It can be argued that this rationale is based on an unconscious knowledge about Faroese fishery and its importance to Faroese society and its inhabitants. This knowledge includes an epic dimension, which materializes through the epic fishery discourse.

A recent political decision regarding the Faroese longliner fleet gives an indication of the relationship between epic fishery discourse and concrete political decisions. Once forming the bulk of the Faroese fishing fleet, longliners have been in severe crisis in the past few decades. Technological developments and the lack of cod and haddock in Faroese waters (the preferred type of fish for line fishing) have contributed to a decrease in the amount of people working on longliners. However, a continuing nostalgic sentiment towards line fishing – unmistakably demonstrated by the fishing hook in Klaksvík (cf. title page) – and the associated heroic status of the fishermen involved, invokes a culturally driven desire to support this industry regardless of its particular contemporary circumstance. The following example demonstrates this argument. In August 2012, the Minister of Fisheries Jacob Vestergaard was interviewed on television about the allocation of mackerel fishing quotas to numerous longliners. In The Faroes it is commonly known that mackerel is a pelagic fish species residing close to the surface of the sea, whereas longliners are equipped for the fishing of demersal or bottom fish such as cod and haddock. The mackerel fishing rights were thus completely useless for the longliners who had received them, which inclined their owners to sell the quotas to other shipping companies, whose trawlers were equipped for fishing this type of fish. The result was a buying and selling activity of vessels and appending licences, where longliner owning companies and their crews received what amounted to several hundreds of thousands of DKK, without leaving their quay. This seemingly irregular and careless allocation of fishing rights was unsurprisingly criticized by economists, but also by a

board member of the Union of Fishermen, who described it as a “gift” causing unwanted tension in the community of fishermen (A. Hansen, 2012). Asked about the decision to allocate fishing quotas in this manner, the Faroese Minister of Fisheries, Jacob Vestergaard, replied:

“I am not distressed that the longliner fleet, those people, who are in the longliner industry, those families, who have had a difficult time in the last few years, get a part of this, even if it is in a bit of a dubious way...I think that is okay” (Kringvarp Føroya, 2012).

In similar fashion to the initiatives of the 1980s, there seems to be an unconscious desire to spend public resources on ailing businesses so as to prevent their short term reduction, while ignoring the long term overall health of the Faroese economy. As Jacobsen & í Skorini say, “Faroese authorities have in many cases put the short term interests of the primary industry ahead of the long term interests of the society as a whole” (J. Jacobsen & í Skorini, 2010, p. 46). Given that such priorities cannot be observed in relation to other industries, such as tourism, fish farming and the service industries, it is plausible that the approach adopted by the Minister of Fisheries is owed to a habitual affection for fishery. It constitutes a kind of preferential treatment, which can best be explained by the historical development of a Faroese fishery ethos, the existence of an epic fishery discourse, and the consequent status of fishery as the embodiment of Faroese identity.

The stories, legends and general nostalgic sentiment regarding fishery and fishermen means that Faroese fishery management is kept in check, so to speak, by its own past. Economists claim, firstly, that while fishery is a significant contributor to the Faroese economy its importance is largely exaggerated, and secondly, that the exaggerated importance of fishery is influencing the politics of fishery in a way which suppresses necessary and crucial reform of the industry itself. However, the trial-and-error approach, through which fishery was conducted in the past, and about which there are numerous glorifying success stories, makes it difficult to introduce progressive schemes, such as a strictly economically founded management of fishery. This difficulty has been observed by several analysts (Eidesgaard, 2012; J. Jacobsen & í Skorini, 2010; J. Jacobsen, 2000; Oskarsson, 2012; í Skorini, 2011), and has been specifically explained in Róar Akralíð’s essay “Tí lurtar politiski

myndugleikin ikki eftir búskaparfrøðingum” (“Why the political authority does not listen to economists”) (Akralíð, 2011). A recurrent theme in the debate is concerned with expertise: who has the right to speak about fishery and which forms of knowledge are valid when it comes to fishery management? Consequently, the most notable aspect of the Faroese fishery debate is the marriage of an epic experience of fishery on the one hand, and a relative disdain for economic theory and science on the other. Such attitudes are difficult to spot in relation to other industries in The Faroes, most of which have developed within the past few decades. Therefore, it can be realistically assumed that the relatively rich history of fishery in The Faroes has developed a deep seated cultural ethos, which is boomeranging on the contemporary management of fishery. In numerous cases, epic fishery discourse seems to be accompanied by an explicit anti intellectualism, which most often materializes as a passionate resistance to the recommendations made by economists or other types of academics. The word “frøðingur” is a case in point. It translates into “scientist” in Faroese, but has developed a derogatory edge, since it is most often used when attempting to repudiate or ridicule academics. This point is illustrated by the politician Jógvan við Keldu, who declares that “our real business people are being ‘tread upon’ by theoretical frøðingar, who do not have anything but a theoretical examination [...], without knowing the real occupational everyday [...] we will not get far” (við Keldu, 2012). The reasons for such resistance to scientific knowledge may vary, but it is most likely due to a widespread belief that the expertise involved in Faroese fishery has developed through practical experience, i.e. trial and error, and not through the theoretical models and projections of scientists. Although this resistance sometimes takes the form of technical arguments for the current management of fishery, it is much more frequently characterized by an anti-intellectual bias. The general feeling is that fishermen, skippers and ship owners have been singularly responsible for progress in The Faroes for more than a century, and therefore, they should not be deprived of their historical right to carry out their work as they please. Arguments made by academics are often met with vehement opposition, most often with attempts to undermine the validity of scientific theory and knowledge in relation to economics and fishery. A recent online debate regarding fishery management reveals this fervent opposition to proposals to improve fishery, and the disdain towards scientific knowledge. The first quote is from an article written by Liggjas Johannesen, a fishing ship owner and skipper:

“There are 5 persons [academics] with some fans along with them, who want to decide how to run all kinds of fishery in The Faroes. Those 5 are not chosen by the people, neither are they chosen by the elected, but have chosen themselves. They say they will not stop until fishery is managed according to their head.”

The following three excerpts are from comments on Johannesen’s article:

Jógvan við Keldu: “Líggjas doesn’t only write sensibly, but he is one of our tradesmen who put himself forward at our darkest hour [referring to the economic crisis of the early 1990s]. Here were those, who decided to save towns, people, the political infrastructure, industry and export. The theoretical ‘shouters’ with their spread sheets and those who attack the industry did not come out of their holes until the storm was over [...].”

Eliesar Lydersen: “then these schooled men say that our fishermen scrounge off the people’s property and that they have got everything for free [referring to freely allocated fishing licences]! Far out. I want to ask, what is it exactly these men learn for 7 years in Denmark? How can they reach such a strange conclusion? I have always thought the words ‘you can read yourself stupid’ were said more or less in jest, but I doubt it...”

Jens Christian Simonsen: “A fantastic article Líggjas, you know what you’re talking about, it is just so sad that the economists won’t see the truth, they cling to their desk work, which will be the end of all industry in The Faroes.”

(Vágaportal, 10 February 2012).

Here, the opposition towards the reform of fishery takes the form of mistrust of the academic or scientific backgrounds of those who put forward arguments for reform. It is directed at the legitimacy and authority of their “knowledge” and “expertise” regarding fishery management. Therefore, knowledge and expertise can be deemed a central theme to fishery management,

because it represents a kind of stumbling block or a basis for political inaction in relation to fishery management reform.

Although it is not surprising that fishery is an important industry in The Faroes – considering its geographical location and its relatively lucrative fishing banks – a pervasive cultural preference for fishery compared with other activity may be inopportune, because it influences politics in a way, which on some occasions is detrimental to the industry itself and to Faroese society as a whole. For example, the impact of the epic fishery discourse on politics may take the form of political action, which seeks to preserve the short term interests of ailing businesses, while ignoring the long term wellbeing of the Faroese economy. It may also take the form of a general disregard for scientific advice on fishery itself given the background of an unswerving loyalty to the prevailing attitudes in the fishing community, and a consequent political inaction with regard to potential reform. Add to this that the Faroese economy is small and vulnerable, as demonstrated by the crisis in the early 1990s, and that several North Atlantic fish stocks have been threatened by overfishing over the past few decades (FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department, 2012), and the situation is such that an exaggeration of the value of fishery, and the over reliance on this particular industry may have serious implications in the future. This is not to say, for example, that providing subsidies or other types of support to the fishing industry is never a good decision, or that listening to and acting on scientific or academic advice is always the right thing to do. The aim here is to inject a dose of ambivalence into the fishery management debate, so that authorities would be more wary of making decisions, which seem to be based purely on a historical and cultural penchant towards a particular industry.

5.2.2. Reflection on the Analysis

The analysis of this thesis seeks to generate a counter-memory in relation to taken for granted historical perspectives, with a purpose to encourage a new mode of thinking, which may supersede the current dominant way of thinking about Faroese fishery. This objective is inspired by Foucault's suggestion that history should not be created for its own sake, but that it should have an effect in the present (cf. chapter 2.2). The choice with regard to theory was made, firstly, because the initial problem observed was deemed to be a discursive problem, and secondly, because that discursive problem seemed to have some deep seated historical and cultural associations. Therefore, the application of Foucaultian discourse analysis, i.e. a

genealogy of history, seemed most conducive to an examination of the Faroese fishery experience. The choice of theory meant that the empirical data used in the thesis was a combination of texts and images, which demonstrated both the historical and contemporary experience of fishery in The Faroes. Since the discourse in focus concerned an epic dimension of fishery, a particular emphasis was put on illustrating the emergence and contemporary existence of what can be called the epic fishery discourse. A deliberate attempt was made to make use of a wide variety of signification, so as to demonstrate the representativeness of the alleged experience. It is important to note that genealogical analysis is not comprehensive, but highly selective in relation to empirical material. It consciously prioritizes certain events and significations, which may not have been given particular importance in conventional historical analysis. Therefore, this thesis should neither be viewed as objective nor as neutral. It is not an attempt to locate objective truths about Faroese fishery. It is undeniably subject to prior knowledge, experiences and perceptions of its author. In this context it is worth noting that an alternative analysis could have highlighted the way fishery is experienced and articulated, for example, by economists or other academics. Such an analysis of “expert” knowledge would be relevant, because, as Foucault says, the point is not that “everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous [...]. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do” (Foucault, 1984c, p. 343). In other words, one should always look to unsettle modes of thinking which are dominant and taken-for-granted. Economic science, may, depending on the problematic, also be viewed as a dominant way of thinking, and should in that case be subjected to analytical scrutiny.

The analysis divided the Faroese fishery experience into three different themes: household fishery, commercial fishery and epic fishery. Such a fragmentation of the fishery experience allowed a perspective, where fishery is seen as having been experienced in a variety of ways in Faroese history. For example, the often proclaimed truth that The Faroes is a fishery society, would certainly not have been regarded as true prior to the 19th century. The overall historical fishery experience was thus presented as a fragmented phenomenon, and the contemporary fishery experience was seen as a temporary stage in an unceasing chain of developments. The analysis also revealed that different rationales are more observable at certain points in time. For example, a commercial experience of fishery in the late 19th century leads to an increased microeconomic logic (cf. chapter 5.1.2), but the commercial dimension coupled with the danger of fishery seems to give rise to an intensified experience

of fishery as epic in the 20th century (cf. chapter 5.1.3). The relationship between different experiences is noticeable, as the perception of the heroism and self sacrifice of skippers and fishermen is also linked with their apparent economic success.

The analysis was intended as a history of contemporary Faroese fishery, and it revealed that the way in which fishery is experienced and discursively represented in the present is not a natural and linear progression towards the attainment of essential Faroese values, but has been formed through a somewhat erratic and discontinuous history. The critical element of the analysis lies in its capacity to show, that the dominant mode of thinking about fishery in the present is not an inevitable and natural “end product” of Faroese fishery history, and that the asceticism associated with fishery as an activity is the result of a series of interpretations and recycling of past experience. This interpretation and recycling of the past gives an impression of a continuous and predestined path on which Faroese society progresses. However, by employing an analytical gaze, where the materialization of that impression takes the form of an epic fishery discourse – made possible through a coincidental convergence of a variety of historical elements – it is possible to unsettle the conventional “truth” that The Faroes is an inherent “fishery society” and that its inhabitants are, in essence, “fisherfolk”. The Faroese are not natural fisherfolk, as the proverb on the first page of this thesis seems to indicate. For instance, the inferior technology mentioned by the Løgting in the 17th century (cf. chapter 5.1.1), the Faroese opposition to the attempts by Ryberg to introduce new fishing methods and equipment in the late 18th century (cf. chapter 3.2.2), and Pløyen’s 1840 assessment that the Faroese were vastly behind their neighbours with regard to fishery (cf. chapter 5.1.2) suggests that methods and equipment had to be imported before it was possible to establish a successful fishery in The Faroes. Therefore, the experience of fishery in The Faroes was not, and is not, a discovery or rediscovery of “Faroeness”; such as it is suggested on an almost daily basis in contemporary Faroese public and political life (cf. chapter 5.1.5). The Faroes adopted fishery and made it its own. It is therefore far from a representation of Faroese values, but is undeniably foreign and *other* (cf. chapter 2.1). It has, as Foucault would say, been “fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms” (Foucault, 1984b, p. 78).

Following on from the exposition of a discursive problem, the analysis also made a connection – or at least argued for the plausibility of a connection – between the epic fishery discourse, and the way in which politics are carried out in The Faroes. In doing so, it went

from an examination of an ideational problem to an examination of some of the hands on political actions and inactions deemed to be a result of that ideational problem (cf. chapter 5.2.2). It is in the combination between an exposure of the discursive problem of the epic fishery discourse and the practical consequences of that discourse, where this thesis engages directly with its primary objective: to supersede a dominant way of thinking about fishery in The Faroes. However, it is also with regard to that combination, where the thesis' limitations are most evident, since a case for the causal relationship between ideas and actions are epistemologically tricky. Nevertheless, the preceding chapter on political implications was an endeavour to do just that.

Another issue with the analysis, which may be regarded as a limitation or inadequacy, is its rather paradoxical relationship with conventional Faroese history. Although it seeks to distance itself from mainstream historical perspectives by generating a counter-memory, it is simultaneously reliant on the very history it seeks to distinguish itself from. The "effect" of mainstream history on the analysis is alleviated by the attempt to avoid retrospective analysis and to investigate primary sources in their own context. Or, in Foucault's words, to "maintain [them] in their proper dispersion" (Foucault, 1984b, p. 80).

In short, the conclusion of the analysis is that contemporary Faroese politics is often characterized by an epic experience of fishery, formed through a coincidental confluence of events in Faroese history, which imposes itself on the way fishery and Faroese society are perceived, and on the way politics are performed. Although qualitative studies have been conducted on Faroese society, where the experience of fishery has been described in passing (Gaini, 2011; Wylie, 1982, 1987), there has, to my knowledge, been no examination of the connection between Faroese fishery culture and fishery politics. This thesis has sought to remedy the analytical deficiency of that connection. Although the analysis and conclusion may be relevant for the specific issue of Faroese fishery and politics, a pertinent question is whether it says anything useful in a wider context of cultural and social studies. It would be wrong to assume that The Faroes is the only society in which cultural and historical associations play an important role in politics. Therefore, this analysis can be taken as an example of how a society recycles and interprets its past to such a degree that it comes to play an active role in that society's political domain. It is through an increased awareness of such a historical and cultural dimension that its detrimental effects on political actions may be

mitigated. The following chapter sums up the principal conclusions of this thesis, and will respond to the questions set out in the problem formulation (cf. chapter 1.3).

6. Conclusions

This thesis is the result of a curiosity regarding the apparent lack of economic consistency in Faroese fishery management, and the consequent hypothesis that Faroese fishery politics are, to a significant extent, historically and culturally motivated. The cultural dimension of Faroese fishery politics has – to my knowledge – not been investigated before, which is another significant motivation behind this thesis. By applying Foucault's genealogical approach to Faroese fishery history, the thesis investigates the lineage of the contemporary Faroese fishery experience. Although the importance of fishery as an industry is understandable, given The Faroes' geographical circumstances, the analysis reveals that fishery as an *experience* is a patchwork of a variety of historical elements, rendering the contemporary experience of fishery to being viewed as having emerged, not through inevitable or natural progression, but through an erratic and coincidental process. The purpose of the analysis is to act as a counter-memory, that is, to point out that the Faroese fishery experience is more ambiguous than what seems to be implied in conventional historical literature.

Fishery has, in the space of less than two centuries, developed from an unreliable and secondary subsistence activity to a large scale commercial activity. In this process, the experience of fishery has undergone a variety of changes, which include both reproduction and transformation of past experience. The formation of the contemporary knowledge of fishery has occurred through a flowing together of a household fishery experience, a commercial fishery experience and an epic fishery experience. The epic experience of fishery, which is the focus of this thesis, is viewed as having descended from the practices involved in both household fishery and commercial fishery. It is particularly notable in the pursuit of this thesis that the Faroese industrialization in the 20th century has entailed a significant intensification of the epic experience of fishery. This has especially been fuelled by the experience of fishery as both lucrative and dangerous and of fishermen as skilled, brave and self sacrificing individuals. This epic experience of fishery, which materializes as an epic fishery discourse, still imposes itself on the way fishery is perceived in contemporary Faroese society, and is regarded as a significant factor in the contemporary representation of fishery as impressive and heroic, and as the foundation on which the whole of Faroese society is built.

The frequent epic references to fishery give an impression of The Faroes as a fishery society and of its inhabitants as fisherfolk. This conception of fishery, and its relationship to

Faroese society, is so prevalent, that it not only creates limits for the way fishery is articulated; it also determines the way in which the politics of fishery are performed in practice. The importance of fishery to the survival of the nation – a point regularly emphasized by politicians – leads to a situation in which it is given considerable preference in comparison with other activities. Furthermore, the epic fishery discourse, and its emphasis on the heroism of fishermen means that advice given by non-fishermen, including advice founded on scientific or academic knowledge, is largely overlooked by the authorities.

On the basis of the analysis carried out in this thesis, the development of the fishery experience should not be viewed as inevitable and natural, and therefore, the epic experience of fishery should be viewed as a result of a coincidental flowing together of a variety of historical elements. The beliefs that Faroese society is an inherent “fishery society”, and that its inhabitants are born “fisherfolk” have become internalized as objective “truths” in Faroese society. A greater awareness of the historical emergence of these notions would not only expose them as fallacies, but would also encourage political authorities to be wary of this otherwise unnoticed partiality towards fishery, and thereby to take into account the most pertinent and up to date factors in their decision making.

7. Afterthoughts

An alternative and equally potent examination of the Faroese fishery experience and its political implications would be accomplished by using the theoretical framework of Slavoj Žižek. This perspective would be highly relevant to the subject of Faroese fishery, because Žižek is interested in the investigation of common causes, and of the underlying motivations for such common causes. His analytical perspective is primarily inspired by poststructural psychoanalysis, and its application should be viewed as a sociological interpretation of the work of Jacques Lacan. The analytical perspective, from which Žižek observes the social and political world, therefore revolves around the concepts of *lack*, *desire* and *enjoyment*. An observation using these concepts reaches outside the realm of discourse and looks at the social world within a psychoanalytic, that is, Lacanian premise. Whereas discourse analysis often looks at the creation of subjectivities and dominant ways of thinking – as it has done in this thesis – Žižek’s ambition is to examine the underlying psychoanalytic motivations for such modes of thought.

Žižek’s point of departure is an ontology, where the self and reality, as it appears to subjects, is fundamentally constituted by a lack. Inspired by Lacan, Žižek has set out three different, but interconnected, orders, which illustrate this lack: The *Imaginary*, the *Symbolic* and the *Real*. The Real represents that which cannot be symbolically represented, i.e. signified, and is therefore an added dimension, which would not normally appear in the context of discourse analysis. The Real embodies a somewhat troubling suspicion that the self image constructed by a subject is nothing but an impression, that is, something imaginary (Žižek, 2008b). The Real is therefore not *real* per se, but reflects the lack, which creeps into the symbolic order (Bjerre & Laustsen, 2006; Žižek, 1991). What is *perceived* as real does not come out of the Real, but is rather a mixture of the symbolic and the imaginary. The lack created by the Real brings about a trauma and a desire to make up for what is missing. This desire is, ultimately, a desire for enjoyment. It can never be satisfied, since it is directed at an illusory object or impossibility in the form of a complete representation in the symbolic order. This is inconsequential, however, since enjoyment is attained in the process of fantasizing about reaching an impossible goal.

Enjoyment is for Žižek a central feature of modern political action. He argues that “our politics is [...] the politics of *jouissance*, concerned with ways of [...] controlling and regulating *jouissance*” (Žižek, 2006, p. 309). The term *jouissance* refers to an excess of

enjoyment, which is out of reach, that is, it is an illusory aspiration, which can never be realized (Žižek, 1991). His claim that politics are related to the regulation of enjoyment introduces a perspective where the connection between lack, desire and enjoyment can be viewed as the underlying dynamics for the ways in which “the social” is continually constructed. Žižek therefore views enjoyment as the point of departure for all contemporary politics and as the gathering point for national organization: “a nation *exists* only as long as its specific *enjoyment* continues to be materialized in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths or fantasies that secure these practices”. Crucially, Žižek emphasizes that deconstructing power formations, and exposing their discursive contingency with a view to arguing that they are “not a biological and transhistorical fact” but an “overdetermined result of textual practices” is misleading [emphasis in original] (Žižek, 1993, p. 202). In other words, Žižek wants to underline that power formations exist, since there is clearly something there, whether it is discursive or non-discursive. As one author on the work of Žižek says, “The thing is contingent but real” (Dean, 2006, p. 14).

Such a perspective is relevant for the study of collective formations of desire and enjoyment or what Žižek calls *ideological phantasms*. Ideological phantasms give an impression that desire may be fully realized, and offers the possibility of enjoyment simply through fantasizing about that realization. The trauma caused by the lack leads to a desire to make up for it. This leads to a development of coping strategies intended to make up for the lack and to satisfy the desire. These strategies may be encapsulated by the notion of the phantasm. The idea of enjoyment refers both to the goal itself, i.e. the enjoyment, which would be achieved through a full realization of desire *and* to the process, i.e. the fantasizing about fulfilling that goal, even if it can never be fulfilled. The concurrency of these two aspects of enjoyment is central to the notion of the ideological phantasm. Paradoxically, enjoyment is a condition, which appears when desire is made possible through ideological phantasms. The fulfilment of the lack associated with an ideological phantasm and the possibility for full enjoyment is, of course, an illusion. Therefore, desire becomes a central concept for “the social”, because it is always socially mediated through ideological phantasms.

An application of a phantasmological perspective on Faroese fishery would involve a view of fishery as an ideology and of the idea of the “fishery society” as an ideological phantasm. What is called the epic experience of fishery in this thesis would be viewed as a

national myth or fantasy responsible for the construction of the practice of fishery and of its continual political management. The epic experience of fishery can be seen as driven by a desire to fulfil the ultimate goal of the “fishery society”, and to enjoy the fulfilment of that goal. Even if it cannot be fulfilled, enjoyment can be achieved in the process of fantasizing about creating the “fishery society”. Since it can be argued that the epic fishery experience did not emerge until the early 20th century, the ideologization or politicization of Faroese fishery would be worthy of analysis. Apart from using a different set of concepts, such an alternative analysis would reveal the psychoanalytic aspect of Faroese fishery development, that is, it would reveal how lack, desire and enjoyment play a role in the fishery experience. A Žižekian analysis of Faroese fishery could also go into more detail on the politics of expertise, discussed in chapter 5.2.1, and could reveal how lack, desire and enjoyment appear differently in statements representing different types of expertise. For example, how does the economist, the fisherman and the politician desire and enjoy in relation to each other? The psychoanalytic aspect of such an analysis would be difficult to elucidate simply through an examination of historical signification – which is how a genealogy is carried out – and would therefore undoubtedly benefit from in depth fieldwork in the contemporary, such as interviews and participant observation. Whereas the analysis in this thesis has focused on the historical emergence of a particular way of thinking and speaking, a phantasmological analysis of Faroese fishery would probably be better suited to expose some of the latent motivations and psychoanalytic features of that emergence.

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