

Johnsen, Jahn Petter. 2004. Fiskeren som forsvant?: avfolking, overbefolkning og endringsprosesser i norsk fiskerinæring i et aktør-nettverk-perspektiv. Trondheim: [Tapir Akademisk Forlag](#)

### **English summary**

*What is a fisherman?* This is the crucial question in this book. The question is the point of departure for a study of modernisation processes in Norwegian fisheries. With this question in mind, different understandings and descriptions of what a fisherman is, are identified and discussed. The book starts with the *discourse on recruitment* in the Norwegian fisheries, a discourse that is actually about the fishermen's creation and ontology. The book focuses on the understandings of fishermen that this discourse conveys, where these understandings come from, and how they are constructed. Further, a main issue is to study how these understandings are used as strategies or repertoires in shaping political and practical action in the fisheries.

The study identifies three different understandings of what a fisherman is and how he is created. These understandings have their origin in three major strategies for studying humans and are well known from mainstream social theory. The study describes how these understandings are translated into more general actor models that have made great impact on fishing practices in Norway. In particular, the struggle between different scientific disciplines and between different applied models for modernisation is highlighted. The book presents how these processes and struggles have resulted in the creation of a new type of fisher, quite different from the anthropoid fisherman we believed we knew. The disappearance of the anthropoid fisherman and the occurrence of a new, cyborg fisher also have other implications. The concern about depopulation in the fishing sector that the *recruitment discourse* revolves around turns out to be only part of the picture, and the book reveals that a process of *overpopulation* has taken place in the fisheries. However, the term *overpopulation* also gets a new meaning through this study.

### **The theoretical approach – the fisherman and the fisheries as heterogeneous networks**

As the central question above indicates, this work abandons a *substantialistic* approach to the fisherman. The fisherman's identity or essence is not regarded as given. Instead, the fisherman is approached from a *relationistic* perspective. This is the perspective used in Actor Network Theory (ANT). Inspired by the shift in focus from *ontology* to *epistemology* and the move away from *substantialism* and *naive realism* by post-structuralists and post-modernists,

ANT introduces a *neo-realistic* perspective. In ANT, reality is not denied – as many claim the post-modernists do – but regarded as complex, constructed, and relational. ANT is also known as the sociology of translation. Translation is defined as *all negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of persuasion and violence, thanks to which an actor or force takes, or causes to be conferred on itself, authority to speak or act on behalf of another actor or force.*

The main concern of ANT is the mechanisms of production, situation, and power of knowledge. In order to analyse and understand, one should be wary of preconceived notions about how such mechanisms look like and function. ANT usually starts from concrete, empirical situations, like a process of change in the fisheries, and then follows the actors' more or less successful attempts at establishing and stabilising “translation” chains. The approach is inspired by Foucauldian discourse analysis, but unlike Foucault, ANT rejects the post-structuralist idea of epistemological breaks in knowledge. In ANT, materials from past and present form parts of heterogeneous networks and become relevant in different ways.

Through translation processes, an actor can stabilise a network. By silencing other actors, some actors can step forth as the spokesperson or the driving force for the network. Actors who succeed in stabilising and silencing the rest of the network through translation become *obligatory passage points* for streams of knowledge, power, influence, information etc. The starting point for ANT is to define and follow the actor's endeavours in ordering the interactions and relations in a way that brings him/her in a position of being the translator of the others. ANT regards society as heterogeneous networks in which all kinds of processes take place. Society consists not only of people, but also of animals, machines, texts, buildings, computers, – any material that can be imagined.

The fisherman and the fisheries are such a patterned network, with fish, knowledge, organisations, technologists, management bodies, etc; all elements representing differently patterned networks mixed together through alliances between other heterogeneous entities. This process of mixing and holding things together is actually the *translation*, and through this translation process the essence and meaning of the entities are produced.

When changes occur in the fisheries, the relations between the actors changes as well, and new definitions of problems, actors, knowledge, essences, and meanings are produced. An important aim is to demonstrate how practices in fisheries are expressed and formulated through the symbolic system of knowledge and to show how the relationship and the connections between the symbolic system of knowledge and practices are established through a wide range of actions, especially linked to formulation of politics and to technological

change. The questions are addressed through qualitative methods, such as document analysis and interviews.

### **The fisherman that disappeared**

In modern social theory three major strategies have been used for studies of humans and society. These strategies have been based on three different sets of ideas or understandings of the relationship between society and humans. The understandings have been formulated as applied models of actors and agency. The first is an individualistic, rational actor model, the second is a structuralistic actor model, and the third is a dialectical, social actor model. These three understandings can also be identified in a translated form in social scientific research about fishermen and fishing communities as: *the Rational Fisherman*, *the World in the Fisherman* and *the Fisherman in the World*.

The fisherman became the central actor in the Norwegian fisheries during the 1930s, when an institutional system was created to secure the fishing population's rights and interests. The wish to improve the welfare, to release the fishing population from the unpredictable and unstable Nature, and to develop a more profitable fishing sector, served as major arguments for the efforts to modernise the fisheries in Norway. In the 1930s three different models for modernisation of the fisheries were launched: A private capitalistic model, an industrial, structuralistic model, and a co-operative model. These three models, which together formed the basis for the formulation of fishing policy during the next 60 years, used the three understandings about the fishermen as rhetorical strategies, and as means for integrating the fisheries policy and the fishing sector into a *machinery for modernisation* in the Norwegian society. The development of the fisheries policy is used as an example and as a representative for this machinery. The book shows how the political goals change among the three development models and the difficulties in establishing a consensus about goals and solutions in the fishing policy. The fisheries policy in Norway, up to the end of the 1980s, can be described as a struggle between defenders of the three development models and the respective rhetoric strategies that are used. The struggle ends with the breakdown of the stock of Atlantic cod in 1989, when *the Resource Management model* finally can be introduced as the main model for formulation and implementation of fishing policy. From 1990 the fishing sector in Norway undergoes a total transformation with this model as the ideological and scientific basis.

Even though there has been a consensus among the fishing population about the need for stabilisation of resource fluctuations and improved welfare for the people, the means and measures have been disputed. A major problem in the modernisation of Norwegian fisheries has been the necessity to make endless compromises between goals and means based on the different understandings of the fisherman. Consequently, several of the goals and means in the fisheries policy have been in conflict. The Resource Management model solves this problem. The model uses the rationalistic understanding of the fisherman as the ideological reason for the implementation of the structuralistic ideas and methods for regulation and control of the individual rationality which, as the supporters of the model claim, represents a threat against the natural resources. Regulation and control is a must in securing society's common interests.

As a consequence of the acceptance of this claim by the politicians, the management system and the fisheries interests, Modernity can finally permeate the fisheries and a strong scientific, political and technical network can be built around a fishing policy, which actually becomes integrated into the *Machinery of Modernisation*. The unpredictable human fisherman is sorted out from the fisheries network, and replaced by heterogeneous and complex relations between, science, technology, politics, and economics. Only those humans who accept and are able to establish relations that link them to, or give them a position as actor or allied in the network, remain inside. The human disappears from the fisheries; parallel to this process of depopulation, the fisheries become overpopulated by the hybrids that form the new Cyborg fisher.

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