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**Fishermen's wives and fish processors: Continuity and change in
women's position in Icelandic fishing villages, 1870–1990**

Skaptadóttir, Unnur Dís, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1995

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Fishermen's Wives and Fish Processors

Continuity and Change in Women's Position in Icelandic Fishing Villages 1870-1990

by

UNNUR DÍS SKAPTADÓTTIR

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1995

1995

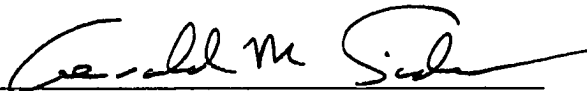
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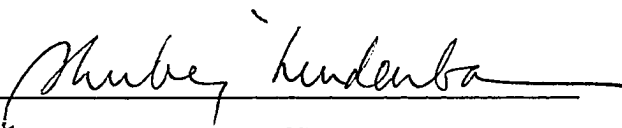
For:
my mother Valdís
and
my daughter Gróa

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy.

Jan 11, 1995
Date


Chair of Examining Committee

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Abstract

Fishermen's Wives and Fish Processors Continuity and Change in Women's Position in Icelandic Fishing Villages 1870-1990

by

Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir

Adviser: Professor Gerald Sider

The main purpose of this dissertation is to examine the changes which have occurred in gender relations in the context of industrialization in Icelandic fishing communities. It considers these relations as they have developed in two villages with different histories in terms of organization of production; villages exemplified by communal ownership on the one hand and private enterprise on the other. In the dissertation an attempt is made to make women's contribution to the maintenance of fishing villages more visible as well as analyzing the historical construction and reconstruction of gender inequality.

The major approach applied in the study of gender is to examine three interrelated domains none of which needs to be considered the prime mover:

the arena of ideas, of the division of labor and of individual experiences. Emphasis is put on the historical construction of women's position with a primary focus on the effects of wage employment and industrialization of women's lives in the sphere of production and reproduction.

The study reveals that in order to get a better understanding of the changes in women's lives with industrialization it is necessary to be specific and take into account their various class positions. In comparing the two villages it is found that in terms of gender they differed to a greater extent in the beginning of the period but have become similar in today's society. The most important differences with regard to women's position in the two villages is that in the village where there has been communal ownership, production continued longer to be organized by the household, whereas the village characterized by private enterprise the population earlier on became involved in wage labour. These are however not differences that are to be found today. The reorganisation with industrialization was based on already existing sexual division of labor in the former peasant society. In the fishing villages, with men's absence, the households have continued to be women's sphere although in a new way in which women are not limited to this sphere.

Women's participation in the fishery has been characterized by both continuity and change. They continue as fishermen's wives to prepare their husbands for fishing, but the processing of fish has moved into highly developed freezing plants. In the freezing plants a clearly defined sexual division of labor is maintained in which men's work is more highly valued than women's. Women are busy as before trying to balance their work in production and reproduction. Their contribution to the fishing economy, and their centrality in the household has given them a certain amount of autonomy but has not assured gender equality.

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Many people have in one way or other contributed to this study. First and foremost I would like to express my deep gratitude to my adviser Professor Gerald Sider who has supervised this project from its very beginning. He has closely followed the study from the early stages of its formation to its completion. He has read the manuscript numerous times and offered valuable criticism and suggestions. I thank also my other committee members June Nash and Jane Schneider for their useful comments. They have both been very helpful and supportive in the writing of this thesis.

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Key to the pronunciation of Icelandic letters:

Á á as *ou* in "found"

É é as *ye* in "yes"

Ð ð as *th* in "then"

Í í and Ý ý as *ee* in "free"

Ó ó as *ou* in "toe"

Ú ú as *oo* in "choose"

Þ þ as *th* in "thin"

Æ æ as *i* in "time"

Ö ö as *u* in "fur"

Ei ei as *a* in "frame"

Part I

Introduction

Chapter 1

Statement of Problem

1.1. Introduction

In 1898 a girl was born to a woman servant in a farm in the eastern part of Iceland. The father of Jóhanna, the newly born girl, was a servant in his brother's household on a nearby farm. In the following year the two young servants decided to begin living together. They did not have access to land, so they decided to take the chance and move to the nearest coastal settlement where he had an opportunity to become a crew member on a six-oared rowing boat. The couple soon had two other children. They worked hard, he in fishing and she in processing fish for the merchant. In spite of their heavy work load however, they were in constant debt with the merchant and were sometimes seasonally without employment. Then in 1906, when Jóhanna was eight years old, her father drowned and her mother returned to servanthood, taking the

youngest child with her. The older children were sent to other homes. Jóhanna, was taken in by a family in the village as a baby-sitter. While living with this family she would also occasionally go with the woman of the house spreading out and stacking fish. She stayed with this family until she was twelve years old. At this time her mother had remarried and was able to get her children back. Jóhanna was then old enough to get a job with a merchant in processing fish and she did that seasonally with other jobs until at the age of seventeen when she met her future husband. He was ten years older, a boat owner and a foreman. A year later they got married and she began to run a household as a boat owner's wife. By this time she was pregnant with her first son. As a boat owner's wife she managed the work of women servants and with their help served the men who were on her husband's boat either as fishermen or landmen. She also took care of their cow, milking it and haying for it with the help of women servants. After Jóhanna had been married for almost fifteen years her husband drowned and now she was alone rearing her five children. She decided to try to keep the household going, and the family together, with the help of her sons who had been involved in the fishery for a while. Thus she did not have to send her children away, although after two years her second youngest daughter went to stay with an aunt, after whom she had been named, and did not return. Jóhanna was able to manage on her own, but she no longer had any servants and soon she began participating in the baiting and fish processing for wages. After the freezing plant opened she worked there until she was 70 years old. After this she stayed home, running the household for her son who never married. By the late 1980s only two of her children still live in

the village; others have moved away looking for employment outside the fishery.

The woman described above lived through great changes during her lifetime. In this period Iceland changed from a peasant society into a modern post-industrial service society. The most important developments towards industrial society occurred in the fishery. In this dissertation I examine the changes in gender relations that come with industrialization in two fishing villages in Iceland. I consider how these relations have developed and been reshaped along with technological change and class formation during this period of intense industrial development from the early decades of this century to the present.

Fishing communities have usually been associated with male activities in the fishing fleet. However, in recent years a number of studies on gender in fishing communities have been done in different parts of the world. As a result the women in fishing communities have become more visible. These studies show that women have contributed substantially to the fisheries and that their contributions are essential for the maintenance of these communities (Davis and Nadel-Klein 1988). Icelandic women have always made an important contribution to the fisheries and fishing communities, although what is involved in this contribution has changed with time. I will examine how women participated in, and their contribution was transformed by, industrialization. In an attempt to make their contribution more visible while at the same time getting a clearer picture of the historical construction of gender in Iceland, I will take a look at Icelandic fishing communities from a feminist perspective.

In modern times Icelanders see themselves to a large degree as a fishermen's nation. The cradle of "real" and "pure" Icelandic culture and language is seen as the farming areas, but identity connected to the fishery can be seen clearly in the popular culture, such as in popular songs known by all Icelanders. In the identity connected to the fisheries there are however clearly contradictory images. Icelanders see themselves as a proud fishing nation ("stolt fiskveiðipjóð"), glorifying the risks and rewards of fishing, while simultaneously considering the fishing communities as a burden, and looking down upon the work performed by fisher-folk. Having knowledge of these general, dominant and contradictory ideas in Icelandic culture and how they have been formed in this century is essential if we want to gain insight into gender construction.

Images of gender in Icelandic culture moreover often contrast with the actuality of behaviour and participation in production, presenting a different, but related, set of contradictions. The gender images attached to the fishing communities in Icelandic culture are of passive but passionate women and heroic men. These are images that give a limited idea about the life and work of people in fishing communities past and present. Men's activities have been emphasised whereas women's activities in these communities have been largely ignored. Women have been seen as waiting and loving.

The way women and men view themselves in a particular culture is not directly derived from their position in the relations of production. Nonetheless, ideology regarding gender can not be seen as independent from the relations of production and the larger structural changes of the society. In looking at the Icelandic case it is clear that the cultural

representations of gender do not accurately reflect either women's or men's activities, their positions in the relations of production, or their contributions. As gender differences do not emerge from the relations of production, it is not enough to document the importance of women's work contribution in order to correct a skewed picture. We have to analyze how gender has been constructed and reconstructed in the historical period under consideration, with a focus on relations of reproduction as well.

Industrialization in Iceland has been associated with urbanization and with the spread of modern capitalist culture. How have urbanization and industrialization affected gender roles in practice and how have these influenced, and in turn been influenced by ideology and gender stereotypes? Has industrialization and urbanization encouraged more egalitarian beliefs and led to improvements in the position of women, or has the rise of capitalism led to greater inequality between men and women? In feminist research on industrialization, the division of labor into public and private spheres has been emphasized as an important aspect of the industrializing process. In industrial society men's activities were increasingly seen as located in the so-called public sphere and women's in the private. However, if we consider the public sphere we find an occupational segregation of "men's jobs" and "women's jobs" in which gender not only defines what kind of work women and men do but also the social evaluation of this work by men and women.

The social construction of "woman" and of "man" changed along with the construction of the new modern society. I will in particular focus on how the social construction of the female sex changed with the changes toward modernity. Moreover, as women's position has through

this whole period been very much inter-linked with family and household it is important to look back and see how the historical role of the family and household has changed in relation to production.

The importance of incorporating the private sphere of household and family in the analysis of historical changes has become generally accepted by those who study gender relations. We cannot get a better understanding of women's position without considering the private sphere: the household and the family and the different interests that may exist within the household. Changes in household and family occur simultaneously with other social changes. Thus it is clear that when examining gender and industrialization it is not enough to talk only about the division of labour between the public and the private. More than documenting a division of labor we must analyze the social relations based on gender within both the so-called public sphere and the private sphere and their interrelations. Thus I have found the concepts production and reproduction more appropriate than the terms public and private, as will be explained in my discussion of the theoretical approach taken.

In this thesis I am concerned with the change in the allocation of labour in the production of fish for export, from family centered production in the household to the wage labor economy with a new family form based on a conception of men as breadwinners and women as dependent housewives. When looking at women's participation in the labor force we will not only consider how their relation to reproduction defines their status but will also examine gender construction in the sphere of production. This study will show that in the fisheries the status of an occupation is commonly influenced by gender.

I will focus on these questions in the context of changes that have occurred in waged work, family and household, particularly in two fishing communities: Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður. I did field research in these two villages for one year from 1989 to 1990. I spent four summer months in Bolungarvík, and eight months of winter in Neskaupstaður. In both villages I familiarized myself with work in freezing plants by working for a period of time in processing fish. These two fishing villages are generally seen as the two extremes of a continuum in Iceland from private enterprise to community ownership. Bolungarvík has been considered the exemplification of private enterprise and Neskaupstaður that of community control. As is the general rule in fishing villages in Iceland, each village has had a single dominant firm. In both Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður these firms have been able to provide people with stable employment. The fishery in Neskaupstaður is still doing relatively well whereas the dominant company in Bolungarvík has become bankrupt since this study took place, leaving many unemployed for the first time in their lives. In Bolungarvík the conservative party that promoted private ownership has long held political power whereas Neskaupstaður has been known for its leftist politics and has had continuous leftist parties in power since the Social Democrats received the majority vote in 1929. The communists won in 1938 and have maintained majority since then.

In summary this is a study of the formation of gender relations during the time of changes occurring in the last one hundred years when Iceland was transformed from a rural society to a modern industrial society. In this study of gender I will examine contradictions found in the gender ideology in fishing communities where men are

granted more ideological importance than women in spite of women's important economic contributions. In the fishing villages women are socially marginalized but culturally special. The study is located in fishing communities because of the importance of the fisheries not only in the Icelandic economy but also in this nation's cultural identity. Moreover it was in the fisheries where the development from rural to urban society took place.

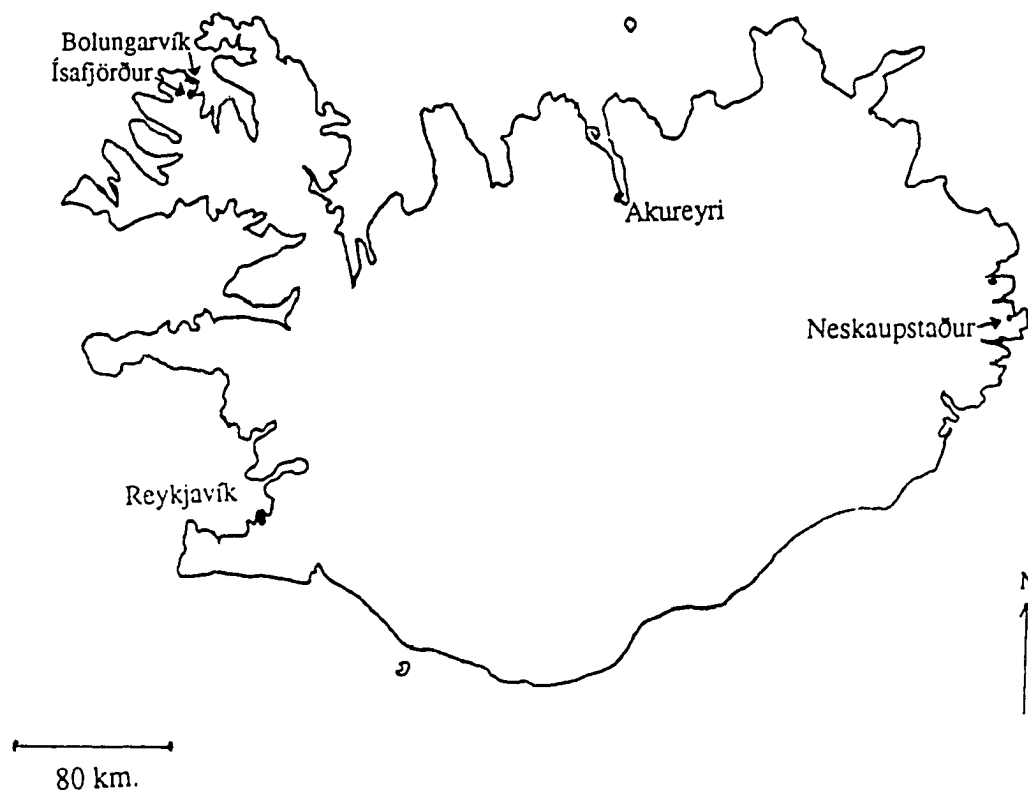
1.2. Location of Research

1.2.1. Geography, Climate and Population

Iceland is an island of altogether 103,000 square kilometers with a coast line of 4,970 kilometers. However only a very small part of the island around the coastal areas is inhabited. Uninhabitable wasteland constitutes 64,538 square kilometers and is mostly in the central highland. In this area there is very little growth and only sand and rocks. Vegetation covers 23,805 square kilometers of Iceland most of which is used for grazing with only 1,100 square kilometers in cultivation (in farm production). The vegetation consists primarily of grass, there being very few trees to be found except where they have recently been planted. Glaciers cover 12,000 square kilometers and lava fields 11,000 square kilometers. Three quarters of the country is above 200 meters.

The ocean surrounding Iceland is rich in marine life and good fishing grounds are found all around the island, but the best fishing areas are along the south and west coasts. Icelandic fishing has in the past been primarily based on cod fishery but today more varieties are utilised such as: herring, haddock, saithe, ling, catfish, ocean perch, halibut, and shrimp.

Map I. Iceland.



The locations of Neskaupstaður and Bolungarvík in Iceland.

Iceland has a population of 262,202 people (1992), a little over 100,000 of them living in or close to the capital area of Reykjavík.

There are three towns in Iceland with a population over 14,000 inhabitants, two of which are very close to Reykjavík; twelve towns with 2000 to 7500 inhabitants; and seventeen with 1000 to 2000 inhabitants. The rest of the population resides in thirty-five small villages of under 1000 inhabitants and in family farms dispersed in lowland areas along the coast (Hagtölur mánaðarins Jan. 1993). Thus a large percentage of the population lives in small villages. Not all of these villages are devoted to fishing, as some of them have other occupational activities such as serving the surrounding farming population.

The population of Iceland has grown extensively during the last two centuries. In 1703 when the first census was taken the population numbered 50,538. One hundred years later, in 1800, it had diminished to 47,240. From then on there was a constant population growth. In 1860 the population of Iceland already numbered 66,987 and by 1901 it had risen to 78,470. In this century the constant growth has continued as can be seen by the fact that in 1940, Icelanders were a little over 120,000 and the population had doubled from 1860 (Hagtölur mánaðarins Jan. 1993).

In spite of being located in the north of the north Atlantic, Iceland is saved by the Gulf stream from very low temperatures and excessive amounts of snow. There is not a great seasonal variation in temperature. The average temperature in January is about 0°C and in July a little over 10°C. The greatest seasonal distinction is between long and dark winters and short and light summers. There are almost twenty four hours of darkness in January and twenty four hours of light

in June. Although not very cold, the climate is unfavourable, to a great extent being characterized by rain and strong winds.

1.2.2. The Centrality of the Fisheries

Fish constitutes the largest export in the Icelandic economy, accounting for over 70 percent of the export commodities and about 50 percent of the total export earnings. Most of the fish is sold to other European countries, Germany and Great Britain being the largest markets. The relative importance of the fishing industry varies greatly from one area to the other. In the south-west the fishing industry is relatively unimportant compared to the north-west peninsula and the east coast, where people subsist on activities related to the fisheries that are crucial for the continuity of employment and habitation. In terms of income generation per capita, the fishing industry is approximately seven times more important in these areas than in the south-west (Árnason 1992:31).

The fishery is, however, not the biggest industry in Iceland and it lags behind other industries and services in measures of employment and contribution to gross national production (see table 1). Although fish continues to be important in total commodity exports, it has declined in spite of the extensions of the Exclusive Fishing Zone in the 1970s which allowed Iceland to increase the output of the fishing sector by around 30 percent. The fishery is the most important export industry and fish the most valuable resource on which the country depends, but only a small percentage of the population is directly

involved in the fisheries and this varies geographically. The number of people directly involved in the fisheries has never exceeded 15 percent of the active population and only about 20 percent of the population today can be said to live in communities which are primarily fishing communities.

TABLE 1. Occupational division in Iceland in 1990:

Farming	4.9%
Fishing	5.7%
Fish processing	6.1%
Industry other than fish industry	12.5%
Construction and operations of public utilities	10.8%
Commerce, restaurants, and hotels	14.5%
Transportation	6.7%
Financial institutions and insurance companies	8.1%
Government employees	18.3%
Other	<u>12.4%</u>
Total	100.0%

(Hagtölur mánaðarins January 1993)

The fishing industry is made up of numerous, relatively small firms exhibiting a high degree of vertical integration in the harvesting and processing sectors. These are located all around the country in the small fishing towns and villages. There are no dominant firms in harvesting and processing, but the marketing sector has long consisted of a few large organizations, relative to the size of the industry, that are owned by the processing firms, and their purpose has been only to

serve the marketing needs of the processing sector (Árnason 1991:13). Besides the marketing sector, there is little horizontal integration in the fishing industry.

The typical Icelandic fishing firm is based in one fishing village. The firm usually consists of one or more processing plants that are capable of producing one or more of the basic output categories; frozen products, salt fish, stock fish, and fish meal. The firm also runs one or more fishing vessels that usually supply most of its fresh fish needs. Then the products are marketed by the appropriate market organization to which the firm belongs (Árnason 1991:13). The above description accounts for ninety percent of the total value of the Icelandic fisheries.

About ninety percent of Icelandic fishing firms are privately owned. In many of the companies shares are held mostly by relatives as is the case in Bolungarvík (Árnason 1991:14). Only rarely are shares publicly available. The typical fishing firm is usually a conglomerate of formally independent firms, co-ordinated by a single dominant owner. Municipal participation in the fishing industry has declined in recent decades and is currently found primarily in the smaller fishing villages. In 1990 municipal ownership in the fishing industry was approximately five to ten percent (Árnason 1991:13).

Since the 1930s, official regional policies ("byggðarstefna") have become increasingly concerned with maintaining employment and population in regional villages and small towns which are being increasingly undermined by population migration to Reykjavík. Numerous measures have been taken for this purpose, such as improvement of local social services, especially in health care, education, road and bridge building as well as building new harbours

and improving old ones. There have been extensive supports for the establishment and development of regional industries, which has taken many forms. The establishment of investment funds to support regional industries has been the most important. Special institutes have also been established to manage these funds and to carry out necessary regional research. These efforts are currently co-ordinated and managed by the Regional Institute ("Byggðarstofnun").

There have been many political conflicts regarding this policy. Those living in the farming areas and in the fishing villages support it, claiming that they are the real producers of wealth in Iceland and that they are only receiving what is in fact theirs. Moreover they have emphasised that they who live from the land and the sea in the outlying regions are preserving important aspects of Icelandic culture which would be lost if everyone moved away from nature and into the stressful city. Recently there have been indications by the dominant parties of diminishing national support for regional development in Iceland. Many of those living in the capital argue against the continuation of what they see as uneconomic forms of production in very small villages. Political sentiments have shifted toward market oriented politics since the late 1980s and early 1990s, and right wing parties are now in power in the Icelandic government.

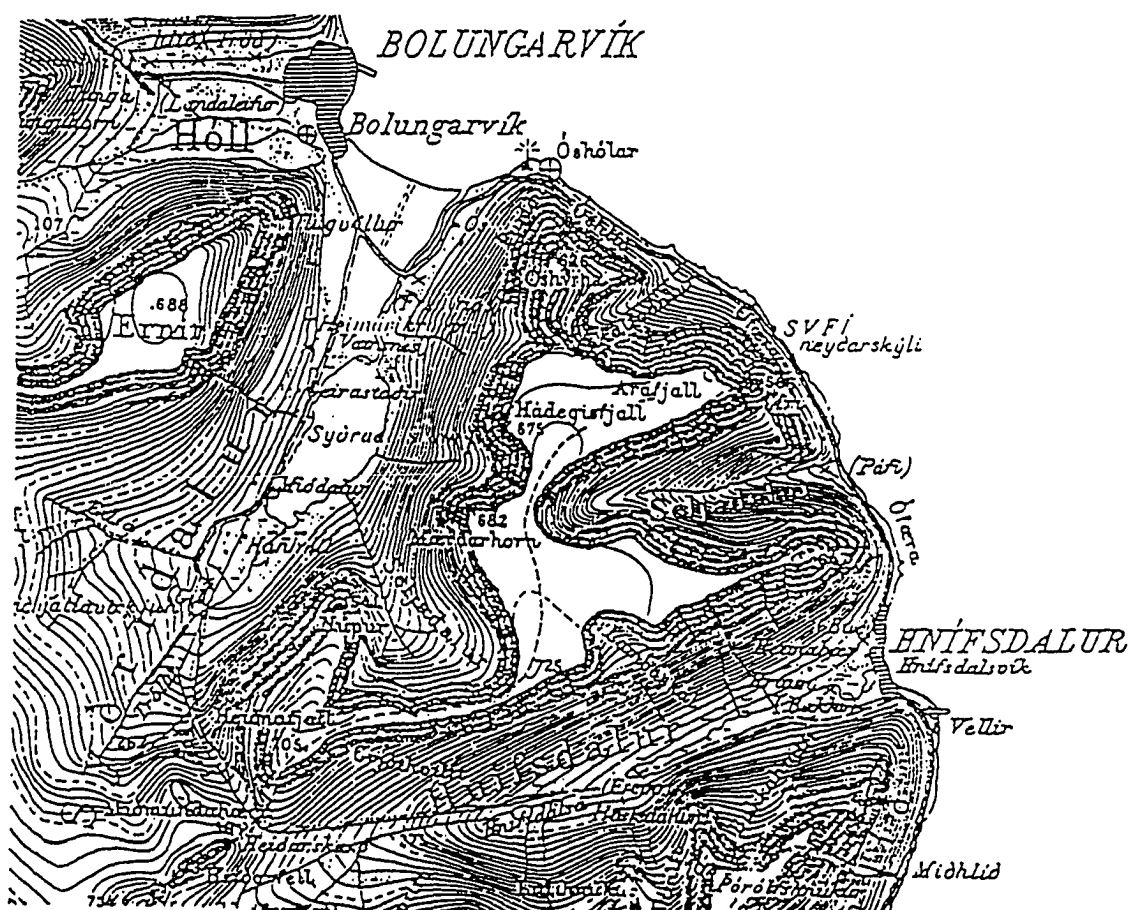
1.3. Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður

Two villages, Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður, were chosen for this study because of their distinct economic organization, geographical location and their different historical developments. Both Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður can be characterized as fishing villages, in that fishing is the primary activity on which everything else depends, and the people in these villages are very much aware of the fact that these are first and foremost fishing villages. The two villages differ from each other in that Bolungarvík has been dominated and closely controlled by a merchant elite, but in Neskaupstaður the township and the fishermen's co-operative have been the owners of the fish processing plant, the large ships and most other means of production. In Bolungarvík the conservative party has held the political power in the community and the dominant ideology there stresses private enterprise. In Neskaupstaður, by contrast, a socialist party has been dominant since before the Second World War and there is a strong support for socialist ideas of equality and co-operation, especially among the older generation. This thesis examines how these two villages came to have such different histories and will show that they are in fact not as different from each other today as one might think. There are, to begin with, some simple geographical similarities. Both are close to good fishing grounds but have very little lowland that can be farmed. Thus the farming community around each of them is small and being service centers for farmers has not played a large role in their development.

1.3.1. Bolungarvík

Bolungarvík, a village with 1215 inhabitants (1989), is one of the northern-most fishing villages in Iceland, located in the West fjords in the north-west of Iceland. The west fjords are in some ways like a separate island, although connected to the mainland. The area is nothing but deep fjords and high barren mountains. On the occasional piece of lowland there are some small fishing towns and areas with a bit

Map II



Bolungarvík and vicinity.

of farming. Bolungarvík, an old seasonal fishing site, is one of these villages, lying on a small area of lowland with steep mountains on three sides, the ocean on the fourth and with few farms in the valley above.

Although Bolungarvík is an isolated village, it is a very modern one. Until the 1950s the only way to go there was by boat, horse riding or walking. Today it is only twenty minutes drive from the nearest town to which the people of Bolungarvík travel often, still for the longest time many people have been afraid to travel between the village and the town because of the large rocks and snow slides that commonly fall on the road. The village like so many others in the west fjords, may seem strangely located especially because there are very bad harbour conditions, which have been a major problem for fishing and because how hard it is to get there. However the village location is appropriate in terms of access to good fishing ground, and this was important until recently when boats were small and could not go far. The climate is not favourable, being cold and windy all year around. As the location is in the far north, it is very dark and cold in the winter and the snow commonly reaches the roofs of people's houses. The mountains surrounding the village are dark and barren, covered with loose rocks and stones.

Today Bolungarvík is noticeably new, with hardly any old buildings, and there are many big and small ships in the harbour. After driving through other small villages on the west fjords, one gets a strong impression that this is a village that is doing well. In fact it has been prospering and the fisheries in Bolungarvík have been seen by

inhabitants as relatively stable and continuously improving.¹ When entering the village one passes the old church, the gas station and a restaurant which specializes in hamburgers and sandwiches. There is no other restaurant in the village. The village has one main road near the sea where the major companies and shops are located. Above this road are the family houses built close to one another. A relatively large privately owned store (mini department store) named after the founder Einar Guðfinnsson, is now run by his grandson. Referred to as "Einarsbúð" in everyday conversation, this shop is by far the largest in the village and sells food, clothes, furniture and household appliances. There are two other small food shops one of which is run by a woman from a renovated garage. The other a bit bigger is owned by the daughter of Einar Guðfinnsson and his son in law.

Across from the village's mini department store there is an impressive community hall which was build by the union of Bolungarvík with the help of other informal organizations such as the women's organization. In this community hall dances are held on special occasions such as on the fisherman's day or when a rock group comes to the village. This is also where the local theater group and the women's association stage their plays and their shows. Recently a small area of the community hall has come to be used as a bar which is open most Friday and Saturday nights. Bolungarvík is no different from other villages around the country in that it has two video rental places to choose from. On the main road one also finds a post office, a bank, a hardware store and some small workshops. The hardware store is

¹ The main company in Bolungarvík was not bankrupt until after the period of the fieldwork on which this study is based.

owned by the one of the sons of Einar Guðfinnsson and there is also his construction company, the biggest and most dominant in the western fjords.

Below the main street is the harbour area where the fish factories and related firms are located. It is also the area where the oldest houses in the village are to be found. This is an area of intense activity. One can see women in large boots coming to the factory in the morning and rushing home during the lunch break. In spite of the fact that one can easily walk from the factory to almost any other part of the village, many of them chose to drive. The harbour is a popular place for small boys to play and to watch men work on their boats or unload the fish from the ships. In the summer boys can commonly be seen fishing from the quays.

In Bolungarvík there are not many job opportunities outside the fisheries and related activities, although the American military has provided some employment building a road up a mountain where they have put a radar station. Most of the men who work in the radar station today are not from Bolungarvík but from Reykjavík. Having this new road up to the top of the mountain, Bolafjall, has created some tourism as it has a great view of the area. Some people from the nearest town who would never have dared travel on the dangerous road to Bolungarvík are now coming to see what the Americans have built.

There has been very little unemployment in Bolungarvík and no major economic crisis for many decades, although the present is rather insecure. The financing of the major local fishing firm was primarily by government loans. In response to economic difficulties the company over-invested in new technology in the fishing industry and in

new ships. However, they have not been able to pay back these loans and thus have declared bankruptcy (February 1993). The village is now burdened with a debt that is three times higher than its annual revenues.

1.3.2. Neskaupstaður

Neskaupstaður with 1754 inhabitants (1989) is also a isolated village, situated in Norðfjörður (a fjord) on the east coast. The only possible access by land is over high and difficult mountains. The road, which winds high up in the mountains and through a tunnel, is often closed because of snow in the winter and the small airport often cannot be used during the winter months because of bad weather. Although there is much snow in the winter in Neskaupstaður, the summer can be very warm compared to other places in Iceland, the temperature sometimes reaching 20 C. The surrounding mountains and the area in general is much more green than Bolungarvík. Neskaupstaður lies at the foot of a steep mountain, and the village is actually built into the hill. In contrast to Bolungarvík, Neskaupstaður has very good harbour conditions and its houses are spread along the coast where in the early part of the century many households had their own dock. The fishermen-farmers built their houses along the coast to have easy access to the sea. Many of the older houses are still standing, and the newer houses are located on the hill with a good view of the fjord allowing their inhabitants to monitor which ships are coming and going.

new harbour which today is located on the outskirts of the village. It is located in such a way that one can only go there by car. Unlike Bolungarvík, Neskaupstaður is more spread out along the coast so the distance from one end of the village to the other is considerable, and it is not always possible to walk to the work place. The newest neighbourhood is located at some distance further out along the fjord. After passing the new harbour, one soon encounters the main freezing plant and the salt-fish factory. Most of the shops such as the book store, cloth shop and flower shop are located on the main road and so are the two banks of the village. Although there is one large mini department store (the co-operative) there are more small shops in Neskaupsstaður than in Bolungarvík. Moreover, there is a liquor store (outlet), which is always crowded on Friday afternoon as it is frequented by villagers of nearby fjords as well. The town hall has been turned into a hotel as part of an attempt to attract tourists to the area. It is owned by the town and has until recently been run by the town council. In this community hall dances are held regularly, as are meetings and movie shows. There is also a small bar, which is a popular meeting place for the villagers, especially the younger generation. The harbour, because of its new location at the outskirts of the village, is not as lively a place as it is in Bolungarvík. The main street is the more lively area, where people stop and talk. A common sight is young mothers, two or three together, with their babies in strollers.

Although there are only four hundred more inhabitants in Neskaupstaður than there are in Bolungarvík, there are more social activities occurring there and the occupational opportunities are more

varied. The hospital that employs many women and the secondary school, which employs more men, provide opportunities that allow people a chance to stay in their home village longer than in Bolungarvík and give some of them an opportunity to return home after their period of study. These institutions also attract outsiders to come for temporary employment. This is not so much the result of more inhabitants but rather that Neskaupstaður constitutes more of a service center for nearby fjords whereas Bolungarvík is located close to a larger town, Ísafjörður, which is the service center of the western fjords, and where there is a hospital and secondary schools.

There is a little lowland in Norðfjörður, and thus there are few farms. Some of the people living in the farming area have seasonal employment in Neskaupstaður. However there is a very clear distinction both in Neskaupstaður and in Bolungarvík between the farm areas where there are family farms and the fishing villages. In this study, the primary concern is the fishing villages and not the farm areas. However, when I talk about the early period or at the turn of the century, before any real villages can be said to have been established, I am referring to the whole area or parish including all the population of Norðfjörður and all the farms in Bolungarvík.² Many of these farms now belong to the villages and no longer function as farms, although they are referred in daily life by their old farm-names. This will give us some insight into the picture of the change from a farming society to fishing villages.

² In this thesis I use on the one hand farm records which are based on municipalities and on the other hand censuses which are based on parishes.

1.4. Organization of the Thesis

The thesis is organized into three main parts and six chapters. In the first part, in chapter two, I begin with a discussion of the theoretical approach of the study and then move on to chapter three where I consider the historical background. It is important to examine the gender system which existed in the farming society before fishing villages began to grow, in order to get an idea of what kind of society people moved from to the coastal settlements. Comparison the first stages of industrial development in the two villages elucidates how they developed differently in terms of household structure and work organized by the household on the one hand and wage labor on the other. This has to be considered in examining the changes in women's position and will cast light on later developments as well. In part two we take a look at the changes which occurred with industrialization. There in chapter four I look at the position of women in the early fishing villages and evaluate the changes that took place with increased fishing and wage labor. In chapter five I take a closer look at the particular developments of the two villages. Finally in chapter six I consider two aspects of women's lives in contemporary fishing villages. I examine what I call women-centered households and how this relates to wage work in fish processing.

Chapter 2

Theoretical approach

2.1. Introduction

Since gender is one of the main concepts to be applied in this study, I will begin my theoretical discussion by examining the use of this concept while simultaneously discussing the approach I take. I first consider its use by those who have studied gender in anthropology. Then I move on to the gender literature pertaining to the changes in women's position with industrialization. In the literature on gender and industrial development there are two interrelated aspects that are of primary concern for this study: first, a focus on changes in women's work and second, a focus on changes in family and household structure. I will then go on to the more particular literature on women in maritime communities, which has been growing steadily in the last decade.

2.2. Focus on Gender

Anthropology is often considered to be the social science where there is least male bias. Margaret Mead's book Sex and Temperament in

Three Primitive Societies came out already in 1935 where she maintained that masculine and feminine characteristics were culturally defined. Phyllis Kaberry studied women's activities and religious views among Australian aboriginal people (1939). More commonly women were not included in the ethnographic descriptions of the past. They were most clearly seen as objects of exchange and sometimes there were specific chapters on women. It is however not until the last couple of decades that serious attempts have been made in anthropology to include women in the examination of the different aspects of society such as in the analysis of the economy, of kinship, and of religion. In the 1970s the discussion of male bias began in anthropology along with an attempt to change this bias. At this time it was pointed out that when anthropologists found differences in the position of men and women in other parts of the world they assumed that these differences were of the same nature as those they knew from their own society or in Western culture.

In an attempt to change the male bias in anthropology, many scholars began to focus their attention on the life and work of women to distinguish what women in fact do from what men say they do. However it was soon discovered that it was not sufficient to addumbrate descriptions of women's lives if there was no change in the theories applied in the analysis. Ideas began to develop regarding the cultural and social construction of femininity and masculinity. At this time it was common to compare the position of women in different parts of the world to seek commonalties in their oppression in order to find out an explanation for "patriarchy". It was also assumed that based on common experience as the oppressed sex, women could better understand women. In the last decade the search for universal explanations has been criticised

as well as the generalizations regarding all women. Critiques of universalism have been made by minorities and Third World women, which has led to more emphasis on diversity and multivocality.

The gender concept has been redefined and re-evaluated in the last few years. It has been developed as a category on a similar level with class, race, and nationality to better understand the power difference between men and women and the reproduction of women's lower status. It has replaced the formerly used concepts of men's and women's roles, for the role concept implies an unchanging biological base in comparison with gender, which emphasizes status or position as socially created in the same way as class or ethnicity. The gender concept has been used primarily as a tool to help us gain a better understanding of the social construction of femininity, and more recently of masculinity and the institutionalization of these processes as an intrinsic part of culture. It has also focused our attention on the inequalities involved in the social construction of femininity and masculinity (Hirdman 1990).

Gender as an analytical tool has in fact mostly been used by scholars when examining women's position in society and in making women's life and work more visible. Thus women have been the engendered subjects of most of their studies, not men. This focus reflects and simultaneously is a response to the ideas in Western culture in which men have been conceptualized as "human" and women as the "other". Consequently this is the context in which scholars work and in which the feminine and the masculine are socially constructed. It is not that men do not have gender, but they have been seen in western culture as the general; it is women who diverge from this general, as de Beauvoir pointed out fifty years ago.

There has always been some disagreement among feminist theorists regarding whether to use the term gender, sexual differences, or simply talk about women. There have been differences in perspectives between the use of "gender" in the Anglo American tradition and "sexual difference theories" in the French and continental tradition. Braidotti (1992), has been critical of the gender concept and the clear division it makes between the social and the biological. She has pointed out how its use commonly lacks theoretical clarity and focus and that it is difficult to translate the gender concept to non-English languages. Braidotti further points out that using the word gender instead of talking of feminist studies has in many cases deviated attention from the study of inequalities to the study of a more general social construction of women and men and how they are different from each other. Continuous critical evaluations are important and especially now with increased discussions of the social construction of the masculine gender. It is however not necessary to give up the use of the concept, because the solution to the problem does not necessarily require the use of a new word. Theoretical clarification can emerge from a concerted focus on the social construction of gender inequalities.

There are several interconnected domains in systems of gender inequality. Because gender, although based on biology, is socially constructed, it varies historically. In examining women's position it is thus not enough to consider what women have in common on a symbolic or an ideological level as "the other" or the "ideal differences" in Western cultures. Harding (1986) has pointed out that gender refers not only to the level of ideas, or the symbolic, but consists of two other levels as well: the division of labor and gendered identities and desires. When we study a

particular "gender system" it can be approached from three different domains (or arenas): First is the domain of ideas, symbols and the dominant values. Ideas regarding what woman should be like and should strive to become are found in this domain. However, if we focus only on the ideal feminine and masculine characteristics emphasized in Western culture and talk of woman in the collective singular we conceal the differences that exist among women both within in any given society and over the different time periods of that society's history. This necessitates the second domain of analysis, the division of labor, the formal and informal institutions of society and social relations. Here we find the variations among women such as those based on age, class, race or marital status.

The third way in which we can approach the gender system is from the perspective of individuals. Here we focus our attention on gendered identities which often can be characterized by tensions because of the incompatibility or inconsistency between the first two; between the dominant ideas and women's different daily realities. Here we also take into account changes in life cycle. In recent years, with interest in multivocality of women there has been a new emphasis on studying gendered identities and on people as active agents. Considering only the first two levels of analysis may lead us to a view of women as mere victims of the social structure. Women and men are moulded by their culture, but it is a culture which is always in the process of change and which has many inconsistencies which allows for manoeuvring. Moreover, women make decisions in their everyday lives based on knowledge of their social circumstances and interpret and reflect upon these circumstances.

We have to take into account women's experiences of their position, and examine what kinds of choices they perceive as real options in their lives. In this work I include women's own descriptions in an attempt to get closer to their subjective experiences and interpretations. Examining only one of these domains, such as just describing the division of labor between men and women and their contributions, gives us only a limited picture and cannot in itself explain the differences found in their position. Perceived differences between the sexes affects the interpretation of the sexual division of labor as Scott (1986) points out when she says that gender is a constitutive element in social relations which is based on perceived differences between the sexes and "gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (Scott 1988:42). When the masculine and feminine categories are created, each is seen as having particular characteristics and doing particular things that belong to that category although this can change over time (Hirdman 1990).

One of the main questions in the anthropology of gender has been whether or not the subordination of women is universal throughout time or the result of historically specific circumstances. While this question no longer the hot topic of discussion among those writing about gender, the way scholars have answered it still has had an impact on the questions they ask, as well as their interpretations. Those who emphasize universal female subordination have been mostly concerned with the symbolic analysis of gender (Rosaldo 1974; Ortner 1974). Those on the other hand who deny the universality of women's subordination as a basic assumption and view gender roles as historically constructed have tended to focus more on gender in relation to the division of labor between men and women. They have primarily focused on control over resources in their

analysis of women's position (Leacock 1978; Leacock and Nash 1981; Sacks 1982).

The concept of universal subordination of women has a limited analytical use since it denies variation, historically, between cultures or within cultures. There is much evidence to show that the position of women has varied and that they have held a certain amount of power in some societies, although commonly indirect (Rogers 1981; Leacock and Nash, 1981). The structures of gender relations have to be specified in each instance not assumed. To do this it is important to consider both the historical construction of gender and examine how women in fact live, as well as the symbolic representation of gender which expresses the gender ideology.

In her book Gender and the Politics of History, Scott (1988) provides a definition of gender which allows for historical specificity and variability. She argues against ahistorical generalizations about women, and points out that in accepting essentialist notions of women and of gender relations many feminist contribute to the kind of thinking they want to oppose. Clearly neither ideological nor economic factors are more determinant of women's position; rather both levels of analysis are important and neither can be reduced to the other. If we take the approach suggested above we do not have to study either the symbolic or the division of labor as more determinant but rather the three interlinked domains none of which needs to be considered the prime mover.

2.3. Production and Reproduction

In the mid 1970s the subordination of women was commonly explained in terms of their attachment to the domestic sphere, whereas men were seen as gaining a higher status from being able to participate in the public sphere. The division into private and public spheres was also used to show women's informal influence in societies in which these two spheres were clearly divided (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974). The domestic/public framework was soon called into question by those who argued that many of women's activities, such as in agricultural production and marketing could not be seen as limited to the domestic sphere. In the 1980s the private/public dichotomy was replaced by many with the concept of social reproduction as a more powerful analytical tool to account for the division of labor between men and women. As Sen and Beneria (1986:151) point out:

Anthropologists dealing with gender roles have emphasised the role of reproduction as a determinant of women's work and the sexual division of labor. Using the concept reproduction they are not only referring to biological reproduction and the daily maintenance, but to social reproduction.

The expanded concept of reproduction, both biological and social, has advantages over the concept of the private sphere, as it refers to several levels of women's participation in society: to the reproduction of children to the social reproduction of labor power, on a daily and generational level, and to the reproduction of society. The concept of reproduction as it has been used implies a research focus not only on sexual division of labor

and differences in position, but the ideas that justify the inequalities as well. Moreover, the household is not seen as a separate area but an important aspect of the economic system as a whole. "It is linked to the market both by what it purchases and what it provides - the commodity labor power that is exchanged for a wage" (Sen and Beneria 1986:151).

Reproduction not only refers to what happens in the household, but refers to many activities in the society and the reproduction of society as well. Within reproduction are the maintenance of kinship relations, which are commonly women's responsibility as are the care for other people whether this takes place in the household or in institutions. Many of women's activities which are not defined as work but rather as kinship relations, take a great deal of time and energy and make it easier for men to engage in activities of their interest.

If we want to gain a better understanding of women's position in the work force it is important to take into account the relation between production and reproduction. However the distinction between productive and reproductive work is not always clear. It is for example common to see women's wage work as work that has been extended out from the household to the public sector (commercialized housework), instead of seeing it as productive work. I have found that women's work in the freezing plant is commonly described as requiring similar qualities as work in the household and that work related to managing a boat owned by the household is not clearly distinguished from housework. Comparable work performed by men in the processing of fish on freezing trawlers or in the management of a boat is described in different terms. The concept of reproduction as it has been used has its limitations, as when reproductive work is taken to be coterminous with women's work, and all the work

women do outside the home to generate income is viewed as defined by and reflective of the work they do in the household (Babb 1986). With such a broad concept as reproduction it is hard to decide where to draw the line between production and reproduction, since reproduction is a concept that refers to work that both reproduces the labour force and society as a whole (Mackintosh 1981:10). Both men and women as wage workers can be said to participate through production in the reproduction of the society. The advantage of the concept of reproduction, as Babb points out:

...lies in the way it explains the sexual division of labour as the cultural elaboration of women's role in biological reproduction; women's diverse economic activities are seen as extending from and linked to their role in bearing and nursing children. Whether the cross cultural tendency for women to engage in reproductive work is adequate to explain their subordination is another question, and it may be only in class based societies that such activities are devalued (Babb 1986:58-59).

The relationship between the public and the private spheres and between production and reproduction is complex and variable. By saying that the two spheres have become separated does not mean that they have become independent of each other. It is precisely the problematic of the interdependence of the two spheres which is interesting to study (Rapp 1983). Some Marxist feminists, especially in the early seventies, such as Dalla-Costa (1972), fell into the functionalist trap of analysing the reproductive sphere only in terms of how it functions to maintain the productive sphere. The nature of the relation between the two areas of

production and reproduction is not always the same and has to be analysed in each instance.

Gender construction does not take place only in the reproductive sphere and then is extended into the productive sphere. The domestic sphere is just one of the contexts in which gender is constructed. As we will see when considering the Icelandic case, gender gets constructed and reconstructed in the area of production as well. The gender construction may then as well be seen as extending back into the household and the area of family reproduction. The reason why I prefer to talk about reproduction and production instead of household and workplace is this: the concept production and reproduction imply that within each area there are relations which have to be analyzed; power differences and unequal access to resources.

As we will see in later chapters, gender construction in production and reproduction and the relations between these two areas affect how jobs are defined as women's jobs and men's jobs as well as whether jobs are defined as skilled or unskilled. As Beechey has pointed out, "gender enters into the definition of skilled work and also plays a part in defining what counts (and does not count) as training" (1988:49). In the work places today we find that lower value is placed on women's work, even where the salary does not vary between men and women, as in the fish factory. Thus it is important to examine the processes involved in the maintenance of women's lower position there. In examining women's position in fish processing I not only show how their association with the reproductive sphere affects their lower status in the work place, but focus on the process involved in reinforcing women's lower status there, keeping in mind the interrelations between the two areas. In both, activities are

defined as feminine and masculine; in both certain jobs are considered skilled, other are considered unskilled.

In this thesis my goal is not simply to try to get a clearer picture of the social construction of men and women in Icelandic fishing communities but more importantly to try to get a better understanding of gendered inequality and how the feminine gender has been created and recreated in this process. This has great importance in the understanding of the development of fishing communities. During the early part of this century, and again as a result of the Second World War there were radical transformations in labour processes and in people's lives in the Icelandic fisheries. In the first half of the twentieth century the work and home at first sight seemed to become increasingly separated. This presumption derives from a unique focus on men. If we include women in our analysis, we discover that for them production and reproduction continued to be interwoven until the Second World War. Women then went increasingly from the household centered curing of fish to wage labor in mechanized processing factories. The proletarianization of fishermen was less complete, as they have for the most part continued to be paid in shares of the catch, rather than the wages that women receive in factories. For both men and women, the longer trips in larger vessels and the shift to factory work created changes within the family and the articulation of families with the larger society which requires an ethnohistorical approach to understand. In short, I will attempt to show that gender operates within both the sphere of production and reproduction and that the domestic sphere is just one of many spheres in which gender is constructed. The apparent separation of the spheres is related to the mystification of gender exploitation.

2.4. Industrialization and Gender

The changes in the complex link between production and social reproduction brought about by industrialization are embedded in class relations that are distinctive in each historical period. It is necessary to look outside and beyond fishing villages to develop an analysis of these changes. A great deal of literature on the connection between gender and work has emerged in the last decades and about the effect of industrialization on women. In this literature we find that when production has moved from the household to factories women are seen as losing economic autonomy (Young et. al. 1981; Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Leacock and Safa 1986). This issue of the changing position of women with industrialization is central to my study. In the work of anthropologists and historians dealing with industrialization and urbanization, there are some major disagreements regarding the affects these changes have had and continue to have on women. On the one hand there are those who argue that industrialization has led to improvement in the position of women, and on the other hand are those who emphasize the negative effect of industrial capitalism on women's lives. In a 1988 review article Thomas referred to these as the 'optimists' and the 'pessimists' respectively.

The former approach, which is held by modernists, assumes an association between industrialization and increased democratic beliefs with more freedom for individuals, such as the suffrage which women gained. According to this view, women also gained by educational and legal changes and by increased participation in the labor market as

independent wage earners. Moreover, it is assumed that in the conjugal family, with romantic love and free choice of marriage partner, there is more gender equality than in the peasant household.

Marxists and many feminists have on the other hand been critical of this view. They tend to emphasize the rise of capitalism when explaining women's oppression today. Socialist feminists see the discrimination of women as an essential element of the capitalist system. They argue that the capitalist economic system benefits from women's low position; women provide cheap labor in the household, as well as a cheap and flexible reserve army of labor. In the development of capitalism women were forced into the domestic sphere and this led to a sex segregated labor market, and these two aspects have reinforced each other (Barrett 1980). According to Barrett (1980:249),

A model of women's dependence has become entrenched in the relations of production of capitalism, in the division of labor, in wage work, and between wage labor and domestic labor. As such, an oppression of women that is not in any essentialist sense pre-given by the logic of capitalist development has become necessary for the ongoing reproduction of the mode of production in its present form.

There is, accordingly, a great difference in the way these two views regard women's position in the past. In order to strengthen their argument, modernists who argue that women's position has become better have tended to emphasize the hard life women led before industrialization. Those who hold the latter view, by contrast have emphasized the positive side for women in peasant society, pointing to women's informal power,

especially in decision-making within the household, which was the unit in which production took place (Scott and Tilly 1978).

When studying peasant societies, feminist anthropologists have found that although men hold the formal power, women may have a great deal of influence, especially where kinship ties are important (Reiter 1975; Thomas 1988). Thomas summarizes the two views in the following way:

...in terms of their portrayal of the era preceding industrial capitalism, the optimists emphasize the hard work, the long hours, the low pay, and especially the patriarchal culture, both nationally and at a village level, within which women found themselves. The pessimists emphasise the reciprocal rights and duties of men and women at the household level, the fact that home and work were not separated, the way that women were fully engaged in household production, and women's position in customary law was considerably better than it later became (Thomas 1988:540).

These opposite views can also be found in the description of the changes in women's position in Iceland in the transition to capitalism. Most of the historians (Guðmundsson and Karlsson 1988; Erlendsdóttir 1977) who have dealt with this issue can be said to be optimists, while the two anthropologists (Hastrup 1985, Kristmundsdóttir 1989) who have considered changes associated with industrialization and urbanization have argued that women's position in society deteriorated. According to Thomas' classification they can be said to be pessimists, not of the Marxist kind but more from a feminist perspective. Hastrup (1985) applying Ardener's concept of muting, has argued that the women who had a place in the household in the peasant society have no place in the coastal

settlements which in Icelandic culture belong to men (see further discussion below). Talking about the first decades of the century, Kristmundsdóttir (1990) along similar lines maintains that women were situated at the center of social life when the household was the production unit in the farming society. When the household is no longer a production unit, "women are removed to the periphery of social life." Kristmundsdóttir maintains that women in urban areas, in contrast to rural areas, have been silenced (Kristmundsdóttir 1990:32).

Icelandic scholars have more commonly argued that the position of women, due to increased legal rights, educational opportunities, and increased possibilities for financial independence, became better than before, indicating that in the peasant society women were oppressed (Erlendsdóttir 1977; Ólafsdóttir 1980; Guðmundsson and Karlsson 1988). Erlendsdóttir (1977) has pointed out that in the peasant society women were devalued and the lowest paid, and that only as widows were they able to run their own affairs. They had no political rights as women and very limited educational opportunities. She maintains that: "Both the attitudes of the rural peasant society and the laws were literally aimed at keeping women in their old bondage and that their position remained unchanged" (Erlendsdóttir 1977:42). In her view the increased economic opportunities and new liberal ideas allowed women to reconsider their position.

Ólafsdóttir (1980), dealing with the same time period at the beginning of this century (in Reykjavík), has emphasized that for many people the coastal areas and especially Reykjavík represented opportunities. According to Ólafsdóttir, this is the reason more women than men chose to move from the rural areas to Reykjavík and more

stayed. There were new economic activities being developed which absorbed more and more men and women from the overly populated countryside where people had to live with the fear of becoming dependent on their municipality. These opposed views which will be taken up in later discussion can contribute to our understanding of the ambivalence in the process of industrialization that both worsened women's situation in some ways and bettered it in others. Moreover, only very rarely are changes in social relations completely of one homogeneous set of affects. Certainly the effects varied with women's class position.

In the Icelandic case at the turn of the century the majority of the population was powerless primarily because of poverty. The rising real income of the working class and the growth of the middle class since the Second World War make it seem as if women's oppression has lessened. It has lessened but not necessarily because of gender reasons only. The increased autonomy of both men and women is in part due to the alleviation of poverty. As their material circumstances improved they could be more autonomous and more assertive in their social relations. So part of what seems like women's improved circumstances is not so much the result of gender or class struggles as much as an overall alleviation of poverty.

The crucial role of women's work in the household for the maintenance and renewal of society has been studied in the context of industrialization. The literature shows that the way in which women have entered into wage labour has been in a subordinate position due to the identification of women with household and family responsibilities. It has been found that in many countries where women's participation in the labour market has increased, women's earnings as a percentage of men's

have declined rather than increased in the last decades. This is the case in Iceland. Women's involvement in production cannot automatically be assumed to lead to autonomy (Safa 1976; Tilly and Scott 1978; Antler 1979). The frameworks usually applied when talking about work have been found to be limited in dealing with women's work since they are for the most part based on men's experiences (Scott 1986). Tilly and Scott (1978), analyzing the importance of relating changes in family to industrialization, show the need to take into consideration the fact that for most women's work in the household is interwoven with work outside of it and that their work experiences are determined by their roles in both spheres. In discussing the relation between women's productive work and their "domestic activities", they show the importance of considering class as a major variable in how women enter the work force and what it means to them.

Henrietta Moore (1988) has pointed out that "since domestic work is considered natural, it is easy to make the mistake of seeing it as constant throughout history, as an unchanging set of necessities which do not need to be subject to historical analysis" (1988:53). She indicates two problems with this position: first that "the relationship between domestic labor and non-domestic labor is not constant but subject to historical determination." and second that "there is the related question of the content of domestic labor. It is simplistic to imagine that domestic labor remains constant through time" (1988:53). Thus it is important to consider the relations of reproduction, the social relations existing in the area of reproduction in the historical period being considered and how these change with other changes.

A great deal of literature on the changing role of family and household under industrialization reveals the complex relations between class and gender in what Medick (1981) has called proto-industrialization (as compared with later stages of industrialization). Medick discusses the important role maintained by the family during proto-industrialization as an organizing unit of production, reproduction and consumption, in articulation with merchant capitalism. He shows the increased importance of the nuclear family household at this time and of the children being kept home longer, moreover indicating that people were having more children and were having children over a longer period of their lives. This is relevant to the Icelandic case in the early decades of this century, where there was a great increase in the number of nuclear family households and the family often organized the production process. Moving to the coastal settlements was an opportunity for poor landless people to break free from the dominant rural landowners and establish their own households. They began to have children at a younger age than before. At the same time they provided a labour supply near the ocean that allowed for further development in the fisheries.

Löfgren (1984), discussing the change in family relations during the same process of industrialization in Sweden, shows how for the different classes of people the family takes various forms and has different meanings. He emphasizes that we have to view the domestic unit of kinship as a cultural phenomenon that can be given different emotional social and economic values in different class settings. Löfgren's suggestion will be taken up in my research because I want to understand the changing form of family and household as well as the changes in the

roles of the family and household members, from the early stages of industrialization.

Gunnlaugsson (1986, 1988), an Icelandic historian, provides a basis for thinking about long term changes by using censuses to study the changes in family and household in Iceland from 1801-1930. His studies of the relationship between demographic and socio-economic development, social legislation and family and household structures, focusing on the formation on coastal villages provides important historical background for this study.

A clear distinction should be made between household and family. Household refers to the social structure centered on a common place of residence. A household may consist of related individuals, families or unrelated individuals. Feminist researchers have pointed out that households are commonly characterized by inequality and unequal access to resources on the part of their members. Following Rapp's definition (1983); the household may be a separate area of activity. "Households are the empirically measurable units within which people pool resources and perform certain tasks". She points out that households may vary in relation to resource allocation. They vary by class in their ability to accumulate and transmit wealth.

Family carries a heavier load of ideology than does household. It is through families that people enter into productive, reproductive and consumption relations. The two genders enter into these relations of production and reproduction differently. Like household, family varies by class (Rapp 1982). It is in both family and household where an important aspect of women's role in social reproduction is situated. The roles of women and men in the household are as much a determinant of

their position as their role in the labour market (Omvedt 1986; Sen and Beneria 1986), consequently both spheres have to be considered and their interrelations. Both sexes have to be considered when analysing the social changes that occur in industrialization, and consequent polarization and proletarianization of the labour force. To include the historical experience of both men and women, the concepts used in talking about industrialization and class formation have to be re-evaluated.

2.5. Gender in Maritime Societies

In the last decades there has been an increasing interest within anthropology in studying gender in fishing communities. However, the emphasis today is as before still to a large extent on men's activities. In analyzing or describing maritime societies, anthropologists have generally been concerned with fishing itself, which is usually done by men. (Firth 1966; Anderson 1972 and 1979; Smith 1977; Durrenberger and Pálsson 1987; Löfgren 1977, 1982). This is also the case for the majority of studies today as can be seen in the journal Maritime Anthropological Studies where men are clearly the focus. If these studies considerable attention is paid to fishing techniques and relation to nature, crews and the social relations of production existing among men at sea. The studies of gender in fishing communities reveal that women have from the earliest settlements by the sea contributed a great deal to the fisheries, and that their activities are both diverse and essential. Moreover, they show that one cannot make generalizations regarding the division of labor between men and women in fishing societies in different parts of the world, and

that as the economy has changed so have women's activities (Antler 1977; Davis 1979; Davis and Nadel-Klein 1988; Porter 1983; Cole 1991; Thompson 1985).

When talking about women in fisheries the most relevant comparative material is with other North Atlantic coastal areas. In this literature we see how the different theoretical approaches discussed above have been applied to the further understanding of gender relations in maritime societies. With regard to the social changes which have occurred in this century with industrialization, we see that there is disagreement in this literature about whether the division of labor between men and women has become more clearly defined and restrictive or more permissive and flexible. Those who hold the former view have shown this as an evidence of a worse position of women, but the latter argue the increased opportunities in the labor market has given women a better position than before. Antler (1977) for example described changes in the lives of fishery women in Newfoundland which are similar to those in Iceland. She shows how, within one generation, household production was eroded and women's contribution to the production process totally changed. She describes how women who before were an integral part of the production process in Newfoundland fishing villages are now either wage laborers in fishing plants or housewives. Like others of those studying fishing communities in the North Atlantic, Antler emphasises that the status of women has become worse with the rise of industrialized fish factories (1979). Gerrard (1983) corroborates this in Northern Norway, showing that with the rise of industrialization and the development of fishing as a full-time occupation, women's seasonal work in the factory has become invisible, a form of reserve labour.

It has commonly been pointed out that in communities where deep sea fishing is practised there is a strong gender division in people's daily life and work. Faris (1972) has for example stated that "in a fishing community one could reasonably expect a sharp division of labour along sexual lines." Porter (1983) found a rather strict division of labor in her study of a Newfoundland fishing community. Davis, however, basing her research on another fishing village in Newfoundland, emphasizes women's new opportunities in wage labor and maintains that the division of labor between men and women in modern times is not as clearly defined as before. She says that with women's work in fishing plants and men's increasing involvement in household activities there is a less rigid division of labor than in the past (1983:26). Porter, however, like Antler although from a different perspective, maintains that women have lost their important role in the fisheries. Porter further points out that these communities are identified by what men do, the fishing itself. This has been so from the earliest formation of fishing villages in Iceland to the time when women were more directly involved in production.

The question raised in this literature which is considered in this thesis is whether the division of labor during the time period under consideration was rigid in the past and has now become more flexible both in the area of production and reproduction or whether it has become more restrictive in the definition of women's and men's work and what meaning does this have for gender construction. Sinclair and Felt (1992) have found in their study of unpaid domestic work in a Newfoundland fishing village that "an extensive division of labor persists, even when women are employed" (1992:59). I shall demonstrate that in Icelandic fishing communities, although women have entered the public sphere of wage

work, the private sphere remains for the most part theirs. I will show that in Icelandic fishing communities a gender division of labor not only persists in the home but is very clearly defined in the work place as well. Thus the usefulness of replacing the concepts of public and private with the concepts of relations of production and relations of reproduction will become clearer.

In the collection of articles edited by Nadel-Klein and Davis, To Work and to Weep (1988), many important issues regarding women in fishing economies are raised. In Icelandic culture the "weep" part of the dichotomy is emphasised in popular songs, although not spoken of much by the women themselves. The importance of the work aspect has however been ignored to a large extent and needs to be brought to light. As Nadel-Klein and Davis, show there is a misconception to be found in emphasising only the one or the other and in seeing women's roles as divorced from direct participation in the fisheries, and their household and expressive roles as of little value. Moreover, women's sense of self is bound up with the fishery. As will be shown, women see their interests as closely related to the interest of their community.

In their introduction to their book on women in fishing communities Nadel-Klein and Davis emphasize the necessity of seeing women as actors in fishing communities. Moreover, they bring out how fishing communities can be stressful environments, where people depend on the dangerous ocean that both gives and takes. They warn against the tendency to overemphasize the similarities found in women's lives in fishing communities. With the collection of articles in To work and to Weep they want to show "that to understand fishing communities and economies, the adaptive challenges of fishing must be placed within the

specific context of history, political economy and gender ideology" (Nadel-Klein and Davis 1988:6).

The popular image of women in North Atlantic coastal communities mostly focuses on the strength (or independence) women gain from the experience of being on their own while their husbands are at sea, having to take decisions on their own in family and financial matters. The focus, therefore is on how women cope with the absence of men, but less on women's own activities. Many studies indicate that in these societies men and women live in very different worlds as the men spend so much time away from home. Their experience and interests differ, and they have little in common (Thompson 1985; Pálsson 1986; Löfgren 1977). It has been suggested that with the men away, women have taken decisions crucial for the family's well being, and that this may be a source for power (Gustavsson 1986; Thompson 1985). In other words it is assumed that women's centrality in the private sphere gives them strength. Nadel-Klein and Davis have argued that "gender ideology becomes a conscious and problematic factor in the world of deep sea fishing, where men are away for prolonged periods of time" (1988:13). They maintain that there is some evidence to show that in such cases deep gender divisions and even hostilities are to be found. Thus in the literature on maritime societies there has been a strong emphasis on the strength women are seen as gaining from being on their own when men are out fishing. It is assumed that this can lead to more equality between men and women than is to be found elsewhere.

Such a view is expressed by Thompson (1985) in a review article on women in fishing societies, where he argues, based on cross cultural comparison, that in some fishing societies women have an unusual degree

of power and independence. This according to Thompson can be explained by two factors primarily: the autonomy women have in the domestic sphere because of men's absence and women's active role in domestic production and financial decision making. A different approach is taken in a recent book on women in a Portuguese coastal community by Cole (1992). She describes the maritime households she finds there as women centered, instead of using terms that imply women's power. As I will show in a discussion of women in maritime households in Iceland, this is a more useful way to discuss women's position there.

There is very little anthropological literature available on fishing communities in Iceland. Pálsson and Durrenberger (1987) have concerned themselves primarily with the fishermen's view on catching abilities. While Magnússon (1985, 1991) is interested in early class formation with the rise of fishing villages, he leaves out the gender aspect and deals only with the fishermen. Kirsten Hastrup (1985) is the only anthropologist who has written on gender in Icelandic fishing communities. She uses a cultural model, arguing that the position of women and men is defined by a cultural conception of "inside" (the social) and "outside" (the wild), which is deeply rooted in history. Hastrup maintains that "on the whole, the opposition between the 'inside' and the 'outside' has been a major conceptual opposition in Iceland ever since the beginnings of history" (Hastrup 1985:55). She further maintains that culture is associated with the farmstead within which there is no alienation of women, and that the farm "explicitly contains both male and female aspects". The men have additional space on the outside when engaged in hunting or the herding of sheep. According to Hastrup, only men went fishing and herded sheep; women were excluded from the wild (the

outside). Thus women belonged to the inside and men to both the inside and the outside. According to Hastrup the fishing and fishing communities are in Icelandic culture associated with hunting in untamed nature and this association "has led to the almost inevitable equation between the fishing villages and the non-social" (Hastrup, 1985:60). Women have no place in this wild sphere. She says that "as women they are socially invisible in the new urban surroundings. They may work hard and live perfectly normal family lives, but they are not 'seen' or 'heard', in circumstances where the 'keys to the granary' are irrelevant" (Hastrup 1985:62).

When trying to gain a better understanding of the changes in gender roles, focusing on the area of production can give us only a limited picture, since gender is constructed in both production and reproduction. It is therefore not enough to study women's relative contributions to production and their different position in the labor market. Women's crucial activities in domestic work have to be taken into account. Women's and men's roles in the labor market are largely determined by their role in reproduction. Women's responsibility for this work affects their weak position in the labor market. Men have a better position in the labor market relative to women not only because they are considered the main providers, but also because they are not responsible for domestic work and can draw energy from the services provided by women there (Jónasdóttir 1985). In order to capture this interactive relation it is not sufficient to study only women's role in the sphere of economic and social relations outside the household. Women's unique responsibility for housework, their low valuation in the labor market, and their assumed

dependency on the male wage, all underlie and are products of asymmetric gender relation (Sen and Beneria 1986).

2.6. Summary

In the literature reviewed above we see the primary concerns of this study and the discussions and debates to which I will contribute. In my presentation I have emphasized historical specificity and variability when dealing with gender construction. I will show the importance of considering the social relations in both production and reproduction, and noted that gender construction takes place in these interrelated areas. Within both areas there are relations which have to be analyzed. In the review of the literature on women in fishing communities, I have focused on industrialization and gender segregation in household and work place aspects of gender that are most relevant to my work. However, to get a clearer understanding of these changes I have found it necessary to look beyond the studies of fishing communities. Thus I have examined the more general discussion of industrialization and its effect on gender and household structure. The questions have been raised whether or not women's position has improved with industrialization and further whether the sexual division of labor has become more restrictive or more flexible. Given that women are diverse, as mentioned above, we cannot assume that social changes affect all women in the same way; their various positions regarding such variables as class, age, marital status and so on make a difference. These are all issues we need to consider when looking at the

Icelandic case, paying particular attention not only to the differences between men and women in the labor force but also the differences among individuals. To understand this we need to look at the particular history not just assume some general patriarchal structures.

Chapter 3

Historical Background

3.1. Introduction

Industrialization occurred late in Iceland in comparison with other North European countries. The oldest generation of Icelanders today grew up in a society that was still basically "peasant" and of which there are hardly any traces left. In this chapter we will consider some aspects of this peasant society focusing primarily on the late nineteenth century at the time when the first stages toward industrialisation were about to be taken. In order to get a better understanding of the changes we will have to consider both the outside factors that affected these changes as well as the dynamics within the peasant society. The conditions for capitalist development were to a large degree created by forces outside the peasant social structures, such as the development of new markets in Europe and the liberalisation of trade rules by the Danish Crown. In this context we will take a brief look at the history of Iceland's political and economic relation with the larger world and with the foreign fishing fleets that fished around the island.

When considering the social dynamics within the peasant society it is important to examine the tensions that existed within the social

system. We must analyze the factors important in maintaining the status quo, or the continuity of the then prevalent social relations, and simultaneously the tensions such as those caused by population pressure and changing relations of production leading to increasing urbanisation and mechanization. In order to do this I will first describe the basic features of late nineteenth century Iceland, including the different economic positions of rural households, and the relations of production within households based on age and gender (Meillassoux 1979).

3.2. Early Fishery

Iceland was occupied by Norwegian settlers in the ninth century. They brought along with them Irish slaves and established a society of independent chieftainships on the island. In 1262 however, Iceland became a colony of Norway and the chiefs subjects of the Norwegian King. Norway then took control over trade with Iceland. In 1380 Norway joined with Denmark and Iceland remained a Danish colony until the twentieth century.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Germans (The Hanseatic League) became dominant in the Norwegian trade, including Iceland. At this time production of fish for trade became for the first time more important than the production of homespun wool. English fishermen began to come to fish in Icelandic waters in the early fifteenth century. They were followed by both English and German merchants who processed fish in Iceland and hired the inhabitants to work for them in

the coastal areas. At the time there were increases in exports and a rise in prices due to competition between the two. The fishery settlements around the German and English merchant entrepreneurs probably provided an attractive alternative source of employment for the landless of this time. However, the growing class of Icelandic landowners had a vested interest in turning the legislature to their own purposes. Foreign fishing was prohibited to a large extent by law -- indeed a ban was imposed on foreign fishing from Icelandic harbours -- and the landless were forced back into agriculture. Thus this merchant activity did not lead to any structural changes of the society but rather enhanced the power of the landowners who had at this time gained hold of the best fishing stations (Gíslason 1990:42-43).

Until the nineteenth century no Icelandic class of merchants existed and practically all legal trade with other nations was in the hands of the Danish. Foreign merchants were not allowed to settle on the island on a year round basis nor to participate in the economy (Gunnarsson 1987). From 1602 until 1787 all foreign trade with Icelanders was monopolised by the Danish. Trade could only be carried out by certain licensed merchants in Copenhagen. The Danish merchants preferred fish products over farm products. Legally, however, they were neither permitted to live in Iceland nor to organize fishing or the processing of fish there. During this time of Danish monopoly each producer in Iceland had to sell his products to a particular local merchant who could determine the terms of trade. These local merchants who were also landowners had formed a partnership with the licensed merchants in Copenhagen. After 1787 trade continued to be limited to the subjects of the Danish Crown.

Foreign fishing vessels, much better equipped and with more highly developed fishing methods than those of Iceland, fished in the fishing grounds around the country. Coming from countries such as Denmark, France, Germany and England the fishermen of these ships did some trading with the inhabitants in exchange for farm products, in spite of the fact that Danish law banned any relation between Icelanders and foreign crews. In 1884 it was for example estimated that about 200 French fishing vessels came to Iceland with about 4000 fishermen. Although the French fished all around the country, they were for the most part located on the east coast. There they exchanged Icelandic farm and wool products with French products, primarily mittens for French bread and biscuits and some wine (Gissurarson 1988). Moreover, in some fjords, fish processing activity was carried out by Danish and Norwegian merchants.

In the period from 1880 to 1910 there was increased merchant activity during which the first stages towards local capitalization of the fisheries were being taken. Investment in the fisheries became possible originally with foreign investment but in 1885 the National Bank of Iceland was established and after that the fisheries and trade increasingly moved into the hands of Icelandic merchants. Sea fishing was the basis upon which these changes were built. "Urbanisation" and "industrialisation" involving capitalist relations of production came about with the development of commercial sea fishing. However, as will be shown in this chapter, the elite of the farming society tried to hinder urban development, as they saw the movement of poor people to the coastal areas as counteracting their interest and that of the social and ideological structure of the peasant society.

In the independence struggle against Denmark, which was going on at this time, a new national identity was constructed which held on to the idealisation of the life of the free-holding peasant as possessing the true and pure Icelandic culture. In contrast the increasing number of fisher-folk who had been moving to the coast were seen as lacking the important elements of the culture, and fishing villages have continued to be considered culture-less entities. A common view in Iceland, among laymen as well as scholars, and also in the history taught in the textbooks, is that the development of fishing and fish export was constrained by colonial relations and that this was the cause of the very limited internal capital accumulation which stunted the growth of the fishing sector. The independence struggle and the new ideas and courage it brought are seen as a causal factor in the industrial development of Iceland. This view disregards the fact that the Danish government encouraged economic development in the fisheries at end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. These and later attempts were however often met with opposition (Gíslason 1990; Hálfðánarsson 1990).

3.3. Icelandic Rural Society in the Nineteenth Century

While the industrial revolution was occurring in Europe and the neighbouring countries of the North Atlantic, Icelanders to a large degree lived as subsistence farmers. They were peasants in the sense that they were producers in rural areas and the household produced most of the

subsistence needs of its members. They were for the most part poor and powerless and had to pay rent to a landowner (Wolf 1955, 1966; Cancian 1989). Although production was organised by the family and primarily for the consumption of household members, a few times a year the head of household would go to the nearest merchant and sell some wool, dried fish processed by household members and mittens or other wool products which had been made during the cold and dark winter.

Into the late nineteenth century Iceland was a rural society depending for the most part on animal husbandry, with fishing as a subsidiary income for those peasants living in coastal areas. Farms were of varied sizes and tenants or owners were commonly not stable. Poorer peasants often could not occupy the same land for a long period of time and their lease was usually temporary (Jónsson 1988). In the household, grown up "children" up to fifty years old could be residing with their parents and they or the unmarried siblings of the head of household or his wife would sometimes belong to the household as servants.

All the members of the household, related and unrelated, shared the same room where they ate, worked and slept together. This room was called "baðstofa".³ Usually there was a separate room where they cooked and processed their food. They lived for the most part in small dwellings made from mud and stone and often with a grass roof. Often one of the rooms, if people had more than one room, had wood covered ceiling and maybe one small window to let in some light. These small dwellings were cold, smelly, and would commonly leak when it rained.

³ According to most descriptions of Icelandic past, in the long winter evenings when people worked inside, they told each other stories, recited poetry and read aloud if there was a book and a literate person in the household. Icelanders like to uphold this image when presenting themselves as a literate nation, but it is difficult to establish how common this in fact was.

In the nine month long winter, the living room was filled with smoke from the heater and oil burning lamps. To keep warm in the cold and dark winter, each bed was shared by two or three individuals. Animals were sometimes kept in a room below the living room in order to get more heat, especially in recent centuries. People were for the most part isolated in these farmhouses, except for men going to seasonal fishing. Church was the most common meeting place.

Animal husbandry was the dominant activity of the peasants, and there was very little cultivation of land besides hay making. There were no real villages, except for some clusters of houses around merchants and crown officials, and farms were scattered around the countryside mostly close to the coastal areas (Gíslason 1990; Guðmundsson and Karlsson 1988). Within this peasant society there were not only independent producers of different economic standing, but servants, part time fishermen and cotters, all of them tied into the peasant mode of production. The oldest census in Iceland dates from 1703. According to this census the occupations were divided in the following way:

Farming only	69%
Farming and some fishing in the spring	15%
Farming and fishing in the winter and spring	16%

We can see from the description above that the Icelandic peasantry conformed to Wolf's definition (1955, 1966); of a subsistence mode of production characterized by production for subsistence and the payment of rent. Wolf makes a distinction between peasants and farmers.

Farmers according to Wolf produce primarily for market and their farm is a business enterprise, whereas peasants produce primarily for subsistence and they "run a household not a business concern" (1966:2). More importantly he analyzes the peasantry from the perspective of the mode of production (Wolf 1982). What defines the peasant mode of production is the payment of rent or tribute which the peasants must pay from their surplus. They are according to Wolf "rural cultivators whose surpluses are transferred to a dominant group of rulers that uses the surpluses both to underwrite its own standard of living and to distribute the remainder to groups in society that do not farm but must be fed for their specific goods and services in turn." However, he points out that there are many different ways in which the fund or rent is produced or siphoned to the dominant group (1966:10).

In 1800 most Icelandic peasants were tenants, but after this time some were able to buy land and become owners of their own farms. Around 1860, 20 percent of the farms were occupied by owners, but 70 percent were still privately owned by individuals who lived elsewhere. Officials of the crown commonly owned many farms and took about seven percent of the value of the farm in annual rent. The family and the assessed farm made up the basic units of the social and economic structure of the rural society. These taxpaying units (farms), which were around 4000 in the last three centuries, were often divided into more than one production unit with separate households. On the one hand they were divided into independent farms called "heimajörð" which were sometimes occupied by landowners but more often by tenants; and on the other hand its dependent or outlying farms, "hjáleiga", occupied by sub-tenants (Gunnlaugsson 1988). The latter were always a part of the

former and the subtenants paid rent to the tenant of the independent farms. The outlying farms were occupied by poor peasants which were less likely to farm them continuously. With a few difficult years in a row tenants of independent farms could be forced to become subtenants. The peasant occupying the independent farm or "heimajörð" was responsible for paying the tax for both households if there was an outlying subtenant "hjáleiga", and he could use the rent of his subtenant to help pay his own rent.

Landowners and tenants of assessed "heimajörð" who lived close to good fishing grounds were commonly involved in the inshore fishing as a secondary activity to their farming. They were referred to as fishery-farmers ("sjávarútvegsbændur"). Cotters, who did not have their own boat and hired themselves out as crew members, also depended a great deal on fishing for their living. They usually had only a very small piece of land, enough to support a cow, but nevertheless maintained an independent household (Magnússon 1985).

Thus within the Icelandic rural society there was always some degree of fishing within the existing peasant relations of production. The fishing was probably more than the censuses indicate since fishing was not always carefully registered with different members of households categorised under such headings as "with farm", "living from farming" or "servant". This fishing was both for home consumption and for exchange with those who could not fish or to sell to the merchant for other products, such as flour, that were needed in the household. As the relations of production were centred around access to land, no one was allowed to live off fishing solely. Fishing communities can thus hardly be said to have existed in Iceland until the nineteenth century.

Independent fisheries were not allowed to arise within the boundaries of the peasant communities. Only those who had right to land could be owners of fishing boats. Others such as tenants, cotters or servants were often obliged to man their boats (Gíslason 1990:45). According to Gunnarsson, the fishing was tied to individual farms by, for example, limiting landing rights to the coastal land of the farm that owned the boat (Gunnarsson 1983:168-169; Gíslason 1990:44). When servant-men went fishing with their farmer, in the winter season, the head of the household received his servant's share and the servant received the same pay as usual.

Inshore fishing was practised for the most part from small open boats, usually six-oared, but sometimes from bigger boats of up to twelve- oared. In the villages of this study, Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður, the boats remained small for a very long time and they were mostly six oared or smaller at this time. In the area of Norðfjörður where Neskaupstaður is located, men would usually go on short fishing trips close to home as in other areas. However, men would also go seasonally from farms to fishing sites. Bolungarvík was, until this century, an important seasonal fishing site where peasants came from nearby areas to fish in the winter. On the boats in the fishing sites each crew member received payment in shares and the owner, who was often the foreman, received a double share.

Many of the landowners who lived off fishing as well as farming ("sjávarbændur") preferred hiring men only for the winter fishing season even though these men did not have the license to move around and be unattached to a farm. These seasonal laborers would then be hired on another farm in the summer season. Landowners, tenants or subtenants

would send their servants to seasonal fishing sites to bring in more income to the household and would go themselves as well. Boats of four, six, or up to twelve men would row from areas such as Bolungarvík which were first and foremost close to fishing grounds and/or areas such as Norðfjörður which had good landing conditions.

Often when the crews went on their seasonal fishing trips one woman followed and her job was to take care of the crew members. She and the land crew members, the land men, would, for example, prepare for fishing and process the fish for storage. In Bolungarvík these women were referred to as "fanggæsla" which means she who guards the catch. Although she was not formally one of the crew, she received a small part of a share of the catch; in Bolungarvík she received the largest fish of each fishing trip.

On the east coast it was common for fishermen from the northern fjords to move to the southern fjords in the beginning of the year and go back to the north in the spring. Men went from farming areas all over Iceland to the coastal areas seasonally. The trip to the fishing site could take many days and could be dangerous in bad weather. To get to these fishing sites they commonly had to walk long distances. When the men went away to a fishing site for the season, sometimes in another part of the country, the women generally managed the farms. Icelandic women therefore have a long history of running the household on their own for long periods of time, and of working both inside and outside while the men were away. Thus the ideal division of labor between men and women was often hard to maintain.

Socially and economically, the peasants were a heterogeneous group. The distribution of wealth depended on the ownership of and

access to land. There were four major categories of people having some access to land: Landowners, peasants with independent households but tenants, their sub-tenants, and cotters (crofters), who commonly kept at least a garden. Even though there was heterogeneity and differences in wealth and size of farms, it can hardly be argued that an Icelandic upper class existed, nor was there a class of Icelandic aristocratic families. This may partly explain why Icelanders tend to think of themselves as a nation where wealth differences are small. Such differences are considered irrelevant in the analysis of Icelandic history; scholars and laymen alike speak, rather, of Icelanders in the past as free-holding independent peasants.

The people yet to be mentioned were the farming servants and the poor paupers who did not have any access to land. In the middle of the nineteenth century the Icelandic servant class was relatively large compared to other countries in Western Europe. They were legally obliged to commit themselves as domestic servants on a year to year basis. If a servant wanted to change farms at the end of a year's service, he or she had to get a permit from the local pastor, who would report on his or her behaviour. The pastors visited the farms regularly and monitored the behaviour of servants as well as other members of households. Servants by definition did not have their own household and only in extreme cases were they married, although this changed a bit towards the end of the century. These people made up 23 percent of the population in 1801 and 26.7 percent in 1880. If we include only those fifteen years or older in the latter part of the nineteenth century, then servants were 35 to 40 percent of Icelanders of working age and thus

have a major part in our analysis of the peasant social structure (Jónsson 1981:7; Gunnlaugsson 1989).

The farming servants for the most part did not reproduce themselves as a group as was common in other parts of Europe. Although some of them had children, they were generally not allowed to marry and reproduce. There were no laws that directly banned the marriage of servants, but there was an indirect obstacle: marriage remained dependent on the permission of the local pastor and crown officials who were not likely to give it to young or hard-working people. People were more likely to get permission if they were older, indeed too old to have children. In spite of the fact that they could not reproduce as a class, there were more than enough of them. The children of farmers could not all stay on the farm, and the farmland could not be divided. Moreover as tenure was very unstable children would usually not establish a household in the same farm where they had been raised. The grown up children with no access to land had no other possibilities than becoming servants. This was increasingly the case in the latter part of the nineteenth century with the substantial population increase. Consequently most servants came from parents who had not been servants and many had siblings who were not servants.

Although servants were not supposed to establish a family and could not form their own household, some of them did have children with them in service in the latter part of the nineteenth century as is evident if we take a look at the censuses from 1860 and 1890. In fact the number of illegitimate births rose in the latter part of the nineteenth century (Gunnlaugsson 1993). There were also a great number of foster

children at this time, since putting children in fosterage with a relative or a friend, to learn good work habits, was a very common practice.

In 1860 when the two communities studied were still basically farming areas, there were 51 household in Norðfjörður parish (Skorrastaðarsókn) and 44 households in Bolungarvík parish (Hólssókn). In the censuses from 1860 no households are described as living only from fishing. At this time there were ten children of unmarried servants in Norðfjörður parish, one with married servants and six children of three widowed women servants. In Bolungarvík there were seven children of unmarried servants. At this time there were 40 foster children in these two parishes.

In 1890 in the Bolungarvík parish (Hólssókn) there were 63 households in which there were ten children of servants. Two of them had married parents, two were living with their unmarried fathers, and six with their unmarried mothers. In Norðfjörður at this time there were 53 households and seven children of servants; one of married parents, two with unmarried fathers, and three with unmarried mothers. At this time there were 33 foster children in these two parishes, and eight other children 12 years old or younger living in various households as "workers" ("léttadrengrur" and "léttastúlka") having been temporarily placed there for payment because of poverty. I have not traced the background of these children. Recent studies in other communes indicate that some foster children resided with relatives, including aunts, uncles and grandparents. This may also have something to do with how the children were categorized by the census taker. In his recent study of foster children, Gunnlaugsson (1993) found that in some cases their parents also lived in the household but the children were registered as the

foster children of the head of the household. This raises questions regarding attitudes towards parenthood. Were you not regarded as a real parent if you did not have your own household? The high number of foster children can also in part be explained by the many people who had to give up farming as their family was dispersed in many farms and parents returned to servanthood.

Iceland consisted of twenty regions ("sýslur") which were further divided into the smallest municipal units ("hreppur"). These numbered about 170 and almost corresponded to the parish. There were usually around 20 farms in each municipality and each household paid taxes to the municipality. The municipality in which an individual was born was responsible for his or her welfare, so that if people were very poor and could no longer run their own household they would be moved to the municipality in which they were born. Married women would usually be moved to the municipality of their husbands. There the husband and wife would commonly become servants on two different farms, that is if they were still young enough to work. The woman would be able to keep a young child with her but older children would be auctioned to those farmers who were willing to take them for the lowest sum of payment from the municipality. This is why the authorities would rather not have poor women give birth in their municipality.

In her biographical account Jóhanna Egilsdóttir (Gröndal 1980) remembers the story of a woman servant in the southern part of the country who became pregnant. When it was about time that she should give birth to the child, the farmer for whom she worked took her from municipality to municipality, travelling on horseback for days without resting until they finally came to Reykjavík and from there he took her to

the nearest village of Hafnarfjörður where the child was finally born. He did not want a poor child to be born in his municipality and become a burden there.

3.3.1. Production Relations in Nineteenth Century Iceland

In rural Iceland, production, reproduction and consumption were organised around the household and family. Consequently the household was also the main employer in the country. Gunnlaugsson (1988) has emphasized the importance for the local and central authorities of keeping families under control and maintaining household productivity as high as possible while keeping down unemployment. Access to land either through renting it or owning it was, as already mentioned, a prerequisite to independent living and the establishment of one's own household and family. Already in 1490 laws stipulated that those who did not have access to land were not allowed to marry and establish their own household but should seek domestic service for a year at a time (Gíslason 1990:45). However people could buy a license which allowed them to move where they wanted and sell their labour on different farms. The cost of the license was higher than that of establishing a farm and very few people could afford this, even fewer women than men. Thus there were more men than women who were casual laborers, and also more men who worked as casual laborers but in fact did not have the license (Jónsson 1981:11).

In 1783 stricter laws were passed making it impossible to buy the license. After these changes in the law, even peasants' sons 18 years and

older, except if they were working for their parents as servants, had to hire themselves out on other farms for a year at a time. Only a few could get exemptions from this. Those who did not follow this law were commonly punished. In 1863 servants were able to buy a licence to become workers but for a fee which was almost as high as a year's salary. In 1894 the license became much cheaper. However the laws regarding the servant bondage were in effect until 1907, although increasingly broken after the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Since the domestic servants could not get married, there were a great number of unmarried people in the country. In 1770-1800 only about 47 percent of women were married. In 1880 however the number had gone down even lower to 39,8 percent (Gunnlaugsson 1987:20). Farming households were, with rare exceptions, headed by men who were responsible for the financial side of the farm and the finances of the household. Wives had a defined area of management within the household and were responsible for certain activities, in particular housework and taking care of cows. All women had to learn to make food from milk and clothes from wool. Women also prepared the grass fields, collected fire material, and made shoes as well as participated fully in the haying in the summer. In the fall they had to prepare food for winter storage. All clothes were made at home. Wool work, such as spinning and knitting, took a great deal of time, and all the household members had to finish as much as they could before Christmas to bring to the merchant to be able to get merchandise that could not be produced at home. Besides doing their own work women did men's work when the men went away fishing. Many homes were without men for the whole fishing season when of course women did their work (Vigfúsdóttir

and Jóhannsson 1991). J. Ross Brown wrote the following after visiting the pastor's household in Þingvellir 1862:

The pastor's family appeared to be composed entirely of females. Like all the Icelandic women I had seen, they do all the work of the establishment, attend to the cows, make the cheese, cut the hay, carry the heavy burdens and perform the manual labor generally. This I found to be the case at all farm houses. Sometimes the men assist, but they prefer riding about the country or lying idle about the doors of their cabins.... But I think the civilization of Iceland is very much like that of Germany in respect to women. They are not rated very high in the scale of humanity. Still, overworked and degraded as they are, the natural proclivities of the sex are not altogether obliterated (Ross Brown 1867:437).

Men did sheep rearing and fishing. Although men had more responsibilities in outside work, they would also help in wool work in the winter and taking care of and repairing tools. Based on interviews with the oldest people, I have a reason to believe that the division of labor was less important on the poorer farms: "One just did what had to be done..." was a common answer when I asked people who had been raised in poor and small households about the sexual division of labor. Moreover where there were fewer men than women, women would be more likely to do what had been defined as men's job than of men doing job's defined as women's jobs. There is evidence to show that this was true for fishing activities as well. When discussing this question with people who were raised in larger households they explain how important it was that women did not do men's work and even more important that men did not do women's work in the house.

At this time there was little division in the daily labour between the peasant's family and the servants (although this varied according to the economic standing of the household), but there were clearly defined ideas regarding the sexual division of labor. Both the division of labor between servants and masters and between women and men varied according to such factors as the economic standing of the household, size of households and the proportional number of men and women. There were always more women than men working as servants on the farms since men had other possibilities, such as being seasonal laborers. According to Jónsson (1981) the ratio of men servants to women servants was 77/100 in nineteenth century. However, it should be taken into consideration that the number of women in the population was somewhat higher. The largest percent of landless workers not tied to the servant bondage was in the north west where people may have seen possibilities in the fishery.

Female farm servants were generally paid less than half of male servants' wages (Erlendsdóttir 1977). Women servants had longer working day than men servants and other household members. They had to get up earlier than other household members, and when men servants retired after a days work, the women servants had to dry and repair their clothes. Each woman servant had a certain male servant whom she served. The male servants, like other men of the household, thus had women serving them, such as pulling off their wet boots and cleaning and mending their clothes. This practice was common into this century. Women who did men's work did not get men's pay. Briet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir said 1888, in the first open lecture held by a woman in Iceland:

It cannot be fair that the woman servant should not have more than one-third of the salary that the man servants has, however hard working she is, and even though she often does the same work he does, as is common in the countryside in the summer. And besides the girl has to do other jobs above what man has to do, both in the morning and evening and on Sundays when he takes a rest. Then she has to take care of the cows, and sheep, and besides this she has to pull off his clothes in the evening and even take off his socks and shoes, while he lies back smoking his pipe. Then she brings him everything dry and ready in the morning, while she has to put on her clothes as they were the evening before. In the summer she has to use part of her free time, and sleeping time, for this service, and for this she gets no appreciation and only criticism that the service is not good enough (Bjarnhéðinsdóttir 1888).

In 1916 a young woman sued her former employer for firing her for not wanting to do this kind of service. Her argument was that she had been hired to work in the hay and that she needed the free time to serve herself and her young daughter. She won the case and he had to pay her a fine. It shows how the farmers had lost their stronghold over their subjects that this practice could no longer be demanded from the young women servants. This was of course because they were by this time able to get other work by the seaside and could leave if they did not like the work conditions.

In order to get a clearer picture of the position of women in peasant society we have to keep in mind the social differentiation which existed among them. We cannot accept the ideal image of the free holding peasant and of the peasant society as an egalitarian one. Kristmundsdóttir (1991) argues that in cultural terms, "Icelandic society

was a homogeneous one and socially egalitarian..." It may have been so in the cultural construction of Icelandic national identity at the time, but this does not mean that Icelandic peasant society was an egalitarian one, as we have shown that differences in social position based on such factors as access to land were very important in determining the social position of both men and women. Thus I cannot agree with Kristmundsdóttir when she maintains that education and not wealth was the more important determinant of social status (Kristmundsdóttir 1991). If we accept uncritically the social categorisation of the time then we must ignore the fact that almost 40 percent of the population (the farming servants - who were becoming more numerous in the latter part of the nineteenth century) were not allowed to establish their own family. When talking about women in the farming society of the past it is not enough to include only the housewives of the well-to-do households.

According to the Farming Laws of 1722, women who did men's work should get men's wages. It is however hard to imagine that women at this time were in a position to demand that the law be observed. The wages women received were usually less than half of what men received. It is clear that women participated fully in production of commodities for exchange as well as goods for household consumption in the rural society, but it is also clear that at this time their work was already undervalued. We have seen the under-valuation of peasant women's work took place not only with regard to the difference in payment between male and female servants but also with regard to their different working conditions. Moreover, at the time when the household was the unit of production women were not in control of the products of the household

unless they were widows and therefore heads of households who could act on the outside in the social role of a man.

In 1850 the first laws regarding the equality of men and women specified that women and men should inherit an equal amount from a relative they were equally related to. Before the rule had been that men inherited two-thirds and women one-third. However, married women did not have control over their own property unless they were widows. In 1861 unmarried women could control their own property if they were 25 years old. Hastrup (1985) and Kristmundsdóttir (1991) have argued that in the rural society of the past women based their social status, which was higher than they later had in urban society, on the fact that they were central in the production unit and that they had some managerial power.

Kristmundsdóttir claims that wives on the better-off farms had some managerial power within the household. However, what do we actually mean by managerial power within a household where a man is the head? Moreover, only a very small percentage of women lived in such a household as a wife. Other women lived on small farms with one or no servants to manage or as servants on other people's farms. This is evident from table 6. For example in Bolungarvík parish, we find that in 1860 there were 44 households. Of those households 29 had servants, and of those 29, 12 had only one servant. Thus we see that 27 out of 44 households had one or no servant. Then there were larger households with more than one, two households had three servants, two had four and the largest farmer (and boat owner) had eight.

In the parish of Norðfjörður at this time we find similar numbers. Out of 51 households, 27 had no servants and ten had only one. Six households had two servants and three had three servants. There were at

TABLE 2.

Households with and without servants in Bolungarvík and Norðfjörður 1860 and 1890.

Bolungarvík

	no servants		one servant		two or more		total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
1890	15	34	12	27	17	38	44
1890	26	41	17	26	20	31	63

Norðfjörður

	no servants		one servant		two or more		total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
1860	27	52	10	19	14	27	51
1890	25	47	9	16	19	35	53

this time four households with five or more servants. Thus we see that although many people at this time were in the servant position, we still find many households with only one or no servant at all. Some of those

households were so poor that their members lived in constant fear of losing what they had and becoming servants themselves. This would have meant that their children would be distributed by poor relief among other households.

Thirty years later, in 1890, when there were more households living on fishing in both areas, there were still about the same proportion of households with servants. In Bolungarvík at this time there were 63 households recorded by the census taker. Of those, 24 were said to be living primarily from fishing and 15 from fishing and farming. At this time there were 26 households with no servants, 17 with one servant, and nine with two servants. Eight households had three servants, and three had four or more servants. In Norðfjörður at this time there were 53 households. Of those, 25 had no servants, nine had one servant and another eleven had two; three had three servants and five had four or more servants. The number of servants may have varied according to season.

Although the censuses give us only a limited picture of the past, these numbers at least indicate of diversity of life situations of real women and men. Thus we find that at these two particular points in time separated by thirty years, that women could be categorised in some of the following ways: as housewives of large homes with other women working under their management; as housewives of smaller households with one or two servants, one of whom might be her sister; as a housewife with no servants; as young servants seeing themselves as temporarily there later to become housewives in their own homes; as older servants who had never married and would never have their own household, or who had been married and had become a servant again

because of widowhood or due to poverty; as grown up daughters of the farmer; as foster daughters and as unrelated women being placed there by the local authorities due to poverty.

From the above discussion we can see that one cannot easily argue, as Hastrup and Kristmundsdóttir have, that the position of women in the farming society was generally better than it was later to become, and there is ample evidence to show that gender inequality characterised the social organisation and ideas of the time. Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, who lived from 1856 to 1940 and is best known for her struggle for women's rights says this about her youth in a farm:

The first inequality I noticed was the subordination of the woman. I felt such a great difference in the position of men and women already when I was very young. I remember when I and my brother had been working together outside all day long and when we came in I had to continue work and he sat down to read -and I actually suffered because I was already more interested in books than in working outside.... My brothers were allowed so many things that we the girls were forbidden. They could read and write when they were not working outside, but we had to knit, spin, comb, prepare food, and repair our clothes and theirs.... We were only allowed to serve our brothers (Héðisdóttir 1988:19).

I have yet to find some evidence showing that women's work on the farm was highly valued. Is it not too commonly assumed that, by being involved in production, women achieved higher status? In discussing what he calls the domestic mode of production, Meillassoux points out that "Women's subordination makes them susceptible to two

kinds of exploitation, the exploitation of their labor in that they lose their claim to their product which is handed over to their husbands who take control of it... and the exploitation of the reproductive capacities since filiation (that is, rights over progeny) is always established through men." He maintains that women have not been able to acquire a status based on relations of production. "In fact despite the dominant place with they occupy in agriculture as well as domestic labor, women were not granted the status of producers. Subjected to conjugality which dominates their kinship relations, what they produce enters the domestic sphere through the mediation of a man" (Meillassoux 1975:77).

Icelandic rural society of the nineteenth century has many similarities to Meillassoux's model of "the domestic mode of production"; what he says about the status of women is similar to what we find in the gender roles of the agricultural society of the Icelandic past.

As discussed above, servant men and women could be sent to other farms to work without extra payment and this includes being sent as a crew member fishing. Farming servants ate and slept in the same room as the family and belonged to the household as its members and they commonly shared a bed with some of the children. However, when the fishing villages began to grow in the coastal areas, the household became increasingly composed of the nuclear family only, and hired help became increasingly differentiated from the family. Servants, mostly women, could then sometimes keep their own household, and when they lived in the household, they would at least sleep separately from the rest of the family.

The different regulations regarding the rights and duties of servants from 1746, 1783 and in 1866, which persisted into the twentieth

century, dealt with two aspects of relations within the household: the relations between parents and children, and the relations between the servants and their masters. The main emphasis was on total submission of both servants and children. Children and servants could not, according to these regulations, refuse to do any kind of work, and if they did they could be punished. Servants could not go anywhere outside the farm without a permission. Imprisonment and beating were, according to the regulation, possible punishment both for children and servants who violated the regulations and stories exist of heads of farming households beating their servants. In Icelandic rural society being a servant had a similar status in a household as being a child (Guttormsson 1983; Hálfðánarsson 1991).

Hálfðánarsson has emphasised that service was generally viewed as a part of the process of socialisation; a direct and logical continuation of childhood, instead of being defined as strictly an economic activity (1991:16). Being a servant was not seen as an economic activity, but rather as a stage in the normal life cycle towards adulthood (Hálfðánarsson 1991). According to Hálfðánarsson "servants were treated as children, irrespective of their age, maturity or physical stature" and he argues that the reason for this was that "according to the idealised model all peasant sons became peasants in the end, thus making peasanthood synonymous to adulthood" (Hálfðánarsson 1991:17). Although for many being a servant was such a stage before their marriage, for a great number of people, especially women, it was a permanent position. Others moved back and forth from having access to some land to being servants when they were in too much debt to keep the farm going.

Moreover, servant women had very little chance of protecting themselves or of claiming rights against rape by their master, and pregnancies of female servants did occur. Servants were almost like the property of the head of household to which they belonged. A regulation accepted in Alþingi in 1722 regarding the punishment of servants said:

Whenever a head of household dislikes the work of insubordinate servants, or if they have in any way done him harm or not obeyed him, then the head of household (húsbóndi) or his wife are free to beat servants, whether it is with the hand, with a whip or a rope, but without hurting or harming in any way (Cited in Guttormsson 1983).

The heads of the household were on the other hand required to provide the servants with clothes and food according to the economic standing of the home and according to common practice in the country. They were required to help the servants when sick and give them time to practice religion, also to keep their clothes clean. They should also pay them at the correct time and not make them work too hard or keep them awake working too long. In the 1866 regulation there are some improvements in servants' rights such as in working hours (Vigfúsdóttir and Jóhannsson 1991).

In 1808 people were forbidden to move to the coast except when they had enough land to carry one cow, six sheep and a small garden. In 1888, as a response to a great increase in coastal dwellings, laws were passed which meant even greater restrictions on coastal residency and on the freedom of servants. The movement of poor people to the coast was a highly debated issue in the Alþingi at the time and was considered a

serious social problem. A year earlier a farmer had put forward a bill in the parliament for a new law regarding landless people. In his supporting document for the bill he expressed concern not only for the economic consequences of coastal residency but the moral consequences as well. He says that cotters are one of the major economic problems of the nation, and then continues:

But then there is the most important side of this issue and this is the moral side, the impact of cotters on industriousness and on our entire national culture. Many people have in the last few years moved from the farming areas to the coastal settlements, both as servants and as free peasants, who have left farms and farming, and in such a way spent the wealth they had in a short time. They have lost the ability to work - that which they knew of farm work, and in this way many children grow up in idleness and debility which becomes the basis of everlasting wretchedness (feebleness), which, sadly to say, runs in families (Alþingistiðindi, 1887, C).

The main argument of the farmers was that the establishment of maritime settlements cost them their supply of cheap labour (Jónsson 1972; Gunnarsson 1980; Jónsson 1981; Gunnlaugsson 1988; Magnússon 1990). But this was not the sole reason why farmers fought against these settlements. Bad years in fishing had devastating effects on the increasing numbers of vagrant laborers otherwise supplementing their incomes by fishing. The consequences often hit the peasants and landowners as well, as crowds of landless paupers who took to the road as beggars and drained municipal services for the poor. These services were financed by the peasants who were for the most part poor themselves (Magnússon 1990:25). Social and economic crises were

explained by many as caused by the irregular life led by the landless coastal dwellers and their lack of moral standards. These people who lived together and had children without being married, because they were not allowed to, threatened the social structure of the time.

Landowners thus opposed the settlement by the sea. They wanted to keep the flow of seasonal labour between farming and fishing under control. As Hálfðánarsson has pointed out in his recent doctoral thesis: "for centuries the Icelandic elites had attempted to bar the growth of an independent working class in the country, which had, in turn hindered the development of the fisheries and contributed to the total domination of agriculture" (1992:13). However, he maintains that seeing this only as a means to guarantee cheap labour is too limited and functional an explanation and that the social legislation was neither simply a conscious effort to preserve a certain social structure nor indeed an effective tool for social control. He sees these laws as what Pierre Bourdieu calls strategies of reproduction or the rules or practices that enable the dominant classes to preserve their predominance.

It is important to take into consideration that with population increase in the latter part of the nineteenth century more and more people, especially women, were stuck in the servant's position. There was an increase in population during most of the century although a slow one. The population of was 47,240 in 1801 but had increased to 72,445 in 1880. There was a slight decrease in the population in the 1880's caused by the emigration to America and a bad case of measles which many people died of. The population was 70,927 in 1890 after which it began to grow again and has since been over 1 percent a year allowed by the new possibilities of livelihood by the coast. The population increase

in the nineteenth century occurred without any major changes in the economy or the introduction of new technology. Farms were increasingly occupied by two or more households and those who had no access to land became servants or moved to the coast. This increase in population was not caused by a higher birth rate, as women were having fewer children, but instead by a lower death rate, especially of infant mortality. Infant mortality had been very high in Iceland and was 23,9 percent in 1881-1885, but had decreased to 10,1 percent in 1901-1905 (Gunnlaugsson 1993, Tölfræðihandbók 1984).

The peasants, especially the smaller tenants, were in a difficult position. The smaller landholders, who were themselves poor tenants of landowners, had an interest in keeping the poor out to survive themselves and keep their farm. As was discussed above, many of the smaller outlying farms had a high turn over of tenants who, because of their economic standing would move back and forth between landlessness and small holding (Gunnlaugsson 1988).

In contrast to what the nationalist rhetoric has taught us and that has influenced the writing of many historians and other writers as well, the Danish colonial government forced the Alþingi to move the labour legislation in a more liberal direction, thus expressing doubts about the rationality of the traditional life cycle system. In spite of an uneven distribution of wealth and access to land, all peasants, whether tenants or landowners, as heads of household had equal rights and duties toward their servants and toward the state. In spite of the differences among them the language had no built in status markers; all were called "bóndi", and thus in the ideology of the time the differences between landowners, tenants and subtenants were partly hidden, and the term "bóndi" never

had a negative connotation. Servants and landless fishermen were however excluded as they had no access to land.

3.4. Summary

In summary, by the middle of the nineteenth century, there was increasing pressure on the land because of population growth. It was becoming hard to subdivide the legally assessed farms further and the servant group became more numerous. As a result people increasingly moved to the coastal areas attempting to live from fishing. In the latter part of the century the fishing villages also served as a staging area for transatlantic migration. People stayed in them until they were able to leave the country. About 15,000 people emigrated to Canada and the United states between 1870 and 1910. In spite of the massive movement of people to the coast, to make their living from fishing, however, there were no real changes in the technology of the fishing industry until the end of the nineteenth century (Hálfðánarsson 1991, Magnússon 1985). In other words it is not enough to look at the changes in market relations, technology and increased merchant activity in the fishery to understand the populations movements of the time. Changes were occurring within the peasant society as well, particularly the increasing population, the increasing number of servants, and the increasing difficulty of total control which played a big part in the massive migration of people to the coastal settlements.

Part II

The Growth of Coastal Settlements

Chapter 4

Industrialization and Urbanization

4.1. Introduction

I have outlined above some of the characteristics of the Icelandic farming society relevant to this study in order to show from what kind of a society fishing settlements developed. In the last decades of the nineteenth century the coastal settlements grew substantially. There was at this time a great increase in the fisheries and in the processing of salted fish. Merchant capitalism was on the rise and the relations of production were changing with wage labor becoming more common. However, some of the fishing and processing continued to be organised by the household which would sell finished products to the local merchant. Thus we can say that there existed a proto-industrial stage in some areas. In some areas there were large sailing vessels, but in the two areas of this study, Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður, the fishermen

fished primarily from small six oared boat and the boats remained small for a relatively long time even though the fishing increased greatly as well as the village population.

During this time crucial changes occurred in Icelandic society as a result of the changes in the fisheries. Ownership of boats and equipment changed hands. The increasing duration of voyages and new processing needs affected work conditions as well as family life. Changes in the development of villages were shaped even more by these processes. As mentioned above, in chapter three, the increase in the population was not caused by higher birth rate but rather by a lower mortality rate. In fact the birth rate went down in the first decades of the twentieth century and did not rise again until after the Second World War. The lower infant mortality rate was an important aspect in the population increase, caused by increased knowledge of caring for infants and higher standards of hygiene.

The fishing village is the site where the social reproduction and the infrastructural base of modern fishing is located in Iceland. It is around the fishery that "modernisation" took place in the first decades of the twentieth century, until the center of gravity shifted totally to Reykjavik. Icelandic industrialisation occurred late, if rapidly; in the 1930s Iceland was basically an agricultural society, and the majority of the population were primarily occupied in activities related to agriculture. During and after the "blessed war", as the Second World War is often called, great changes occurred in fishing villages as a result of the war related economic boom and of war profits. Iceland was occupied by Great Britain in May of 1940. One year later the British occupation army were replaced by an American occupation army.

During the war, men were able to get regular wage labor working for the occupying forces, and for which they were paid in cash. At this time new consumer goods were for the first time available to the working class. As a result of this economic boom there was a major growth in the fishing industry as well as in other industries, and Icelanders stepped into modernity and consumerism. They built new and bigger houses filled with new consumer items and household appliances; houses which were taken care of according to new standards and new notions of hygiene.

In this section we will examine the process of industrialization, the development of wage work, and how the changes in the economy affected women's participation in wage labor. Chapter four will first consider the general developments in the country while in chapter five we will take a look at how these developments manifested themselves in the two villages, Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður. Under what conditions did women enter wage labor and how did this participation change from the processing of salted fish on the pier to freezing plants? What kinds of changes in gender construction were simultaneously taking place in the reproductive sphere of household and family?

4.2. The General Developments of the Fisheries

From 1880 to 1910 the penetration of capitalist relations proceeded, with the fisheries as a leading sector in the capital accumulation process. As a "proto-industrial stage" however, the rural character of production relations still prevailed as an essential element of

the social structure. The first steps toward industrialization of the fisheries came in the beginning of the twentieth century with the increasing number of small boats with engines; sometimes these were just added to the older boats. The boats then began to grow larger and became more numerous. They could go further than before and navigate in worse weather, and new fishing techniques were developed. Although an engine was first put in a boat in Iceland in 1902, it was not until 1930 that the boats and ships were generally mechanised. Mechanisation occurred first in the south and latest in the eastern fjords. Although the fisheries set the pace for the industrial breakthrough it was technologically and socially a heterogeneous occupation, since the increasingly larger ships coexisted with small motor boats.

When production was organized around the household, the division of labor was according to age and sex. Men, women and children worked together as an economic unit to produce their livelihood. Within this unit, the bearing and rearing of children as the production of goods and services were integrated aspects of women's roles. Together with a new organisation of labor came a new notion of family in which women were increasingly seen as primarily wives and mothers and men as breadwinners and family wage earners. Women's work continued to be valued lower, as it had been in the peasant society. Simultaneously the cultural image of the good housewife began to emerge with the emphasis on the caring mother. Kristmundsdóttir (1989) has shown how this image was used by women themselves in their fight for suffrage and in the women's slate which appeared in the first two decades of the century. They claimed that they had something

special to contribute as women, and as mothers, to the welfare of the society (Kristmundsdóttir 1989:83-84).

One characteristic of work in the new villages was that it was only seasonal and thus very unstable for both men and women; moreover, there was not enough work in wage employment for all and therefore unemployment was a constant threat. There were in particular a limited number of jobs available for women, which may in part be explained by the fact that men saw cheap female labor as a major threat to their wages and even their jobs. Unions excluded women from membership so women had to establish their own unions. This was clearly expressed in the labor union in Reykjavík. In a meeting in the labor union of workers in Reykjavík ("Dagsbrún") in 1906, one member suggested that a chapter for women within the union be established. He argued that it was only fair that women earned two thirds of men's salary because they generally produced less but if they did the same work that men did, they should be getting the same wages. This suggestion received both negative and positive responses. But the suggestion to have a committee to find out what to do to better the conditions and wages of the women who were day laborers in Reykjavík was rejected by 84 votes against 26. One of the men who argued against it said that having women and men work together would spoil the morality which unfortunately was already not high, where women were working side by side with men, and he said that the thought was unnatural and perverted and that if this were to be accepted, Iceland would be the only country in the world besides Russia with this kind of a system (see Guðmundsdóttir 1983).

The man, Pétur G. Guðmundsson who had proposed creating a women's organization within the union described this incident later in his

life in an article published in a worker's magazine of 1943. There he says that his proposal was not received with much enthusiasm. He included a part of a speech of an opponent:

I suggest that organization among women should be delayed this year..... No proper man would be the leader of such a society. Besides there is no need for such women's society for the time being, because it would prove to be true that if women organize into an organization and work for a certain amount then housewives will be unable to get women to work for them, for example in drying fish or in washing clothes. I suggest that women's work on the harbour should be limited or abolished in some way or another, for example by men refusing to work with women in the harbour (Guðmundsson 1943).

We see here in this quotation that it was not only seen as immoral for women and men to work side by side but that the men of the union feared that if women's wages were raised as a result of organization they would no longer accept the position of servant. At this time women and men all over the country worked side by side in the pier carrying heavy bags of salt and coal on their backs. It was work which was considered by many to be too hard for women and old people. Moreover even though men and women were organizing into a union in Reykjavik, it was not until much later that unions were established in many of the smaller coastal villages all around the country.

Although men did not want women to organize as wage laborers along with them, women's participation in wage labor especially in fish processing, was a fact. Faced with very big differences in wages, some

women did organize in order to raise their wages. In 1914 the leaders of the suffragettes in Reykjavík organized a meeting with some working women and the first union of women workers was established and named "Framsókn", meaning "moving forward". One year earlier in 1912, women who worked in fish processing in Hafnarfjörður, a small fishing village nearby, had gone on strike to demand higher wages. At this time they had 15 aurar per hour, but were demanding 18 aurar for day time work, five more for work done from five p.m. to 11 p.m. and ten more aurar after that. For work on Sundays they wanted 30 aurar (there are 100 aurar in one crown). Men already had 30 aurar per hour for day time work, and seven aurar more for work from seven p.m. until 11 p.m.; after 11 p.m. and during the night work they were already getting 50 aurar per hour. These striking women got what they demanded and thus the first organised strike by women working in fisheries was successful (Sigurðardóttir 1985). At this time women who were hired for a day at a time but were domestic servants were paid only five crowns per month. If they were sent to work in fish processing, or for other work on the pier it was not for these 12 aurar per hour but for their monthly salary, and then the head of the household to whom they belonged received their salary (Egilsdóttir 1945).

The 1920s were generally prosperous in Iceland. Prices for fish were relatively favourable on the foreign markets and one fishing town after the other came into being. From the beginning of the century until 1930's, salted fish had been the main export of the nation and most of the fish was sold to southern Europe. This growth in the fisheries ended, however, around 1930 because of diminishing cod combined with the international depression and Icelandic fishing was hit by an economic

crisis due to a falling prices. Unemployment grew and women lost their jobs in the processing.

In the latter part of the 1930s and during the second world war there were decreased sales in the Mediterranean, and the sale of iced and dried fish to Britain increased. Due to these changed situations abroad, new markets were found and the fishing industry went through a drastic restructuring. The industrialization of fish processing began in the late 1930s with the introduction of freezing plants in which fish could be processed in large quantities and stored before being sold. Soon new processing techniques were introduced and after this, especially after the war, the freezing plants became more numerous. The 1930s was also a decade of social turmoil, where the conflict between classes gained a political shade. The labour movement was characterized by strikes and was met with heavy resistance from employers and local authorities. In short this was the decade when modern class boundaries became more clearly defined in Iceland (Magnússon 1985). At this time at least some of the women who worked in the new freezing plants in Reykjavik were defining their position in terms of class, as can be seen from a newsletter published by a "few factory girls" in May of 1933. In this newsletter the factory girls protest the establishment of a state police which they fear will be used against the working class. They demand the same salary as men for the same work, but emphasize their class status as primary. They say:

Girls and women, we who work in the production in this country, we who have husbands, fathers, and sons who put their life forward to produce, we do not only have the right to demand but it is out duty to familiarize ourselves with issues

concerning our class interests. But it is not enough to learn, we have to become active participants in the class struggle for a better life and against the lowering of wages (Fiskstöðvarblaðið 1933).

They demanded the same salary for the same work, but they had to wait for thirty years for this demand to be met. About getting the same salary for the same work as men they said:

In the society we live in it is accepted that the woman does not get the same wage for her work as the men, even though she stands and works side by side with him all day long doing the same work and even faster than he does. It is for example common in the fishery that girls take the fish from the boats and throw it on to the cars and stack the fish for the same salary as when they are processing fish for 80 aurar per hour. Then the men come and take over and work this for 1,36 crowns per hour. Often the girls work very fast and are praised by the inspector. The praise does not cost anything and it pays because many then try to work even faster. ... Our demand should be the same wage for the same work, we have to demand this when we are used for such work, which is in many cases dangerous for our health, that we should get same salary as men or 1,36 crowns per hour (Fiskstöðvarblaðið 1933).

The change here described of industrialization of the fish processing and the coming of freezing plants did mean new work opportunity for some women. However unemployment was high as a result of the depression, and, as with the loss of markets for salted fish, many women had their work in the salt fish processing. In these decades there was not much work for women and the little there was continued to

be seasonal. Although more women now became full time housewives, women from working class households and unmarried women always worked for wages when they could.

In the Second World War most of the fish was sold iced to Britain, but before this time the most common forms of processing had been salting, drying, smoking and canning. After the war there was a new period of growth based on war profits, characterized by the buying of new trawlers and the development of new and larger freezing plants. Export of frozen fish became most important and the United States was the largest buyer for many decades. With the war profits there was a great economic expansion which brought a higher standard of living as well as increased government services, and with this an emphasis on women's responsibilities in the home. Increased consumerism and less production in the home, especially when coupled with advertising, helped keep the economy going. This was actually the first time in Icelandic history that women in general were removed from productive roles and that we see a clear division between the women's sphere in the household and men's sphere in the labor market. It was at this time that even working class women could stay at home and that housework became redefined and in many ways more complex.

Since 1945, both the volume and the value of the Icelandic catches have increased a great deal. From 1945 to 1988, the aggregate volume of the catch increased by some 380 percent and the real catch value by 590 percent. There are two main reasons for the increased catch volume. First, extensions of the fishery jurisdiction have enabled Iceland to gradually increase its share in the fisheries and other nations have been increasingly pushed out of Icelandic waters. This factor alone accounts

for roughly a doubling of the catch since 1945. Second, new fisheries have been developed (Árnason 1991:16). Paralleling the expansion in jurisdiction, the Icelandic fishing fleet has increased in total tonnage over 300 percent due to a substantial improvement in technology (Árnason 1991:7). In recent times the market has been shifting towards Europe as European demand for fish increased and their own fisheries contracted following the general extension of the fisheries' jurisdiction to 200 miles. At the same time, competition in the United States market for frozen fish products has intensified. European fish markets have become more favourable (Árnason 1991:25).

Employment in the fish processing industry has grown significantly since 1950 due to the expansion of the fisheries following the extensions of the fishery jurisdiction. Following a recession in the late 1960s with high unemployment, expansion was especially pronounced in the 1970s. New trawlers, which were a boost to small villages, were bought with government support, and women were pulled into the labor market in large numbers. With the new trawlers, increasingly fish processing, which had been a seasonal employment, became a stable year around activity. According to Árnason (1991:23) "the fishing industry has grown about 160 percent since 1950. The value of fish exports has risen about 700 percent during the same period."

Small boats have continued to exist side by side with large trawlers. The small boats are individually owned and are run almost as part of the household. The fishermen on these boats do not see themselves merely as wage earners and both they and their wives who take care of the work on land do not keep count of the work in the fishery. On the other hand work on large ships and trawlers has more in

common with regular wage labour. Men are hired and paid in shares according to union and government defined regulations. The ships on which they work are owned by companies which commonly also own fish processing factories.

TABLE 3.

Occupational division 1860, 1910, 1940, 1950, 1980, 1986:

	1860	1910	1940	1950	1980	1986
Farming	79,9	47,6	30,5	20,0	7,9	5,8
Fishing	9,7	15,4	15,9	10,8	5,3	5,0
Fish process		3,1		6,5	9,5	7,9
Other industry	1,5	5,4	14,2	16,3	15,2	14,3
Construction		3,7	7,3	11,5	11,0	10,0
Transport	1,6	4,3	8,7	8,7	7,3	6,6
Commerce		3,4	7,2	9,2	18,8	22,5
Services	7,6	17,1	15,2	11,7	7,2	7,1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

(Tölfræðihandbókin 1984. Hagtiðindi, March 1988)

The economic expansion based in part on the extension of "fishing grounds" to 200 miles in the early 1970s created many jobs for women in Iceland, and there was also a demand for female labor in the growing service sector. Changes in lifestyle, especially increased consumerism since the Second World War, created a need for a higher income, as goods that would have been considered to be extreme luxuries at the beginning of the century are now regarded as necessities. One income is no longer enough to run a household. Women's income is needed not

merely because of the higher consumption needs of the household, but also because the real income of both men and women has declined.

When women entered the labor force in great numbers in the early 1970s, it was at least in part because families needed added income to maintain the new standard of living. It was becoming harder to do this on one salary. At the same time there has been an increased demand for female labour to fill the growing number of "female" jobs in the service sector of the economy. With two members of the family working for a wage, the new standard of living could be met by majority of families. Dependence on consumer goods increased and young people stayed in school longer, by improving the quality of the labor force. The women's movement became strong as a result of the inequality felt by the young women going out to work, who continued to be defined as only housewives and mothers (Kristmundsdóttir 1991). By this time, as will be discussed at greater length later, the housewife image had become so identified with the image of women that it was said that women were for the first time going out of the kitchen and from their housewifery role to the production sphere.

Along with the industrialization process in Iceland, the relationship between housework and wage work has changed. As women have become the major source of reserve labor, they have been called out of the home when needed in the labour market, sometimes for only a short while, and sometimes for a longer time, later to be returned back to the home when changes occur again in the economy. This has been particularly clear in the fisheries where employment has often been unstable. There women, and more recently foreigners, have served as the main source of reserve labor.

Today Icelandic women are primarily responsible for housework although men "help" to a varying degree. However, most women are not full time housewives because a large number of them are employed outside of the home as well. In 1936, 36 percent of married women had some income earned outside of the household; in 1970 the figure was 52 percent and in 1982 it was 80 percent. As of 1992, 71.9 percent of all Icelandic women between the ages 16 and 75 are active in the labor force. They work on average 37 hours a week in wage work. About 49.3 percent of Icelandic women are employed full time and work on the average 45 hours a week (Jónsdóttir 1992). Many more women than men are in part time jobs. Men who work full time work on the average nine hours per week more than women, but women working full time have only 60 percent of the wage of men who work full time. There is almost no difference in the wage labor participation of married and unmarried women. Thus we see that in addition to housework, Icelandic women today contribute to household income through wage labor as well. However, their increased participation has mainly been in low-paid occupations in production and in services. The increased education of women has not increased their wages a great deal.

Until 1961 it was legal in some cases, as in fish processing, to pay women a lower wage for the same work performed. In 1961, laws regulating an increase in women's wages in unskilled labor and clerical work were supposed to occur in stages until 1967 when equal pay with men was supposed to be reached. In 1976 new laws specified that women and men should not only be paid the same for the same work but for comparable work as well. Thus women and

men are legally equal in the labor market, but in spite of this law the wage differences are not receding but if anything increasing. That the wage differential is greater in occupations which require skill and education may have something to do with the fact that "comparable" remains to be clearly defined in the laws regarding equal pay for comparable work. There are also remains unequal access to indirect wages.

According to a study done in Iceland 1980 to 1981, the work day of women is no shorter than men when work in and outside of household is combined. The same study showed that men's participation in housework is about the same regardless of whether their wives work full time or part time in the labor force, or are full time housewives. Thus there is not much to indicate that increased participation of women in the labor market leads to a more equal share of work in the home.

The wage labor participation of women (the number of women who earn some income outside of household) is higher outside of Reykjavík. In 1982 women's wage labor participation (earning some income being 84 percent) was highest in the West fjords where Bolungarvík is located, and second highest in the Eastern fjords where Neskaupstaður is located (83 percent having some income outside of household) but lowest in Reykjavík at 76 percent. The working day of unskilled female laborers in production varies but is longest in the fish processing outside of the capital. In 1983 it was 48.3 hours a week on the average (Guðmundsdóttir and Vilhjálmsson 1985).

Women in the freezing plants, like over 90 percent of Icelandic workers, are unionized. They belong to the local workers union in their villages. All occupations in Iceland have unions and union fees are subtracted directly from the salaries. These unions have joined into a larger associations of unions, the largest of these being the Federation of Labour ("Alþýðusambandið") which includes about half of all wage earners. With increased unemployment in Iceland in the late 1980s and early 1990s more women than men of the fishing villages have had to live off unemployment benefits. Unemployment insurance is only available to those who belong to the unions and only those who have worked a minimum of 425 hours in the last twelve months can receive full unemployment benefits which are about the same as minimum wage.⁴ This has caused a problem for women in the fishing villages who are commonly hired part time or seasonally in the freezing plants. Although they have been unionized they commonly have not had enough hours to get full benefits or, if they have been seasonally employed before, no benefits at all.

We have briefly reviewed the major changes taking place in the fisheries in this century, focusing on women's participation in particular. We will now turn our attention more directly to the changes in the fishing villages and consider these developments there.

⁴ In 1993 this amounted to about 48,000 crowns a month or about \$750. Although buying or renting a house in a fishing village is not expensive as there is abundance of housing, the cost of food is high outside of the capital area. To give an indication of how much this is, the price of bread is about 150 crowns, mead is about 1000 per kilo and fresh vegetables and fruits can be many hundred crowns per kilo especially in the winter months.

4.3. The Emergence of Fishing Villages

When growing numbers of people began to settle in the coastal villages, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the villages were commonly viewed as cultureless entities, where people's lives were nothing but drudgery and economic insecurity. This view, which persisted into this century, is expressed in the following quotation from 1911 in an article written in defence of the farming way of life, which some people feared was coming to an end. This article was so well regarded that it was reprinted in two other papers and reviewed and discussed as well. The author says:

In my opinion the economic prosperity not only stands and falls with farming, but it has a great meaning for the nation. The stability in Icelandic life is not to be found by the seaside, in the fishing sites, but among peasants. Imagine a nation without farming: could it exist? And if it could, what would be its condition? Would it not become a fisherman's life, literally speaking, with all its disappointments, all its suffering. And the country? The country of the famous founding fathers - merely a fishing site (Bíldfell 1911:114-115).

In the first decade of this century, fishing became the main occupation of people in many areas. Fishing villages grew extensively and new ones began to form. In this time period Icelandic merchants slowly began to replace the Danish merchants and to invest in boats and fishing gear. These Icelandic merchants still maintained strong connections to Copenhagen as discussed above. They were in many

cases the owners of boats; in some cases a merchant and the foreman of the boat owned the boat in common. But there were also many independent owners of small boats, who bought their equipment from the merchants to whom they sold their catch.

Many of those who moved from the countryside to the villages on the coast were landless farm servants and poor tenants. In these first decades of the century markets for fish were developed and consequently the need for mobile wage labour had increased. Technological developments in both deep-sea fishing and fishing in coastal waters promoted more diverse job opportunities and higher salaries and made it possible for landless people to make a living from the sea. Common law marriages were common in the coastal areas as these poor people in debt or on poor relief had not been allowed to marry and establish their own independent production in the farming areas. Gunnlaugsson (1988,1989) has shown in his studies comparing Icelandic household structure in farming and fishing areas, that the households were smaller in the fishing areas than in farming areas and that both were reduced from earlier levels. The age at marriage, which had risen between 1850 to 1880, now began to fall owing to improved marriage prospects. During the period from 1880 to 1930 the number of families grew faster than the population. The medium size of households became smaller and the marriage age became lower.

In the fishing villages, after 1880, people were able to get married at a younger age as access to land was no longer a prerequisite to marriage. The marriage age had, according to Gunnlaugsson (1993), been one of the highest in any European country in the nineteenth century. This lowering of marriage age occurred at the same time when

birth control methods came to be better known. Moreover, at this time a higher percentage of women had children than before in the peasant society when many women never had any children. In 1856 to 1865 women had on the average five children. In 1886 to 1895 women had four children on the average and if we go to 1926-1935 this number is a little over three. Since women have had fewer and fewer children although there was a temporary rise in fertility along with the economic boom after the Second World War (Tölfræðihandbók 1984).

The number of servants fell in the first decades of the twentieth century in rural areas the farmers became more dependent on the work of their children. In the coastal areas there were also households without servants as discussed above and there were farmers in coastal areas and cotters, many of whom had vegetable gardens. Most of them had only family members to do the work. Some had one or two servants, and many had seasonal workers and boarders. It had been common for children to leave their parents home in the farming areas at around 16 years of age or younger to work in other households, but now it became common for those in the village to send their children to farms in the summer months.⁵ Households in coastal areas did usually not consist of three generations living together under one roof. It was more common for siblings to live together, but since they had paid employment they probably hoped to establish their own household later.

The pressure to change the laws regarding the right to marry and form a family came not only from the capitalist merchants or investors

⁵ Sending children to farms for the summer months continued to be seen as a good for children growing up in towns until in the 1970s. It was considered to be good for them to be close to nature, and to help out with easy tasks to learn to work. I was for example sent to the same farm where my mother had spent her summers thirty years earlier.

who were investing in the new fishery. There was also pressure from the large number of people who envisioned a new and better future for themselves in the coastal areas where they could be more independent and run their own household. The result of the massive migration was not increased poverty as the local authorities had feared (Gunnlaugsson 1988). The service bondage was formally annulled in 1907, but long before that people were moving and the annual bond could no longer hold them. However, attitudes about the relationship between a servant and the head of household took longer to change, and traces of the old ways were to be found in the villages between employer and employed. Moreover, as we will see, servants, mostly women, continued to exist in the villages until the Second World War as this was the only chance they had for a stable occupation.

It was during this time of emerging fishing villages that a negative view of them came about. The landowners were the most dominant group and they were in a position to affect the public view of the coastal dwellers as lazy and lacking in culture. In the independence struggle it was the farming areas that were emphasized as the cradle of good Icelandic culture and language. The coastal areas were more associated with the Danish and Norwegian merchants and the Icelandic merchants who had Danish connections. The landowners, who were the most influential group in the Alþingi, claimed that urbanization would increase poverty and the costs of poor relief, thus creating a problem which the small coastal communities could not solve. The local governments in these coastal communities responded by keeping a very close eye on immigrants and sending many back to their home communes or denying people the right to settle in cottages, thus trying to

keep an equilibrium between an increase in population and the economic development of the villages (Gunnlaugsson 1988:37).

This, as well as the farmers' fear that they would lose their cheap labour to the coast, is where the view of the people in fishing communities originated. This should not however, be understood to mean that the fisheries and the fishing have not had a great impact on the formation of Icelandic cultural identity. Although looked down upon, fishing is also the source of pride for Icelanders when they want to present themselves as heroic and adventurous, being a proud fishing nation.

Until the freezing plants were established, most of the fish was salted and dried. While it was the men's job to cut the fish, both men and women salted it and women washed and dried it. The drying was often done around the household, by the housewife, or in better off households by daughters and migrant women under the supervision of the housewife. Where the production was not organised around the household but by the merchant, they would be hired by him. Credit played an important role in the economy of fishing villages. Fishermen were required to sell their product to the merchant who had provided them with equipment and other goods in the beginning of a season. Most fishermen were in chronic debt to the merchant. The reality experienced by the majority of people moving to the coastal villages was one of considerable economic and social inequality, where boats and landing sites were for the most part owned and controlled by fishermen farmers ("sjávarbændur") and merchants.

Many of the people born in the beginning of the twentieth century whom I interviewed described the merchants' power and their total

dependence on them. As pointed out to me by one of those interviewed, the description of Halldór Laxness in a 1931 novel about the life of a fishing village gives a very clear picture of early twentieth century conditions. The following quotation from his novel captures their stories very well:

And life in the place was like a kind of accompaniment to this absurd weather; its inhabitants went around in circles toiling and moiling through one cycle of bad weather after another; without its leading to anything at all. They seemed to be the victims of enchantment; they had to go far out to sea to catch the silly fish, whenever the weather made it at all possible, cut their heads off, split them, clean and salt them, and pile them in stacks till summer. But however hard they toiled the unending race with the weather roundabout, the result was just as invisible; everything vanished again into the sea from which it was caught, whether men fished in partnership or for fixed wages; the accounts at Johann Bogesen's swallowed everything up. No money was ever to be seen (Laxness 1986:64).

In the discussion of the fishing villages with increased possibilities of wage labor and the changes that occurred, there is a tendency to ignore the fact that Icelandic fishing communities continued to have many of characteristics of a farming society until the second world war. Until then, most Icelanders lived off farming in one way or another, and many of the inhabitants of fishing communities, including those categorized as cotters, kept some animals. Only by taking this into account can we get a more accurate picture of the life and work of

women and their position in the first decades of the century and of the commonalties and differences among them.

Because in these villages there was not much to be bought, food processing from meat, milk and fish was still to a great extent located in the household. The same can be said of the making of clothes for family members which were not bought to any great extent until much later or even after the Second World War. Thus in the larger households the housewife still had some of the managerial powers that she had in the rural society, and she usually organised the work of the female servants. Many of the female servants, although not tied by the service bondage any more, lived in the household where they worked and, in the first decades of the century, this was considered a good option for young women and a good preparation for later marriage. Other servants lived in their own households with their husband and children and worked in the better-off households, cleaning and doing laundry.

Thus in the early stages of industrial development in Iceland we can not talk of a clear division between the public and the private, the work place and the home, and it would be hard to argue, based on the available evidence, that the housewives in general were secluded in their homes as later occurred in a more urbanized society after the Second World War. Women's work and that of men was still to some degree an extension of the household, not a separate sphere of activity. In the better off households, such as that of the merchant in Bolungarvík, who had the biggest household, this was certainly the case as well. The workers ate in the household and the household was not a private sphere at all, but, if anything, more open than others. In the poorer households women were directly involved in production through waged labor; in the

better-off households women were also involved but in a different way in preparation for fishing, preparing lines and baiting, food and clothes for fishermen, and in processing the catch.

Women's participation in the fishery has mainly been in fish processing; washing and drying the salted fish and piling it into stacks. Women have also always been involved in baiting and the preparation of lines although this varies between areas. They have performed these and other jobs as wage laborers, as domestic workers and as fishermen's wives. Women hired as domestic workers on farms would often be sent to work in the fishery without any extra payment at the turn of the century as discussed above. This continued to some extent in the fishing villages as the women continued to be hired as servants in people's homes but went with the housewife or were sent by her to work in fish processing. Many younger women were seasonally employed in the fishery and on a farm in the summer season. This was true for men as well. A foreign traveller from California, J. Ross Brown, described women's work in Reykjavík in 1862 from an outsider's point of view. Reykjavík was at that time a small fishing village:

The women are really the only class of inhabitants except for the fleas, who possess any vitality. Rude, slatternly, and ignorant as they are, they still evince some sign of life and energy compared with the men. Overtaxed by domestic cares, they go down upon the waves when a vessel comes in, and by hard labor earn enough to purchase a few rags of clothing for their children. The men are too lazy even to carry the fish out of their own boats. At home they lie about the doors, smoking and gossiping, and too often drunk. Some are too lazy to get drunk, and go to sleep over the effort. In truth the prevailing

indolence among all classes is so striking that one can almost imagine himself in a Southern climate (1867:437).

The picture portrayed here by an outside observer is in total contrast to Icelandic men's descriptions of themselves as having been hard working throughout history. Besides the fact that Ross Brown is here observing fishermen after they return from the fishing, he may have been observing the resistance of men to oppressive work discipline and ill paid work at a time when they were becoming heads of their own households. Women's greater intensity may on the other hand have meant that they were too desperate to resist, since they had no other options.

The work women performed in the early decades of this century in the fishing villages continued to be defined as less important than men's work, as had been the case in the rural society. But in contrast to the farming communities, they were now "free" to move and leave, and could have their own households and therefore keep some distance from their employer who no longer could control every aspect of their life but only their working hours. This did not necessarily mean more economic security since unemployment was common and work in general seasonal. Women did work side by side with men on the pier not only in the drying of fish but in other work as well, such as carrying coal and salt from the boats for only half of the wages men received (Verkakonan 1945). The working conditions of women were described in a newspaper in Reykjavik in 1880 in the following way:

The women you see there on the pier, with the coal, the saltfish, the sugar boxes, these are the women who belong to

peasants and cotters, the women of this capital who never make trouble, who do not open their mouth although they work like men for only half of their salary... and the water carriers, they are what is left of the girls on the pier, that is to say those who have become poor widows and have become older and tired without having any wealth or any place to stay in their old age, except for the town and the water posts (cited in Egilsdóttir 1945).

Even though certain jobs were classified as women's jobs and others as men's, the sexual division was in fact not very clear when it came to work on the pier in the beginning of the century, not only in Reykjavik but in other fishing villages as well. Fishing had always been defined as men's work, but there have always been examples of women going fishing (Magnúsdóttir 1982). Unlike many fishing areas where women are seen having a bad influence on the catch, their presence on fishing boats was not necessarily seen as negative. In the folk tales collected in the middle of last century we find views about both bad and good influences of women on fishing. In Icelandic folk belief, for a fisherman to dream that he was touching a woman's hair meant good luck fishing, especially in the catching of flounder. Even better luck was ensured by tying a woman's hair to the fishing hook (Kristjánsson 1980:323). Wearing mittens made by an unmarried maid could also help catching abilities, especially if the mittens were decorative and well made. But we can also find negative views on women's association with the fishing. If a fisherman dreamt that a woman was making love with him at sea, then it meant that a storm was coming. In other stories it is enough

just to dream of women, when at sea, to have bad weather the next day.

During the 1920s young women continued to move to the coastal villages in order to get away from their servanthood on the isolated farms. As they were no longer legally bound to farms, since 1907, they could no longer be kept in this position against their will and could move when they wanted. Some of the women who moved to the villages could now get a chance to establish a household with a man or with siblings. However work in fish processing was seasonal, so if they did not want to be servants they would have to move from farming to fishing according to season and a great number of people did this, both married and unmarried. For men there were more opportunities for wage labor in the fishery, primarily as fishermen. For women on the other hand being a servant continued to be the most common occupation at the time in the growing coastal settlements.

Sigrún P. Blöndal the head of a home economics school debated women's rights activities in 1926. She warned that when "...women cut their hair, ride in a saddle, and walk in pants and young girls fill the shops, the telephone and other offices.. but the homes suffer because of the lack of people." In her opinion women should rather hire themselves as housemaids where they can prepare for their proper role in life as a housewife and a mother. Björg C. Þorláksson a women's rights activist rejected this, stating that it was not the women's movement that pulled the women away from the countryside but that housewives of farms may have been exploiting the young girls, forcing them to live by their "lower instincts" and keeping them from expanding their minds, which they desired, and therefore they themselves chose to struggle in villages rather

than suffer on the farms (cited in Vigfúsdóttir and Jóhannsson 1991:167).

In the growing fishing villages there were generally more women than men (Garðarsdóttir 1993). In her recent research on women's migration patterns in the beginning of the century in two coastal villages Garðarsdóttir (1993) shows a great deal of migration from one fishing village to another. Her research indicates that many of those who were moving into the fishing villages came from other fishing villages as well as from farming areas.

The process by which the public and private spheres were divided, was, however, beginning to occur and women were increasingly servicing those who were in direct production instead of being in direct production themselves. By this time many of the women's jobs began to be done for wages, such as domestic service, sewing for other people and processing fish. While domestic service and sewing were still often performed in the household, the fish processing was increasingly done outside of the household. Simultaneously women's work in reproduction became increasingly defined as non-work.

The work places were increasingly gender divided. Certain jobs were formally categorized as "women's jobs" and other as "men's jobs" and each category had a separate pay scale until in the 1960s as already mentioned. Women were only paid about two-thirds of what men were paid for comparable or the same work. This was rationalized by claiming that men were providers but women housewives or would later become housewives.

The move to the fishing villages was not a move from a rural environment to an urban environment in the first decades of the century.

There was an increase in the number of nuclear family households, but the family continued in many cases to organize the production process. Moving to the coastal settlements was an opportunity for poor landless people to break free from the dominant rural farmers and establish their own households. However, seasonal labor migration between farming and the urban occupations continued from the late nineteenth century until the second world war. There were also farmers in coastal villages in the first decades of this century. Many households had servants, but others had only the family members to do the work. Some had one or two servants, and many had seasonal workers and laborers.

4.4. Summary

We can see from the above that by the first decades of the century, wage labor organization was already having an effect on people's lives. The villages must have had new lifestyles not known before in rural Iceland as there had not existed any rural villages before except for small clusters of houses around merchants. However, the settlements by the sea had many of the characteristics of the rural society as will be described in a greater detail when we take a look at the particular villages, and many of the households had the character of rural households. To be sure they were certainly nothing like the households of urban areas later in the century, and this includes Reykjavík, which was by far the largest of the fishing communities at this time (Valdimarsdóttir 1986). Thus the position of women cannot be

attributed to changes associated with being an urban rather than a rural household until the 1930s or after the Second World War. Women in these villages were not socially isolated in small domestic units; they were highly involved in the fisheries and in other production for home and market. Households were smaller than they had been before, but they were less isolated and many households were still important in production. However, the division of labor into men's and women's activities was becoming more clearly defined and so were the private and public spheres. The changes in the Icelandic economy at the turn of the century therefore had an effect on gender.

Women's position was defined in terms of activities performed in the domestic sphere carrying out reproductive activities. This however still included involvement in productive activities. Many households kept a cow or a few sheep, and this meant work in hay making in the summer and meat processing. However the production in the household at this time was increasingly for home consumption and not for exchange. Most households depended on wage earners for their survival as well.

In the new fishing villages, women continued to do the work that had to be performed in the household, as well as take care of children, the old and sick. For a while, in the beginning of the century in the better-off homes, the housewife continued to run the household, take care of housework, and organize the work of servants, although there were fewer than before. Wives of fishermen who did not own boats, and day laborers as well as widows and unmarried women worked, at least seasonally, for wages. They had no comforts and usually had to live very meagerly. They had to combine wage work and housework, and do

their housework after a day of washing the laundry in another home or washing fish on the pier. It is not until the period of much unemployment during the depression that women increasingly lost their work in the fisheries.

During and after the Second World War the freezing plants and trawlers became more numerous but work there remained seasonal and women were pulled out of production and into the non-producing home. Economic conditions allowed more women than before to stay home and take care of the work to be done there. Thus the absence of women from the productive sphere is only a few decades long in Iceland, even though the dominant opinion was that they entered for the first time in the 1970s.

Basically three kinds of villages have come into being in the last hundred years. The first kind are villages that from the beginning had both fisheries and some other kind of industry as well as specialization and merchant activity for example Reykjavík, Ísafjörður, Akureyri, Hafnarfjörður, Seyðisfjörður and some others. Then there are smaller villages that depend mostly on fisheries and have not had much else. The third kind are those that developed in agricultural areas as service centers to the farmers such as Selfoss, and Egilstaðir. There are of course towns and villages which have combined characteristics, but Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður, although serving small farming communities, developed primarily around the fisheries and therefore belong to the second group. Other villages in Iceland are even more centred around the fisheries only, and most of these are smaller with fewer than 1000 inhabitants. Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður are relatively big fishing villages compared to other villages of this category

today, and have in later years developed some other services. It is to these two villages we will now turn our attention.

Chapter 5

Neskaupstaður and Bolungarvík The History of two Different Fishing Villages

5.1. Introduction

We have discussed in previous chapter the general historical background out of which the fishing villages arose, and the main features in the development of the fisheries in this century. We will now take a closer look at the two communities under consideration and examine their different historical development, considering some of the factors which have been important in shaping the particular characters of these villages. Neskaupstaður and Bolungarvík were not chosen because they were more typical than other fishing villages. It would be hard to find the typical village because each village is particular and typical in its own way. Two aspects weighed strongly in my choice of villages. First, the fact that the two villages differ in their historical development in terms of ownership and organization of production and second, because of their different geographical location. In comparison to other fishing communities in Iceland, these could be described as being on the opposite ends of a continuum in terms of ownership and control over the

means of production. Gestur Guðmundsson (1992) has suggested that these two communities combined can be used to construct a model to describe the developments of the Icelandic fishing villages. We will see as well that in spite of the differences, these two villages have much in common. Even though I do not want to argue that Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður are typical fishing villages, they also share a great deal with other Icelandic fishing communities. In both, fishing is the primary activity on which everything else depends, and the local residents are aware of the fact that these are first and foremost fishing villages. This awareness shapes their identity.

5.2. Bolungarvík

Bolungarvík has a long history as a seasonal fishing site. In the Sagas, in "Landnámabók" (Book of Settlers) it is said that a woman, Þuríður, and her son Völusteinn came there from Norway in 930. She was called "sundafyllir" because she is said to have filled the bays with fish by magic. It is said that she put the fish in Ísafjarðardjúp in such a way that one had to row from Bolungarvík to catch the fish. That is why the farmers who live further in the fjord had to have seasonal fishing sites in Bolungarvík. There is evidence of Bolungarvík as a fishing site in twelfth and thirteenth centuries in "Sturlunga". In 1703 there were already 257 people living in the parish all year around. All were living on farms, and none were described in the censuses as living by fishing

only. At this time there were 18 seasonal fishing huts and at least 40 boats there.

When Bolungarvík was a seasonal fishing site the fishermen would mostly come from further in the fjord ("Ísafjarðardjúp") and would stay in huts that were built from mud, wood and rocks. In the first decade of this century people were increasingly settling in Bolungarvík. From 1890 to 1900 there was a population increase from 387 to 562 people. By 1910 the population had doubled, rising to 1021 inhabitants. The landing sites were owned by the landowners of the area and the merchant, and the fishermen had to pay rent to them in order to be able to land their boats. The merchant commonly owned the boat in a partnership with its foreman. The first motor boat came in 1903 and by 1906 most of the boats of Bolungarvík had motors (Jakobsson 1978).

The main fishing season in Bolungarvík was from Easter until the twelfth week of summer. The merchant - fish buyers made agreements with the foremen for an entire season at a time. The merchants often did not know the price they would be able to sell the fish for until the fall when they began exporting the fully processed fish. During the time when the farmers and their servants came seasonally, each crew would stay together in the same hut from year to year. The huts were often named after the foreman who came there every year with his crew. Each hut contained two crews of six men each and a woman. The woman ("fanggæsla"), took care of the food preparation and helped the landmen with preparing lines and processing the fish. The seasonal huts were usually two floors, with storage and baiting downstairs and the people eating and sleeping upstairs, two in each bed. The "fanggæsla" commonly shared a bed with the foreman.

At the turn of the century, Bolungarvík was one of the biggest seasonal fishing sites for rowing boats in the country. According to the description of a man who was there in 1901, there were 46 boats rowing from there, of which 30 were boats that had come for the season, although in these years the seasonal boats were often more numerous (Sæmundsson 1923). Most of the boats had five or six crew members, who fished with both lines and nets. This same year an icehouse was established in the village which was used to freeze the bait and a year later the first engine was put in a one of the small boats. Once motorized, such small open boats were considered to be inadequate and were replaced by bigger boats with deck-houses. By the early 1920s they were already big enough to be going to other parts of the country for seasonal fishery. At this time however most of the boats fishing from Bolungarvík were owned by the villagers.

The location of Bolungarvík was primarily based on being close to good fishing grounds and the harbour conditions were almost impossible. It was very difficult to build docks in the harbour, since the landing sites were unprotected from ocean waves from all directions in the very common high winds. The fishermen, often with the help of another crew, had to pull boats up to nine-ton size up to the rocky shore after each fishing trip and set the boats back in the water before going fishing. These were not only difficult tasks but dangerous as well. If the men did not work well together as a team, a life could be lost. It was only in Bolungarvík that such big boats were pulled this way. It took 53 years to build a breakwater that could last in the bad winter weather in Bolungarvík. As a consequence of these harbour conditions, Bolungarvík could not have large ships until in the late 1930s. They

tried to use the harbour in Ísafjörður, a town near by, but before the road was constructed it was very difficult to get between these two places in the winter months. In spite of these difficulties Bolungarvík was in 1925 one of the largest fishing sites in the western fjords.

In 1891 a man named Pétur Oddsson and his wife Guðný settled in a farm in Bolungarvík. They lived meagerly and he supplemented his income by going fishing. In 1897 he began to buy and sell fish and three years later he opened his shop in the village. On his sixtieth birthday a man from his village who does not sign his name wrote about this couple in a fishery's journal (*Ægir* 1922). There the author describes Pétur in the following way:

Pétur soon became active as a merchant and in the fishery here, and his shop has been the largest. He has now in the last years been the owner of one third of the motor boats which have gone fishing from here, and has always been the leading member of the community and been trusted by the members of the community..... Pétur has been the most important in any cultural event and in the development of the village and has become known nationally for his activities (*Ægir* 1922:110).

Besides owning many motorboats himself, and hiring the men on these boats, Pétur Oddson owned other boats in partnership with their representative foremen. He was also the biggest buyer of fish and the owner of the biggest merchant company, and he established with others in the community a "bank" and was on its board. Pétur Oddsson and his wife lost all but one of their six children and they died from tuberculosis during the depression in the thirties. At the time some people were moving away from Bolungarvík. Einar Guðfinnsson (mentioned above)

who became the biggest merchant of Bolungarvík, bought all his property and his house for a small price and took over as the most important owner until today. Since Einar Guðfinnsson's death his children and grand- children run all of the major companies of the town. Einar's youngest son was named after Pétur and Guðný who had come to his wife in a dream when she was pregnant. Collectively the children and grandchildren and their spouses are referred to as "Einarsfólkið" in the village.

The depression hit the village hard. Ari is a man who was born and raised in Bolungarvík and is now in his sixties. He is a former fisherman who worked as a crew member on land, baiting and such, but who has in recent years been a floor manager in the salt fish processing plant. Ari described for me the difficult times of the depression years:

I heard my parents say that Pétur Oddsson and Guðný sent some things before Christmas to the houses of those people who they thought were very poor. Because here in the past there was a great deal of poverty and no money. The problem was that the boats were small here and the weather often bad, with strong winds. Then it was not possible to row for fish, and so naturally nothing to be caught. There was no insurance, just the share. Then there came years when there was no fish here and consequently no money. For example in 1931 there was both bad weather and little fishing. That is why those who had some animals or a garden had a better life; then people would at least have some meat and potatoes. But those who did not have this would have to buy or borrow from the merchant. The merchant would let them borrow for quite a long time. He knew if the man could be trusted or not. He would be willing to lend to you if you were a hard working

man and if it was because of reasons beyond your control that you were in trouble.

By the time of the depression many families had settled down in what were formerly seasonal huts indeed by the early thirties it can be said that these seasonal huts no longer existed as such, most of them being used by families all year around. Meanwhile separate baiting huts were built on the shoreline. After the Second World War the seasonal huts disappeared for the most part being replaced by good housing. Ari's father was a fisherman who settled down in a seasonal hut. The family also kept a cow and few sheep in a separate house nearby and had access to some grass fields a short distance from the village. Ari describes how his family lived and the changes which occurred when he was a child:

My father who was a fisherman bought the house in 1932 when I was one year old. Six years passed until they could change the downstairs and make a kitchen since there was no money to be had. The house was about 4 x 6 meters in size and we were eight brothers. There were two in each bed and I slept over the opening for the steps. There was a table there but no chairs. There was a chest for the clothes. When they made the kitchen downstairs they also made a small living room about 4 x 4 meters in size. It was only used for special occasions and when guests came. Soon after my father and mother were engaged he was on herring fishery and bought an organ for her. It used to stand upstairs but was then moved to the living room.... Much was written in the merchants book... There was no water in this house and not in other seasonal huts. It was about 150 meters to the hut where there was running water all year around. But when we got the kitchen we got running water and a sink. But the toilet did not come

until in the early fifties just before I became engaged and moved out of the house. In 1947 they began to build here. After the war money began to come in, people built new houses and the ships grew larger as well, and at this time people's views also changed a great deal.

Einar became one of the best known merchants of fishing villages in Iceland and a model for successful private enterprise. He has often been referred to as the owner of Bolungarvík. After he took over about 40 years ago the town grew substantially. Einar has been characterized both as the patriarch of this village and as the innovator of new technology. He had the freezing plant built and he invested (with the help of the state) in larger ships. He is therefore often thought of as the prime mover behind the great increase in living standards in the community occurring during his lifetime. However, the living standard rose after the war all over the country, and not only in Bolungarvík, as a result of many combined factors. Einar Guðfinnsson is described by those I interviewed as having enjoyed great popularity. Even though he was a serious man he was seen as caring very much about the village and about the welfare of its inhabitants.

Major changes occurred in the village of Bolungarvík during and after the Second World War, such as the new freezing plant that opened with big celebration and a dance in 1941. Ships became bigger as better harbour facilities permitted their entry, and trawlers were brought into the community from the late 1950's. Einar Guðfinnsson and his sons owned not only the freezing plant, but built a big shop and other companies. The construction of the harbour and other public buildings were, however, public projects.

5.3. Neskaupstaður

Neskaupstaður is commonly seen as the opposite of Bolungarvík and commonly is referred to as "the red village" or even sometimes as "little Moscow". There has probably been some fishing in Norðfjörður, the fjord in which Neskaupstaður is located, since the settling of the area. However, even though there was abundant fish, and the fishing grounds nearby, one cannot see fishing as an independent occupation in the census until the 1880s. Before that farmers would fish during a short period of time in the spring and fall and in between farm work in the summer.

Fish was mostly for household use and for sale to those farmers who did not have the opportunity to go fishing. In 1860 there were 19 six oared or smaller boats in the area, only three of them in Nes which later became Neskaupstaður, and the others in the farming areas. By 1869 there were 23 boats and, in addition, some exchanges with French fishermen, who sold the inhabitants of the area fishing equipment for knit wear. It was not until 1876 that the people in Neskaupstaður or in the other villages on the east coast began processing fish for export (Geirsson 1983:15).

Helgason (1983) who has collected some historical data on the area, points out that after the volcanic eruption of Askja 1875 many households had to turn to fishing because there was so much ash on the ground. However, while this may have been one of the factors for the increased fishing, there were others too as we have described above. By this time there were Faeroes and Norwegian fishermen fishing in the

grounds nearby who landed their fish in Nes, and they influenced the local people's fishing methods. Moreover, they showed the inhabitants that there was wealth to be had from fishing. At this time there was also a Norwegian company located in Norðfjörður, catching and processing cod. After 1874 when the salting of fish began, fishing became an independent occupation that many people could make a living from. Already in 1880 there was so much fishing that more people had to be hired than could be found in the area, so people were hired from the south for the summer season. Fishermen and women for processing were moved from the south coast like cattle in the hold of the ships, lying as close to each other as possible. At this time there were no rules or regulations regarding hiring or the wages of workers (Geirsson 1983).

The farmers in the Nes did not like this development of more and more people settling in the area. It was clear that even though most of the new settlers had a few animals, they would be in big trouble if there was not much fish to be had, since most of them would then have to be supported by the municipality causing hardship to the farmers. A report was done in 1887 to show that there were too many people in the area, and to demand that this immigration be stopped and that some of those already there be forced to leave.

At this time there was a discussion in the parliament about the lack of workers on farms caused by the movement to the seaside and emigration to America, and in 1888 there were new laws that attempted to stop crofting. Before, as previously discussed, people had to get the permission of the municipal government to be able to settle down and now in order to get this permission, people had to have, besides clothes for themselves and their family, at least 400 crowns in money or other

valuables. In these times when credit was pervasive, it was impossible for any person who wanted to settle by the sea to acquire this much wealth, since people did not get paid in money but in goods. Those who did not have residency in Norðfjörður commune were suddenly told to leave, and poor people were not allowed to settle there. The population decreased from 106 in 1886 to 79 in 1891. However, this attempt to limit immigration was not successful because a few years later the restrictions were loosened again and the population grew rapidly thereafter (Helgason 1983).

The increase in fishing and in processing of salted fish for export, called for additional workers and thus allowed for the increase in the population of Nes, although for a long time after there were always some seasonal laborers. The first motorboats came in 1905, but they coexisted with the older rowing boats until 1920. At this time hired fishermen were paid a monthly salary and in shares, and the boat owner provided tools and housing. The hired fishermen would commonly live in the boat owner's household. Women who worked in the processing at this time received half of the wages which men received.

In Neskaupstaður in contrast with Bolungarvík it was easy to build docks along the coastline. The majority of households had boats and the dock was like an extension of the household, not separated from it. Most of the seasonal laborers, both men and women, did not live separately but in the households of those for whom they worked.

During the summer season and into the fall was the most important fishing season in this area. From New Years and until May the fishermen would prepare their tools. But as the ships grew larger it was possible to go to other areas of the country in other seasons. In 1917

the fishermen in Norðfjörður first took their boats to other fishing sites for the winter season, especially to Hornafjörður. They would bring a crew from their own town and the fish would be salted and then brought home and fully processed and dried.

There were two and sometimes three dominant merchants in Neskaupstaður in the early part of the century, but they were never as dominant as Pétur Oddsson and Einar Guðfinnsson were in Bolungarvík. Besides buying fully processed fish they also organized some processing. The first merchant was Konráð Hjálmarsson who began in 1883. Sveinn Sigfússon began in 1884 and he was considered "the father" of the village. In daily life he was referred to as "Sveinn borgari" (bourgeois), and he soon became the biggest merchant in Neskaupstaður. The attitude towards these merchants on whom people depended a great deal and who provided them work in many ways paralleled the attitudes toward the old landowners; a servile way of thinking. This can be seen by the description of a man who was born at the turn of the century and worked as a youth on the dock for the merchant. He proudly told me that he had been the first real communist of Neskaupstaður as he had dared to oppose the merchant power, but that naturally he had changed to the farmers party when he himself became a farmer. At the time when he worked on the pier for the merchant, wage labor was new and there was a mixture of thankfulness to this employer for letting them keep their home and anger about the working conditions:

These merchants did this good deed to give people food to eat who could not pay for it sometimes, and then the debts grew. If the farmer came home with something to eat it was because the merchant had done a good deed for him. My foster father

dealt with Sigfús and it did not matter if my foster father could not pay. Everything we produced went to his shop in the fall. I care so much for this store that always gave us food, even though I am not much for these merchants. Even after I began trading with the coop I sometimes would go to this store and buy something little as a small appreciation for having never had to go hungry.

As we can see, he is grateful to the merchant for never having had to go hungry. The same man told me later about working for this merchant in 1917:

One had to work the fish that came in night and day until it was finished. It was slavery. I was 17 years old. We were hired for one month for certain payment and we had to work night and day for this amount. I had been working until 3 in the morning two nights and beginning at 7 am again in the morning. Then I was supposed to work Saturday, Saturday evening and Sunday night. I told them that I could not do this job for nothing. I can do it for a half "night pay". Sigfús (the merchant) said "don't you get paid monthly?" I said "I have worked for it for eleven hours a day." He said "you will just work like my boys. It is not possible to pay both monthly and hourly salary." Then I just left, and when I came back on Monday the manager scolded me. I was not to leave work unless allowed to. People worked Saturday night and until noon next day with no pay. People had no other work than for these merchants and were afraid to oppose them. And they could never work enough to eat and then they owed him money therefore could not stop working for him even if they wanted. But I had more freedom having a good foster father and coming from a farm, so I was less dependent on them. Then the week after I had walked out the manager kept harassing me in front of other workers. He beat up some of

the workers, this small man. The men complained to each other, but there is nothing else they could do.

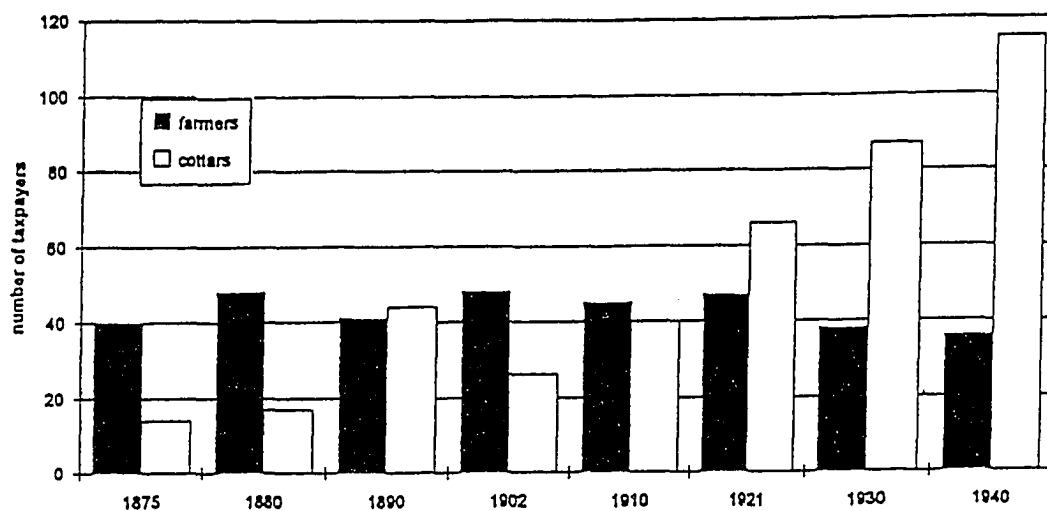
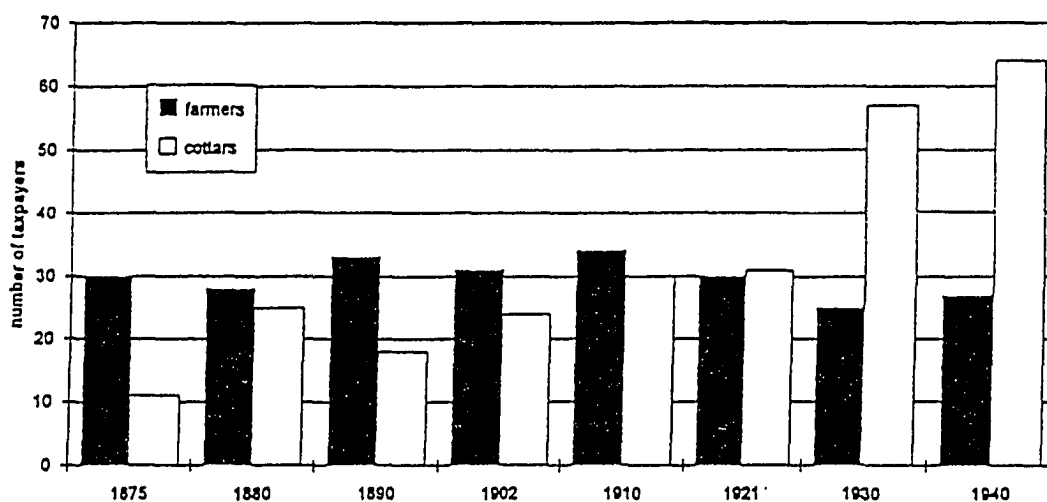
In other words, the working conditions of this early wage work had many similarities to the earlier servanthood, where one could not leave without permission and could expect punishment from the employer. Moreover as under servanthood, people had to work long hours without any extra payment. However, although some attitudes remained from the farming society regarding the work ethic, the organization of production was changing and allowing many landless people to settle in the villages.

5.4. Comparison and Contrast in the Historical Developments of the two Villages

Both villages grew extensively within the first half of the century as can be seen from table 4 below. When we look at these records we have to keep in mind that in order to establish a household in the nineteenth century people had to have access to some land where they could keep a cow and a small garden. In fishing villages like Neskaupstaður and Bolungarvík many cotter's households, categorized as landless in the records, had access to large enough land to keep a cow, a few sheep and to grow some vegetables. Much of the daily work with animal care and the garden was in the hands of the women. Those who did not have any access to land were not tax payers and are therefore not

included here. The number of those categorized by the farm records as having farmland remained fairly stable while the cotters' households became more numerous. This was particularly so in Neskaupstaður where the number of cotters' households grew faster than in Bolungarvík. We see from table 4 that cotters who paid tax became more numerous in both villages in the end of the nineteenth century. In Bolungarvík the greatest increase occurs in the 1880s but in Norðfjörður, as we discussed above, the local government at this time temporarily stopped poor people from settling down there and forced others to move away. However, already in the next decade the number of cotters' households had more than doubled.

During the early decades of the twentieth century the households of both villages were to some extent the corporate unit which the rural household had been, although increasingly employment was sought outside of the home by at least some of the household members. Although many of these new villagers lived primarily from fishing, this was a seasonal activity and could be insecure. Thus work patterns continued to follow the seasons. This meant that most of the inhabitants were unemployed for a part of the year. Since they did not have regular wage labor in the fisheries all year around they had to have other means of making a living. As we can see from table 5 many of those defined as non-farmers in the farming records subsidized their income by keeping animals. More of the households in both villages had sheep, which require less care than cows, and which grazed during the summer months in the surrounding mountains and valleys. Most of the cotters had only one cow or even shared one with someone else, and most had less than twenty sheep.

TABLE 4.**Number of taxpayers in Norðfjörður and Bolungarvík 1875-1940.****Number of taxpayers in Norðfjörður 1875-1940.****Number of taxpayers in Bolungarvík 1875-1940.**

In 1930, when Neskaupstaður had gained the status of a township, 44 percent of the cotter households still had a cow, but only 32 percent had sheep. At this time 70 households in the village kept hens. In 1930 Bolungarvík was not yet formally recognized as a town but among the 57 cotter's households only three had a cow but 45 had sheep. The main difference between the two villages in this regard is that in Bolungarvík there were generally fewer households with a cow but more with sheep.

The information in table 5 indicates some of the contrasts I have described in the two villages. In Neskaupstaður, the household continued to be a corporate unit to a greater extent than in Bolungarvík. In Bolungarvík households depended to a greater extent on the wage labor of their members. In Bolungarvík households also kept relatively more sheep, which require less daily care than cows and can make do with less pasture. In both villages the cotters kept many fewer animals than the farmers, but even so until the Second World War they still had some. Moreover, those living primarily from farming and the cotters, who lived primarily from fishing coexisted in both villages even though farming and fishing areas became increasingly geographically distinct.

We can see from the table 5 on animal husbandry, that in spite of the changing organization of production that came about with wage labor, the households was still a unit of production at the beginning of the century.

Some of the production which took place in the villages was organized by the households and this was true not only with regard to such things as growing of vegetables, keeping of animals, making clothes and processing of food but in the fisheries as well. It was the unit

TABLE 5.

**Animal husbandry among cotters in Norðfjörður and Bolungarvík
1875-1940.**

Norðfjörður

	cotters	cotters owning a cow		cotters owning sheep	
		n	%	n	%
1875	14	3	21	13	93
1880	17	0	0	15	88
1890	44	7	16	25	57
1902	26	7	27	22	85
1910	40	19	48	31	78
1921	66	25	38	44	67
1930	87	38	44	21	24
1940	115	62	54	37	32

Bolungarvík

	cotters	cotters owning cow		cotters owning sheep	
		n	%	n	%
1875	11	3	27	5	45
1880	25	5	20	22	88
1890	18	5	28	18	100
1902	24	3	13	24	100
1910	30	11	37	26	87
1921	31	1	3	28	90
1930	57	3	5	45	79
1940	62	9	15	58	94

which in many cases organized the fishing crew and the drying of the fish which was often done next to the house. Of the two villages, this was especially the case in Neskaupstaður where the dock and the boat were in a sense an extension of the household as is clearly depicted in old pictures of the village. There each boat owner had his own dock where the crew landed and began the processing, the boats were commonly owned by the households, and each had its own baiting- and processing hut and a place to dry the fish. The fish was primarily salted for export and each boat owner took care to process their own fish before selling it to the merchant. The processed fish was paid for in merchandise from the merchant's store. Even though men went away fishing, work and home were not defined as separate entities. Although there were women's tasks and men's tasks, there was not a clear division between the production sphere and the reproduction sphere at this time.

In Bolungarvík, the households were not as independent as in Neskaupstaður since the village had for centuries been a seasonal fishing site. As people began settling in the seasonal huts all year around, fewer households owned their own boat, although some foremen owned half of a boat with the merchant who from early on was dominant. Thus the members of households had to sell their labor, although, as we saw above, many had some animal husbandry and a potato garden to subsidize subsistence needs. Although many households kept their own boats, it was also very common for the merchants to own boats on which they hired crews. In Bolungarvík this was usually the case.

The merchants also hired women to work in fish processing on their pier, washing the fish, salting it and laying it to dry. In the early

part of the century the working conditions on the pier, especially working in the open air of Icelandic climate was not easy. The workers did not have any rights at this time regarding hourly wages or working hours. They were to show appreciation for getting a chance to work as work was very unstable and only seasonal. In Neskaupstaður it was common for women to come from the southern part of Iceland to work in fish processing. The majority of people who came to Bolungarvík came there from nearby fjords.

The most common job to be had for these migrant women at the end of last century and the beginning of this one was as domestic workers and this continued to an extent in the coastal settlements. In Bolungarvík parish in 1890 there were 47 women hired as domestic servants ("vinnukonur") not having their own households, 51 were wives and six headed households on their own. At this time there were 23 men hired in such a way ("vinnumenn"). In Norðfjörður parish (Skorrastaðarsókn) in 1890 the number of men and women hired as servants was equal, at 33. There were as well 42 married women, and four who were heads of their own households. If we look at the censuses eleven years later, in 1901, we find some change. With very few exceptions women in the servant occupation are still categorized as servants ("vinnukonur") regardless of their involvement in the processing of salt fish, but male servants were increasingly described by the census takers as servant-fishermen.

As we can see from table 6 below a large number women were hired in 1890 and 1901 as live-in servants in proportion to the number of married women. Although we see a decrease in numbers of servants in 1901, by which time fishing had increased along with women's work in

fish processing, servants were still over a third of the female population, and this includes a decrease in the number of servants in the farming areas.

TABLE 6.

Proportions of married women versus unmarried servants in Norðfjörður and Bolungarvík 1890 and 1901

Norðfjörður

	married women		unmarried servants		total
	n	%	n	%	
1890	42	56	33	44	75
1901	79	61	49	39	128

Bolungarvík

	married women		unmarried servants		total
	n	%	n	%	
1890	51	52	47	48	98
1901	73	60	48	40	121

In Norðfjörður in 1901 there were two parishes, one (the area on which the village of Neskaupstaður was developing) consisted primarily of households of landless cotters and merchants. The other was a farming area where some of the farmers lived from fishing as well as farming. In the parish of cotters there were 24 women servants in cotters' households, of whom five were in the households of merchants.

Together the five landowners had 11 servants. There were 34 married wives and four women heads of households. In the latter parish consisting almost only of farmers we find altogether 25 women servants and 45 married women, and five women heads of households. Of the four landless households in this area only one had a servant and this household lived only from fishing, but at least 13 of the households in this farming area lived in part from fishing.

What we can see from these census data is that, although there are relatively fewer women servants in the areas at the turn of the century when the villages had begun to develop, there are still many households with servants, especially women servants and there is no difference in this regard between cotter's and farmer's households. However, more of the young servants at this time were likely to be able to establish their own household than had been possible for female servants in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Unfortunately we have no way of knowing from the censuses whether married women had waged employment in these two communities as this information is not to be found, except for one who is a seamstress. Other occupations than servant given for unmarried women in 1901 are a midwife, a seamstress in each village, one daily wage worker, and a housekeeper.

In the first decades of the twentieth century live-in servanthood continued to exist in the villages although it was increasingly a seasonal employment. In the census records of Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður from 1920 we find many women who are hired as servants. At that time it was still the most common occupation for women. In Neskaupstaður ("Nes" at this time) there were 148 households in which there 48 women

registered as servants.⁶ In Bolungarvík in 1920 there were 162 households registered and in them altogether 30 female servants. Thus there were relatively fewer women categorized as servants in Bolungarvík at this time than in Neskaupstaður. In both villages the majority of women servants were under 30 years old. Unlike in Neskaupstaður we find in Bolungarvík other occupational categories for women (mostly unmarried women) such as: a knitter, a seamstress, four daily wage laborers and two shop assistants and a few who are said to work in fish processing.

From this we can see that in 1920 there were more women working as independent wage laborers in Bolungarvík than in Neskaupstaður. The only women in Neskaupstaður who are said to live of fish processing are few widows. At this time there are many small households in both villages consisting of the nuclear family and a single relative living with the family. The main difference between the 1901 and 1920 is that in the latter year the women servants are found in fewer and larger households. This was even more so in Bolungarvík. In Bolungarvík at this time there were also relatively more nuclear family households than in Neskaupstaður.

Based on information gathered from interviews with people born in the beginning of the century and on biographies, it becomes clear that many married women participated in the seasonal waged employment in the fisheries at this time although this was not recorded. They washed fish and spread it out to dry, stacked it and re-stacked it, side by side with the women servants and older children. Such was the case with

⁶ It is important to take into account that the census were recorded in the middle of the winter and that there were generally more servants in Neskaupstaður during the summer season.

Ari's mother. She always worked outside the home, mostly processing fish for the merchant. Ari talks about his mother's work for wages as well as in the household, and about the division of labor among household members:

Although my mother worked a long day, all the distances were so short at this time that we the children were always at a close distance to them. You could always go and talk to her while she was working. The housework was not harder than today but the workday was much longer and we never had any help. We children were only boys so we never helped her in the house, it was unheard of at this time. She did all the housework after a long working day. The only help I can remember that she got with housework was when my father helped her with combing the wool for her, for example if he came home and the crew did not go out to sea in the evening. She would sew our clothes and knit our underwear, mittens, socks and sweaters. My parents always worked a long day and as a child I only spent time with them while they were working. After dinner she was either spinning or knitting and he maybe combing the wool or he was repairing nets. He was very good at net making and taught people how to repair nets. We the boys would sometimes help him with this work. It was all done up in the same room where we slept and ate. We the boys were also very willing to take care of the animals and get herring for the sheep. My father was often away fishing for a long time and we helped our mother with this job.

In summary, the people who moved to Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður at the turn of the century combined their activities in the fishery with animal husbandry although to a varying degree. Nuclear households became more common than before, but since some

production continued to take place in the households servants were still needed at least seasonally.

5.5. Conditions of Work and Life in the Beginning of the Century: Women's Narratives

We see from the above census material the various lives women must have led in early fishing villages, and this can also be seen from women's own descriptions of their lives. It is very hard to find any written records of the lives these women led at the turn of the century. They did not write their auto-biographies, nor was there anything written on or about them in the newspapers of the time. The same can be said about the women who were being born in the beginning of the century, but they are some of them alive now and can tell their stories. We will now take a look at the lives and work of a few women from Neskaupstaður and Bolungarvík using primarily their own descriptions.⁷ In these descriptions we see how they the different women combined their activities in production and reproduction and how the combination changed during their lives.

⁷ These descriptions are taken from interviews which were conducted during field work in Neskaupstaður and Bolungarvík 1989 to 1990. Names have been changed some facts about the individuals twisted around in an attempt to hide their identity.

Two Fishermen's Wives.

The oldest of these women Svana, of Neskaupstaður was born in 1897. At the time of the interview in 1991 she was still active in housework, living with her daughter of fifty who had never married. Her parents had moved to a farm near Neskaupstaður a few years before she was born. They had three other children as well. In 1904 when her mother and brother died, what was left of the family was dispersed, as was a common practise in farming areas at that time. The changes in her position at different periods in her life can be explained by changes in the social structure as well as by new life cycle position:

I was born in 1897 and I was seven years old when my mother died. Then I moved to the communal director here in Neskaupstaður and was with them for three years. He took me from my father because my father could not continue farming. Then I was in a house here nearby and was there for three years. I was a baby sitter there. Then I moved back to my father because he had bought a house and then I worked in fish for the merchant. I was also in baiting. Baiting was done by teenagers and women. In 1918 I got married and had seven children and I usually had girls helping me. We had a boat, and they left in the morning and came back in the evening. Fifteen years later when he died they were four on the boat who drowned. The girls who worked for me lived here with us. A girl would maybe be with me in the summer and then for the winter season she would go with the boat and cook for the crew in Vopnafjörður and other areas. After I lost my husband my brother helped me and I had some sheep and a cow. And my children helped, the boys going to sea. The oldest was confirmed that spring.

The first thing we may note here is that the father of this woman is not able to keep the family together in a farming society without a wife, due to the poverty that was widespread in the first decade of the century. However, in the fishing society when her husband dies a widow is able to keep the family together because they have a boat and the oldest is thirteen years old and can go fishing. We may also notice the changing position of Svana during her childhood from being a foster child for three years to becoming a baby-sitter at ten and then moving back to her father's home at thirteen when she is able to be hired in fish processing for the merchant. When she marries she is able to establish her own household, and more than that she has servants in the fishing season and has managerial power over their work. In her description we also find women who are servants and work for her in the summer season, going with the men and serving them while they go away for the winter season. When she becomes a widow, it helps having the domestic animals which provide security for the maintenance of the household in fishing communities.

As a boat owner's wife Svana had some extra burden or work in running a house with seasonal live-in workers (fishermen) who in some cases lived there and very commonly were fed there. Some wives of large households describe having spent most of their days in work around meals. Svana relates her experience of this in the following way:

The men went away for the winter season and then the girl would go with them. Fishermen who came seasonally here usually lived in the homes. I once had three Faeroes fishermen eating here for a summer season, but they did not sleep here. They were on the boat with the brothers. This made us more

busier in the housework because things could not be bought from the stores like today. The housewives were not working outside at that time but we did the washing and drying of the fish here around the house and then it was sold to the merchant; that was housework too. The swim bladder was an important export product and that was a great deal of work that we, the housewives and women servants took care of. It was cut out of the cod and then it was put in salted water, and then it was cleaned and then it was spread on stones outside until it was hard and dry. Then it was sold to the merchant. I did this like other women and I bought this table and chairs for the money. There was a doctor here in 1920 who owned it and then they got divorced and I bought it from them when they separated.

Here Svana describes how the processing of the fish, the production of a commodity, was "housework too". At this time in Neskaupstaður the area of home making and the area of production had not become separate domains, although there were people in the village who were at this time hired as laborers for the merchant. As a boat owner's wife, a woman managed the household in a way similar to that of a farmer's wife who managed the farm household. Moreover, part of the fish (the swim bladder) was hers, and she herself could control what she did with the money she got after selling it processed to the merchant. It is interesting to see that she decided to save this money to buy a nice piece of furniture for the home.

Erla moved to Neskaupstaður from a farm in the north of Iceland and at a young age married a boat owner, Gunnar, who was 10 years older than her. She moved into his parents home and they lived there until they could establish their own household a few years later.

Although they only had one child, their household was big, with live-in servants and two elderly relatives. Erla did not participate in processing, but she was very active in the women's association, and Gunnar in the co-operative. He did not go much to sea himself but worked with the landmen and took care of other work on land, thus Erla did not have to do this work. In their older age they lived in an apartment in the same house as their son and had close relations with their grandchildren, many of which still lived in the village. They talked freely about their socialist ideals and worried about the individualism of the younger generations. They proudly showed me pictures of Gunnar's travel to the Soviet Union, which he remembered warmly. Of her work in the big household she said:

We usually had ten extra people eating with us over the summer months and many of them lived in our home as well. I had an inside girl with me who helped me most of the year. We had to wash the clothes of these people and serve them in other ways. We did laundry every other week and every week in the fishing season. As there was so much laundry from all these people I would sometimes get help from the girls who worked in fish processing. We were busy all day long cooking and doing other tasks. The winters were much easier, since then there were usually only two men living with us. It was not until the confirmation of my youngest son that I bought clothes, but otherwise I did all the sewing that had to be done. Work with food was not only cooking. We grew potatoes, and turnips and rhubarbs. We had a cow and in the winter I could make butter when there were not so many people with us. In the summer I and the girl had to make hay for the cow. And we also had hens. Fish was provided by my husband. Most of the day was spent cooking because there was first breakfast

early in the morning before seven, then around 9-10 in the morning everyone came in for porridge. Then there was lunch and afternoon coffee with cakes and dinner and in late evening too. We only shopped with the coop because this was the shop of the people, we did not want to shop at the merchants. This was our ideal and the way we thought. I took care of the shopping. We needed so much for this big household. We had to bake a great deal almost every day, because we had to serve coffee three times a day. We who cooked did not eat with the other people, since there was no space and no time. We did not buy any furniture until thirty years ago, because we did not have any space for furniture. Food and clothes were more important. As there was so much work to be done in the household, I never worked in the baiting or participated in the fish processing, as did many other women.

These two households of Svana and Erla were both in Neskaupstaður. We see how their households were in many ways independent production units, which hired their own labour to produce for household needs as well as to sell. This was not as common in Bolungarvík as there were not as many independent boat owners.

However there were also large households there and of these the Einar's house ("Einarshús") was the biggest and most open. Many people lived and worked in this merchant's house which included his eight children, one stepdaughter, and five to six additional relatives. As already noted, it was the wealthiest home in the village. There were usually women servants living there as well as temporary workers. In such a large household there was a very clear gender division of labor. The housewife was respected as a manager who could make certain demands. There was constant work for the women around the meals.

The house was located close to the harbour and next to Einar's store, and all the workers in the store and all guests in the village had their afternoon coffee there.

Servants' Stories

Being a live-in servant was, as already mentioned, the most common occupation for women until the Second World War in Iceland. Valdís was a maid for many years and as she never married she never moved from her home. Two other women I talked to who were about twenty years younger had not moved away from their parent's households either, and earned the money to run these household for their parents. One described her parent's household and her work as a housemaid as follows:.

I was born in 1918. Most of my life I have worked with fish in some way or another. My father had a small boat and at my young age I worked with that, with baiting and with spreading out the salt fish to dry. My mother did not have a job, but of course everyone was just working together with the fish. My older brother went with my father to sea. At this time most people had some domestic animals, a small garden and a boat, and the children helped with the work. I began to help at about eight or nine years old. I had to take care of younger siblings. We had no woman servant in the home but usually two or three fishermen who fished with my father lived with us in the summer and they needed food and service. My parents lived here in this same house and I have always lived here. But the house has been renovated and the rooms made bigger. I live in the oldest part. At this time in the past we spent much time spinning, colouring wool and knitting. I went to school for

four winters. But in those days we learned to read before we started school at ten years old. Teachers who came to the home or our parents would teach us. The pier was just down here from the house and the drying was done around the house. There was a pier down from most houses. We had some goats. It was not common to have them. My mother milked the goats and we the children helped her. Those farmers or fishermen who had a cow or two sold milk to others. You just had to go to the next house to buy milk. In the winter when my father could not go to sea he worked as a carpenter. We sold the fish after we processed it to the merchant, we packed it and everything. We also kept some for ourselves. But after the boat owners organized they sold it themselves somewhere.

In my young years I worked as a housemaid. When I was fourteen I went to my first service and I worked like that for many years here and also in Akureyri. Took care of children and helped out in the house. In the beginning I slept here in my home and came back early in the morning. But in my second job also here in Neskaupstaður I lived there. This was really the only possible job for young girls at the time. There was nothing else. Washing floors, cooking and such. There were no washing machines or anything and everything was done by hand. But there were some housewives who had jobs with only washing the clothes. I for example did not have to do this because some housewife came and did that. When I came back from Akureyri after having been a housemaid there in the same house for four years I was 24 years old and I moved back home. I had spent one year, few years earlier, in Reykjavík and learned to sew. By this time there was a freezing plant there but the only work to be had was in the summer. It was during the war years and the ships sailed with the catch and I sewed in the winters. Then I was home for three years and took care of my sick mother. At that time my father and one of my brothers were dead and my sister married here in the village. In 1951 I began working in the freezing

plant full time. I have probably worked in the freezing plant now for 30 years, always full time until recently. We used to work from seven in the morning to six in the evening and sometimes again after dinner.

Valdís was a live-in housemaid until in the Second World War and when the chance came along to get work in fish factory, first for only the summer and then on a year round basis she took the opportunity. Other women worked as housemaids until they got married and they were in some cases able to take a child with them. Valdís was born in 1922 and worked as a servant away from her home area from 16 years old. She had a daughter when she was 18 years old who followed her in her work as a live in housemaid. She talks about this time:

I came first here to Neskaupstaður to work in a house. It was the only job to be had for a girl. I grew up in a farm, also here in the eastern fjords. In the service I took care of the children, washed and such. Before I had been working like this elsewhere. When I first came to Neskaupstaður I brought with me my daughter to the service. When I was in service I had a very low salary. But I also went for two winters to the south for the winter season to serve the landmen. There were two crews sharing a house and we were two housekeepers. We had a good kitchen and very good work conditions. My daughter was then eight years old and she did not like it there and went to her grandparents. After this we came here together and I met my husband and we married and had three children together. I did not begin to work again until my youngest child was one year old, first in the summer and then all year round, always all day.

Wage workers' accounts

At the same time there were other households which did not own any boat, and in which there were no servants. The women of these households who were married to fishermen or other workers, as well as widows and unmarried women, had to sell their labor power. They also had to do their own housework when coming home and their children early on began to help, especially the girls. They had no comforts and usually had to live very meagerly. It was common for poor families to live five or six together in one room with two or three sharing a bed. The poorer women came home to a cold house, doing the housework under these conditions after a day of washing the laundry in another home or after a day on the pier washing fish. Such households, which depended primarily on wage work, existed in both villages at this time.

Margrét was born in 1904 and has lived all her life in Bolungarvík. She was the third illegitimate child born to a mother who was a servant in her sister's household. The mother had to give Margrét away since she and the father who was a servant on another farm could not yet afford to establish their own household.

When I was born my parents were both servants (vinnuhjú). She was with Kristján Halldórsson and Petrína Guðmundsdóttir her sister. Pétur Oddsson had a farm there too and my father was a servant with him. When my mother had me she was a servant with two children. She lost her boyfriend when she was pregnant with the first child. Then she was living in Skálavík and he drowned, and seven years later she had a boy. And she had these two children with her when she had me. I was her third child so she had to find a

place for me since she could not be a servant with three children. But in the spring when they [the parents] were free from the "servanthood" they began living together. At that time my father was a twice widower. I was never with them. I grew up with other people and stayed with them until I began living with my fiancée. That was 1922, I was 18 years old in the fall and I had a year old daughter.

Margrét worked for the merchant until she married her first husband. She was 28 years old when her husband died and she began and worked in fish processing again. She was working in the freezing plant until she was over seventy years old. Margrét was always involved in the workers union and after a long day at work she would commonly go and serve coffee at fund-raising meetings of the union. She continued to be active even in her older years, when she also became the representative of the fish factory women in the local union. Margrét described the work and working conditions of the past in the following way:

When I began working in the fish we worked from six in the morning until seven or eight in the evening. We had to work outside, beginning in the morning breaking the ice of the water we would wash the fish in. We got no break and had to drink our coffee standing up. All the work was outside until the fish was dry. There was really no salary. The salary was so low that I had to get help from the community. It was not enough to run a household.... The work has become easier over the years and the changes have occurred little by little. I began working in the Icehouse full time around 1940, but before that I had worked a great deal. I was working all the summers while I was having my children in my second

marriage. In the freezing plant I worked with freezing the bait, and then I had to stand outside all day breaking ice to be used to freeze the bait.

Margrét's former husband did not have a boat and they tried to make a living from his salary as a day laborer. Together they had six children. She describes the housework in a poor household in the first decades of the century:

When I began my household there were no comforts. We had to walk long distance to get water and take it back out after using it. We had to dig up peat and dry it to use as fuel. That is how it was. We lived in a very tight space then; we could get one bed in there and a boiler. We pushed the bed aside in the day so I could put the crib behind it. Two men could sit there and eat on the bed but I had to eat standing up. We also had a boy eating with us who was working with fish. Later I lived in a bigger room with six children and then we had a little room in the front where I could cook. All the floors were washed with a cloth and sand. When my husband died I worked more outside. By that time my oldest girl was 10 years old and she took over, and took care of the housework, taking care of younger siblings.

Margrét later married again to a man who was younger than her and with him she had four more children. Her latter husband was an independent fisherman, who fished alone on a small boat, but he did not earn enough for her to be able to stay at home. Although she had a great number of children and grandchildren, most of them had moved away from Bolungarvík as soon as they were old enough to get work elsewhere. When her first husband died she had to send some of her

children away just as she had been sent away as a foster child born to a servant. However, they were not sent to unrelated people, and it was not formally talked about as fostering. She explained,

It was a bit difficult. I had to get help from the parish. I had then five of the children with me. My oldest boy went for the summer to work as a cowboy and he stayed there. Then later another boy went to live with my unmarried sister-in-law when he was twelve years old. She also took one of my girls when she was seven years old. She wanted to take her because she had her mother's name. I went out to work that spring washing the fish and spreading it out to dry. We spread the fish out on the rocks for the merchant. There was no independent processing by households, it was all for the merchant. I also worked in the winter stacking and re-stacking and grading the fish. At this time my oldest girl was already ten years old so she could take care of the children. I took all the work I could get. Then I got remarried and had four more children. Most of them left to the south, since there were no opportunities here. I began working outside when I was 28 years old until I was 75 years old, always in fish.

Sigrún, in Neskaupstaður, was born in 1914 and worked with fish most of her life. She and her husband Karl, a fisherman, moved to the village in 1934 from a nearby fjord. Their common grandmother lived with them and helped them for the first five years of their marriage taking care of the children. Karl was a fisherman on different ships and trawlers and often went seasonally to other fishing sites. As they were not from Neskaupstaður they did not have any kin network to help them out and neither did they have any animals to rely on for milk and meat

but had to depend fully on wage labour. As Sigrún and Karl were poor, for most of their marriage they both had wage work and when Karl was on land he participated fully in the housework.

If a man was a fisherman on one of the boats owned by the merchant, his wife was supposed to be able to get merchandise while he was away fishing. However, if the fishing was not going well this could be a problem. Sigrún explained:

People like us never saw money. One was for example working for Þorláksverslun (one of the merchants) and it was written down in their books, and then one could take out merchandise. We owned nothing and often had a very hard time, especially in the first years. For example one season when my husband was fishing in Djúpavogur, I was supposed to get merchandise from Sigfús Sveinsson (one of the merchants). There was no fishing this season and then one was told in the store that they did not have what one asked for even though I knew they had it. Then one had to walk by the shore and look for seaweed to try to heat up and then we had only rice to eat for a while. But finally they sent us some fish, and my uncle sent me a bag of potatoes and that saved us for a while.

Sigrún always had to combine housework and wage work, but in her young years housework was not easy and had no comforts. Moreover as we can see from the following she took her youngest child with her when she began working in fish processing.

When I used to live on the third floor I had to climb with the water up the stairs and then down the stairs again after using it. Often one could also take the laundry out to the river and wash

it there. For a long while after we came here we did not have good heating. My husband had bought an oil heater and it could be moved around since it was on wheels. But it smelled and it did not really heat up the house. I remember coming home from work after we got proper heating. I was so warm that I had to take some clothes off, since I was so used to the cold. People were accustomed to this cold. For example, we lived in a place where moisture froze in the night-pot under the bed and so did the water on the table. I did not begin working outside until my youngest girl was four years old. Then I could take her along when I was salting the fish. Before this time it was common that people would ask me to come to clean their houses and wash laundry. I of course grabbed it. ... In these years I was like a grey cat, in all offices and here and there in public places cleaning floors. One would keep all claws out.

In the two examples above we see the common problem for women of poorer households, who have to combine work outside of the household and away from children to work in fish or to work in other people's homes. Even though their work was hard they talk about how the worrying in itself made it hard, and having to trust a ten year old girl to run take care of younger siblings and even to cook the meals.

Guðrún, a woman in her fifties, describes how it was for poor people in Neskaupstaður, when she grew up there. Her mother was a widow and then she had Guðrún with a man she did not live with. After five years, the mother moved with Guðrún to Neskaupstaður, to the father who was by this time a fisherman there, and they began to live together. She began to work with spreading out fish to dry, which was a common job for older children to do side by side with their mother. It was a job women which could do with children by their side on dry days.

The children who helped their mother in this way usually did not get a separate salary.

My mother always worked with salt fish as long as I can remember. It was nearby the house so I could always go there when I needed to talk to her. Life was hard then, I did not know what money looked like. I had worked from the age of nine helping my mother spreading out fish to dry for the merchant. But the first real work I got paid for myself was in the butchery. I will never forget this first work experience. I was going to get my salary, but then was told I should buy something in the store for it. They preferred not giving you money. I told them I had to use the money elsewhere.... My father was working for them at this time and he never received any money. The only other money I ever saw was when my mother began to work in the fish processing plant and received an envelope.

5.6. Comparative Political Economy and Unionization Experience

The unions in the two villages were established later than in Reykjavík. In Neskaupstaður a workers union was first established in 1914 but did not last long; it was re-established in 1922 by both men and women. In Bolungarvík, the union was established in 1931 and included both men and women from the beginning. When the union was established in Bolungarvík there was a very strong opposition to union activists in the village.

The first leader of the union in Neskaupstaður described the merchant power in the following way:

For a long time two merchant establishments have been dominating the town, those of Konráð Hjálmarsson and Sigfús Sveinsson. These companies have by now taken hold of most that is worth anything in this town. The dominance of these two big companies is of two kinds. They give work, depending on when they want to or need it, doing such things as carrying rocks, taking ice, fish processing, serving ships and so on... They price people's labor and product such as fish, and pay in necessary merchandise for a price that they themselves decide. The working people in Neskaupstaður have been divided and powerless against these big "salmons" until now (cited in Geirsson 1983:149).

Although the workers union became active in Neskaupstaður in 1922, in terms of making agreements regarding wages and work hours the strongest opposition to the merchant's power did not come from workers but rather from small boat owners. In 1931 the small boat owners formed an association. The depression had begun to be felt in Neskaupstaður and the price of salted fish had fallen. The purpose of the organization was to buy salt directly from Reykjavík, and to sell their product directly. As a result of the depression the boat owners had become even more indebted to the merchants than before, and many of them could not buy any salt to process their fish. Then the merchants began demanding a kilo of wet fish for one kilo of salt, and the fishermen could no longer accept these conditions. In 1932, 45 small boat owners signed an agreement to buy salt together directly from the suppliers. The merchants tried their best to pull strings in the Reykjavík

banks to stop this but were not able to. The price of the salt that was bought was much lower than they had bought from the merchant and through this action they were able to break some of the merchant power.

Margrét remembers when the union of Bolungarvík was established, and the opposition to it, in the following way:

It was a hard summer when the union was established. My husband was then dying and we had seven children in one room. I had to keep the children outside so that their father could have some peace. It was hard to get the union started because there was such strong opposition to it, not only from the employers but from the other people as well, the workers. I worked as a volunteer for many years. The workers were afraid of the employers because the employers had opposed it publicly. It had to do with the political parties also. I remember one summer day when the weather was wonderful. I heard some noise through the window. My husband said to me "Go to the store and see if you cannot get any news, something terrible must be happening I hear so much noise." I went out and then they were taking Hannibal (the union leader) to the boat. He was having lunch in the house of a man here in the village and they went and asked for him and then they took him by force, tied him and carried him to the boat that took him to Ísafjörður. He was planning to establish a union here. But Einar was not very hard to deal with after the union was established two years later.

The older generation of working class people of the two villages remember the unions as having been much more active organizations in the past than they are today. They talked about how easy it had been to get people to come to meetings and that there were lively discussions and debates going on primarily among the men. The women were not active

participants in these meetings to the same degree but they primarily talk about having taken care of the coffee.

As already noted the people who organized against the merchant power did not consist primarily of wage laborers. Thus the merchant power was undermined not by popular resistance of the working class, but by the small boat owners. In the depression of the 1930s, they could no longer afford to deal with the merchant. They were the ones who organized under the banner of socialism and were the main spokesmen for socialist ideas in Neskaupstaður. It should be recalled that in Neskaupstaður more equal access to landing boats created a relatively large group of independent small boat owners. Today the village still has many such boat owners compared to other fishing villages. The large numbers allowed for organizing against the power of the merchants and winning. The big ship owners at the same time tried to establish their own organization which also bought salt and fishing gear, but this organization only lasted for two or three years.

The attempt by small fishermen in Bolungarvík to organize in the same time period failed. They organized into a fishermen's association in 1929 but their organization did not last long. In the booking of their first meeting it was clearly stated that this organization was established for the economic interest of fishermen and was not political at all. One of their main goals was to better the harbour conditions and try to have an impact on the price of the fish. Already in the first meeting it was made clear that this was an association which had no connection to the union which they called "unhealthy and not belonging to any society". This organization had almost no success and soon became little more than a club for entertainment.

From the above discussion we can see how the village economic organization, including access to landing sites and the geographical conditions of the harbour influenced the developing of organizing and union activity. The merchants in Neskaupstaður would probably have been able to get a closer grip on the fisher families if each had not been so independent with their own dock. In Bolungarvík, the extremely difficult harbour conditions not only hindered the investment in larger ships, but also allowed the merchant to be more dominating. Although wage labor was becoming important in both villages, it was more so in Bolungarvík. Another element is the fact that Bolungarvík had been a seasonal fishing site, and therefore there people there who had been seasonal workers, wanted to settle down and could be hired. In Neskaupstaður there was in the beginning a strict application of the law that people should have some animals and a piece of land to be able to settle down.

One has to keep this difference in historical development in mind when evaluating the very different perspectives on history found in the two villages. The older generation in Neskaupstaður commonly used socialist terminology when explaining their historical background of merchant power and the victory of the fishermen's co-operative. The people who narrated the story of how the fishermen organized against the merchants were not only those old enough to remember it themselves, but also the younger people who were only children then but had heard the story. In Bolungarvík, many people describe how hard it was to be poor and dependent on the merchant, and the story of the union leader being carried to the boat is well known. However they do not talk as negatively about merchant power as the people of

Neskaupstaður. Many of them talk about how they appreciate how Einar helped them to get a loan to build their house or what kind of employer he was and how much he cared about the future of the village.

In spite of the differences described the two villages also have some commonalities. In both of them as in other fishing villages around the country, there is one most dominant fishing firm which owns both the processing factories and some of the trawlers. These primary firms are corporations and anyone is free to buy shares in them. However in Bolungarvík, the so-called "Einarsfólk" have owned the largest amount of shares and they have been the one's who have been running the enterprise. In Neskaupstaður by contrast outside specialists have been hired to run the firm. The difference in the distribution of wealth is most clearly seen in that in Bolungarvík there is an elite that is economically taken care of while in Neskaupstaður there is no such elite visible to outsiders.

At this time kinship relations are more visible in Bolungarvík which consists primarily of three major families. It is easier to trace the relations among the inhabitants, most of whom immigrated there from the western fjords. In Neskaupstaður there is no dominant family or families and the people who live there come from many parts of the country, although primarily from the east coast and the south coast.

After the fishermen organized themselves in the 1930s in Neskaupstaður, the means of production - - the ships and the fish factories - - and the means of trade were to a large extent controlled by the fishermen's co-operative and the community. In other words, the fish factories, freezing plant, and salt fish processing factory, were owned by the fishermen's co-operative. Moreover, when the large ships and

trawlers began to be used, it was the township that owned and ran them. Today, however, these assets are run in a similar manner as private enterprises and usually an outsider is hired as the head manager. The people of the village emphasize that since they are not individually owned, no one can decide that if things are not going well, they should take the profit and invest it somewhere else, as has happened in other villages in Iceland.

Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður differ from many other fishing villages in Iceland in that they are a bit larger. Many villages have around 700 inhabitants. Moreover these two communities have been at least until today characterized by more stability and less unemployment than many other villages. Both Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður have been symbols for something more than just fishing villages. Bolungarvík has been seen as a symbol of a town that has done well as a result of private ownership with paternalism where everyone is taken care of with jobs and loans. Neskaupstaður on the other hand has been the pride of the left as the only town where the leftist political parties have been dominant and where the fishing industry has been very stable and is still so today despite these hard times. The relatively good economic status of Neskaupstaður today can probably be explained by the fact that the company has not over-invested as greatly as did the private companies in Bolungarvík. Moreover the fisheries in Neskaupstaður are more varied and can provide fish for the factory all year around.

In the last couple of years Bolungarvík village council has increasingly become economically involved in the local fisheries. Since 1988 the town council has invested in multiple shares and has been

forced to take on loans in order to insure that the fisheries can continue. The town council and the union have invested in fishing and processing, so as not to lose ships and quotas from the area. This has been explained as a temporary arrangement to make it possible for people to live there and keep employment going. According to an interview with the mayor of the town "most of the town council members do not want the community to be directly involved in economic activities of this kind, but the municipality has been forced to participate." (Morgunblaðið 16 August, 1992). The Einar Guðfinnsson firm has been declared bankrupt, and for the first time a large percentage of the population is facing unemployment. The prices of homes have gone down and people who want to leave and search for employment elsewhere have a problem selling their houses. Bolungarvík which has in the past been seen by the conservative party (the Independence party) as a symbol of successful private entrepreneurship, is today in an almost hopeless situation as the village fund has in debts that are double the current value of its property.

5.7. The Home Economic Movement

In this part of the thesis I have described the early formation of fishing villages which came about at the same time as the independence struggle against Denmark was at its height, defining Icelandic cultural identity as derived from the farming areas. Since the typical fishing village does not exist I discussed only briefly the new relations of production which arose with increased mercantilism, fishery, and wage

labor. Instead I turned to the two villages in which this study takes place, examined the particular developments in Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður, and described and compared their different recent histories. In particular I focused on the changes which occurred in women's position with changes in production and reproduction. We have seen that, in the beginning of the century, wage employment increased to a considerable extent, but at the same time some production continued to take place in households.

In the new fishing communities there was both continuity and change in gender roles and in the division of labour between men and women from the way it had been in the rural areas. Women continued to do the work in the household and be responsible for the child care and the care of the old and sick. At the beginning of the century in the better-off homes, the housewife continued to run the household, take care of the housework, and organize the work of servants who, although fewer in number, existed for a while. Most households had some animals and a garden which the women and children would take care of if the man was away fishing. When the household was still a unit of production, as was very much the case in Neskaupstaður, the fisherman's wife had an important productive role.

We have seen that in the early villages around and after the turn of the century, many women continued to work as servants, this being the primary occupation for young women. During this time the division between production and reproduction was not very clear. Later, when the division between wage work and the home became more clearly defined, the work performed in the home was no longer defined as work. Women continued to be involved in village life and in the fisheries as

processors and as fishermen's wives. However many people were so very poor that they were largely powerless, men and women alike.

A comparison of the development of the two villages shows that there were some differences in the early part of the century in sphere of reproduction and gender relations mostly because in Neskaupstaður the household more commonly organized the production process than in Bolungarvík. In Bolungarvík more women combined wage work and housework whereas in Neskaupstaður, work in fish processing was more likely to be part of housework.

In the fishing villages the form and nature of domestic work changed a great deal. In the peasant economy of the past, household and the non-household production were closely linked, making it hard to see them as separate entities. Production was organized by the members of a household who produced for subsistence and for the market. During this century production increasingly became a separate sphere of activity and subsistence dependent on a wage which is then transformed by domestic work into use value consumed in the household.

This process has occurred in both villages and has made them more similar with regard to gender relations in this century. In both villages we have seen that there were variations among them based primarily on economic standing. To point to these differences among women within the villages I did not separate women's own descriptions according to village but rather according to their activities. This I will also do in next chapter when dealing with gender today. There may be some differences between the two villages regarding gender construction in today's society but they are not as important as those aspects found in

both villages. These are aspects which are important in defining the characteristics of gender in Icelandic fishing communities.

Considering the changes occurring in the fishing villages we see that the two spheres of home and work continued to become increasingly separated and the processing of fish moved out of the household as the merchants increasingly hired people for this activity. Women were consequently less often hired as domestic workers in people's homes, as they were no longer needed in most of them. With this change, we also get a change in terms from the former term "húsfreyja" to the concept "húsmóðir". The more used term today, "húsmóðir", symbolizes the new emphasis on motherhood which now becomes a more realistic goal for a greater number of women, whereas the concept "húsfreyja" referred more to the managerial role of married women in the past. The terms for both men and women have changed. The term "húsbóndi" now, as before, primarily refers to a man as the head of household, but has a narrower meaning today. The servants referred to their employer as their "húsbóndi". The social changes that have occurred in the household are reflected in these two concepts.

With new values, emphasis fell on women staying home, and housework that no longer involved the production of commodities ceased to be defined as work. In the 1930s with the depression, the markets for salted fish were lost and thus women in the fishing villages lost their work in processing. For a while, there was not much paid work to be had for women, except for seasonal work. The wider society did not treat them as unemployed and they themselves, it seems, did not see themselves as unemployed. It was not until the freezing plants became more common that women would go out to work again. But the

work in these plants was for a long time very unstable and seasonal, and the workers could be told with a day's notice whether there would be any work the next day or not. For example, in Neskaupstaður in the early days of the freezing plant around 1950 work was seasonal and there was hardly any work to be had from October and until March. Why is it that women accepted this without any protest? Why was this not considered a social problem at this time? Why did the women not see themselves as unemployed except maybe the poorest of them? The new housewife image that emphasized women's role as non-producers, stressing the spiritual and emotional side of work in the home, forms part of an answer to these questions.

Toward the middle of this century, after the war profit and with the growth of the middle class it became increasingly difficult to get women to work in other people's homes except for a much higher payment than before. The real income of working class households had risen allowing more women to live up to the middle class values of being at home. A fisherman's wife and a housewife describes her life in the 1950s and early 1960s. She had taken over her mother-in-law's role, who had died, when she was eighteen years old. The household consisted of her, her husband and children and his father and four brothers. She had to prepare three men for fishing, and wash their clothes. She also took care of all the financial matters of the boat and the fishery.

When I was with my four oldest children it was not even considered a possibility to go out to work. There was no work to be had, except in the herring in the summer and fall. Many women did that but I didn't. When I was that age, my age

mates did not work outside and we spent the time together. Today, one does not meet anyone if one is home. In the past one would dress up the kids and go visiting... get coffee in a short visit, but this is all over now. I got my first washing machine after the fourth child. It was an old machine that my mother-in-law had owned. The first years I used it, it took two days to do the laundry. I had to know the day before if I was going to wash and wake up early to heat up the water, or they (the fishermen who left at four in the morning) would do it before going to sea. I did not want a machine until I could get an automatic and I was stubborn so I had to wait until 1965. It was much more work then than today because then we had two meal a day and I baked one day a week. Housework now takes less time. Then I made all the clothes for the children. I also had our potato garden. It was a great saving never to have to buy fish.

As we can see from this description there was still a great deal of production occurring in the homes in the 1960s and not much could be bought ready-made in the shops. The wife had the possibility of keeping down the household expenses by producing things for the household herself, such as baking, sewing, and growing potatoes, although this is not classified as real work. Alda describes how it was possible to live off one salary:

In the sixties it was easier to live off one salary than it is today. One also did more knitting and sewing in the home instead of buying clothes ready made. Also food was relatively cheaper than today.

Finally, preparing fishermen to go to sea involved a great deal of work on women's part. By also taking care of the financial side of the

household fishery she was in effect running a small enterprise, as we will discuss further in the next chapter.

Antler has discussed the role of home economic schools in providing a new role for women who were being withdrawn from fish production in Newfoundland. She says that these courses "offer a heavy-handed message stressing consumerism and amplifying the decorative, housewifery aspect of women's former range of productive work" (Antler 1980:4). The home economic schools were also very popular for women in Iceland when there were already seven in 1927 after which they became more numerous. In these schools women were taught their new roles. Among the themes of the home economic school were the following: home, organization of work, machines and other tools, physical position when working, working clothes, cleaning, health issues, and laundry. These schools helped organize the new division of labor within families and the new images of the family. They provided new standards by which people could measure their own life, where the woman is the emotional manager.

Sigrún A. Blöndal who was the head of a home economics school in the eastern part of Iceland, emphasized in a speech that she gave in 1926 that women's instincts are more closely related to the emotional life than the intellect. She stated that the role of women was derived from and required those aspects connected to the natural instinct. Therefore it would be best for women to get themselves hired as domestics, where they could best prepare for their lives as mothers and housewives (Blöndal 1926).

One cannot talk about the home economic schools without mentioning the women's associations ("Kvenfélög"), which were very

popular in these times all around the country. The women's associations also played an important role in pressuring for the establishment of home economic schools. Their goals, as presented by a committee in the women's associations, were that cooking and sewing would be required for all girls in the elementary schools and that the government would make a school kitchen in all schools. Moreover the committee asserted that home economic schools should be in all areas of the country.

The women's associations came into being along with urbanization although though they were originally established in the farming areas. They were seen as housewives' interest groups, fighting for the betterment of women's position. As such it was a political organization, comparable to the farmer's association. The women's association was supposed to look after women's interests in the same way as the farmer's association took care of farmer's interests.⁸ Those interests as expressed by the first women's association established in a farming area in 1869. They emphasized among other things cleanliness in the home; getting children used to work at an early age, washing the wool before selling it, teaching women rather than men how to weave and teaching children to read. It is interesting to note that the second association established, in 1874, suggest that unmarried women, who belong to the association, should be rewarded by the head of the household in which they serve for well done work (Torlacius 1981:6-7).

⁸ The association consisted primarily of established wives as can be seen in the concerns of the women's association in Neskaupstaður. Their association ("Anna") was established in 1907 and one of their first concerns was to keep the women servants at home in the evening. They were clearly a charity organization. They for example fed a girl one year so that she could go to school.

The main emphasis of the women's association was on the housewife and on the family as the moral base of society. This can be seen in the magazines published by the association. The name of the main magazine is "the Housewife" ("Húsfreyjan"). In 1930 when they exist to a greater degree in villages and towns it is said that the main goal of the association was to make housewives better able to do their important and difficult jobs; to care for homemaking and home industry. This goal could be reached by properly arranged housing, practical diet, gardening and other things. There is a great emphasis on the how to organize the housework once there were no longer domestic servants to be had.

The articles in the magazine are about such issues as: the spiritual side of the housewife's work, dish washing, gardening, child rearing, cooking. There was a continuous discussion of how to recruit girls to help in homes where the housewife was temporarily unable to do her work because of health reasons. There were women sent by the women's association all over the countryside and into the fishing villages to teach courses on food preparation and cooking.

An important aspect of the early women's association in the two villages studied was charity towards less fortunate people. Much of their work has always been to raise funds for things that were needed in the community. They contributed to the building of the community hall, to buying medical equipment, and to acquiring items for the church. Fund raising was (and is still today) done by selling handmade products and cakes and by putting on a play at least once a year. In Bolungarvík, the women's association called "Brautin" was established in 1911. They are still very strong and they have since 1917 staged a play or a show for the

elderly every year. When I was there they had an additional show to raise money for two women who had recently become widows. In the home, women were taking care of the "welfare" of the family, the basic unit on which society builds, and in the women's organization they were extending this "welfare" to the community.

I have ended the present part of the thesis with a description of some aspects of the social construction the new housewife as a prologue to a discussion about gender today. We have seen how with regular wage labour and the rising of real wages of the working class at the time, household and workplace were increasingly divided into separate spheres of activity. In the following part of the thesis we will consider these aspects as they are reflected in the fishing villages of today.

Part III

Gender Today

Chapter 6

Fishermen's Wives and Fish Processors

6.1. Introduction

It is sometimes said about women in fishing communities of the North Atlantic that they are unusually strong and independent, and that they are more powerful than other women. This independence and strength are seen as deriving from their participation in production and from the fact that they take care of the household when their husbands are away fishing. But these women are also sometimes talked about as an invisible army of reserve labor in the fishing industry. When we take a look at women in Icelandic fishing villages we see that there are some truths to be found in these views. Women are generally at the center of the household as well as being used as a reserve labor force. To understand how these different components of women's social identities come together

we need to consider the different aspects of gender at the level of ideas and of the division of labor.

In this part, we will take up questions of gender construction in production and reproduction in Icelandic fishing communities of today. We will first take a brief look at the dominant ideas in Icelandic popular culture and then move on to a more descriptive account of some aspects of women's position, in the two villages, focusing on women-centered households on the one hand and the division of labor in fish processing on the other in the two communities. Although my discussion of women's wage work is limited to the freezing plant, this is not the only place where fish processing takes place in Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður. Both villages also have factories for the processing of salted fish and for making fish flour in addition women work peeling shrimps. The freezing plant is, however, the work place in a fishing community most associated with women's work and is also the work place in the fisheries where women are in the greatest number. In this chapter, as in the last chapter, I have chosen a few of the women and men whom I interviewed and included their descriptions so as to present their subjective experiences and identities.

6.2. Cultural Perceptions of Women in Maritime Society

In fishing communities in Iceland we find ideas about men and women which at first sight seem to be in contradiction. On the one hand there are widespread ideas about fishermen's wives, who are supposed to have strong characters and patiently wait for their men, and on the other

hand there are a few usually negative views of women who work in fish factories. If we take a look at the fishermen, we also find ideas which seem to be in contradiction. When on land they are seen as drunk and rowdy, but at sea they are national heroes. Their heroic role when out at sea bringing wealth to the nation is intensely romanticized in popular songs.⁹ The cultural perception of women in fishing villages is primarily linked to their roles as wives and girlfriends. They are seen in the popular culture as having strong characters, but always waiting for their men. There are songs about wives who are happy at the return of their husbands, of men missing their girlfriends and of men who have a woman waiting in each harbour. Such songs, which every Icelander knows, are many. One of them is "Kátir voru karlar" which in translation is:

Merry were the men on Kúttur Haraldur.
 They went out to fish from Akranes.
 And all of them returned and none of them died
 Every woman laughs from happiness
 She laughs, she laughs (repeated).

There is the song about "fisherman's life, the dream of every daring man"; he places himself in the arms of "bára" who invites him to a wild dance. It then goes to say: "fisherman's life, love and adventure, happiness in heart, and the sound of high waves and strong winds". The third and last part of this song is: "To the girls I say words of love, one, two, three kisses and I jump on board." Bára is a commonly used woman's name. In this

⁹ These songs were played a great deal on the state radio until in the eighties when new private radio stations were allowed. For decades there was a weekly radio show broadcasting greetings to and from fishermen out at sea. The same songs were played year after year. Other songs are mostly sung when people get together.

song, however, it is not with a capital b and therefore refers to the ocean waves. In fishermen's songs the ocean waves often symbolize the feminine. Although they are dangerous, and the fishermen show their strength against them but are also "kissed" by the waves. Alda and Unnur, are also women's names which can mean ocean waves. These names are common in fishing villages.

The first verse of another fishermen's song (Ég er kokkur á kúttur frá Sandi) goes like this:

I am a cook on a boat from Sandur.
 I get hit in the face every day.
 And I don't feel better on land,
 if I get into a fight with my wife.
 She is double in strength, Tóta,
 especially if she is angry,
 so I usually run
 because escape is my only solution.

The verse shows the unclear status of fishermen on land in its most extreme form, and portrays a very strong and totally dominating fisherman's wife.

Songs or stories of women's productive activities are hard to find, the exception being about herring girls in the 1950s and 1960s. They were, and still are, seen as young and unmarried, dreaming about the love and nice clothes that they will buy from their wages. Their "adventure" is so romanticized that the hardship involved has been well hidden. In 1948 Gils Guðmundsson describes herring fishing in the following way in a book for fishermen:

The herring is a strange fish ("kynjafiskur"). She turns the scientist's hair grey and turns his ideas upside down and makes fun of his predictions. She makes the merchant rich in just a few months or turns him bankrupt in even shorter time. She gives good earning to the fisherman if she sees fit to show up, but hunger and suffering if not. To the herring girl the herring gives dances, pretty shoes and new dresses when all is going well, or sends her home, with the assistance of the town or state (Guðmundsson 1948:50).

In this writing we see a common perception of women's work, especially with regard to the so called herring adventure. Fishermen are seen as working for their living and the herring girls for luxuries, although it is mentioned that if catch is not going well, the herring girl cannot even pay for her fare back home. In this description which is very typical we do not find many women such as the one who told me that when she was eight years old she went with her mother, who was a widow, to work in herring full time. The child did not receive separate wages but just helped her mother. When she was twelve years old she worked independently in packing the herring into barrels, and received her own wages. The view of fish factory women, in contrast to the view of the herring girls, is of rough women and their work is denigrated. Thus in general we find that the productive work of fishermen is romanticized whereas women's productive work remains invisible or debased. What we have here are opposite images of men and women. The fisherman is a hero when he is involved in production and is seen as a failure when on land. There is a great deal of romanticization of his productive role, but he does not function well in relation to family and household. The fisherman's wife is respected as such but her role in production is not.

The picture here portrayed becomes much more complex as one moves closer to the daily reality of a fishing community. Even in this context we still find that these ideas have some salience for the members of the communities. In my interviews with people of Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður I found that although these cultural perceptions of course do not represent the actuality of behaviour and participation in production - in fact they can be misleading - they affect how people perceive themselves and others. This soon became clear to me when I first moved to these fishing communities and asked to be introduced to people, both men and women, who directly worked in the fisheries, or to fishermen's wives. Both men and women were much more willing to give me names of men, and in particular old, experienced fishermen. It was assumed that a scholar would probably be interested mainly in collecting stories of famous fishermen and their dangerous adventures at sea. Icelandic scholars and authors have helped maintain this image through their exclusive interest in the tales of fishermen. Countless books have been written on this subject, and are commonly found on the bookshelves in maritime households.

As might be expected I received very different answers in my interviews according to both class and gender. These cannot be entirely explained by my own gender, but rather they reflect a certain attitude. Women generally listened carefully to my questions and then answered them. The men on the other hand, especially the older fishermen, often did not listen carefully to my questions, or if they did they commonly ignored them and kept talking about what they thought was more important, which is their adventure at sea. The silence and ignoring of questions was particularly noticeable when I asked about family matters, household and life on land in general.

This silence about life on land and in the household can partly be explained by women's prominence in these areas. In the maritime community, women have stayed home when the men have gone away. Women play a larger role than men in maintaining kinship ties. Women have organized a great deal of the social life in village activities through the women's association. As men have increasingly been able to spend more time on land than before, they have established formal organizations and clubs such as the Lions in their villages. They also participate more than before in the Life Saving Association ("Slysavarnarfélagið") which has both male and female members (although with men's and women's divisions) and many of them are involved in the local rescue team. In the rescue team, men are trained to rescue people in the mountains and on the sea.

Women's organizations include the women's association discussed above and the women's division of the Life Saving Association, where women have for many decades been involved in collecting money to be able to buy life saving devices for fishermen at sea and in the harbour. Their fund-raising consists mostly of selling home made things. They get together to knit or sew and they bake cakes at home which they sell to other members of the community.¹⁰ The sewing circles are the most informal of women's organizations. They are small groups of women with a combination of related and unrelated members of similar age, sometimes

¹⁰ There is also a newer organization of "Málfreyjur" (a club where women learn to express themselves in public) in both communities, but they consist primarily of women who are educated and of women who stay in these villages temporarily to work. In both villages, there are also theater groups which consist of both men and women, and sports clubs in which men are more involved than women. There are no active women's liberation movements in Neskaupstaður or Bolungarvík. There used to be one in Neskaupstaður in the 1970s and they now have an equal rights committee which meets few times a year and organizes a meeting on International Women's Day (March 8).

old school friends. The women meet at least once a month in each other's homes and bring with them their knitting or sewing. Many of them have been in the same sewing circle since childhood. In some of these sewing circles no work is taken along but it is still referred as a sewing circle. Formerly women would bring with them clothes to be repaired, but today their work in these clubs is more for pleasure and can often be rather complex (and expensive) knitting or sewing. Important aspects of the sewing circle are the decorative cakes and dishes made and served by the hostess.

The views toward sewing circles reflect women's status in society. They are generally seen as places of gossip and men can sometimes be heard commenting that a meeting, if it is too informal, has become too much of a sewing circle. There have also been some women who have held a negative view toward these gatherings, seeing them as reflecting an old-fashioned activity of women. This view was commonly found among the feminists in the 1970s, but the Icelandic feminists of 1980-90 by contrast praised these clubs as women's sphere where a women's culture can develop. Although women of all classes belong to these clubs today, they were originally an upper class phenomenon which began in the 1940s, some say to keep "good girls" away from the American soldiers.

The two aspects which are most commonly seen as making women in maritime societies particularly strong are the absence of men and the consequent centrality in the household. Somewhat ignored is the significance of their common participation in production. In Icelandic fishing communities we find a degree of independence among the women, as is described by Thompson (1985). Whether this independence is translated into political, economic or ideological power is another

question, which we will now examine. In the following descriptions of women-centered households on the one hand, and women in fish processing on the other hand, I combine for the most part my findings from Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður. This is because I found that with regard to these aspects, there are hardly any differences to be seen across the two villages, notwithstanding their very different histories.

6.2. Women-Centered Households

In the two communities, Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður, fishermen and their wives can be said to have a very different daily experiences from each other as men spend so much time from home. This is also to an extent true for other people in these communities as the work places are very gender divided and work hours long. In the absence of men, fishermen's wives make decisions on their own, crucial to the families well being. Instead of assuming that these factors lead automatically to more power for women, Cole (1991), writing about women's lives in a Portuguese fishing village, describes maritime households as women-centered. As there is not much evidence of women's formal power but more informal influence, this term can be applied to maritime households in Iceland. The term as used here refers to not only to the absence of fishermen, but also to mutual aid among women and the strong ties between women relatives, especially between sisters and between mothers and daughters. Households tend to be women centered, whether men are absent or present. Women run the households from day to day and they

are usually more involved in maintaining kinship relations and relations between households. This centrality does however not necessarily imply that their households are characterized by gender equality.

When examining the maritime households, it becomes obvious that the women act as heads of households from day to day. However, it is necessary to make a distinction between different kinds of fishermen's wives, because their work in relation to the household and the fisheries varies. For example, being a wife of a fisherman on a large ship that goes far and stays out long is different than being a wife of a fisherman with his own small boat who goes out daily. In the former case the wife has to stay alone with the children for long periods of time, sometimes a few months, and then the husband comes home to stay maybe for a week occasionally, or even longer in recent times. The fisherman on a small boat, comes home everyday so the couple can talk things over in the evening, the children see him regularly and their family life is closer to society's norm. What makes the position of wives of small boat fishermen different is how commonly they are involved in managing the boat, taking care of the financial side, and some of them are involved in baiting and line preparation. There is not necessarily a wealth difference between these two groups of small boat owners on the one hand and fishermen on larger ships on the other hand. There are greater wealth differences to be found within each group. Fishermen often buy a small boat after having spent many years on bigger trawlers.

Most fishermen's wives, whether married to a small boat owner or a trawler fisherman, have the sole responsibility for the finances of the household, and this is true for many other women in fishing communities as well long after their husbands begin to work on land. Moreover, most

women work for wages. Their centrality in the household and participation in wage labor does not, however, give them formal power in the community and over the community's finances.

The centrality in the household is not only to be seen in the division of labor among men and women but also in the many of the dominant ideas. As already noted in fishing communities fishermen's wives are talked about as strong and independent. As an example of this strength it was commonly explained to me that some children of fishermen were always referred to as the daughter or son of the mother. This was told to me when people wanted to emphasize the dominance of fishermen's wives in the household. However, they only gave me examples of men being called in such a way. Sometimes I found, however, that these men were not referred to only by their mother's name but by the name of their maternal grandfather as well. So the name really reflects three persons: first their own nickname, then their mother's nickname, and then their maternal grandfather's nickname. If one asked about a man nicknamed in such a way by using his real name no one would know who you were asking about. This is unlikely to occur if the mother in question is a fisherman's wife who is not from the village, but has moved there. Even though she has lived in the village for over thirty years, raised children there and has been involved in the women's association, she may be referred to not by her first name and her father's first name as is the norm in Iceland, but by her first name and husband's first name (or by her own nickname and her husband's nickname).

I found that in Neskaupstaður and Bolungarvík this reference to the mother is not in fact very common and people are most of the time referring to the same mothers who have become, in a way, the token

symbols of fishermen's wives strength. Moreover these stories of dominant women were also sometimes told not only to discuss their strength but to explain their sons lack of manly characteristics, although I could not see examples of this being used as an insult to the son. Members of the oldest generation are often referred to by their nickname and the name of their house (or former farmhouse).

Another factor which may explain the idea of the centrality of women is the fact that until in the late 1970s it was common in many villages for fishermen not only to go on long fishing trips, but to go seasonally to other areas of the country leaving the villages with women in great majority. In Neskaupstaður for example a large number of boats, small and large, used to fish from elsewhere in the winter season until the 1970s, when they were able to invest in new trawlers. Not only did fishermen leave, but also other men who worked on land in baiting and other activities. They went mostly to the south coast, leaving the town with very few men. This meant that a big part of the male population stayed away for the winter season and many wives were left alone with their children for many months at a time.¹¹ During this time the fishermen would fish from other harbours and land their catch there and in the meantime there was no fish to be processed in their home village. After 1950, they would go more to the south-west for the entire winter season. It was not until in the early 1980s that the fishermen stopped leaving for the winter season, responding to pressure that was put on them to fish from home harbour thereby avoiding seasonal unemployment in the processing (Geirsson 1983).

¹¹ Many young and unmarried women left as well to work in fish processing.

In the summer in Neskaupstaður, with the herring fishery ensured that, the town would fill up again as people from other areas came to work there. In the past many of the seasonal workers lived in local residents' homes. Later, however, special working quarters were built for the seasonal workers both in Neskaupstaður and Bolungarvík. In these working quarters, which are called "verbúð" as were the former seasonal huts, live mostly young unmarried people and foreigners who come as temporary hired workers. There they are usually provided cheap or free housing and in some cases meals as well. In Bolungarvík, men also went seasonally to other parts of the country but it was not as common as in Neskaupstaður. In recent decades, however, when the firms in both villages acquired trawlers that could go further, people were able to fish from their own village all year around and provide fish for processing there.

Sigrún, whom we already know from last chapter, a woman born in 1914 who moved to Neskaupstaður in 1934 where her husband was hired on different fishing ships, describes how it was when her husband was away fishing:

It made a big difference when my husband was away fishing. When a husband is not home, then the woman has to do everything, both things that have to do with raising the children and also deal with all kinds of other problems that come up. It is more than just shopping and such things. Everything rests on one's shoulders. It was not like today when they come in often. They could be a very long time away, and often they were not even allowed to go on land. If the weather was bad, they would not let them come home. They would just lay the ship in the fjord's opening and wait there for the weather to get

better and then leave again. But later the fishermen were able to win more rights, to have free time in between tours, and that is important for the whole family. Today it is different because husbands can be contacted through telephone. ... I of course had to take care of the finances. I would go once a week, after the trawlers came, to try to get the three hundred crowns, which was the stipend that one was supposed to get from the company to run the household. Sometimes one went back home without getting any money. They would say they did not have any or that they had not been able to catch anything. Of course when the husband came home we would discuss the problems and try to make plans.

Another woman, María, who is in her fifties, is married to a skipper on a big trawler. María has a similar story to tell regarding how women have to make decisions regarding the running of the household on their own:

The old trawlers - they always stayed out long, at least a week to ten days. They used to go to Greenland usually twice a year and that took up to three months. There was no contact except through writing. I always tell the young women, what the hell they are complaining about? In those days men simply could not afford to take holidays. My man took a holiday when my youngest daughter was two years old. When I was younger I used to worry about him out there on the sea, but I kept my thoughts to myself and tried to hide my fear from the children. The portable phone really changed a lot, but I guess one is just used to make decisions on one's own and that does not change. Now they are so much more at home and also it is possible to discuss everything on the phone.

Although the latter of these women implies that it is very different today than it used to be, Kristín in Bolungarvík, who is in her early thirties, has in

many ways a similar story to tell. She and her husband Sigurður have four children. He is a fisherman on a trawler and she works in the freezing plant every morning and cleans offices after five in the evening. She keeps the afternoons free for housework and to be home when the children return from school. She has three sisters in the village and two of them are also married to fishermen on trawlers. Although she did not grow up with them as she was adopted, she sees her sisters almost every day when the husbands are not on land. Then they drop by for a cup of coffee. Her husband stays out one week and comes home one day in between, and recently he has been able to stay home for a week almost every month:

In the past they used to stay out ten days to two weeks, but now this has changed. Before, when we had to call them through the coastal radio station, I only called him when it was very urgent. You had to talk in a secret language, if you did not want others who were listening on the radio to know about your financial problems. We take care of financial matters since men do not have any time. If there is something that has to do with taking loans or talking to the bank managers we do that. ... The children always miss him after a while and begin asking about him. In the past when my husband did not come home as often, we were building the house so he never took time off and was always at sea. Then our son used to talk about him as "the man who comes to visit mother", and he was a bit shy towards "the man who visits mother". The younger children do not see it this way since he comes home more often now. ... When they (the fishermen) come home and stop for a short period of time they don't do much. You are used to have them as guests and attend to them, you just do everything. There is no reason to ask them to do anything if they do not suggest it themselves. But when they stay longer they do more.

I generally found that housework is women's responsibility and the house her sphere although men help to a varying degree. In this regard age does not seem to be the only important factor. Women who are married to trawler fishermen who stay out long, or to fishermen who used to go away seasonally, often talk about how everything changes when the husband is home. One fisherman in Neskaupstaður described to me that when his children were young he had a job in which he could stay home with his children. But he said that it had been different with his own father. His father used to stay out at sea almost all the time. Once however he decided to try to get some work on land, but soon returned as there was no space for him in the small home, not even in the bed as the children were used to share the bed with the mother. Others feel that this is not a problem.

Ásta is a woman in her early forties who is married to a skipper in Neskaupstaður. Her father was also a fisherman but he drowned when she was very young so she grew up without a father. Her mother was alone with five young children and had to go out to work. The grandparents helped financially and with child care. Ásta thinks that it was in some ways easier to be alone with children when her mother was young because although there was no child care then, there were women in every house. She and her three sisters are all married to fishermen but she emphasizes that this is just a coincidence and not at all so common. She talks about her husband's absence from the home and how it affects his relation to the home:

Sometimes he is so tired when he comes home that he just goes directly to sleep, and then he has to leave very soon again. But when they stay longer he can easily adjust to the home. He helps me a great deal, with doing the dishes and washing the floors. It has never been a problem for the children, they are used to this, they don't know anything else. All my sisters are also married to fishermen. But sometimes when he is out long they begin to ask about him. ... The children usually ask me more for advice than him, even when he is home. Sometimes I feel like a middleman between him and the children. He will tell me to say this and that to the boys instead of telling them himself. Maybe because he is a skipper. But I have told him I am no captain. ... We (the wives) have to do everything. We take care of the finances and when we were building this house I had to arrange for the loans. This does not change when he is on land. I run the household. ... We make most decisions together, especially since the portable telephone came two years ago. But unlike many people we do not plan much ahead because you never know how much they will be getting and we do not want to spend the money beforehand if there is no fishing in the coming season. I remember how the women in my sewing circle used to discuss and plan beforehand how they were going to spend the herring money they were expecting. ... It is no big deal being married to a fisherman. You get used to this like anything else. This is just his work. Some girls don't want to marry a fisherman. Maybe it is because they were used to have their fathers around or maybe there is no fisherman in their family. That is why they think staying alone and raising the children is hard. Being married to a fisherman can make the marriage better, at least I think so. When he returns home, then everyone is happy and tries to be good and stay home more. Then there is more emphasis on family life.

Although small boat fishermen do not stay out long and usually come home every day, women still take care of the finances. In this case it

is common that the wife not only takes care of the finances of the household but of the boat as well as discussed above. They are also sometimes involved in other aspects of the work on land such as baiting, or arranging for others to do it and pay her or him. They thus have commonly gained an experience running a small firm, even though they usually do not view their work as that of a manager of a small firm. Many of them do not define these activities as work although they spend a great deal of time making arrangements and taking care of financial matters. Instead some of them talk about it as helping their husband who cannot do this since the boat is out when everything is open and does not have time to get involved.

Guðrún, a woman in her early fifties, has been married twice, in both cases to fishermen. Her first husband fished with his brothers on a nine ton boat that they owned together with their father. The father, however, never went with them and took care of land work. They used to go on short trips, except for the winter season when they fished from the south coast. She describes her experience after moving to Neskaupstaður and becoming a fisherman's wife, and how the fishery is related to the household.

I came here first when I was fifteen years old to go to school. I took one year and then... I met my husband that year and then we went south to work in fish. (to two separate villages). Then we came back here and we got engaged on my seventeenth birthday. He had parents here and was the oldest of five brothers. I moved in their home while we are looking around for a place, but that fall my mother-in-law died and it so happens that I took on the care of the home and the five brothers at seventeen years of age. This was in the fall and I was almost eighteen years old and I had planned to go to home

economics school, but that would anyway have... I was pregnant so nothing came of it, and we lived there for two years. When we moved I already had two children. The youngest of the brothers moved with us. Our oldest child was 11 when he (her husband) died. They were originally five brothers. One drowned when he was six years old. Another died at nineteen years of age and then there were two who drowned when my husband died. It was more common then that brothers were together on a boat. They owned it together the brothers and the father. I was pregnant with my sixth child when he died. ... They used to go away for the winter season. They went in 1964 and then I went along, and became a housekeeper in a kitchen in the workers' quarters with one child (seven months old). My parents had the older children who were two and three years old. I could not stand the thought of staying here for the whole winter from January till May. In my first marriage I did not have to be involved with the fishery at all because the brothers were so many. But in the second marriage I have been more involved because my husband is alone on the boat, more for fun than because I have to. It was just to make the knots and such, and you just did this at home, it was before we bought this ready made. Now we have a baiting machine and now there is a young mother who takes care of preparing the hooks for baiting ("stokka"). She takes the baby with her in the morning. It is easy to get people to do this.

When I asked her about the household finances she said:

... It has always been my job to take care of the finances, since the fishermen are coming to land when everything has been closed. It has always been my job to take care of the finances and such things. I have taken care of this the whole time.

I asked if she thought fishermen's wives were as a result more independent than other women? She replied:

I think so. When I stood alone with all my children, I think I would not have been able to cope if I had not been used to take care of this. This is common in fishing villages. Some men joke: "We can't even have our wallets." They just have to talk to their wife if they need something, since she takes care of this. My husband has sometimes no idea how much things cost. I have often said that it would be good for the men to come closer to these issues because they wonder where all the money goes. I was away for two months last year because of sickness and my husband was alone with two children and a grandchild and he was able to manage.

When I asked Ásta if she thought fishermen's wives were more independent than other women, she replied that she was not sure and probably this varied between individual women, but then she said:

When I think about it, it's possible that they are. This is not only in the home, because they have to be in more contact with companies and institutions like the banks. Fishermen's wives often have to tell their husbands that he should not accept something that is not fair or correct in silence and without protest because the women know that it can be straightened out. I have often heard this and women will not be pushed around.

We can see from this that it is not easy to maintain that the position of women in fishing communities is determined by their limitation to the private sphere, because there are aspects of the public sphere which they

consider themselves to be better able to cope with than their husbands. This responsibility gives them strength and a certain amount of independence. At the same time although many women see this as an advantage to have control over household finances, others see it as an added burden. The latter complain that the men are uninterested and that they themselves must worry alone about the next payments. This is a common source of tension and argument between husband and wife. Many women told me that their husbands always complained that they spend too much money, even when they were trying very hard to save money. Sometimes the women countered this argument by collecting receipts to prove their thrift. This is what Ásta did when her husband had been complaining. She tells about her experience:

Most fishermen think that their wives spend too much. Last fall I kept an account of every small thing I had to buy for one month. After this month I gave up. But I can always show this if he starts complaining, and then he can see where the money goes. It is very common it seems to me from what I have heard from other women. But this may be understandable for these men, because they don't know how much things cost.

One trawler fisherman explained why he and his ex-wife had divorced:

We used to fight about money and the financial situation. We were building this house and I used to work a great deal and stayed out to sea most of the time away from her and the two children. I could not understand, I was endlessly bringing her my salary, and then she would tell me when I came on land that I could not do this or that because we did not have the money. And I don't drink alcohol. I became angry because I thought

she was spending all the money for herself while I was away. Then one day she left me and moved with the children to Reykjavík. Now I am alone in this house and I have to pay all the bills myself.

If we take only the division of labor and the independence that derives from it, but do not include the dominant ideas or other relations in the household we could come to the same conclusion as Thompson (1985) who maintained that the position of women in maritime societies is better and that they are more powerful than other women. Their position functioning as heads of households and having the finances under their control does give women some independence. But the strength and the respect fishermen's wives have does not derive from being alone with the children, as single mothers do not have the same status. Being a single mother is not looked down on in a fishing village, or in Iceland in general. It is not only socially accepted to have a child outside of marriages at a young age, but women are encouraged to have children irrespective of their marital status. In fact it can be argued that in Iceland becoming a mother is more important in becoming a grown up woman than the marital status (although this is important as well). Women who have no child are referred to as being "childless" ("barnlaus"). It is however extremely hard to make it on your own as a single mother in a fishing community where there are few employment opportunities outside the freezing plant with its low wages. Single mothers do not have a positive status derived from being on their own with their children and they are encouraged to find a spouse. Some of the single mothers, who have had a child outside of marriage, are widowed, or divorced, live in their parent's home, but for many others the only solution is to move to Reykjavík looking for other

opportunities. Some of them see this as a choice between the security which the network of relatives and friends provide in the villages where and a life in the city where they can attempt make a more independent living.

In spite of the fact that women have been so much without their husbands in fishing villages, single mothers as well as wives of trawler fishermen often talk about social isolation in a society where many activities are organized for couples. The yearly "Þorablót" (a festival in the winter) in Bolungarvík is, for example, only for couples, and the women have to wear a traditional costume. In Neskaupstaður the "Þorablót" is open to all, but there the middle aged unmarried people are the particular targets of by the local comedians who make fun of them in their shows.¹² Fishermen's wives commonly emphasize a need to get out to work just to be around other people. One wife of a trawler fishermen put it this way:

Of course fishermen's wives can easily get isolated, because they can hardly participate in social activities to the same degree as other women who have their husbands working on land. What has however helped me is that I have always worked outside the home and in this way been able to be around other women. My grandmother made this possible as she took care of the children.

The positive ideas we find about fishermen's wives are only partly caused by the fact that they take care of running the households by

¹² It should be noted here that in Iceland there is hardly any distinction between living together in legal marriage or in common law marriage. There is for example no distinction in terms used to refer to wife and husband or in-laws.

themselves. More important is the fact that they are associated with the fishermen, and that they wait for the fishermen, who go out to sea in almost any weather bringing wealth to the nation. Thus the respect fishermen's wives have in the community does not derive only from being independent and on their own but maybe more from being the women behind the fishermen. The fishermen's wife gains respect because of her role in reproduction but not in relation to her work outside of the household. Moreover, in spite of the fact that I consciously looked for the power their strength and independence might give to women outside of the household, or for some evidence that one might point to, I could hardly find any.

Whether women are fishermen's wives or not they generally express a strong "attachment" to their role in reproduction. Many women emphasized that their work in a freezing plant can be easily adjusted to household responsibilities and almost all the women I talked to said that the biggest advantage to the job was its flexibility, and that it could more easily be articulated with family life than other available jobs in the community. Fish factory women can easily take some time off when a child is sick or a husband is home from the sea. Many of them are hired under conditions that allow them to work when they want to. However, the two villages Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður may be exceptional in this regard, since work there has been more stable than in most other fishing communities. In each case one company owns both boats and factories and thus have an interest in providing fish for the factories rather than selling it unprocessed elsewhere.

It is only with the recent changes in Bolungarvík, and after these interviews were completed, that people have experienced unemployment because the major company went bankrupt. After the bankruptcy of the

Einar Guðfinnsson company and related establishments, 150 people had to face serious unemployment for the first time. Previously, it was almost an obligation of this company, as of dominant companies elsewhere, to provide work for those who were willing to work and as long as there was any fish to be had. Although women's work in the freezing plant has become more stable in the last decades and not as seasonal as it used to be, it can still be argued that women are used as a reserve army of labor. Women are generally not upset about the fact that men are higher paid than they are. They commonly talk about the men as the main providers, and those of them who are fishermen are seen as working in a dangerous and tough situation, besides having to stay from the family so much.

Above I mentioned many fishermen's silence about life on land and in the family. A similar silence was to be found among the fishermen's wives when asked about the danger of their husband's occupation, in bad weather. Fishermen and other men who had been raised in a fishing community were generally willing to talk about the dangers of their occupation but very few women with whom I spoke would admit to me that they worried about a husband at sea unless if the weather was very bad. They would often turn to another topic of discussion or say that it did not help to talk about this. Ari remembers when he was a child and his father was fishing on a small boat. He says:

When I was a child, there were only small boats here, from four to eight tons. Of course there was often bad weather in those days as today and of course there were many men at sea when the storms came. Because I was a son of a fisherman on such a small boat I used to go down to the pier after school to see which boats had already come in and to look which boats

were coming in, because in such a fishing community you learn early on to know all the boats from a distance. Therefore I often stood there in bad weather and waited. Women were not exactly worried about their husbands, but of course in bad weather they were. Maybe underneath people were somewhat worried, but they did not show this. I can remember when I was about ten or eleven years old and the weather was bad. My father was on a five ton boat and it was four o'clock and he should have been here before noon because of the storm. I was out on the breakwater but ran home regularly. Then I noticed that my mother was always walking to the window which turned to the ocean and going to the door, but she did not say anything. But you could feel she was looking for someone. Then they came. This was common for women, but they did not talk about or express their fear. If in the evening one boat had not shown up people became nervous because then they knew something was wrong and they just had to wait and hope they had been able to get on land somewhere else. There was no telephone like today when people can call at all times and people know very soon if something happens. Even though they could go on land somewhere they could not let anyone know here, but came back after the weather calmed down. And then you would see a boat coming after many days and everyone would wait and be worried until they could see that all the crew members were there.

Guðrún who lost her husband into the sea says:

I was never worried about my husband when he was out at sea. It was therefore such a surprise for me to realize that the boat had gone down and the brothers had drowned. Of course it was a great shock and hard to accept. In the beginning I was busy helping the children to get over their loss that winter. But the spring came and I watched the boats sail out on the still fjord and then I began to realize what had happened. But it

was wonderful to experience the support of the people of the community during those hard times. I never thought I would marry a fisherman again, but I did. And now I often worry about him at sea.

Women generally said they felt the ships were safe. Some said however that they worried about their husbands when they went fishing very far such as close to Greenland or Newfoundland. Some women in Bolungarvík said they were more afraid of Óshlíð, the mountain above the road to the next town.

In summary I have found that the term women-centered can be applied to maritime households in Iceland. Women act as heads of households from day to day. They make the decisions regarding household expenses and the children's upbringing. They are moreover seen in the dominant ideology as having a central role.

We have seen in earlier chapters that men's absence from the home is not new in Icelandic history. But it is also obvious that what is involved in being on your own today is not the same as it was in the past. The contrasting stories told by women of the oldest and the youngest generations illustrates this. They are in fact describing different stories of their daily lives. The descriptions of younger women are in many ways "a middle class story" and very different from before the Second World War when many people were extremely poor. The real income of the younger generation, as of others in Iceland, has risen considerably; most people have escaped the misery of poverty and this gives them more autonomy throughout their lives, both women and men. This is not exactly a gender based liberation, although these circumstances allowed women to organize and win some rights. In the past women had no contact with their

husbands while they went on seasonal fishing expeditions in another part of the country. Their daily concern was to make ends meet, to take care of the cows and the production in the home, whereas in the modern consumer society, decisions revolve to a greater extent around consumer items that the family is purchasing and around large loans that they have taken because of house building. Women in maritime households are perceived of as strong and independent raising the children on their own, but this status is not gained from being on their own but rather because of their association with the fishermen. They have to remain strong and not express their fear when their husbands are working under dangerous conditions.

6.4. Gendered Division of Labor in Fish Processing

In the two communities studied, there continues to be a very clear sexual division of labor, and this division has become more clearly defined with industrialization. This is the case both in the fisheries and in other jobs within the community. The majority of women have a job outside the home, with the exception of a few with young children. However, many of these jobs are part time, well suited to women who have children of school age, still living at home. Children usually spend time home alone after school or with siblings. They know where the mother works and can walk to her if something comes up, or go to other relatives or neighbours. The villages are generally seen as safe places to raise children since the children can play on their own without much danger. Moreover, in both communities, everyone goes home for lunch and some even go home in the

coffee breaks. Some women who stay home with small children go to work in the freezing plant or some other job in the summer when school is out and they have 10 to 13 year old girls to take care of the small children during the day.

Edda is a woman in her late forties who lives in Bolungarvík. She is married to a man who used to be a fisherman but works now on land. Her grandparents and parents also live in the village. Her grandmother lived a very different life from her. As a woman married to a foreman on a boat her husband owned with Einar Guðfinnsson, she did all the work which had to be done around the house. In her grandmother's household there was a very clear division of labor. As an example of this she and her husband told me that he would not even get himself a glass of water if he was standing next to the glass and the running water. In Edda's household it is different, as both her husband and children have always been involved in the housework to some extent, although it is primarily her responsibility and she tells her husband what needs to be done. She and her oldest daughter who is twenty years old both work in the freezing plant in the morning. Her daughter lives with her boyfriend and young baby. Edda says about her experience when she had to go out to work in the late seventies in a shop:

I used to work outside when the children were young and they could come with me and play there. My daughter was 10 years old at this time and she baked cakes and pancakes and made coffee and brought it to me.

In these villages children generally begin to work early. The most common job for girls who are about 10 and 11 years old is baby-sitting in

the summer. Between 13 years and 15 years when they are old enough to go to the freezing plant, they get a job provided by the community cleaning, cutting grass and otherwise improving the village's look. Sons of fishermen commonly go with their fathers fishing. Boys generally spend a great deal of time in the harbour. From a young age they begin to earn money in a very gender divided labor market. Children of this young age generally show a great interest in working during the summer months and those who do not have a job in the summer when they are 15 years old talk of themselves as being unemployed.

In Bolungarvík there are not many job opportunities outside the fisheries and related activities. In Neskaupstaður, by contrast, there is a hospital that employs many women and also a secondary school. The secondary school in Neskaupstaður prepares boys for jobs in the town but not the girls. In the school one can learn certain some trades such as electrician or car mechanic. The girls are, however, mostly in a "high school" or "junior college" track which is more academic and does not give any immediate job opportunities upon graduation. Even though there is a large hospital next door, they are not prepared for the work there. According to a new study, girls in fishing villages expressed most interest in working in health care, but they are also likely to think that they will not find jobs in their home communities (Þórlindsson 1992). There is more emphasis on education in Neskaupstaður than in Bolungarvík, where the emphasis is more on early involvement in working for wages.

Most work places in both villages employ either primarily women or primarily men. One can almost say that there are men's work places and women's work places. Thus the hospital in Neskaupstaður has mostly women while in the net making there are mostly men. Going to sea is a

man's job, with very few exceptions. In the freezing plant, on the other hand, a place generally associated with women, we find both men and women. Here, where women and men work in the same place, there is a clear segregation in the division of labor. Men and women rarely intermingle either during work or breaks, and during the latter they sit at separate tables, usually on separate sides of the room, if they stay in the same room. Furthermore, the work women do at a particular time period and a particular place is described as feminine while the work men do is described in masculine terms. The feminine qualities described as being required in the jobs defined as feminine are in content similar to those seen as needed to be a good housewife and a mother.

There are fewer jobs in the freezing plant which are conceived of as women's jobs than men's jobs. Women cut, clean out worms, and pack the fish. A few are floor managers, although fewer women than men. The work on the pier, driving trucks and fork lifters, and unloading the fish from the ship, are men's jobs, with some very rare exceptions. Men work in the freezing room, they are commonly floor managers and only men are in machine maintenance work. Old men walk around and sharpen the knives for the women, and before the conveyer belt came, young boys would bring in the fish to the women and take it away from them again once it was packed. Men more commonly work with machines (feeding the machine with fish and so on) although this is changing now as we will see below.

There are more jobs defined as men's jobs than as women's jobs. Moreover, the jobs women perform are generally more monotonous and have become even more so in the last five to six years, especially with the conveyor belt. Women stand or sit in the same place almost all day long

performing the same tasks. Men on the other hand have jobs that allow them both to move around and which allows them more control over the work process itself. They can for example more easily control the speed of their work. They also have more chances to talk to others while working.

6.4.1. Regular Work-Day in Three Freezing Plants

Technological developments have continued to occur in the freezing plants. During the last decade new machines have come about with the aid of modern computer technology which streamline the work as well as keeping a close account of the utilization of the fish. At the same time and as a result, the organization of work has changed. In the 1970s and early 1980s there was a piece work system in the freezing plants. In the beginning speed was most important, but little by little quality and good utilization of the material became more important in the calculation. At this time work in a freezing plant could be quite stressful. In the late 1980s the individual bonus system was abolished in the freezing plants around the country and replaced with what has been called a house bonus. What this means is that everybody in the factory gets the same bonus. My research took place after this change to a house bonus, but during a preliminary research project I had become familiar with the individual bonus system.

The following descriptions of a typical work day in three different factories give an indication of the change and they can be seen as three different stages of development towards the monotonization of women's work in the freezing plant. The first is based on preliminary field research in a small fishing village on the south-west coast. The other two are based

on observation and discussion with women working in the freezing plant in first Bolungarvík and then Neskaupstaður. Although the job as a fish processor in a freezing plant has become in a way more monotonous, it does not mean that it has become more simple, because there are more and more different ways to cut and pack the fish according to the new demands of buyers. In a freezing plant like this there are many kinds of fish to be processed and in many different ways. It takes some time to learn the different cuts and the related language used to refer to the different methods.

The first of the freezing plants was rather old fashioned, the work women performed involved some degree of variety, and there was an individual bonus system. In the other two plants, there was a house bonus and the work has to some extent been routinized, with each person doing more of the same every day. Let us now turn our attention to three women workers in these three freezing plants.

Sigga gets up seven o'clock in the morning, wakes her children and gives them breakfast and prepares them for school which begins a bit later than her workday. When she is at work they are alone at home except for her youngest who goes to child care. She is three years old and her brother takes her there when he goes to school at nine. Her work day in the freezing plant begins at eight, and along with the other women she is ready with her apron, her hair net and rubber gloves when the loud bell rings indicating that work should begin. Two women work together at each table and both clean, cut, and pack the fish. There is a piece-work system and the two women who work together get a bonus payment as a unit. Sigga shares a table with a woman who has a long experience of this work,

just like herself, but neither is a bonus queen.¹³ It is carefully recorded how much each woman produces and how well she utilizes the fish given to her.

Today the women are working with cod and Sigga tries to look carefully for any worms and cut the bones so as not to take any of the fish along with them. She, like the other women, complains in a loud voice about the bad quality of the fish. The women in this freezing plant never have a nice word to say about the fish. If you did not know better, you would think it was their worst enemy. It is in their interest that the fish be considered bad so they will get a higher bonus for their work. They shout at the boys and scold them for not bringing the fish fast enough to them.

Nine o'clock is the first five minute smoke-break and some of the women don't go as the lights are not turned off in their tables and they want to use the time. Then there is work again until ten, when they get a longer coffee break for twenty minutes. Sigga and her partner try to pack everything they cut before this longer brake so that the water will not leak from the fish while they are away. If the water goes, their bonus will go down as the fish will be lighter. When Sigga returns, there is a piece of paper on her table. Soon some women at a nearby table begin to secretly smuggle worms to her and put it on the paper. It is a part of the quality test and in their interest that Sigga finds many worms. The bonus queen works alone today. The only woman she trusts to work fast enough with her did not show up. The bonus queen of this freezing plant is a young woman who is proud of being the fastest there. The other women talk

¹³ The term bonus queens (bónusdrottning) was used for the fastest workers. It was a title which carried a certain amount of prestige among the women in the freezing plant.

during the coffee break about the problem she has in that the queen is too fast for the bonus system and reaches the new ceiling too easily.

Everyone goes home for lunch at twelve o'clock. Sigga stops on the way home to get some milk and bread. During the times when her husband is away fishing, she waits to have a warm dinner until in the evening. After lunch she plans to relax a bit but then suddenly remembers that she has to go to the bank as it will be closed when work is over. It is back into the boots, run to the bank and then directly to factory. When she returns to work, she puts on the shirt, the hair net, finds the plastic apron and waits for the loud ringing. She is a bit more relaxed now than in the morning and talks to the woman she works with. The inspectors come and take a test from one of their boxes and Sigga is not worried, as they rarely find a single bone. But now they return holding up a small bone. This means that they have to unpack four packages and go over them again. Sigga takes the blame, she talks too much and has been a bit absent minded today. This really brings down the bonus, and Sigga takes off her gloves so as to feel the fish more easily for bones.

At two o'clock there a short smoke break which Sigga decides to skip as they have lost some time already. Time goes fast, and too fast when you are competing with time. Women compete with other women, on other tables, but mostly they compete with time. At three o'clock there is a longer break which they have to take as they turn the lights off in the tables and Sigga really needs a cup of coffee. She and her friends take one card game. Then it is back to work. After working full speed all day, Sigga can feel how her energy is leaving her and how she has to concentrate more carefully so as not to make mistakes. Maybe she should take a high chair and sit down for a while, but she decides not to as she can never work as

fast sitting down as when she is standing up. She is so tired of looking into the light in the table that she is glad when it is time to pack. It is soon five o'clock and Sigga and her partner have finished cleaning their table when they notice that one new girl and one older woman who hurt her arm have not nearly finished packing what they have cut. Without a word they move over to them and help them finish their packing. Then it is wash the apron and the boots, punch the clock, and go to the child care center for the youngest child. When Sigga receives her salary at the end of the month she does not understand how it is calculated. She says that one has to be a mathematician to understand the complex calculations. What she receives is a bit higher than the minimum wage and it is only half of what her husband earns.

We go with Vala to the second freezing plant. She is a young woman of twenty from out of town and has come to the village for a summer job. She lives in the nearby working quarters. We follow her in her first day of work. She walks to the freezing plant a bit before eight to get a new apron, a hair net and a shirt and she has with her new rubber gloves she bought the day before. As she is Icelandic nobody shows her around. An old man gives her two very sharp knives and tells her to go to a table and do like the others. Vala walks to a table but is told by some women that this is really another woman's table who has had it for a long time and that she cannot work there. She will have to find another table. Slowly she walks to the next available table when a young woman comes running up and says that this is her mother's table but that she is welcome to take the one behind her. Vala is glad when the mother comes and is very friendly and willing to help her.

This freezing plant is big and the machines are noisy. There are young boys who bring the fish to Vala and after cutting and cleaning the fish she puts it on another tray which goes on a line to the packers. By this time the individual bonus system has been abolished and there is only a house bonus which reflects the combined effort of all the workers. Each woman works individually on a table doing the cutting, but the packing is separate and done by other women. The only variation in work is to wash the containers with water after emptying them and waiting for the boys to bring you more fish. In the first break, which is only five minutes, Vala does not go to the coffee room; it is too much bother to take off her boots. She just goes out to smoke one cigarette.

They are processing a fat and slippery fish today, and the fat in the fish makes your rubber gloves grow too big. In the longer break Vala goes and sits with some girls who are also boarders in the workers' living quarters. They are a few years younger than her and have been put to other jobs such as packing the fish. Because of the noise from the machines, most of the women wear head phones in which they can listen to the radio or to music. It is impossible to keep up a conversation during work as the women don't face each other. Vala counts the trays of fish she can finish in an hour, and plans to get headphones as soon as possible so as not to be bored. She is glad that in this job she can keep her thoughts to herself. In the lunch break she goes back to the living quarters and eats a big meal. It is unbelievable how hungry one can get from such a work.

In the afternoon they cut cod. One of the floor managers comes and shows Vala how to do it. This is more complicated than the job in the morning, much slower and one has to be careful when cutting off the backbone to go close to the bone and throw out as little fish as possible.

Vala's legs soon tire from standing on the cold floor and she tells the woman who is working in front of her. The woman in front of her says she always stands on a rubber mat and advises her to do the same. But Vala prefers to try to find a high plastic chair, similar to the ones some of the other women are using. In the long coffee break, she gets to talk to some women of the village. They complain that too many school children have been hired for the summer. These kids spend too much time just staring at the walls and bring down the bonus they tell her. After the break Vala goes looking for a chair but notices that they are marked with women's names. She sees one which has some name on it but she decides to take the risk. She attempts to work faster, but at the same time tries to utilize the fish well, so that the women will not think that she is bringing down the bonus. An older woman, probably around seventy years old, comes to look at her work. She is an inspector. She says that she used to be fast in her younger years but that older women who can not work fast but are experienced are commonly chosen to be inspectors.

The woman of the third freezing plant is Katla. She is fifty years old and she generally only works in the freezing plant in the morning, except when there is much fish as in the herring season. She has been up for a while, usually waking up early when her husband, who is alone on a boat, goes to sea very early in the morning. Katla puts on her boots and goes out to wait for the factory bus. She lives too far from the freezing plant to walk. Two of her friends from the plant also take the bus. By eight o'clock she is ready with her apron and her knives. She goes to her table which is next to the table of her sister-in-law. The relatively new tables and the chairs have been designed in such a way as to make the position of

the women more comfortable when working, in an attempt to reduce the health problems which are common in this occupation, and especially to lower the incidence of back pains and sore muscles.

They both sit while they work. Each worker works alone but they sit side by side and not so far from each other that they can talk if they want to. A few women are wearing head phones. Katla has tried the headphones but finds them uncomfortable. The fish comes to them in a line and they just have to take the fish tray from there and put it next to them and after processing the fish put it on another tray in front of them which they push on the other line when they are finished. From there the tray moves to the women who pack the fish. In hourly breaks Katla always goes and sits at the same table with the same women she has been sitting with for many years. Today she is a bit irritated because María, a woman her age, did not come and did not even call in. Katla knows that María's husband is home from the sea but she thinks that women should at least announce if they are coming or not. At nine-thirty Katla, like everyone else, stops working when she can hear from the loudspeakers that the exercises are beginning. Everyone in the factory participates in these exercises, young and old, floor managers, packers, cutters and the old men who sharpen the knives. At first Katla did not want to participate when this routine was initiated a couple of years ago, but now she has come to like them and thinks that they may do her some good, especially her hands. She feels less pain in her arms now. Katla says that this freezing plant may not be the best in the country, but that the working conditions have greatly improved. She is not worried about the plant going bankrupt because they have not over-invested, although she thinks that having a conveyor belt ought to increase her salary because more fish would go through the house

in a day. She is proud of the factory and points to the big paintings by a well known artist on the walls, portraying ships and people at work in the fisheries. She says that the painter knows what he is doing because he used to be a seasonal worker in fishing communities when he was younger. Katla has a strong opinion about white collar specialist in Iceland's capital -- men who have never peed into the salt sea and women who have never cut fish or pulled out worms. They are not in touch with the real life of this nation she maintains. When the lunch break comes, many of the women leave after superficially cleaning their table but Katla does a careful cleaning as she is not planning to return in the afternoon.

None of the women described above works on the conveyor belt, which has come to many freezing plants today, such as the one in Bolungarvík. It has made the work of women much less challenging than before. There is a machine which cuts the fish with the help of computer technology and all the women have to do was to sit and check the fish for bones or worms. In some cases they do not have to pack the fish as each piece goes automatically and pre-frozen to separate containers according to size. At this early stage most of the women saw this as an improvement and did not worry about the possible technological displacement. Instead they view the new technology as a potentially allowing for higher salary as more fish goes through the factory and should improve house-bonus. However, a few are worried about the increased monotony of this new technology and find the work more boring.

Women's work conditions in the fisheries have become better and the work more secure through the year. It has become easier but at the same time more monotonous, and with the most recent change, the conveyor belt, they have to an extent lost some "control" over how they

work. That is, they no longer work as individuals each with their own speed and quality of work. Given the more clearly defined sexual division of labor in the freezing plant what is seen as appropriate work for women, has in some sense become more restrictive than what is seen as appropriate for men.

6.4.2. Gender Construction in the Work Place

Until the early 1960's men's and women's jobs were differently paid, and men received a higher salary. It is often said that the harder working women would take on men's jobs in order to raise their wages. Men's jobs were and still are considered to be more arduous. Alda who works in the freezing plant in Neskaupstaður is a wife of a fisherman. Her husband is on a trawler and stays out for a long periods at a time. She has two children who have moved away to go to school in Reykjavík. Alda works full time. She is outspoken and is the representative of the workers in the union. She has for more than two decades done almost all the jobs in a freezing plant, including many men's jobs. She discussed this wage difference between men's and women's jobs with me and then said:

Actually the salaries were not only according to sex, but there were specific jobs so that hard working women tried to get men's jobs. You would get men's salary for boning the fish with hands and working on the machines and such men's jobs.

She says about men's jobs:

Operating machines is generally a men's job, because it is a job that goes on longer into the evening. They have to finish the freezing and this is also a hard job to do. Men's work is almost only limited to being forklift operators, and to jobs involved in transferring the fish to the factory. They have jobs that require physical strength, such as lifting heavy boxes of fish.

It is not possible to maintain that jobs per se are manly or womanly; their character can change depending on whether a man or a woman generally performs them. Consequently if a woman like Alda performs a job defined as a manly job, then she becomes defined as having manly characteristics such as strength, speaking loudly, and rough manners. If she is not strong physically, she may be described as talking men's talk. However if the same job increasingly becomes a woman's job, it loses its masculine attributes and begins to require womanly qualities and properties such as compassion in order to be performed well. The concepts compassion ("hugulsemi"), conscientiousness, patience and neatness often came up in conversations about women's work. In the descriptions of men's work, on the other hand, the main emphasis was on physical strength and technical knowledge.

It is too simple to argue that women's work is defined as womanly because it is the work that is most like that done in the home and that it is devalued because it is an extension of the work performed in the household. There is more involved in this process. Women of course become good at performing jobs that they have been trained to do from a very young age, thus they are better at such things as cutting the fish than those who have no training. This is a job that requires skill and a training for it to be performed well and efficiently. Moreover, it is possible that

supposedly "feminine" characteristics such as being patient are more likely to be acquired by women since it is something that is valued in women and reinforced throughout their lives.

The ideas regarding what is feminine or masculine at a particular time affect the gender division of labor, which reflects upon the definition of the feminine and the masculine. This reproduction of the gender division of labor is clearly based on power differences. This can be seen when the pattern is broken, as we see in the pride women evince when they do men's jobs either in the fish factory or out at sea. When men perform work generally defined as women's work they talk about it as a humiliating experience. Within the freezing plant men do not want to perform women's jobs, even when in another part of the country the particular job is not as clearly defined as either a men's or a women's job. When I asked men why there were no men in cutting and packing they would usually answer that men did not have the ability or the patience this job requires. Some said they were too clumsy. However, more said, and especially in informal discussion, that they would rather be unemployed; that it would be humiliating for them to do women's work in the freezing plant. A man who worked as a floor manager in a freezing plant said about his experience in trying to give men women's job's:

We have tried to put men in the cutting and packing, but not with good results. Whether or not it is because they do not want this or if they cannot stand still so long I am not sure. One year there were many boys here and then we took some boys to the tables. They did the job but not well enough. When there was the individual bonus system the women would sometimes have a higher salary on the tables than men, and they work the harder jobs so this is not the reason. I think now

that it is an old heresy, women have to do this and men that. The boys thought they should go outside and do men's work. The men's jobs are often dirtier, but the women's work is generally harder and more tiring.

This view about women's work being harder than men's is very unusual. The majority of the people with whom I talked who have worked in a freezing plant maintained that men's work was really harder. Anna, a woman in her early forties, who was born and raised in Neskaupstaður and has worked with fish from a young age, explained that:

The work women perform requires more patience, which is something men lack. Men on the other hand do jobs that require more physical strength; they do not have enough patience to cut and pack the fish. In the past only men used to work with the machines, but today many women have begun to do this work. It is just a fact that because of their compassion women are able to run the machines longer without repair.

Salting herring and packing it into barrels is an example of women's work. An example of a manly work where men work together and talk about manly things is the baiting, and the baiting huts are associated with men, especially in literature. In both Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður baiting is classified as a masculine job although in both villages and especially in Neskaupstaður it is also done by women. The baiting done by women is more commonly for the small boats, and it is done either by a fisherman's wife or someone hired at a piece rate. The men who bait in the baiting huts are usually land-based crew members of ships and are paid in shares just like other crew members.

The herring season, which is mostly in the mid-to-late summer, has always been important in Neskaupstaður. The best years were from 1961 to 1967. At that time there was so much herring that many people had to be hired from other places. Usually people worked outside on the pier washing and salting the fish and packing it into barrels but in 1968 after the herring season was extended to the fall, work-houses were provided. Alda explains how salting herring used to be much better paid in the past:

In the herring years you could get good money over the summer if you could salt herring. It was far better paid than it is today. Also if you consider that then when you salted the herring you had to put each herring down in the correct manner. In these years you had to follow particular rules about how to go about putting the herring into the barrel. At that time it was possible to get paid as much for salting one barrel as baiting one bucket, but now the salting of one barrel is valued less than half of what one can get for a bucket. Herring is women's work and naturally it is men who usually do the baiting.

Edda, from Bolungarvík, describes her experience when she decided to cross the borderline between men's and women's work to go baiting with her husband in the men's baiting hut, as the only woman there at that time:

I and my husband baited for Einar Guðfinnsson for a while. I did four buckets and he did four. One puts hooks on the line and then the bait on the hooks. When I began baiting it was considered awful. To leave the freezing plant to go to baiting! My brothers were very shocked. But I have often teased them, saying this is not at all harder than working in the freezing plant. I think I would ten times more like to bait than work in the freezing plant.

In response to my question, "Why do they think it is harder?" she responded:

Because they have never worked in the freezing plant. They think it is harder because men are used to do this work, but this is changing and now there are more women baiting.

Another example of women crossing the borderline between men's and women's jobs are those women who go to sea, although, as I mentioned in an earlier chapter, there have never been any formal bans on women going fishing in Icelandic culture. Women have always fished although this has not been a common job for women and the women who have fished have been considered exceptional and not very womanly. Those few women who go to sea usually go as cooks, and they are hired under the same conditions as the men and with the same size of the share as other crew members. Alda went to sea as a boat cook when she was a young woman. She describes her experience working on a herring boat as follows:

I was not one of those who wanted to get married and settle down. ... But I decided to go on a herring boat as a cook one summer, at the time when the herring adventure was still in full swing. This was of course a way for me to get money in a short time. At this time there was a great difference between men's and women's salaries, much more than today. This was, however, a sure way to earn some money since you were valued as one of the crew. It was not such a hard job. There were eleven men on the boat. I think that those of us who did such things as going out to sea were seen as cool chicks because the ships at this time were not like today. There were no comforts, you had to share a room with seven or eight men

and the living and work conditions were very primitive. You had to be like one of the boys.

Although men are generally higher paid than women in these communities and in Icelandic society, as women earn only 60 percent of men's wages, wage differences cannot explain the difference in the status of jobs in the examples above. Men and women have the same hourly pay in the freezing plant, and the few women who go to sea are hired on the basis of the same share as other crew members. This is therefore not just a question of wage differences but rather of status differences. Clearly it is not the job or the activity itself that matters, but who generally performs it.

Today, all the workers in the freezing plant are paid according to the same wage scale. However, it is noticeable when one takes a look into the plant that the men who work there are usually those too old or too young to get better paid jobs, whereas the women are of all ages. Men who are between 20 and 65 years of age are either in managerial jobs or work as repairmen, and thus have higher incomes. Alda discusses this fact:

The women here are of different ages from youth to in some cases over seventy years old. But a certain age group of men cannot be found here, it seems to me, unless they have some education. Those men take care of repairing machines, or are managers or electricians, or if not, (if they are doing regular labor) then they are young boys or older men. From the age of 20 to 50 they seem to be doing something else, like going to sea or something where they can earn more money. If men are going to be providers and get a roof over their heads it cannot be done with this kind of work; for that you have to go to sea or do something that gives you more money. But some of these men return later when they are older and have given up on the sea. ... The fact is that among those laborers who are

least educated like us, there is less inequality in the salary between men and women. The higher the salary the more difference you will find in this regard. In fact this is maybe understandable because we are just selling pure labor power (raw labor power) and women are absolutely indispensable in the cutting and the packing. Men have tried to do this and it just does not work; they do not have the patience that this work requires. Maybe they see this as a woman's job and too degrading to do, but at least it has been shown that it just is not possible to have men do this and therefore women are necessary.

She emphasizes the care women take in their jobs in the freezing plant and how valuable it is to save the fish from damage:

I work full time, that is from eight to five, and naturally as everyone knows in the fish processing, we are always saving some important valuables from being destroyed. We are always processing fish that would otherwise be damaged. And this can lead to 60 hours a week and more. Last summer, for example, we often began at six in the morning because the union had put a ban on week-end work over the summer months, so people were exhausted on Saturdays. But then we had the Saturday off. But this led to a longer working day the other days of the week, so we had as much night work as if we had been working Saturdays.

Edda described her work in the freezing plant in the 1960's:

At that time there was work in the freezing plant from eight in the morning and often until 12 in the night, and you did not have the day off even though it was Saturday or Sunday.

I asked her, "Could you not get off if you wanted to?" and she replied:

One just worked, one just had to go to work. It was not like today. This was because there were more fish in the sea and there were no trawlers selling directly abroad like today. It was not well taken if we did not want to work and we felt like we had to.

The emphasis on women in processing as saving very important valuables is very common and strong in the culture. This may be explained from the fact that until the middle of this century work in Iceland whether in farming, or in fishing was seasonal, and people worked hard in getting as much fish as possible during the season. It is commonly said that when there was much fish to be had, then everyone "who could wear mittens" would go out to work and to get it processed before it would be damaged.¹⁴

There are also many women who live in fishing villages who will not work in a freezing plant. One floor manager explains why it has often been so hard to get young full time workers:

It used to be easy to get people to work and there were even waiting lists for jobs, but in the last decades it has become harder to get workers. In my opinion, and I have never kept this opinion to myself, the fishery has not had the respect it should have here in Iceland, even though we live from it. You can see this when you ask a young woman what she does for a living and she answers that she only works in fish. The word only shows what I mean. Here as in other fishing villages, you don't work with fish unless if you have nothing else. This is so even though the salary is higher than, for example, working in a shop. The housewives are really those who are holding up this company here as in other fishing villages. The problem is that

¹⁴ This is a common expression for seasonal work in haying or in the fishery where everyone would go to work and schools would close for the day. The mittens refer to the knitted mittens used by fishermen and workers when working outside in the Icelandic climate.

many of them only want to work part time and that is not a sufficient work force. Most of them have grown up here with this they and are the stable work force who keep the company going. They used to be more willing to work full time but this has changed as they have become older. The young have other opportunities such as working in a bank or in the hospital. The small group of core workers is getting smaller and older and few younger women come into this group except as temporary workers.

Edda summed up her view on work in the fisheries as follows:

There was a time when people did not look at the fisheries as a good enough work place. It was seen as nothing.... The freezing plant! No! But working in a freezing plant, there is no shame working in fish. It is more honourable working in the fish than merely working in an office, because you are providing for the nation. There are women my age who will not work in the freezing plant and have never stepped with their foot into the factory. "Work in fish ugh... I'd rather be unemployed!" they say. I have done everything in the fisheries except going out to sea to catch fish.

The pride that many women who work in fish processing take in the fishery has to do with being a part of the economic activity most important for the Icelandic export economy. Even when evaluating men's work as more important than their own, women still see their own work as important for the national economy. They see it as an important aspect of the entire fishing industry and many of them are interested in other aspects of the fishery such as fishing and marketing.

Fríða is a young woman in her twenties who works in the freezing plant. She is a single mother and shares a home with her father. She told me that when she took the fish processor course, she was most interested in the marketing aspects, while many of the others had been most interested in interpersonal relations or quality control. Fríða explained further:

In the course I liked learning about quality control. But I think a great deal about where the fish goes, so I liked learning about the market in the course... We all follow day by day where the trawlers are and how much they are catching, even when you are not working with fish at that particular time, you enquire about them. It is as if one has become part of it all... I heard an interview on the radio recently with a woman who works in a large freezing plant in Reykjavík, and she said that with the conveyor belt she felt like a part of the machine. Here it is different, because everything revolves around fish. But still working in fish processing is seen as a second class job everywhere in Iceland, including Reykjavík. I don't know why it is. Maybe the society has made it this way, but the mentality is just like this.

The view expressed by the fish processors above contradicts Bradley's argument (1989) that by moving into modern factories, women have "lost all sense of connection with the mainstream of fishing activity, and all sense of involvement in the skills and traditions of one of humankind's oldest occupations" (Bradley 1989:103). Women are conscious of their work being looked down upon, but they feel that the fishery of which they are a part is important for the economy and the continuous existence of the nation. By doing their work well they are

saving resources that would otherwise be damaged and making quality products for the market.

The fishery is not peripheral to the Icelandic economy as in many other countries in the North Atlantic, it is central to and a part of the modern national identity. Moreover, and maybe more importantly, women do not see their identity as just fish processors. There is not a very clear line between their identity as fish processors and as members of fishing communities or families or households which include fishermen. A good example of how much a part of the fishing community they see themselves is the fact that often when I asked women when something happened, they would answer that they were not exactly sure, but they were sure that it was the year before or after a particular trawler had been bought in the village.

Women are generally not very upset about the fact that men are higher paid than they are. Men are perceived by the majority of them as the main providers and those who are fishermen are seen as working in a dangerous and difficult situation, besides having to stay away from their family for long periods of time. Women generally do not see their interests as diverging from the higher paid fishermen of the same communities. As one woman who grew up as a fisherman's daughter, married a fisherman and has a son who is a fisherman says:

I think that the fishermen should definitely earn more than people on land. They do more demanding and harder work. My son is a fisherman on a successful trawler so he has a high salary. They deserve it because of the risks they take.

In other words, women's identity as fish processors cannot be clearly removed from their identity as a member of their fishing community, or as members of families which include a husband, brother, or son who is a fisherman. "We are all on the same boat" as the saying goes. Experience teaches that the stronger division is between "us", the fisher folk who produce the wealth on which society is built and "them", the city dwellers who spend this wealth and who see the fishing villages as a burden but depend on them without realizing it.

While women are not satisfied with the low salary they receive for their work, and point out that the work is seen as second class, they take some pride in it and in the new technology and work conditions which have made it easier for them to perform their tasks. Based on her research in Newfoundland, Porter maintains that the women remembered old fishing work with pride, whereas the work in the freezing plants is seen as demeaning (1983). Among the older women I have interviewed I have not found any romantization of the past, when they had to work outside in the cold and wet. Instead they emphasize the improvements that have been made.

Although women's work in the freezing plant has become more stable and not as seasonal as it used to be, it can still be argued that they are used as a reserve labour force. Many of them as already mentioned are hired under conditions that allow them to work when they want, although they feel obligated to show up whenever there is a large quantity of fish. It is only in the last decade that women were able to get guaranteed hiring in the fish processing. Prior to that, workers could be sent home with a very short notice, and women were usually sent home first when there was a deficit. All told these women can be called upon when there is abundant

fish and sent home when there is a deficit. Having this advantage to come when they please can make it hard for them to leave, when they need to, while there are much fish to be processed. One woman recalled wanting to leave when it happened that there were a lot of fish to be processed; "they made me feel like a traitor to the nation, to leave all these valuables to be damaged."

Some of the women who work full time resent the part-time housewives who are opportunistic in their selection of working hours, who come and leave when they please, or who only work when the hourly pay is higher. As Edda explained:

Sometimes on week-ends and in the evening housewives would come and work in the fish and this irritated me. They could not come to work Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday. But if there was work on the week-end then they showed up. I don't know why they did not come the other days. Maybe they only wanted to work in evenings and week ends, and that irritated me. They only came when there was higher pay. One would get paid week-end and evening pay even though one did not work the other days.

There are many complaints about the fact that it is often hard to get enough laborers to the freezing plants and therefore foreigners have to be hired. The present tax laws clearly influence married women's participation in the work force. Each worker gets a tax card from the tax office when employed and brings to the firm where she or he works. If they do not bring the tax card the company takes tax from all their salary, but refunds it in August the following year. If however the employee uses the tax card she or he can earn about 57,000 crowns (ca. \$825) per month

without paying tax.¹⁵ Most of those who work in fish processing do not reach this limit for a regular working day. If a woman is married or living together with a man and does not have a job outside the home, her spouse can utilize 80 percent of her tax card and thus gets an extra tax deduction. Women can also utilize the tax card of her husband in the same way although this is unusual.

Alda indicates the effects these tax laws have on the wage labor participation of some married women in the fishing villages:

It has become harder than before to get women of the village or Icelandic women to work in the processing partly because of the changes in the tax system. There are many women who used to go into this work seasonally in the salting herring and doing other processing when their labor was needed. It was the housewives who used to do this, but now for example the fishermen's wives give their tax card to their husbands. The husbands can deduct their tax card, not fully but 80 percent. They say it is not worth it to take the tax card and just work and pay for child care for maybe one or two children and have no money left. When you have paid the tax and the child care fee, then there is very little left. If the husbands are fishermen, for example on a trawler, then they go on three tours a month and they finish the tax deduction on the first tour.

Pointing out the changes in employment opportunities, Alda adds:

There are so many fewer people who are temporarily hired than there used to be now everyone has a permanent job. ... There are many more job opportunities in banks and offices, as well as in shops for women. ... During the years when the women's

¹⁵ This amount can change from year to year and is decided upon by the government.

movement was most active, there was a strong emphasis on women getting educated instead of trying to raise the wages in the fishery and at this time many women learned clerical skills and took evening courses. After they had learned new skills they did not like not being able to use them and just work in the fishery. Many women of this village participated in the evening courses.

When asked whether she thought that the women's movement had any effect on women's position, she replied:

It's effects were less than we expected at the time, although it did have some effect. The saddest thing is that women are getting even less salary than men, and it is a sad story that, even since women have come increasingly into the labor market, it seems to me that the salary for women's work has gone down. It is absolutely impossible to live on these salaries.

The main reasons women give for why they go out to work in the fisheries are to earn their living and to get out of the home, especially after their children grow up. They go out to work primarily to be in the company of other women and because of the autonomy their own income gives them. Some women complained to me that they really wanted to go out to work and meet other women but that their husband had already utilized their tax card.

The women who have been most involved in the labour unions complain that it is hard to fight for better pay when women do not see themselves as providers. The attitudes I have described above, they argue, have hindered the achievement of economic equality. However they do not put all the blame on the women themselves and are also critical of the labor union leadership. Alda clarifies their position:

The union has been criticised for having become a clique of "top men" who are out of touch with the ordinary worker. I think this critique has helped in that more regular people have been getting involved. The negotiations always take place in Reykjavík except in the spring of 1988 when they were in Akureyri. That was a lot of fun, and this time the union was able to bring the negotiations closer to the ordinary worker. I have always found it very sad to walk into the house of the Federation of Employers ("Vinnuveitendasambandið") in Garðastræti in Reykjavík. One walks into the lions nest there. One has the feeling that one is an outsider, and this is, first of all, their place, and there they have all their information and all their tools and equipment to work with and one has always found it a bit embarrassing. That is why I found it so very different in Akureyri when we met in the building of the Federation of Labor in the northern part of Iceland ("Alþýðusamband Norðurlands"). Many people came who would never have gone to Reykjavík.

Recently there has been a noteworthy increase of capital investment in freezing trawlers where the fish processing is comparable to the fish processing on land. These freezing trawlers are very well equipped and working conditions are good. The jobs aboard them are, however, primarily men's jobs although a few young women have been hired as well. The salary paid in shares is high and there is competition for a place on such a trawler. In Norway there have been women hired on freezing trawlers for some time and in certain parts of Norway, especially the west coast it has become common to hire women. Eva Munk Madsen (1990) has studied the gender division of labor on Norwegian freezing trawlers and has found that the work women do is comparable to the jobs they do

on land. Thus women on Norwegian trawlers are mostly to be found in cutting and packing as they are in the freezing plant on land and in the kitchen. It is likely that the development will be similar in Iceland.

6.5. Summary

In this analysis of fishermen's wives and fish processors, I have discussed some of the aspects at work in the social construction of gender in Icelandic fishing communities of today. I have examined women's position in relation to reproduction and production in modern fishing communities by focusing on women's central position both in the household and in the freezing plant. I have emphasized the division of labor and how gender differences are created and recreated in reproduction and production. In my analysis, I have attempted to take into account the dominant ideas and the women's own descriptions as well.

All told, we have seen that, whether as fishermen's wives or fish processors, women make an important contribution to reproduction and production alike. Women have a central position in the household and they are primarily responsible for the work performed there. Gender construction is not only extended from the reproductive sphere to the area of production. By examining work routines in a freezing plant, we have been able to gain insight into the processes involved in the construction of gender and the maintenance of gender inequalities where men's jobs remain more highly valued in spite of hourly wage. It is clear that women's contribution to the fishing economy, as well as their centrality in

the household, have not guaranteed them high status. Control over their own and their husband's income, as well as acting as heads of household in everyday life, does give women some independence and a certain amount of autonomy. Yet this centrality in the household does not give women formal power in the community or over community finances. Taking into account the three different domains of analysis suggested in the discussion of the gender system, we can understand why the important contribution of women in both production and reproduction in fishing villages has not led to gender equality.

Conclusions

This thesis has been concerned with gender construction in Iceland with a particular focus on fishing villages. I have shown how in one lifetime household production has been eroded and women's contribution to the production process totally changed. The concept of gender has been used with an emphasis on the continuous social construction of femininity, and on historical specificity and variability. In my analysis of women's position I have followed a definition of gender which includes three arenas of analysis, none of which needs to be considered prior to the other: the domain of ideas, the division of labor, and individual experiences.

The first domain deals with the major division between men and women in the culture and how this is perpetuated in the dominant ideology. It is in this domain that ideas regarding what women and men should strive to become exist. The second domain focuses our attention on the diversity in the lives of real women, and it is in this arena that social changes affect women differently. The third domain consists of individual women who are active agents and who evaluate their options. I have included women's own descriptions of their lives and their options as a way to characterize this arena of analysis. In order to gain a better understanding of women's position in each particular time period I have not only examined ideas concerning women, but have attempted to show how women of different economic positions in fact lead different lives.

It is in this light that I studied the particularities of women's lives in fishing communities in past and present Iceland. I have emphasized the historical construction of their position and have examined how this position has changed historically with the changes that have occurred since villages began to grow in coastal areas. The primary focus has been on the effects of wage employment and industrialization on women's lives in both production and reproduction.

In the spring of 1993 a documentary was shown on television in Iceland which created a great upheaval. This film showed examples of the dark side of peasant society in Icelandic past. It was stated in the film that the lack of "culture" and development in the Icelandic past was to blame for the horrible circumstances of many people's lives, and bad treatment of the weakest by the heads of farming households. It was maintained that culture could not come into existence in farming areas but only in cities. Moreover, it was implied that the mistreatment of servants and children in the past were in part caused by this lack of culture. After the film was shown it was the main topic of conversation everywhere that people met, in work places, in family gatherings and also in newspapers all over Iceland. Historians were interviewed on the radio and angry people called in expressing their views. The film represented, in a very robust way and without any social analysis, the new conception of Icelandic history which no longer glorifies the distant past -- in particular the early settlement of the island -- but draws attention to people's lives in more recent times.

In this thesis I have applied this newer conception of Icelandic history, produced by a new generation of social historians.¹⁶ Looking at

¹⁶ See in particular Hálfðánarsson and Gunnlaugsson in bibliography.

Icelandic history, I did not search for examples of strong Icelandic women of the early settlements as described in the Icelandic Sagas. It has been common to look there for the origins of the strength Icelandic women are thought to have, although others assume this strength comes from their survival in the harsh fishing communities as has been discussed above. However, it remains to be asked what is implied with the discussion of women's strength. Furthermore, if in fact women in Iceland are strong and independent, does it imply equality in the home and in the labor market? Rather the talk of women's strength, derived from early settlement, serves to mask the real inequalities between men and women. I did not look for exceptional women of the past but instead I began by attempting to get a clearer picture of the real lives of women in the society which existed in the nineteenth century about the time when the fishing settlements arose. I examined production relations among peasants of that time in order to get an idea of what kind of social structure characterised the society from which the fishing villages evolved. We saw there a heterogeneous agrarian society in which there were considerable differences in women's position based primarily on their economic standing. It made a difference if they were household managers, poor peasant wives or servants.

In part two, I considered the growth of the fishery and the early developments of the fishing villages. Instead of giving a general picture of "a fishing village" I preferred to describe instead the particular developments of two villages, Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður. These villages have experienced different histories and have been characterised by different economic organization. However, we see that the differences were greater in the earlier part of the century as the household continued for longer time to organize production in Neskaupstaður than in

Bolungarvík, where people were more dependent on wage labor and seasonal work. This was especially true for men; being a servant continued to be the most common job for women (especially young women) until in the 1940s. These differences affected gender roles as married women of Neskaupstaður more often acted as managers in their households, managing the labor of women servants who worked seasonally in the fishery.

I tackled the question of whether the increase in wage labor and industrialization together with the growth of villages had negative or positive effects on women's status in the first decades of the century. I came to the conclusion that we have to be specific and take the lives of various women of different classes into consideration to be able to then generalize. Moreover, like any other social change, the transformation of fishing and fish processing had negative and positive effects. As we saw from the discussion of the position of women in Icelandic rural society and the early fishing communities, we cannot simply assume the existence of patriarchal structures; it is instead necessary to take a close look at women's diverse positions in production as well as in reproduction. Thus the wives of large households lost their managerial role over the labor of others as the households became increasingly nuclear households. For other women, who had been tied by the service bondage in the past, the fishing villages implied a real possibility of establishing their own household with a man. They would no longer have to work under conditions in which their master controlled every aspect of their lives. What we saw happen in this century was a great increase in the number of independent households and consequently in the possibilities to get away from servanthood and become a wage laborer. Even so, both men and

women in the early coastal settlements were generally very poor and thus powerless.

Although the discrimination against women may well be an element of modern or capitalist relations of production, and although this economic system benefits from women's low position, this does not lead us to the conclusion that women's oppression originated with capitalism. As we saw from the differences in working conditions and evaluations of men's and women's activities there is much evidence from the past showing that the position of women was lower than men's in Iceland prior to industrial capitalism. Thus it is important to see the gender system as something that, like culture, is always in the process of change, in spite of the attempts to maintain and hold on to certain aspects. The gender system is only systemic because of its interlinked domains but their contents may change. Thus with the new division of labor in production and reproduction we get new also have new ideas, including justification and mystification as well as new identities and individual agents who adjust to or attempt to change their position based on their present circumstances and possibilities. Therefore one can say that what we call gender systems are both maintained and changed along with other societal changes.

In the last part of the thesis I dealt with the time period during and after the Second World War, characterized by the rise of a middle class, rising wages for the working class, and the coming of the welfare state. During this period there were economic and social improvements for all Icelanders regardless of their class and gender. Simultaneously we find in the fishing villages the disappearance of farming production in the home and the appearance of the new non-productive housewife and the fish factory workers. This was a period which began with the depression when

a great number of women were pushed out of production, although in fishing villages some women were always seasonal workers. The ideology which developed at this time portrayed women as home makers and non-producers and men as breadwinners. It is still to be found in women's attitudes toward their work today, as can be seen in the discussion of fishermen's wives and fish processors in Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður.

When it comes to the position of women today these two villages do not differ a great deal. In fact there are greater differences to be found within each village among women than between them. Thus the socialist ideas of equality in Neskaupstaður have not been reflected in more equal pay for women than is to be found elsewhere in Iceland. In both villages women's involvement in the fisheries is primarily in the processing in the freezing plant where they work under similar circumstances for the same salaries. However there are some differences to be found; for example child-care center and some other social services such as public housing were established earlier in Neskaupstaður than in Bolungarvík.

Because of the overall similarities in the two villages, with regard to the maritime households and work in the freezing plants which I focus on in my analysis of gender construction today, I found no need to deal with them separately in this part of the thesis. The circumstances and values revolving around these issues were very much alike, although in each village, people tended to maintain that their position was better than in the other village. The inhabitants of Bolungarvík claimed that they had an easier life because of the successful private enterprise and many of the inhabitants of Neskaupstaður maintained that they had more equality both in terms of gender as well as class, because of their socialism.

We have seen in the discussions above that the major changes in women's lives emerged not only with the development of fishing villages, but reflected, as well, the upheavals that occurred during and after the Second World War and with industrialization. If we compare the lives of women in fishing communities in pre-industrial and industrial Iceland, there are important differences to be found. I have speculated which of these differences imply changes in women's position as compared with men's. Many of the changes that have improved the lot of women are not gender specific but are the result of economic improvements and the welfare system which have allowed women more autonomy. The majority of women have been able to participate in the labor market, but given the gender division, they receive about 60 percent of men's wages. However, the increased autonomy has allowed women to organize to improve their position.

Anthropologists have primarily been occupied with cultural differences of past societies as well as in the so-called non-modern world. In recent times anthropologists have however increasingly turned their attention toward western and industrial societies. So-called modern societies with their continuously improving communication and transportation systems, not only create homogeneity but heterogeneity as well. In industrial society, old traditions and views get redefined. Moreover, history is increasingly studied by anthropologists not just for comparative purposes but in order to understand the social construction of the phenomena studied (Roseberry and O'Brien 1991).

Icelandic fishing communities exist within a western, modern, industrial society. What makes the villages studied different and special is not their cultural isolation, lack of material wealth or of technology. In

these villages, new traditions and social formations have come about, many of which have to do with gender. Culture cannot be turned into a thing, as it is continuously changing and new cultural formations are taking place. It is moreover not always easy to say where a culture begins or ends, or to generalize about cultural consensus even within a relatively homogenous country such as Iceland or even in geographically isolated fishing villages within Iceland. Even so there are many cultural aspects of fishing communities which make them special and different and which are derived from living in close contact with nature and from depending on a primary extractive industry which is the central activity defining these communities. People's daily experiences, social organization and productive relations, generate certain distinct cultural features in fishing communities. With regard to gender relations, we have seen that these are communities which evaluate men's activities more highly than women's. They are after all communities which are clearly identified in terms of an activity that by definition is gender specific, namely fishing itself.

Women's participation in the fishery has been characterized by both continuity and change. In the beginning of the history studied here, men's activities were more highly valued than women's and higher paid. The reorganization induced by industrialization built upon an already existing sexual division of labour. Women are still, as before, busy trying to compromise their work in production and reproduction. It is clear that women's contribution to the fishing economy in both the past and present has not automatically guaranteed them high status. Control over their own and their husbands' income in the household, as well as serving as heads of household, give them the possibility of having influence in the household and make them independent. However, influence over household finances

does not extend to the management of community wealth; although a few small businesses are run by women. In Bolungarvík and Neskaupstaður there are no women in the higher ranks of any companies or in any of the highest paid jobs. The same can be said about the political sphere where women are few.

Men continue to be culturally dominant and their activities out at sea are considered more important than the activities performed by women on land. Women however can gain status by being associated with these men as fishermen's wives. By showing their strength and not expressing their fear, when their husbands are out at sea, women in a way participate in their heroic activities. We have seen that a strict gender division of labor is maintained between those jobs which are seen as appropriate for men and those seen as appropriate for women, although what is defined as feminine or masculine has in some cases changed.

In spite of very high participation of women in the labor market in Iceland, they find themselves in a highly divided segment in which men's jobs continue to be more highly valued. Moreover, even though women have gone out of the household to work the division of labor in the household has not changed to the same extent. Women are still responsible for the area of family reproduction and thus they carry a double work load. A question arises whether they are willing to let go of their centrality in the area of reproduction when they do not yet have equal access to the arena of production. Applying the theoretical perspective on gender suggested in this thesis with its three levels of analysis can assist us in explaining why it is that women's centrality in the household as well as their contribution in the fishery through waged employment have not guaranteed gender equality.

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