

## Culture



# Will C. VAN DEN HOONAARD, *Reluctant Pioneers: Constraints and Opportunities in an Icelandic Fishing Community*, New York: Peter Lang, 1992, 173 pages, U.S. \$36.95

Charles R. Menzies

Volume 13, numéro 2, 1993

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1083135ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083135ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie

### ISSN

0229-009X (imprimé)

2563-710X (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer ce compte rendu

Menzies, C. (1993). Compte rendu de [Will C. VAN DEN HOONAARD, *Reluctant Pioneers: Constraints and Opportunities in an Icelandic Fishing Community*, New York: Peter Lang, 1992, 173 pages, U.S. \$36.95]. *Culture*, 13(2), 102–103. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083135ar>

Tous droits réservés © Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie, 1993

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

**é**rudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

The anthropological study of our own societies has already produced a large number of insightful works. The majority of these, still, may be experienced as somewhat rhapsodic, and a bit loose-jointed. The theoretical propositions sometimes seem so general that they do not really excite the reader. Even if Edelsward has not given us new tools in this regard, her book is another testimonial to the growing trend of making us ourselves the "others".

Will C. VAN DEN HOONAARD, *Reluctant Pioneers: Constraints and Opportunities in an Icelandic Fishing Community*, New York: Peter Lang, 1992, 173 pages, U.S. \$36.95.

By Charles R. Menzies  
City University of New York

In *Reluctant Pioneers*, van den Hoonard sets for himself the task of describing the rise of the shrimp fishery in the Westfjord region of Iceland and the subsequent development of a shrimp fishers' occupational identity in the village of 'Kaupeyri'. Shrimp fishers face a peculiar difficulty in establishing an autonomous occupational identity as they exist, says van den Hoonard, "on the occupational fringe of the fishing industry. [Thus], they cannot appeal to the traditional occupational imagery of the established fishermen" (p. 9). It is this contradictory occupational location — neither "pure fisherman [nor], of course landlubbers" (p. 9) — that informs van den Hoonard's description of the shrimp fishers' occupational culture.

Van den Hoonard dispenses with the historical background and contemporary ethnographic setting in two short chapters (pp. 17-25, 27-35). In the chapter on history, van den Hoonard describes how a succession of fisheries that utilized different types of gear (i.e. trawls, longlines, gillnets, etc.), levels of technology, and chased different species of fish developed and then faded away (pp. 18-23). His history moves with an apparent inevitability through eight separate stages without much evidence of conflict or contradiction. There is no sense of differing histories or the possibilities of such, but rather van den Hoonard melds the different threads together into one line that stretches (almost beyond belief) from the early period of Danish colonialism to van

den Hoonard's ethnographic present of the mid-1970s. I would have preferred that van den Hoonard spend more time explaining the period he calls the "herring adventure", 1955-1968 (pp. 22-23) as it seems pivotal to understanding latter points he raises with respect to the development of a shrimp fishers' occupational culture in opposition to so-called traditional fishing culture.

The chapter on the contemporary ethnographic setting provides the reader with several details and facts germane to van den Hoonard's argument. However, gender issues are deftly dealt out: "by reason of the author's gender, this world [of women] remained closed to him" (p. 34). Despite his exclusion from the world of women, van den Hoonard still tells us that shrimpers' wives "complain that their husbands 'think fish'" and that "there appear to be sharp cleavages between the everyday world of men and women" (p. 34). Had van den Hoonard at least attempted to explore further this sharp cleavage between women and men, his overall argument would have been better served.

In the central chapters of the book (four, five and six) van den Hoonard outlines the basic material and social aspects of the shrimpers' occupational culture and the ways in which shrimpers manifest their identity in the larger society. One of the strongest sections of the book, a discussion of crew recruitment and composition (pp. 52-61) is found in Chapter Four. The section on skills in Chapter Five is a clearly stated empirical description of the knowledge required to be a good fisher (pp. 71-76). In Chapter Six, van den Hoonard summarizes the development of the shrimp fishers' Association of Small-Boat Owners with an eye toward contextualizing their current role within the various fishers' organizations and within the wider arena of Icelandic politics.

Chapters Seven ("Going South") and Eight ("Turning the Table on Empiricism") are studies of the conflicts and contradictory situations into which the shrimp fishers of Kaupeyri are placed. Going South — both metaphorically and literally — refers to the nature of periphery/centre politics within Iceland and, in particular, with the experience of this group of northwestern Icelandic shrimp fishers with the development and implementation of a licensing and regulatory system. For the specialist, Chapter Eight contains a tantalizing glimpse into the development of the shrimp fishing quota system and the ensuing conflict between fisher and government bureaucrat (pp. 114-121).

Underlying van den Hoonaard's argument is the notion that shrimp fishers form a unified occupational culture defined 'internally' in terms of skills and fishing ability and 'externally' in opposition to other fishery-based occupational cultures (such as longliners or trawlers) and in opposition to the government bureaucrats who are charged with regulating the fishery. This approach incorporates an analytic weakness in that it reifies such factors as techniques of capture (for example, hook and line versus net) or size of vessel (for example, offshore/inshore, big/small) and thereby creates a false conception of separateness between fishers engaged in different spheres of the fishing industry. Van den Hoonaard's focus on gear types, as opposed to, say, the organization of labour within the process of production (i.e. divisions between crews and skippers, owners and non-owners, or shoreworkers and fishers) ignores what is more likely a fluid social situation; a situation in which men begin their fishing career in small dories, move on to the larger offshore boats and then, when advancing age begins to impair their ability to work on the physically taxing offshore fleet, 'retire' to the shrimp fishery (see, for example, pp.23, 48-49, 79).

In very few fisheries world-wide do divisions based explicitly on gear type or species of capture remain static for very long. More typical is a constant fluctuation between levels of capitalization, scales of production, and/or species targeted. The causes for these variations and changes are more likely to be found in changes in the market, costs of production, and resource depletion. Furthermore, fishers may move between different sub-sections of a fishery or even find employment in several different fisheries.

A more fruitful approach toward the social divisions of contradictions between fishers as a group and/or between fishers and non-fishers would begin by asking questions such as: how does the structure of ownership vary? Are boats owned by individual fishers and their family, groups of agnatic kin, or by large corporations? How extensively capitalized is the fishery? How are fishers articulated to the market (directly through fisher-owned co-operatives, through government controlled marketing boards, or through private brokers and/or fish processing firms)? By asking questions such as these, the researcher is forced to look beyond the artificial line drawn around a particular occupational sub-culture and is thus forced to confront the messiness of social interaction.

Ronnie VERNOOY, *Starting All Over Again: Making and Remaking a Living on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua*, Wageningen, Netherlands: Agricultural University of Wageningen, 1992, 299 pages (paper).

John Brohman

Simon Fraser University

This book, which is based on research carried out for the author's PhD thesis, analyzes interrelations between economic, political, gender, and cultural aspects of people's livelihoods in the Bluefields region of the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. It pays special attention to the ways in which coastal people in and around Bluefields react to events that cause major disruptions to their livelihoods: the Contra war, hurricane Joan, and the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas by the UNO coalition. Such disruptions are treated by Vernoooy not as merely isolated or peculiar historical incidents, but as important constitutive parts of the historical makeup of the Bluefields region and of the life stories and experiences of its people. He finds that one of the basic features of life in the Atlantic coast is the inability and the need to cope with the many uncertainties that accompany the 'boom and bust' pattern of development in the region.

Tendencies toward disruption and instability are illustrated by case studies of farms in the Bluefields' hinterland, an analysis of trading relations within Bluefields itself, and the labour history of an elderly *costeño* involved in the forestry industry. Among the subjects of broader theoretical interest that the book covers are: different forms of market exchange and the continuing presence of non-commoditized relations in many enterprises; the complex and often unintended social consequences of policy making by the state; the importance of non-economic concerns based on gender, ethnic, and cultural values within economic decision making; and the need to address the realms of everyday life as well as the structures of *longue durée* within analyses of social change and continuity.

One of the principal goals of the book is to better understand the complex and often contradictory process of social change by examining how a diverse group of social actors react to a series of locally and regionally disruptive events. Regional transforma-