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THE SEA OF BITTERNESS: POLITICAL PROCESS AND IDEOLOGY IN A DUTCH MARITIME COMMUNITY

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The object of this article is, first, to present an ethnographic analysis of political processes in an occupational community of mussel fishermen in the Dutch town of Yerseke. It shows how a conflict over access to marine resources divided a local fishermen's association and how the opposing factions turned into parties and eventually reunited. The second aim of the article is to discuss and reassess some of the earlier notions concerning factionalism, drawing on this case history and on comparative material.

Introduction

Every individual of a society, each in his own interest, endeavours to exploit the situation as he perceives it and in so doing the collectivity of individuals alters the structure of society itself (Leach 1954: 8).

Since the late 1950s, anthropologists have devoted a great deal of attention to local-level politics. This concern can be understood as a reaction to earlier structural functionalism, with its emphasis on large-scale political systems, their formal structural aspects and the maintenance of social order within these units. Succeeding generations of political anthropologists focused their studies on conflict, political actors and various types of political grouping.

Such political groupings vary from spontaneous coalitions to institutionalized parties. They have in common that they are conflict groups, but the former are temporary alliances, while the latter are corporate groups. Within this spectrum of political groupings, factions and parties represent poles on a continuum. Following Boissevain, I will define 'faction' as an 'exclusive coalition of persons (followers) recruited personally according to structurally diverse principles by or on behalf of a person in conflict with another person or persons within the same social unit over honour and/or control over resources' (Boissevain 1968: 551). By 'factionalism' I mean conflict between such coalitions in a political arena. As we move towards the other end of the continuum between factions and parties, we find specialized corporate groupings with well-defined rules whose members choose to align themselves according to common interests (cf. Bujra 1973: 134).

The aim of the current article is, first, to shed light on factionalism and political process in an association of mussel fishermen in the Dutch town of Yerseke. I will take the genesis of factions in conflict as my starting point, and observe their structural transformations over time. This case history shows that factions can

become 'parties' almost instantly. Following a conflict over access to marine resources, the fishermen's association was split by factionalism and soon afterwards several discontented musselmen established a rival association. Shortly after I arrived in Yerseke in January 1986 to carry out fieldwork, I realized that this fission had had an enormous impact upon relations among the local mussel planters and in the encompassing community. The older musselmen, especially, vividly remember the events and are still full of resentment.

The second object of this article is to discuss and reassess some received anthropological notions regarding factions, factionalism and corporate political groupings, especially with regard to the role of ideology and the dynamics of political processes. A diachronic approach implies that the broader social and political-economic context must be taken into account. Analysing the dynamics of a political conflict as a total ongoing process 'involves looking at the conditions in which it occurs, at the way in which multiple aggregates emerge within a collectivity, at how they oppose one another in particular situations, and at how the interactions of opposition produce decisions, social restructuring, or social rigidification' (Salisbury & Silverman 1977: 1). This is precisely what the current article aims to do. In addition, attention will be paid to the eventual fusion of the parties which originated as factions. It is remarkable that peace-making processes and the unification of conflict groups have received little if any attention in the political anthropological literature. Before undertaking this enterprise, however, I shall describe the stage of the political drama and present a bird's-eye view of the history of the local musselmen.

The setting

The coastline of Zeeland, a province in the south-west of the Netherlands, is heavily indented. Several inlets and estuaries, all positioned in an east-west direction, divide its territory into islands and peninsulas. The landscape is extremely flat. Altitudes vary from scarcely above to slightly below sea-level. Dikes surround the land to safeguard it against inundation. Since time immemorial, the coastal dwellers have either tilled the fertile soils or adjusted to the estuarine environment and exploited its resources. Nowadays, there are seven major maritime communities in the province, amongst which is Yerseke.

The settlement is located on the south bank of the Eastern Scheldt, a saline inlet penetrating some 48 km inland from the North Sea (see fig. 1). The various ecozones of the inlet, with its intertidal stretches and intersecting deeper streams, abound with fish and shellfish. In 1987, a storm-surge barrier was completed in the mouth of the sea-arm. The construction of this barrier was the result of a Parliamentary decision in 1958, following a disastrous flood five years earlier. Several other estuaries and inlets in this area were dammed off altogether.

Yerseke, a thriving fishing town, is one of the oldest settlements on the former island of South-Beveland, which is connected to the mainland by a dam. It is the country's foremost centre of shellfish farming and shipping. The town's favourable geographical position and an excellent network of communication with the hinterland have contributed importantly to its rise as a nucleus of maritime enterprise. Belgium, France, Holland and Germany constitute an important market for seafood shipped from Yerseke. Over 70 per cent. of the yearly shellfish supply is exported.

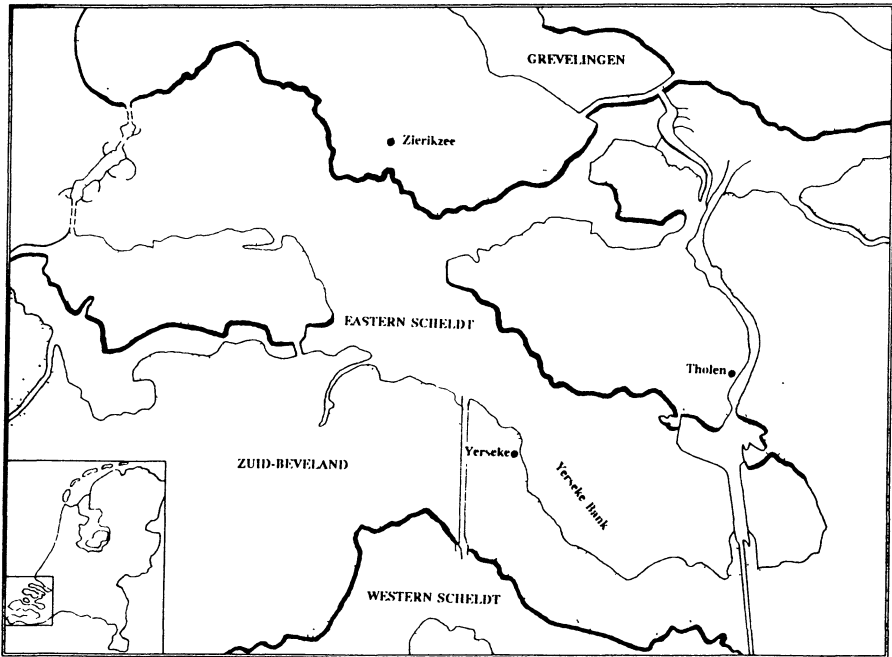


FIGURE 1.

Today, the town has a population of approximately 5900. Its economy is dominated by oyster and mussel culture and trade.¹ Other maritime pursuits, such as shrimping, lobstering and cockle fishing, also provide an important source of local employment, as do the six mussel canneries and the twenty-odd shellfish culling and packing shops. Yerseke harbours one of the country's largest fishing fleets, which is second only to that of Urk. There are two harbours for the fishing fleet, which consists of over a hundred modern diesel-powered boats, ranging from 17 to 40 meters in length. Each vessel is equipped with two or four dredges and manned by from two to four crew members. Ship's maintenance and repair is usually carried out by one of the local shipyards. Some ten trucking companies distribute the seafood to customers at home and abroad. All in all, a large percentage of Yerseke's working population depends directly or indirectly on the fishing industry for its livelihood. In 1980, for example, nearly 700 men and women worked in the maritime sector.

There are 80 mussel firms in the Netherlands; roughly half of these are based in Yerseke. In addition to the canneries, a dozen companies are vertically integrated, that is, they combine farming, processing and shipping. Each firm rents plots, delineated by seamarks, in the Eastern Scheldt and the western section of the Waddenzee from the Crown Land Office (*Domeinen*). The latter area is located inbetween the Frisian islands of Texel, Vlieland and Terschelling and the mainland, more than 200 km north of Yerseke. The average size of plots in the Waddenzee is 10 hectares, and in the Eastern Scheldt 4.5 hectares. Some 6000 hectares are available for cultivation in the Waddenzee, in addition to 3000 hectares in Zeeland waters. Nowadays, the state follows a very restrictive policy with regard to the admittance of newcomers. Only those inheriting a family business or experienced

employees who want to set up their own enterprise can get a licence, provided that the total number of firms does not increase.

*The musselmen of Yerseke in historical perspective*²

Archaeologists who have examined kitchen middens estimate that shellfish gathering and fishing in Zeeland is at least 9000 years old. However, Yerseke's history as a predominantly maritime community is relatively recent. Until the last quarter of the nineteenth century its resource base was mainly agricultural. From the early decades of the century until circa 1870, some 20 to 30 inhabitants earned a living as full-time fishermen, dredging or gathering shellfish according to the tide. They operated from a small harbour in Yersekedam, a neighbouring hamlet. The majority of the fishing crews were composed of agnatic kinsmen. Many landless rural labourers, both male and female, also exploited the tidal flats. During the slack agricultural winter season they supplemented their income by gathering oysters, mussels, periwinkles and whelks, which they sold to local fishermen and shellfish dealers.

In 1870, the state privatized several oyster banks in the Eastern Scheldt and other Zeeland estuaries. Extensive underwater grounds were divided into five and ten hectare plots, which could be leased at public auctions.³ The highest bidders gained exclusive access rights. This measure, taken at the request of several wealthy urban entrepreneurs, was to counter overexploitation of the marine commons. It led to a rapid capitalization and industrialization of the oyster industry (cf. Van Ginkel 1988; 1989; 1991). Shellfishing rapidly gave way to mariculture. By 1886, all banks suitable for mussel and oyster farming were privatized. Within decades Yerseke became the Dutch centre of oystering. Most of the newcomers to the industry established their firms and companies in Yerseke because the town was connected to an international railway network, contrary to most of the other important shellfishing communities in Zeeland, such as Bruinisse, Tholen and Philippine. In the wake of this development the village turned into an affluent country town which attracted many migrants. Its population had nearly quadrupled by the early 1890s. Many new edifices and streets were constructed and a new harbour was built. From merely ten sailing craft in 1860 the local fishing fleet grew to 160 boats, including ten steam-powered vessels, around the turn of the century.

The new mode of production in the oyster industry initially resulted in a loss of independence for the existing oystermen. Most of them could not afford to pay the lease fees, which escalated soon after the introduction of the auctions. They either became wage-labourers for one of the newly established companies or oyster barons (cf. Van Ginkel 1988), or turned to musseling.

Compared to oyster culture, mussel farming was far less labour- and capital-intensive. The required means of production consisted of a flat-bottomed sailing boat, three dredges and other gear. In addition, the mussel planters had to pay a modest fee for the rent of plots. From the 1860s onwards, the Board of Fisheries for the Zeeland Streams (*Bestuur der Visscherijen op de Zeeuwse Stroomten*), a government body installed in 1825 to manage the fisheries in the province, allotted these plots every five years among the participants in the mussel industry by the drawing of lots. Hence, mussel culture is older than oyster farming. Nonetheless,

contrary to the oyster industry, the mussel industry did not undergo a phase of rapid capitalization because the monetary rewards were lower and plots were not rented at public auctions but allocated by lot. Besides, a free mussel fishery was permitted in the Zuiderzee and Waddenzee. The musselmen of Yerseke sailed to these seas in order to fish young mussels which they then planted on plots in Zeeland waters or sold to other fishermen.⁴

Following the growth of the oyster industry, the number of musselmen also expanded. Given the lower capital investment required in this branch of trade, many fishermen turned to musseling. Even though the possible profits were considerably smaller than those that could be obtained in oystering, those who possessed little money but valued their independence became musselmen. Through thrift and arduous labour they tried to eke out a scanty livelihood. By the end of the nineteenth century, Yerseke counted approximately seventy musselmen, as well as several fishermen who also fished oysters, lobsters, crabs, whelks or periwinkles. Not only were they small-scale commodity producers, many were also fishmongers. They sailed to Belgian cities such as Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent and Mechlin and sold their catch to wholesale dealers, market vendors and peddlers.

During the early decades of the twentieth century, vehement competition for a share in the market resulted in continuous overproduction. Given the imbalance between supply and demand, prices dropped. As a consequence, most musselmen tried to increase their production in order to maintain their standard of living. This solution to the 'peasant dilemma' (cf. Wolf 1966: 15) only exacerbated the situation, of course. A boom in the home industry of bottling mussels during the first world war slightly alleviated the problem. At the same time, however, it became increasingly difficult to export the bivalves to Belgium and France. The acts of war and trade barriers imposed by the German occupying army impeded the clear transit of goods. When the war ended, extremely unfavourable exchange rates and declined purchasing power in these nations created additional problems for the Zeeland mussel shippers. Things became even worse when the motorization of the fleet increased the supply of mussel seed shipped home from the Waddenzee. Several times the mussel farmers and shippers themselves proposed to bring an end to the impairment of the industry by introducing quotas, quality standards and minimum prices. However, these measures failed time and again because there were always planters and shippers who did not join co-operatives established with this aim in mind, or refused to live up to their rules. They favoured their own private interests above those of the mussel industry as a whole. For example, in 1917, and again in 1927, a union of Zeeland Mussel Planters was established (both named *Bond van Zeeuwsche Mosselkweekers*). These unions only existed a few years before they were liquidated. Their problem was that several planters who did not join sold their mussels under the minimum prices set by the union. Others, who were members, sometimes also tried to evade the price regulations, while at the same time benefiting from them.

It was only in the 1930s that the state intervened in the ailing industry. The 1934 'Mussel Crisis Measure' (*Crisis Mossel-besluit*), and subsequent government interventions, finally introduced the measures which organizations of musselmen had proposed earlier, but were unable to enforce. In 1935, the Central Sales Bureau of Mussels (*Centraal Verkoopkantoor van Mosselen*) was established, partly at the

instance of the planters. Henceforth, all transactions between planters and shippers had to be made via the Bureau. Subsequently, it allocated production quotas to the individual mussel farmers, set quality standards and introduced minimum prices for the export market. Furthermore, it regulated the admittance of newcomers in order to curb the expansion of the number of culturists.

The rigid regulation of the mussel industry continued to exist until 1967. In this year, some of the most successful planters and dealers persuaded the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries to withdraw most of the protective measures which had been introduced in the 1930s. The quota system was abandoned and henceforth mussels had to be sold at an auction set up in Yerseke. This triggered a rapid expansion of the industry, though many small-scale firms were unable to compete and were bought by large shellfish farmers (cf. Van Ginkel 1990: 59–62).⁵ The Industrial Board of Fisheries (*Produktschap voor Vis en Visprodukten*), together with representatives of all branches of the mussel industry – planters, dealers and canneries – still determine quality standards and minimum prices for the bivalves. In general, these measures have proved successful. Both culturists and shippers benefited from this arrangement and overproduction was brought to an end. In recent years, supply has not been able to keep up with demand. Yet, as we shall see shortly, the survival of the Zeeland mussel industry has been endangered several times since the end of the second world war.

Factionalism in Yerseke's fishermen's association

In 1898, some Yerseke musselmen established a fishermen's association in order to co-operate and defend their mutual interests. The majority of their colleagues joined the association, which was simply called *Visservereniging Yerseke* (Fishermen's Association Yerseke). Usually, its meetings were noisy, with advocates and opponents of proposals under discussion loudly ventilating their opinions. The number of members fluctuated over the years, depending on the general situation in the mussel sector. When the industry prospered, membership numbers dropped. In times of crisis, many joined or rejoined the association. All in all, it was a prosperous organization. In 1948, a local newspaper reporting on the association's semi-centenary wrote that

it is quite an achievement for an association in Yerseke – and that a fishermen's association – to persist for fifty years. It is generally known that unity among fishermen is usually far to seek. However, in spite of its fifty years, this association is still powerful and even more energetic than ever before and meets a great want in a community like ours (*De Koerier*, 30 October 1948).

The *Visservereniging Yerseke* still exists today. During the period between 1950 and 1978, however, the occupational community of musselmen was split by factional strife. In 1951, a group of discontented planters established another fishermen's association, *Visserbelang* (Fishermen's Interest). What caused this sudden swing in the united co-operation of mussel planters, which had been praised only a few years earlier?

The rift in the association occurred following a conflict over access to the Waddensee, some 200 km north of Yerseke. A parasitic mussel disease necessitated this shift in the location of production. In 1950, a serious problem assailed the planters and dealers. A parasitic copepod, *Mytilicola intestinalis*, killed a large proportion of the mussels in Zeeland waters. The musselmen were powerless against

this ecological disaster and tried to sell what little there was left of their stocks. They feared that this catastrophe presaged the end of musseling in Zeeland. The shippers were consequently unable to supply their customers. To make things worse, the French government banned the import of Zeeland mussels because it feared that the bivalves were contaminated and thus might be a health hazard.⁶ This dramatic state of affairs preceded the fission of the Fishermen's Association Yerseke.

During several meetings of the *Vissersvereniging* the only item on the agenda was the prevailing situation and what could be done to counter it. All members agreed to ask for a reduction of the lease fees. This request was granted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. Another proposal concerned a temporary relocation of the production areas to the Waddenzee, where the parasite had not yet affected the bivalves. The association's committee contacted the Fisheries Inspector, Jan van Dijk,⁷ to inquire about the possibilities of cultivation in the Waddenzee. Van Dijk would only allow two groupings of ten firms, or twenty crews, to parcel out and cultivate plots in the eastern section of the Waddenzee. To this end, all interested Zeeland planters were asked to form teams of ten crews each. Two teams would then be selected by lot. The Fisheries Inspector stipulated that each team should consist of a mixture of small-scale and large-scale firms.⁸

On 8 September 1950, the *Vissersvereniging's* committee convened a general meeting. When Van Dijk's proposal was discussed, several members opposed it. One fisherman summed up their opinion by saying that 'if we cannot go together, none of us should go. If some are allowed to go, and others not, we'll make sure that the chosen will not be able to go either'. The majority of the members voted against the proposal. They did so because they wanted equal access rights for all musselmen and not just for two teams. Nonetheless, fishermen's associations in other Zeeland towns voted in favour of the proposal.

Two weeks later, the official drawing of the lots took place in the office of the Central Sales Bureau of Mussels. Officials and representatives of the six teams formed in the meanwhile attended the event. A team from Bruinisse was drawn first. The other team elected was one recruited by a Yerseke musselman, Jacobus Daane.

Daane ran a family business with his younger brother Johannes. Their main operation was fishing mussel seed from the Waddenzee which they planted on their Zeeland plots. Besides, they had a contract with a Belgian mussel dealer, whom they supplied with marketable mussels. Jacobus and Johannes Daane were upwardly mobile during these years. They had expanded the firm they had taken over from their father. Jacobus Daane was a born leader.⁹ As soon as the parasitic disease affecting the mussels was signalled for the first time, he and two friends went to the Waddenzee for a week in May to find out if it would be possible to start mussel cultivation there. Their reconnaissance confirmed that the area was suitable for mussel farming. Daane had contacted the Fisheries Inspector prior to the consultation between the latter and the committee of the *Vissersvereniging*. He asked whether the planters would get permission to cultivate mussels in the Waddenzee. Van Dijk said that he would look into the matter, and that he expected that there would be no problem. Thus, Daane was the first to know that the Waddenzee would be a possible production location. He then recruited a team

of friends and acquaintances before the official confirmation that the planters would be allowed to the Waddenzee.

The fact that Daane's team was formed in advance of the general meeting of the *Visservereniging* and that it was selected in the draw gave rise to a lot of suspicion and gossip. He was accused of having manipulated the selection procedure. One man told me: 'It stank, we were spoofed. One way or another someone tampered with the lots'. Though his opponents thought that Daane had somehow succeeded in putting the name of his team on more than one lot, they said that 'it was impossible to prove fraud'. Yet they firmly believed that the drawing of the lots had been a dishonest affair. A majority of the planters who were not allowed to exploit the Waddenzee grounds were infuriated that two teams could sail and earn an income, while their boats lay idle. When they suspected that Daane's team was quite successful, they mockingly nicknamed it the 'Golden Team'.¹⁰ There was growing opposition to the prevailing situation and relations between the members of Daane's team and their opponents grew increasingly hostile.

One opponent, Theofiel Sinke, whose brother, ironically, was a member of the 'Golden Team', felt that something had to be done. He rallied a following of discontented musselmen to his cause and called for a general meeting of the fishermen's association. This meeting was held on February 2nd, 1951. Sinke criticized the committee of the *Visservereniging* and claimed that it had not tried hard enough to obtain permission for all culturists to go to the Waddenzee. Moreover, he pointed out that this might have something to do with the fact that two committee members were in the 'Golden Team'. Next he and his colleague Abraham Pikaar moved a motion of no confidence, and demanded that the committee resign. Its chairman, Cees Cornelisse, himself a member of the 'Golden Team', replied that he saw no reason for this and that the committee would stay on. Sinke and Pikaar asked for a vote, but Cornelisse refused to give in, because 'there is no motive for a motion of no confidence other than insinuations and backbiting'. Much turmoil and many reproachful remarks ensued. Someone even shouted 'If you don't resign, we'll kick you out!' Before leaving the meeting in anger, Sinke said that he would not leave it at this and threatened that he and his followers would withdraw their membership and establish their own association.

This they did. The new association was called *Visserbelang* (Fishermen's Interest). Now that two associations existed, the musselmen were forced to align themselves openly. Many planters joined the new association out of discontent with the course of events. Membership numbers of the *Visservereniging* dwindled from 111 in 1949 to a mere 42 in 1951. Apart from the 34 crew members of the 'Golden Team', some older planters and most mussel dealers stayed in the *Visservereniging*. The main goal of *Visserbelang* was to try to gain entry to the Waddenzee. Their pressure on the Fisheries Inspector and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries proved successful. Van Dijk decided to allocate plots in the Waddenzee to all participants in the industry.¹¹ Thus from 1 May 1951 onwards, each mussel planter was allowed to rent and exploit a fixed number of demarcated parcels there. Moreover, the parasitic disease disappeared from Zeeland waters just as quickly as it had invaded them. Apparently, the primary reason for the conflict between the fishermen's associations, each from then onwards striving for the same interests, had disappeared. Nonetheless, they did not join forces as yet. On the contrary.

The fission of the *Visssersvereniging* disrupted the occupational community of musselmen and divided the town in general. Old friendships were torn up, some brothers and cousins became rivals or even enemies, several neighbours were no longer on speaking terms, and adversaries refused to talk to or greet one another. Through this avoidance behaviour, symbolic boundaries were redefined. The events of the early 1950s were not easily forgotten. Since many plots were now located in the Waddenzee, the planters had to sail to these waters. This voyage took at least 24 hours. To save time and fuel costs, most planters left their boats in northern harbours when possible and travelled back and forth by bus. The members of both associations journeyed separately, refusing to accompany each other. Crew members of discordant planters were not allowed to sit around the same table in the taverns they frequented. When the mussel farmers of *Visssersbelang* collectively joined the Zeeland Fishery Interests Foundation, a federation of local fishermen's associations, the members of the *Visssersvereniging* refused to do likewise. Yet, both associations usually met on the same day, often in the same building – though in separate rooms – and discussed the same topics.

The long road towards reunion

Some of those who did not belong to the hard core of opponents suggested several times that the associations should reunite, however to no avail. Even when, in 1958, all Zeeland fishermen faced the same problem in the government's decision to dam off the Eastern Scheldt and other Zeeland estuaries, lingering animosities prevented the amalgamation of the associations, in spite of their common interests. Nonetheless, opposition to the so-called 'Delta-law' increased. Hesitatingly, action groups were formed and by the late 1960s some sixteen local and national associations of fishermen, mariculturists and environmentalists launched protests against the government decision, initially on their own, but in a later stage of the battle together under the name of *Oosterschelde Open*. This joint effort cut across the earlier organizational ties of mussel planters, though the committees of both *Visssersbelang* and the *Visssersvereniging* still refused to reunite. Yet, more and more members in each association felt that it was absurd to maintain both, especially because they now fought a common battle against the damming off of the Eastern Scheldt.¹² Some of those who had left the old association during the factional strife returned to it. This paved the way for an eventual reunion. The rank and file of both associations increased their pressure to combine efforts. For example, a member of *Visssersbelang* said in a meeting in 1969:

I sense a growing understanding of each other's viewpoint. We have become aware that we must sacrifice all personal or historical discord to the common interest. It is our generation's duty to bring all this to a good ending. Our compass must be set on concord and resolution. I hope that the *Visssersvereniging Yerseke* will also realize this and that it will aim at full co-operation.

Similar voices could indeed be heard in the *Visssersvereniging*.

Yet it took another nine years until the actual fusion of both associations in 1978. At last, a generation after the fission, most of the protagonists of the factional strife, those still alive now in their seventies or eighties, had retired or lost their leadership roles to younger musselmen. The latter saw little reason to continue the argument which had preoccupied their fathers, grandfathers and uncles. One

of my younger informants phrased it like this: 'Whatever happened back then is ancient history now'. Negotiations between peacemakers of both associations bore fruit. The only difficulty to be solved concerned how to break radically with the past. It was agreed that the committee of each association must resign so that a new one could be elected. This happened and an equal number of members of both associations were elected to the committee.¹³ The very first issue under discussion concerned the name of the reunited association. A majority voted in favour of the name of the oldest association, *Visservereniging Yerseke*. Since then, at least on the face of it, unity was restored. The older people, however, could not forget and forgive so easily and today still talk bitterly about what happened in the 1950s. Even some of the younger musselmen stress that it was the members of 'the other association' who approached their own association to inquire about the possibility of a fusion, thus implicitly admitting that they had been wrong in the first place.

Ideology and factionalism

The crucial ingredients in the political process described above appear to be (1) the fact that Daane recruited his team prior to the official confirmation that mussel culture in the Waddenzee would be allowed, and (2) the idea that Daane had somehow manipulated the drawing of lots so that his team was selected. The first fact in itself gave rise to condemnation. Why? This has to do with the ideology of Yerseke musselmen. As in so many fishing communities, local social relationships are characterized by an egalitarian facade, though actual relations are certainly not egalitarian. Cohen writes that we must distinguish among 'equality as an ideology ('We should all be equal here'), as a rhetoric ('We are all equal here'), and as pragmatism ('We behave *as if* we are all equal here'), and that 'none of these should be confused with a description of actual social relations' (1985: 33). The egalitarianism of Yerseke mussel farmers is ideological. This can be seen from the statement of the musselman quoted above, who said that 'if we cannot go together [to the Waddenzee], none of us should go'. Another man remarked that 'it is not fair that a small group could reap the fruits of a monopoly, while our boats lay idle and we could only walk up and down the harbour'. No-one should be favoured above others, so Daane's foreknowledge of the prospects of mussel cultivation in the Waddenzee and the fact that his team could go, while others could not, was strongly disapproved of. This evidence contradicts Bujra's remark that factions lack an ideological focus (1973: 149). There certainly existed a consciousness of a kind among the members of *Visserbelang*, though it was limited in scope and directed against the behaviour of Daane and his supporters.

The belief that Daane manipulated the selection procedure is closely connected to the former point. From the official protocol there is no evidence that swindle was involved in the procedure. Daane himself denies fraud, of course: 'It was an honest affair. We were only fortunate in a fair draw. They were just jealous that they could not go. It is all smutty talk'.¹⁴ Whatever happened exactly is – from the perspective of an anthropologist at least – not the important issue. More significantly, what people think may become reality in its own right; it affects how they will behave, even though behaviour does not have a truth value (cf. Cohen 1978: 7). Thus, what matters is that people *thought* that the drawing of lots had

been a dishonest affair. A clear example of the Thomas theorem ensued: 'If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences' (quoted in Chirot 1977: 54). The 'real consequences' were factional conflict in and fission of the *Visservereniging* and disrupted community life. In this respect, the present case history bears a striking family resemblance to Leach's reproduction of the myth of the Hpalang feud in Highland Burma. He writes that

the 'myth' in question is not a myth in the generally accepted sense. It is not a sacred tale hedged by taboo. I call it a myth simply because... the truth or untruth of the tale or any particular part of it is quite irrelevant; *the tale exists and is preserved in order to justify present-day attitudes and actions* (Leach 1954: 85, my emphasis).

The same held true for a long time in Yerseke. The tale of Daane's manipulations led to rivalry and new alignments in the occupational community of musselmen. Henceforth, two factions which quickly became parties competed with each other within this larger encapsulating community. Initially, the hostile dispute was about access to a resource and the concomitant changing power balances. In a later phase the remaining issue concerned 'morality', i.e. who was right or wrong. Boissevain regards this as a general feature of factional conflict: 'Factional conflict would appear to be about attempts to change the normative concepts of who is boss, about which way of doing things is correct, about whose views will prevail, about whose ideas will be called "normal" and "right"' (1977: 101).

The two coalitions were not structurally equivalent.¹⁵ They divided the occupational community 'diagonally' (cf. Bujra 1973: 148; Boissevain 1977: 107). Daane's faction, centred around the 'Golden Team', had a tightly knit core and a strong leader. It further consisted of approximately ten marginal followers, who chose to stay in the old association. They either benefited from their membership (the dealers, who were supplied with marketable mussels) or felt that they had nothing to win by leaving the *Visservereniging* (some older members). An additional advantage for the dealers was that they could use 're-watering' plots rented by the old association. Daane did not recruit all members of the 'Golden Team' personally, though the majority belonged to his personal network. The networks of all other members in this faction strongly overlapped.

The other faction was less leader-centred. Though Sinke and Pikaar voiced the general discontent in the *Visservereniging*, they were not strong leaders but mainly acted as social catalysts. The fact that so many followed them in the newly established association was not a result of networking. Rather, it was a matter of opposing Daane's team. In this sense, *Visserbelang* was a 'levelling coalition': an 'alignment between individuals who are united by their common feelings of hostility towards "a target"' (Thoden van Velzen 1973: 221). The main target of its members was Daane, both a social climber as well as a man who broke with traditional norms and whose reputation was undermined. But the behaviour of the other members of the 'Golden Team' aroused feelings of indignation, too. They had opted for an individualist strategy to safeguard their own personal interests, thus breaching the unwritten rule of communal sense and solidarity.

Some of the other features which Thoden van Velsen attributes to the levelling coalition also apply, for example the seemingly spontaneous support and the tenuous ties between its members (1973: 242). This unsteady basis was made clear to me by a man who initially joined *Visserbelang*, but had returned to the old association after a couple of years. He said that 'they were always arguing in the

new association. I've never seen such a muddle. It was terrible. I was a close friend of its chairman Sakke Riedijk, I still am, but I couldn't stand the quarrels going on there'.

The creation of *Visserbelang* rested on the attempt to gain access to the Waddenzee and on common feelings of indignation, and not on a close interaction among its members or on a completely opposed viewpoint *vis-à-vis* the other association with regard to the items on the agenda. In fact, both associations usually discussed the same topics during their meetings. Lacking cohesiveness, many members of *Visserbelang* were disloyal and in the course of time changed sides again. The difference between the quality of relations in the two associations was also apparent from the way their respective chairmen addressed their audiences: the *Visservereniging's* chairman, Cees Cornelisse, always opened a meeting with the words 'dear friends', whereas Sakke Riedijk of the other association made do with 'dear men'. Despite the apparently weak cohesiveness of *Visserbelang*, the coalition survived because it had assumed the form of a corporate group, thus formalizing and tightening its internal structure and organization.

This very fact made it difficult for the associations to reunite, even after the first goal – access to mussel plots in the Waddenzee – was achieved. The factions had turned into parties and thus became entrenched as corporate groups. Though some years after the fission there appeared among many members of each association to be a willingness to co-operate, even to join forces again, old animosities lingered among its leaders. For a long time they were able to prevent amalgamation. Even when an external threat endangered their livelihoods, they obstinately refused to give in, though they formed a united front against the 'Delta Plan'.¹⁶ From the day that the members of *Visserbelang* were allowed to cultivate mussels in the Waddenzee, the political-economic aspect of the conflict lost its meaning. What remained was its ideological dimension; the issue of who had broken the egalitarian rules and whose behaviour had been 'right' and whose 'wrong'.

The committees of both associations felt that the 'other' must make the initial move and thus confess that it had been wrong in the first place. This was unthinkable for the opponents in the conflict, because they knew that their pride and honour were at stake. It was only after this generation lost its position of power to a younger generation that a reunion became possible. Knowing how delicate the matter was, these younger musselmen sought and found a solution for a reunion which was acceptable to both sides. But even after the fusion, 'morality' continued to play a role. Many still maintain that the members of 'the other association' approached their own association and in so doing implicitly admitted that they could be blamed for the friction in the occupational community of musselmen.

To sum up, the reasons why the conflict described in this case study dragged on for so long are twofold. First, the fact that the faction led by Sinke and Pikaar turned into a separate corporate group made it difficult for the associations to reunite. A sharp symbolic boundary was drawn through avoidance behaviour which prevented communication and created a deep rift between the two associations. None of the protagonists in the dispute was willing to lose face by crossing this boundary. Secondly, and related to the above, whoever would seek rapprochement first would practically admit to having been wrong during the initial phase of the conflict, either because he had breached the rules of a deeply rooted egalitarian

ideology, or because he had divided and thus weakened the fishermen's organization. However, the opponents were convinced that they stood for a good cause and hence a quick reconciliation was out of the question.

Conclusion

I am not the first to have described the institutionalization of factional discord with the result that factions turn into parties. Boissevain, for instance, points out that a faction opposing the Catholic hierarchy in the Maltese village of Hal-Farrug became a political party and that two dissenting *festa partiti* developed into social clubs, each with a corporate core and formalized recruitment (1964; 1969). Beals and Siegel (1966) give an example of how a faction opposing the Village Council in Taos Pueblo (New Mexico) organized itself into an institutionalized party. Friedrich (1968) contends that factions in Durazno (Mexico) now have many features in common with corporate groups. Gulliver writes that in a Tanzanian community, Namabeya, 'factions hardened into discrete segments' and that a possible development could be 'the hardening of factions into opposed political groups or "parties"' (1977: 64). Schneider & Schneider describe a conflict over the position of principal chief ('Lord of the Sea') between two families in a Malaysian Dayak community. This conflict led to a 'fundamental cleavage in the village which ultimately resulted in the factionalization of the village and the fission into two villages' (1988: 59).

In an essay on the dynamics of political action Bujra (1973: 144-9) goes to some length to isolate the factors which she deems conducive to the institutionalization of factionalism. She maintains that this can happen (1) when a faction defeats its rivals; (2) in situations where there is only one political party which brooks the creation of factions, which then take the place of organized party politics; (3) when factionalism does not lead to a victory for either side and turns into a ritualized, game-like dispute; (4) when the issues involved endure and are expected to persist and when a formalized organization can bring political or economic advantages.

The first factor which Bujra mentions is puzzling; can we still speak of factionalism when a faction has actually *defeated* its rivals? In my view, opposition and thus factionalism would then have ceased to exist. Bujra's second point makes more sense, but is not relevant to the present discussion. The third and fourth factors are of some significance with regard to the transformation of the rival factions of Yerseke musselmen into corporate groups. The faction that turned into *Visserbelang* did formalize because its members thought that by doing so they would be able to gain access to marine resources in the Waddenzee. It also had to institutionalize in order effectively to oppose the *Visservereniging*, which was already strongly entrenched as a corporate group. However, even after *Visserbelang* had gained access to Waddenzee mussel plots and although both associations faced the same problems and fought for the same interests, the participants certainly did not regard the conflict as a ritualized game. The redrawing of symbolic boundaries in the community had left scars too deep to be easily healed and there was nothing 'game-like' in the dissension.

Furthermore, Bujra ignores the fact that under certain circumstances factions can become 'parties' almost overnight. She writes that 'the institutionalization of factional oppositions occurs only when the issues involved are sustained over a

long period' (1973: 148). Several other anthropologists have also pointed out that spontaneous coalitions and factions can formalize and acquire corporate attributes, but like Bujra they assume that this only happens after a prolonged conflict (see, for example, Boissevain 1968: 551; Bujra 1973: 145-7; Schneider & Schneider 1988). This case history, however, shows that a faction (or a levelling coalition) can turn into a corporate grouping in a very short span of time. In fact, the history of Dutch society is replete with examples of factions quickly becoming parties, especially when the conflict is actuated by disagreements within the realm of religion or ideology. For instance, different perceptions of 'moral rectitude' have been at the core of many church schisms in the Netherlands. Thus it would appear that there is not necessarily, as Bujra would have it, 'a lack of ideological focus in factions' (1973: 149; see also Bailey 1969: 52). On the contrary: one of the reasons which made a reunion of Yerseke's fishermen's associations difficult was that the conflict was partly about ideology. The 'specialization' of the conflict (cf. Bujra 1973: 141) also hampered its resolution. It is not easy to leave the trenches, ignore the battlefield and fraternize, especially when both parties involved regard each other as morally corrupt.

Yet eventually, the opposing parties which originated as factions amalgamated when, as a result of the coming to power of a new generation, the differences between their members had eased. The younger musselmen realized that continuation of the dissension which had preoccupied their predecessors would ultimately weaken their bargaining position *vis-à-vis* state institutions. Though some still had strong opinions about the issue of moral rectitude, they had been involved in the conflict only marginally and therefore could take a more pragmatic stand than their forebears.

Following Nicholas (1965), many anthropologists have indicated that factions are impermanent. The same is said of levelling coalitions (Thoden van Velzen 1973: 221). Keeping this conception of factionalism in mind, it is all the more surprising that there are few if any instances in the literature of the reunification of factions or levelling coalitions, let alone of corporate groups which originated in this form. Even those who have explicitly opted for a dynamic approach (e.g. Silverman & Salisbury 1977) do not pay any attention to the fusion of factions or parties, or fail to present empirical evidence (e.g. Bujra 1973).

Clearly, then, we should analyze the genesis and structural transformations of factions and other political groupings from a diachronic viewpoint, as a 'total ongoing process', concentrating our attention not only on conflict but also on its resolution. In political anthropology conflict and its development are heavily overemphasized, while the existence or genesis of unity is apparently regarded as unproblematic and, perhaps for that reason, is hardly ever described and analyzed. The present article is an attempt to restore the balance in this respect and thus goes beyond existing positions in the literature. It is only with the advantage of hindsight that anthropologists can grasp the dynamics of political action to their full extent. This makes a strong case for a historically informed political anthropology.

Another bias of political anthropologists is their penchant for definitions and categorizations. Many have attempted to present authoritative definitions of various kinds of local-level political groupings. In so doing they have constructed a

nomenclature which from time to time has been the subject of reconsideration and reformulation. In the worst case this nominalist tendency becomes an end in itself, such that analysis is reduced to mere pigeon-holing. When social phenomena do not fit into the classification, new concepts are easily created or old ones redefined to fill the void. This case study shows that there are local-level political groupings which share characteristics of, for example, levelling coalitions and factions, and that these can become corporate groups in a short span of time. These corporate groups, in turn, have features in common with factions and levelling coalitions. Rather than add yet another concept or definition to the literature, and without denying the importance of conceptual tools, I would like to point to these family resemblances. In the last instance, the concept of factionalism may well be used to describe and analyse conflict not only between loosely structured groupings, but also between corporate groups.

NOTES

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¹ Farming of the common blue mussel (*Mytilus edulis*) in the Netherlands is a semi-culture. The production of mussel seed is left entirely to nature. The government grants permission to fish on seed beds during well-defined periods, usually some weeks in spring and autumn. The seeds are then transferred to private plots, where they will grow until the bivalves can be marketed.

² For a more detailed account of the history of the musselmen and the mussel industry in Yerseke, see Van Ginkel (1990; 1991).

³ Since the introduction of leasing, the state also provided for police patrols to prevent theft of oysters and mussels from the parcels. Nevertheless, poaching and theft of shellfish did occur. Even today, mussel farmers claim that mussels are fished illegally from their plots and that there is fraudulent displacement of seamarks.

⁴ A crucial step before mussels are marketed is their purification or 'rewatering'. They are planted on special plots for a period of at least ten days, where the mussels can dispose of silt and sand. The only suitable location for this procedure is situated just off Yerseke's coast.

⁵ This can be seen from the declining number of mussel firms. In 1959, there were 143 firms of mussel farmers in the Netherlands (61 in Yerseke), today only 80 remain (36 are based in Yerseke).

⁶ The import ban was lifted a year later, in 1951.

⁷ For obvious reasons, all personal names are pseudonyms.

⁸ Remember that by this time each individual mussel planter was allotted a certain production quota. These quotas varied between approximately 100,000 kg and 1,400,000 kg which could be marketed per year.

⁹ This became clear once more when in 1953 a flood disaster struck Zeeland. Yerseke was not inundated itself, and from this town several rescue operations were attempted. The mayor was ill during this period and in his stead Jacobus Daane co-ordinated the operations from the town hall, even though he did not hold any official office.

¹⁰ The team from Bruinisse was less successful and was called the 'Stone Team'. Those who were denied access to the Waddenzee were not entirely without income. The Fisheries Inspector arranged that a percentage of the proceeds of the two 'lucky' teams was distributed among their less fortunate colleagues. Moreover, many planters were not exclusively musselmen. They also farmed oysters or fished lobsters. Some started fishing slipper limpets to supplement their income.

¹¹ It had taken the Fisheries Inspector a little over a year to determine which Waddenzee grounds were suitable for mussel farming. He also had to take the interests of shrimpers into account, who exploited this area and claimed customary rights. Following the general permission to cultivate plots in the Waddenzee, the 'Golden Team' was dissolved.

¹² This battle was successful. In 1976, government decided to alter the earlier plan to dam off the Eastern Scheldt entirely. Instead, it approved the construction of a storm-surge barrier which would maintain the tidal regime (cf. Van Ginkel 1988).

¹³ Elected officials sit for a number of years and are eligible for re-election. The chairman is (re-)elected each year during the annual meeting.

¹⁴ Interestingly, Daane told me that if I wanted to hear an entirely different version of the story, I should see his opponent Sinke, not knowing of the fact that I had already done so.

¹⁵ It has been noted by some authors that factions are structurally equivalent or have a tendency to become so (see, for example, Bujra 1973: 148; Nicholas 1966: 53). However, I agree with Boissevain that 'rival factions, far from being in balanced opposition, are structurally and organizationally asymmetrical' (1977: 99; see also Salisbury & Silverman 1977: 6).

¹⁶ Some social anthropologists have noted that 'unity ... can ... arise when an external threat affects both sides in a factional dispute' (Bujra 1973: 144). Maybe it would have been easier to resolve the conflict had both associations not been institutionalized parties.

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L'océan d'amertume : processus politique et idéologie dans une communauté maritime hollandaise*Résumé*

Le premier objet de cet article est de présenter une analyse ethnographique des processus politiques en cours dans un quartier de la ville de Yerseke, quartier habité par des pêcheurs de moules. On nous montre comment un conflit concernant l'accès aux ressources marines divise une association de pêcheurs de la région et comment les factions rivales se transforment en partis mais finissent par se réunir. En deuxième lieu, l'article tente, au moyen de ce cas d'étude ainsi que d'autres données comparatives, de discuter et de réévaluer de vieilles interprétations de la notion de factionalisme.

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