

Socio-economic categories in Norwegian censuses up to about 1960

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Abstract This article discusses the development of the socio-economic classification systems in Norwegian population censuses from 1815 to 1960. The early nineteenth-century system was an attempt to classify people according to *who they were* in terms of social rank and political rights. Through a gradual change during the century, greater emphasis was made on classifying people according to *what their jobs were*. A new framework for socio-economic classifications was developed in the 1870s. This framework remained in effect with few changes until 1960. The characteristics of this system are analysed in connection with dominant political philosophical and economic ideas, and the system is compared to the British and French classification system of the same period.

Keywords: POPULATION CENSUSES, SOCIO-ECONOMIC CATEGORIES, NORWAY.

‘Population statistics — and particularly those relating to censuses — are the most important of all types of statistics. The greatest riches of a country lie in its people, living and working within its borders. Thus it is its people who, as a living social organism, constitute the most important subject of all statistical research [...]. The population [is] the most important element of comparison in every statistical survey, and represents — immediately, or subsequently — the focal point around which all statistical research revolves.’

This is how the director of the central statistical office of Norway, Anders N. Kiær, opened his book *Bidrag til en norsk Befolkningstatistik* [Contribution to Norwegian Population Statistics] from 1882. These words had, perhaps, greater effect in 1882 than 20 to 30 years earlier — or, in fact, later. Demographic statistics have been compiled to an ever-greater extent since the mid-1860s. Meanwhile, other statistics were rather neglected. The census yielded not only important demographic data. In Kiær’s time, censuses were the country’s most important source for the registration of the development of the different sectors in the economy. For domestic trade, trade and industry, and many other occupations in the ‘new’ middle class, the

same censuses which gave an overview of the number of people employed in the various sections of the economy were also the most reliable method of estimating the scale and development of the different trades. Agricultural statistics continued to be based on the records compiled through censuses in the rural districts. As Kiær said, the population was really the focal point around which all statistical research revolved.

The following presentation deals with the classification of the population according to rank and position (*stand og livsstilling*), or 'socio-economic criteria', to use the modern expression. The latter term indicates how these statistics function as a link between economic data and social data. Such work gave the statistics concerning rank and position a somewhat hybrid character — especially up to the 1910 census. During this period, Statistics Norway tried systematically to classify people twice — once with respect to their social position, and once with respect to the kind of activity they were performing in their daily work. In this period, only one question was asked to reveal this information, namely what their rank and position was. This was not difficult for senior civil servants and farm-owners, since it was evident who they were and what they did. But it was more difficult with cottagers (*husmenn*) whose livelihood depended on fishing, or clerks who worked at mechanical workshops — just to give two examples.

This is the way in which the censuses provided information on the country's social and economic structure and development. At the same time, they bear witness to the compilers' attitudes to and interpretations of social and economic issues. Another, very important, aspect of statistical information is its performative effect. The categories used in statistics contribute in constituting a picture of social and economic structures, of reality. Through the use of statistical numbers and categories in research, politics and administration this picture of reality might be strengthened. One could even say that the acceptance and integration of statistics and administration and politics make its picture of reality come real — they become part of the general perceptions and practices that constitute identities, voting rights, welfare arrangements, and so on. I shall try to take up these matters by way of a small digression, before returning to Norwegian reasoning and practice in socio-economic grouping.

CATEGORISING THE WORLD

Nearly all modern statistical analyses are based on the creation of equivalences between individual events or objects (Desrosières 1998: 10–12). In this way, and only in this way, can we make comparisons. It is not only with statistics, though, that we make this kind of categorisation. In order to understand or explain something, we often have to try to put it in a specific group, or to compare it with things we know. The subjects of law and medicine are built around complex systems that place individual objects in

defined categories. Such information is often vital for determining what to do in each specific case. Then, of course, in a more casual way, we classify things nearly all the time. Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star's (1998) book on how we classify things is entitled 'Sorting things out', and starts off with a summary of how the authors themselves classify things on an average day: sorting out dirty clothes, mail received, newspapers read and unread, etc.

Statistical categories are not, of course, dreamed up in closed rooms in a statistics office, but will often reflect and reinforce standard practices and the use of concepts in politics, science and public administration in general. There will be many occasions when categories overlap in various segments of the society. But statistical categories and concepts often have strong normative power. Statistics have always had an aura of factual and objective omnipotence. It is difficult to see exactly how this has arisen, even though in general it appears to have been generated through complex processes involving complicated methods and bureaucratic systems. More than anything else, it is the political-administrative use of figures and categories that gives statistics their productive effect. '...numbers do not merely inscribe a pre-existing reality. They constitute it,' as Nikolas Rose (1999) has pointed out. What he is referring to is how political and administrative practice depends on well-defined areas of expertise, fixed routines, figures and standards. Such rules and knowledge technologies delimit and fill the space that the policy is practised in: 'Unemployment policy' is unthinkable without the definition of what 'unemployment' means, the figures of how many people are unemployed, where these people are, and the institutions that communicate between the authorities and the unemployed.

Most categories, both in the areas of statistics and elsewhere, are of little significance for the understanding of social relations, the creation of identities and limits. Yet some categories may have clear juridical and institutional effects. These effects have been studied in relation to various contexts including classification according to ethnic group. Prominent examples of this are the delimitation to reserves of the first nations' peoples in countries such as the USA and Canada, and the definition of 'coloured' and 'black' in *apartheid* South Africa (Blanck 1998, Bowker and Star 1998). And links between the categories of censuses, the creation of new states, and the development of national unity have been analysed by various people including Benedict Anderson (1983), Silvana Patriarca (1996), Margo Anderson (1988) and, to some extent, Eric Hobsbawm (1990). These studies show that the development of groups sustaining national policy are just as efficient at ostracising groups as they are at embracing them.

Based on similar perspectives, the establishment of systems for socio-economic groupings has also been studied in a number of countries. It has been pointed out how categories that define high socio-economic groups — such as German *Beamte*, French *cadres* and American *managers* — cannot be

understood outside their specific social and political circles. It is also impossible to 'translate' a category — even if many of the people in the groups belong to the same functional and institutional circles. In the case of France, the UK and Germany, in particular, the historical background for the more comprehensive classification systems that such concepts pertain to has been thoroughly analysed.

I would like, here, to summarise certain characteristics of the development of the French and British classification systems before going on to relate them to the Norwegian system after 1875. The British system was developed following attempts to classify the population according to groups that could illuminate the causes and effects of poverty, as well as analyse fertility and mortality issues in terms of what were perceived to be distinctly different segments of the population (Hennock 1976). Charles Booth's pioneering social surveys of the population in London's poorest districts in the 1880s made the implicit assumption that the population could be, and should be, categorised into more or less naturally distinct groups according to abilities and moral qualities. This standpoint became even more pronounced in Karl Pearson's and Francis Galton's 'anthropometrical' approaches to social surveys and classifications (Stigler 1999, Szreter 1984). Inspired by the eugenicist attitudes circulating at the time, Galton argued in the 1890s that the population could be categorised following a normal distribution curve into five segments according to natural characteristics and 'genetic value'. One of the topics of debate in the General Register Office's Committee on the Census was whether the country had reached a point where the fertility of middle and, in particular, upper classes was stagnating, while that of classes lower down the scale was still high. The categorisation that was finally resolved in 1913 was explicitly intended to foster comparative fertility studies of the various levels of the population. The five-class system that was then adopted has been maintained with few changes ever since. 'Upper and middle classes' were put in the first category, skilled workers in the third category, and unskilled workers in the fifth. The intermediate categories, two and four, were not so well defined in practice, and consisted of 'intermediate groups' and 'semi-skilled workers'. They were supposed to include those marginal people who did not fit into any of the more clearly defined categories. It is clear that ability and knowledge were the criteria for determining the limits of categories two and four. It was this that the hierarchy indicated — not income levels or existing types of organisation in the society.

The French system developed more gradually and is not stamped with the mark of any particular socio-political theory (Boltanski 1987, Desrosières 1977). Since the 1930s, the French classification system has evolved on the basis of four relatively distinct groups: farmers, workers, civil servants, and *cadres*. The name of this last group cannot be translated and describes a clearly defined management class that has developed over the years, espe-

cially through the powerful engineering profession and its relationship to the state. To explain the development of the other groups and their subsequent categorisation, analysts usually refer back to the French Revolution and the following decades. Groups that identified themselves with each other through formal organisations or informal ties (trade unions, guilds, etc.) formed the links in the classification system. There were, and still are, important distinctions between salaried staff and wage-earners. This differentiation derives from the social structure of the French farming sector, but it was also applied to salaried managers on the one side, and employers and executive company owners on the other. In other words, conventions that have evolved over time play an important role. There is virtually no trace of the philosophy upon which the British system is built: a categorisation of the entire population from top to bottom based on principles that identify groups according to the individuals' inherent qualities.

RANK AND POSITION IN THE NORWEGIAN CENSUSES OF 1815–1855

By categorising people according to their social rank, position and profession — terms which sometimes overlapped over the years and sometimes became redundant — the censuses gave varying pictures of 'what' the population was and how it sustained itself. It was impossible to categorise the population based on 'a more logical, consistent system,' wrote Kiær in his influential book of 1882. Understanding and assessment were necessary in order to 'throw as much light as possible on the actual groups evolving'. We shall now examine how these evolving groups changed. They were affected not only by changes in social structures and employment, but also by the radical changes in the very principles determining categorisation that took place between the early censuses of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s. In simple terms, we can say that there was a move away from asking people *who they were* to asking them *what their job was*.

Early censuses were essentially a record of social rank and family composition. Women existed only in the category 'sex and age'. If we consider the classifications that the censuses used up to 1855, we obtain a complex picture of political significance and rank of those belonging to the generations that came into power after 1814. The census categories were aimed at singling out those who had full political rights. Other groups were treated more summarily.

The summary in table 1 is taken from the 1835 census. The classifications used in this census were the same as the ones used in 1825. There were eleven categories in urban areas. The first seven were, with the exception of old-age pensioners, restricted to urban inhabitants who were entitled to vote. It was not common to have a pension, however, and there were only about 2,000 pensioners in the whole country. Most of these must have been senior civil servants, and/or owned property or land — in addition to having

Table I. Socio-economic categories in the 1835 census, Norway.

| Towns and small coastal settlements | | |
|--|---|-----------|
| I | Senior civil servants | |
| | <i>i. Clergymen</i> | 111 |
| | <i>ii. Civilians</i> | 558 |
| | <i>iii. Servicemen</i> | 386 |
| II | Pensioners | 619 |
| III | Citizens with citizenship such as: | |
| | <i>i. Wholesalers or retailers</i> | 1 738 |
| | <i>ii. Grocers, sutlers, innkeepers, etc</i> | 1 136 |
| | <i>iii. Manufacturers or craftsmen</i> | 3 036 |
| | <i>iv. Ships' captains</i> | 1 060 |
| IV | Craftsmen without citizenship | 2 597 |
| V | Seamen and fishermen | 4 412 |
| VI | Day-labourers | 8 203 |
| VII | Servants | 15 327 |
| VIII | The poor | 4 720 |
| Total, according to rank and position | | 42 903 |
| Total, according to sex and age | | 129 002 |
| Parishes | | |
| I | Farmers farming taxed land: | |
| | <i>i. Freeholders</i> | 72 624 |
| | <i>ii. Tenant farmers and tenants</i> | 30 568 |
| II | Cottagers (<i>husmenn</i>) on non-taxed land. | 55 213 |
| III | Senior civil servants | |
| | <i>i. Clergymen</i> | 387 |
| | <i>ii. Civilians</i> | 201 |
| | <i>iii. Servicemen</i> | 349 |
| IV | Pensioners | 1485 |
| V | Shopkeepers | 654 |
| VI | Factory-owners and manufacturers | 369 |
| VII | Craftsmen | 13 615 |
| VIII | Ships' captains with citizenship as such. | 848 |
| IX | Sailors and fishermen | 22 583 |
| X | Day-labourers and croppers without land. | 42 974 |
| XI | Servants | 124 627 |
| XII | The poor | 25 977 |
| Total, according to rank and position | | 392 474 |
| Total, according to sex and age | | 1 065 825 |

formally been granted citizenship in the towns. Being a landowner was the only way to acquire the right to vote and to climb the ladder of social rank. It is worth noting that captains of ships were not distinguished from other seamen; only those captains that had been granted citizenship were to be recorded. Other captains were 'seamen and fishermen'. Neither were distinctions made in the group 'manufacturers and craftsmen'. It would have been important to distinguish such workers in an economic context, but in relation to social and political rank it was irrelevant. The next class encompassed those without voting rights: craftsmen without citizenship, seamen and fishermen, day-labourers and fishermen, servants and the poor — anyone who at the time of the census received financial aid from the state.

The rural population is categorised in a corresponding way. Freeholders are distinguished from tenant farmers and tenants. These are in turn distinguished from cottagers with land. Those without land are listed near the bottom of the census form with day-labourers. Only servants and poor people are lower down. Otherwise, the terms are the same. We can assume that categorisation of the privileged groups in both urban and rural areas is relatively precise. If we think in terms of business categories, however, we must be careful not to attach too much significance to the figures for the other categories. They most definitely cannot be compared with census figures compiled after 1865. Any person of responsibility who happened to be a fisherman was, as we have seen, precluded from the 'fisherman' category. The category called 'servants' was probably far too big. In analysing the census of 1865, Kiær grouped these people in separate sub-categories according to the job held by the head of the family. The servants were often considered permanent workers at the master's place of work (NOS 1869: VI). In the towns, subordinates of the master artisan often lived in the same house as him, but how often such workers were designated craftsmen without citizenship, or servants, when the master completed the census form for his whole household must have varied. In rural areas, servants worked both inside and outside the house. Kiær pointed out that an average senior civil servant in the town had 1.94 servants, as compared to 4.44 servants in the country in 1865, and he determined that at least half the servants in the country actually worked as farmhands. Furthermore, there were many people who would not fit naturally into any category, but who, nonetheless, had to be put into the closest one if he was head of the family. The many copy-writers and clerks who sorted through all the census forms in the Statistics Office (*Tabellkontor*) constitute just one probable example of such people.

In 1845, many of the groups were split up. New categories were established — particularly for the towns — and included designations such as 'students' and 'clerks'. Efforts to encompass everyone reached a conclusion when a category was set up for 'persons who do not pertain to any of the above-mentioned classes'. It was the Office of the Auditor General that requested the inclusion of this last group (DT 1845: 616). It was the counting

of family members that also led to the introduction of double-entry book-keeping; the state wanted to be able to check the population's rank and position according to the totals of individuals categorised by sex and age. Yet the most important increase in the number of fields to complete came by way of a much more detailed categorisation of citizenship. The small form now acquired separate fields for 'wholesalers', 'retailers' 'trading citizens' 'shop clerks', 'grocers', 'sutlers', 'innkeepers' and 'restaurateurs and suchlike'. The 'suchlike' term must have been difficult to apply, since it meant that every category was allowed to trade in the towns. 'Manufacturers and craftsmen' remained, however, a single category. The above subdivisions probably arose because of the major conflicts affecting urban citizens in the 1840s, and these coincided with, and were to some extent caused by, the push to deregulate trade (Nilsen 1969, Seip 1974: 129-135).

In 1855, however, there was a reduction in the number of categories back to approximately the number used in 1825 and 1835. Clergymen had complained bitterly over the workload the censuses caused them. The work was therefore simplified by removing some of the categories: senior civil servants, junior officials, and a couple of other categories that had been added in 1845. The Ministry of Finance believed that the figures for these categories could be obtained elsewhere. The categories that included civil servants who were thus no longer covered by the censuses were, therefore, not included in the printed copy of the census either. Surprisingly, the category 'fisherman' also disappeared. It had been distinguished from other seafarer categories and had acquired its own field in 1845, but was removed in this census (DT 1855: 737-747). One of the parties that gave vent to its views on the design of the form was the Army Department. Taking military service into account, this department wished to differentiate those living off the land from those 'making living from the sea'. This proved to be a guideline for the relationship between land and sea authorities. The desire to distinguish between these categories led to the Ministry of Finance determining that the category 'fisherman' should be abandoned altogether. The argument was that fishermen 'often did other work, under which they have to be categorised, since, in general, they used to be farmers, and thus must be categorised as people who sustain themselves through farming, since the census forms would be misleading, or would serve no purpose, in the light of the Army Department's comments.' Consequently, although trade statistics showed that from 1855 the fishing trade was of inestimable significance for Norwegian exports, the census for the same year indicated that there were, in fact, no fishermen in the whole country.

THE PRODUCTIVE AND THE UNPRODUCTIVE PART OF THE POPULATION

These purely numerical statistics show that consideration of specific issues influenced categorisation. Social rank and political rights were the funda-

mental logic behind the classifications. Thus, the 1865 census constituted a major breakthrough towards categorising people based on economic sectors and occupations, though subsequent censuses reversed certain important parts of the changes introduced at that time. The radical changes made in 1865 were based on the critical assumption that the census was nominative: Every person was to be listed individually and there were no longer any fields to tick off for rank and job. People had to specify their respective job in an open field in the form 'as accurately and specifically as possible' (NOS 1869: XXXIII). It was then up to the Statistics Office to allocate a category, and there was thus no limit to the number of job types that could be defined. And Kiær, the driving force behind the census and the processing of the resulting information, appeared to enjoy the freedom this gave him. 'The population by rank and job' was first categorised into six main occupational categories: I. Agriculture, cattle-breeding, forestry and fishing; II. Mining and industry; III. Trade, shipping and land transport; IV. Work of 'an indeterminate nature'; V. Immaterial work; and VI. Unproductive work. These main categories were then divided into a further 55 sub-categories — again following primarily production-oriented criteria. The sub-categories were then split up according to the respective worker's formal position. Only on reaching this third level do we begin to recognise the categories similar to those of earlier censuses. But the degree of detail was, of course, much greater — in 1865, sub-categorisation continued right down to 'quarrymen', 'artists and literati' and 'prostitutes'.¹

Even the actual coding was carried out based on considerations relating to the work's 'subject and character', as Kiær called it. There were many small-scale farmers, farmhands and cottagers who had several sources of income, particularly in rural districts. Some people were fishermen; others worked on large farms or were craftsmen, etc. It was necessary in such cases to use careful judgment to categorise the population according to 'actual' work. Many cottagers became manufacturers or saw-mill workers. Whether a particular freeholder or cottager was categorised as a fisherman or farmer, depended on the assessment of his declaration and the number of farm animals he had, as well as on the importance of fishing in the area he lived in. Rank and formal position were, therefore, less important. And even when such categories existed on the above-mentioned third level in the classification system, categories such as 'fisherman', 'cottagers', and 'manufacturers' were thus interpreted in a different way from before. The statistics can therefore not be compared directly with those acquired in previous censuses (even though historians often do this). Furthermore, it cannot have been particularly clear in those times, that a cottager without land is no longer a 'cottager', but a manufacturer in 'mining and industry', because the head-farmer made him repair shoes for the other workers on the farm. Kiær's classification system uses a combination of economic sectors and actual job activity to determine their category, but he finds himself obliged

in the more detailed reports to use more conventional concepts that are really meaningless with respect to this basic principle. 'Freeholders' and 'cottagers' describe what people *are*, not what they *do* — except for the census of 1865, where the categories were determined based on what the individuals did.²

However, there is one basic principle which was not only maintained, but which was also reinforced in later censuses, electoral statistics and some business statistics. Kiær made a clear distinction between the working part and the non-working part of the population, and these were called 'productive' and 'unproductive' groups in analyses and tables. This distinction can be compared with that of 'sustaining' and 'wasting' (*nærende og tærende*), which was often used in old statistical analyses, but there is an important difference. Those who were 'sustaining' were often considered to be those who could look after themselves and their families, those who had an income. Those who were 'wasting' were women, children, poor people, prisoners and those who, for health reasons, could not look after themselves. Kiær's concept of productive people, however, was in the main a realisation of the classic economic theory of the value of work, as understood in the British tradition of David Ricardo and Karl Marx. Attempts were made to remove those people who had an income only from land rent, or solely financial capital, from the 'productive' category and to put them in the 'unproductive' category. No reason was given for this in 1865, but the principle is evident in many specific sorting criteria. Freeholders who could not be considered as active farmers and who had no other income were considered 'capitalists'. Those people who reported that they were shipowners, but who lived in such a way that it was impossible to see that they actually were in charge of a shipping company, were considered in the same way, 'so the matter is not so very different from the following: having money in a savings bank, despite speculation, can often be more worthwhile' (NOS 1869: VII).

This difference affected more than just the categorisation of those who worked in money markets. Sons who were more than fifteen years old and came from an agricultural background were assumed to be doing 'something useful for themselves' and were therefore categorised as being gainfully employed in agriculture. But Kiær did not have the same opinion about 'property sons', whom he always assessed as unproductive until they were 20 years old. These people were then placed in the last category together with capitalists, independent gentlemen, blind people, mentally disturbed people, prisoners, and prostitutes. Women remaining at home were always a problem for Kiær. In 1865, they were grouped together with children under 15 years of age receiving support; but he emphasized that this rather hid their significance of providing 'joint benefit'. In his book *Bidrag til en norsk Befolkningsstatistik*, Kiær quoted foreign economists and statisticians who considered that women should be included more readily in the

statistics because they were responsible for most of the consumption of what their respective husbands earned. Kiær, however, considered this a far too 'restricted view'. He believed that women were productive in the home in a more factual way. In the census of 1875, therefore, all women were moved from categories for supported people to appropriate business categories. Housewives who remained at home were grouped together with servants and housemaids, except for farmers' wives, who were considered as employed in agriculture. According to Kiær, this led to a new problem in that house-bound wives from more prosperous families found themselves listed amongst those performing 'domestic chores', even if their work was 'very insignificant'. He believed that they really should have been grouped in the 'unproductive' category of the population (Kiær 1882: 70 and 93 f).

In the 1890s, Kiær made a more comprehensive assessment of the country's national income. This was partly to determine whether it could afford to finance new social insurance schemes. He also calculated the monetary value of the work carried out by particular groups of house-bound women. The guidelines were approximately the same as those for men who worked for the household, or who had a job whose working conditions and remuneration were not measured in terms of money. Kiær's intuitive and obvious argument in this matter and others was that it was meaningless to include the work of housemaids as national income and yet not the work of a woman who carried out a major unpaid contribution in running the home (Kiær 1898-1899).

SOCIO-POLITICAL MAPPING — THE SUPERIORS, INDEPENDENTS AND SUBORDINATES

'Concerning statistics on the way of life in Norway, a gradual tendency has developed in which the acquisition power of a job is emphasised more and more, and the title or the name of the position in many cases fades into the background,' wrote Gunnar Jahn, newly appointed director of Statistics Norway in 1920 (NOS 1926: 2). The trend was very clear, but the term 'gradual' is not very accurate. In 1875, a new category was decided upon which again brought social and political rank into focus. We know nothing of people's reactions to the radical changes that took place in 1865, and it is possible that some people found this categorisation strange and difficult to understand.

But the most important reason why the census of 1875 more than that of 1865 revealed a society structured around formal rank and legally determined rights can probably be found elsewhere. It was J.N. Mohn who prepared the census in 1875 and who led the first phase of the categorisation work. Mohn was also engaged to evaluate in detail the effects of a variety of proposals to extend the right to vote put forward by a number of members of parliament. The evaluation was obviously impartial, but it was the

same population that had to be categorised, and it was appropriate in many ways to be able to compare the figures of the electoral roll with those of an up-to-date census. As expected, the principles governing the categories were relatively similar, even though the census statistics were, of course, much more detailed. Sivert Langholm drew attention to the connection between Mohn's electoral roll statistics and the categories of the census in his book *Elitenes valg* ('The election of the elites', 1984). 'It may appear here that the socio-political problems arising from the debate on the right to vote and, more specifically, from the statistics on the right to vote, helped determine the primary form of the analysis of the social structure of Norway that constituted the basis of Statistics Norway's work at the end of the 1870s.' There is little reason to doubt that this tentative opinion carries weight; Kiær, too, points out that the census was categorised according to the main principles that Mohn had found best-suited to the voting statistics (Kiær 1882: 76 f).

Mohn divided the male population into six groups: self-employed persons, private functionaries, the working class, senior civil servants, *bestillingsmenn* (public functionaries on an intermediate level, e.g. teachers), and unproductive people (Mohn 1877). Freeholder farmers belonged to the group 'self-employed'; a categorisation according to economic sectors was less important. Mohn believed that his principle of categorisation required 'no justification'. He referred to the fact that his assignment was to assess how the proposals put forward affected 'the established order'. Inevitably, this led to a conservative categorisation, in which those with similar political rights, such as freeholders and senior civil servants, were categorised with those who were aspiring social climbers. Such people were sometimes the workers, but more often were the 'new' middle class. Teachers and other civil servants, office workers and a growing number of highly educated people did not fit into the established ranking categories — these people all belonged with *bestillingsmenn* or the wide-ranging group called 'private functionaries.'³ Mohn's calculations also give us an interesting view of the then current political way of thinking. In his exhaustive evaluation of how the proposals for new voting rights would work, he took no account of how large the proportion of the total number of workers, public officers, or contract workers that would acquire voting rights would be. The problem was how the *power ratio* between the main categories would be if a particular proposal prevailed. The main issue was how big a share of the votes that senior servants, self-employed, workers, etc. would acquire. Political rights were evaluated and discussed collectively. In Mohn's arithmetic, for example, it was never made clear, that the senior civil servants class was numerically very small in relation to the whole population.

The categories of the censuses up to 1855 were based purely on formal criteria. In the electoral roll statistics and the census of 1875, the philosophy behind the classifications had to be explained more explicitly. The critical

issue was to differentiate superiors from subordinates and especially to delimit the growing group of people who had nobody below them but who, nonetheless, worked independently. The issue of filtering out independent workers was also clearly expressed in the most liberal proposal concerning voting rights put forward by the *Storting* (Norwegian parliament) (Daae and Sørensen). Everyone who paid tax was to have the right to vote, except for *tyender* (subordinate domestic servants), who, because of their completely subordinate position, were not to have the right to vote, even if their income and capital made them taxpayers. In his book *Bidrag til en norsk Befolkningsstatistik*, Kiær enlarged upon this issue: ‘That which may determine the character of a job and thus affect its influence on the worker’s personality is, first of all, the purpose of the job and, secondly, whether the person has a superior or subordinate role in it’ (Kiær 1882: 68). Even the counters were clearly instructed ‘to decide more or less the extent to which workers had a superior or subordinate role in their work’, as stated in 1891.⁴

The desire to acquire information, including information on the structure of business, required a detailed specification of workers and self-employed who did not naturally pertain to larger categories, right down, in fact, to ‘bone mill workers’ (four in the whole country), ‘map printers’ (five) and ‘pearl fishermen’ (one). Consequently, the number of categories increased dramatically because it was considered important to ascertain relationships of superiority and subordination even in very small business categories. In 1875, there were 96 main categories for jobs, and these were subdivided into 759 sub-categories. The Swedish statistical office had a total of 246 categories at the time, and the Danish office had 199.

The categorisation into six main groups generated by Mohn’s analysis of electoral roll statistics, and census material was in principle a kind of ‘two-by-three’ categorisation as presented in table 2. In most of the analyses of the working segment of the population, the simple categorisation into three parts was used. In large analyses of the whole adult population, six categories were used. This gave room for the category ‘unproductive’, since workers in the public sector and the private sector were merged into one category.

Table 2. The socio-economic classification system of J.N. Mohn, used in the Norwegian 1875 census.

| | The public sector | The private sector |
|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | Senior civil servants | Self-employed |
| 2 | <i>Bestillingsmenn</i> ¹ and similar | Independent private functionaries |
| 3 | Workers | Workers |

¹ Public functionaries on an intermediate level, e.g. teachers.

How does the Norwegian system compare to the British and the French systems as presented previously? There are many clear similarities with the British system, especially with regard to the element of overall 'design' implemented at specific times to suit a well-defined purpose. The French system, however, is conspicuously different. This system developed slowly and related more quickly to institutional and organizational matters in society. Another similarity between the British and the Norwegian systems is that they both reflect hierarchical social structures. The British system was organised according to skills and qualities. The population was categorised discretely, but sequentially, starting with those from a good family with many skills and going down to workers without any special professional knowledge or skills and who were often in a marginal area overlapping with the poor population. The categories in the Norwegian hierarchy were more rigidly defined structures. The various groups of 'self-employed' reveal most clearly, perhaps, the characteristics typical of the Norwegian system. In comparison with the French system, Norwegian categorisation appeared to be just a mix of farmers, big business owners, and very small manufacturers, or even people without any education or professional skills, but who had managed to find a way of making a living with no other employees than themselves. Neither could it measure the underlying phenomenon that was so important in Great Britain — abilities, knowledge, and social value — because it focused so singularly on whether the respective person was in a personal, often financially defined, situation of dependency on someone else.

The historian of statistics, Theodore M. Porter, has stated that statistics are indeed able to describe reality because they define it (Porter 1994). This relates back to a point I made in the introduction. Namely, statistics should not be seen only as a reflection of reality, but as something which helps create it. Those who were registered as poor people or as self-employed people obviously existed regardless of the statistics. Yet, at the same time, there is absolutely no indication of how the population should be categorised according to socio-economic criteria: whether poor people and self-employed people should come under their own categories, in sub-categories with other people, or whether they should be omitted completely. The designers of these forms can therefore choose between institutional-pragmatic methods, as in France, an elitist social philosophy concerned for the workers' high rate of fertility, as in Great Britain, or a conservative approach where established rights, the distribution of property, and specific factors of superiority/subordination are decisive (or from any of the other types of categorisation that have, or have not, been used). Only when these and many other important decisions have been made, and a detailed form of categories has been compiled following compilation of the guidelines, is it fair to say that a statistic is right or wrong, precise or imprecise.

At the same time, these categories represent a kind of general social map of the structure of society. When voting rights, invalidity insurance, and import duty versus income tax were the subject of heated discussions in the 1880s and the 1890s, the issue of who would suffer and who would benefit was related to the population categories as they appeared on this map. This was because the map was the only guideline they had. Furthermore, when Sivert Langholm, in the book I cited earlier, analysed the relationship between the people and the elites, he naturally used the categorisation of rank and position as found in the nineteenth-century census. This is sensible, because we assume that they accurately reflect established attitudes of how the society was 'really' built up. Yet, it is more important that the categorisations already existed, and from a technical point of view gave the best foundation for quantitative analysis and the calculation of ratios. More than 100 years after J. N. Mohn created his six-part hierarchy, his statistics continue to reproduce a particular perception of social realities, designed to distinguish established groups from those awaiting emancipation.

THE 1875 SYSTEM IN LATER CENSUSES

The Norwegian system as put forward by Mohn and Kiær has two defining characteristics. The first is that productive people had to be distinguished from unproductive people. In the definition of productiveness, however, the elements of personal judgement from the statisticians were as important as purely technical-functional descriptions of the categories. The second characteristic is that 'superior' had to be distinguished from 'subordinate'; and here the significance for personality and character building plays a role. Thus, those who worked independently without superiors and subordinates had to be recorded in a separate category. It was this last issue that led to Mohn and Kiær's 'two-by-three' categorisation.

The first-mentioned part of the system gradually broke down in later censuses. Kiær's definition of productive and unproductive had obvious ideological overtones. In practice, however, the Central Bureau of Statistics distinguished between those who worked and those who did not work, regardless of whether the work was paid or unpaid. But the continued expansion of the money economy and the growth of professional and political requirements to filter out those engaged in the general labour market made this distinction more and more difficult to maintain. In 1910, the distinction between working people and non-working people was replaced by one which differentiated between those with an occupation and those without. However, we must be careful not to interpret this change a necessary consequence of the modernisation of the economy. As we have mentioned, France differentiated more consistently between salaried and non-salaried workers. The French debates on the meaning of 'productive' were also of a very different nature (Vanoli 1983) From 1910, however, housewives were

distinguished from women who did paid work in the house and home, such as custodians, cooks, and chambermaids. In the summary of the 1910 census, the concept 'unproductive' was still used, but it was defined in a different way from that which Kiær had originally established. Those who could live purely on their pension or the income from their capital were distinguished from those who were dependent on private or public allowances. It was these latter people who were now listed as unproductive; ten years later, in 1920, the category was eliminated entirely.

The two-by-three categorisation, however, proved to have a longer lifetime, as Langholm (1984) indicated. In 1920, Statistics Norway began to use eight 'social positions', which in major surveys were reduced to three. These were (i) 'self-employed' and 'independent workers'⁶, (ii) four groups of clerical staff from 'senior clerks' to 'office and shop assistants', and (iii) 'foremen' and 'workers'. In this new category, 'foremen' were distinguished from the old category of 'workers', and the categories for clerical staff were specified in greater detail (NOS 1926: 4 f). In reductions to four categories, the first two categories were maintained, clerical staff became one category, and the last two categories were merged into 'workers'. Furthermore, as of 1910, senior civil servants were recorded as a separate category among clerical staff, but in 1920 and later censuses, they were included with other groups in the category of senior clerical officials. In 1910, Gunnar Jahn had already pointed out that the categorisation of social positions should not necessarily be seen as an expression of social *significance*. The placement of senior civil servants 'below' the self-employed, for example, attests this. It is worth noting, however, that the changes in 1910 and 1920 involved only the definition of sub-categories, such as they were defined in 1875, in a different way in the simplified analysis. The logic behind the definition of the sub-categories was the same. If we now look back at the British system, it is worth noting how Norwegian foremen and workers were grouped in separate categories (superior/subordinate relationship), whereas the British distinction of skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled workers never gained a foothold in this main categorisation.

At the same time, it was emphasised that the censuses should give more detailed information of significance for those involved in production. This last point becomes evident in attempts to establish categories according to so-called 'consistent socio-economic positions' (*gjennomgående livsstillinger*) (NOS 1926, Jønsberg 1924). It had been a constant problem to know how to categorise clerical staff and skilled workers employed by a company that carried out other activities than those that the job description indicated. The question was, for example, whether a carpenter at a mechanical engineering workshop should be categorised as a worker in the mechanical engineering industry, as a woodworker, or simply as a carpenter. This problem also faced Kiær in 1865, when he asked whether a cottager who repaired shoes was a cottager, a farmhand, or a cobbler. In 1865, the cottager became

a cobbler; in 1910 the carpenter at the mechanical engineering workshop became a mechanical engineer. This principle was maintained in 1920. But separate tables for 'consistent socio-economic positions' were compiled, in which certain skilled workers, the main manufacturing trades, technicians and engineers were grouped together regardless of their business category. This categorisation was clearly based on the principle that an employee should be listed according to his knowledge and skills in the production world. But this was not done in order to create an alternative, hierarchical system based on skills and abilities. The 'consistent socio-economic positions' were not categorised according to their importance relative to each other. They simply identified occupations which were considered important for the Norwegian economy and which could provide a solution to the problem of categorising skilled workers who worked in trades other than 'their own'.

These types of positions may have helped protect the more general categorisation of social positions from becoming statistics of a more occupation- or education-oriented nature. In the censuses up to 1960, when a detailed Nordic standard for the categorisation of occupations replaced the general categorisations based on social rank and significance, the 1875 system— apart from slight revisions in 1920 — was kept without any major changes. The categorisations may have been preserved to some extent for convenience, for it was thus easier to compare new figures with old ones. A more substantial explanation is that this stratification seemed sensible also for analysing social questions and income distribution in the decades after World War I. In the rhetoric and social analysis of the labour movement, this hierarchical categorisation yielded a fairly accurate description of the 'actual' division of classes in the society. Categorisation designed to show how a movement from below threatens established groups can also be used to show how income, capital and education are unevenly distributed between exactly the same groups.

EPILOGUE: RETURN OF THE UNPRODUCTIVE

The conclusion is thus that the main categories of what became known as 'social ranks/positions' and the principles behind these were used longer than Kiær's rather special categories of 'productive' and 'unproductive'. But perhaps this is not true, and I shall end this article with a little digression.

The area of statistics that after 1945 revealed the clearest differences between Norwegian and foreign solutions was national accounting. A fundamental starting point behind all Norwegian national accounting practices in the testing phase of the 1930s and 1940s was that there was a difference between 'real' and 'financial' objects and flows. Definition equations, diagrams, and accounting systems thus acquired a kind of dual character: one for real objects and one for financial objects. Economists such as Ragnar

Frisch, Petter Jakob Bjerve and Odd Aukrust never justified this principle theoretically or normatively. The difference between 'real' and 'financial' objects was something that existed in reality. The real objects were physical goods and services; they existed regardless of who owned them. The financial objects were the various instruments for making payments. Two separate flow charts could be constructed for the majority of transactions, a flow of real objects and one of financial objects, each going a different way.

This raised a number of problems such as how to record interest in the national accounts and how to calculate aggregated amounts, a concept used particularly in connection with total factor income. In leading Anglo-American literature, factor income was normally calculated as the sum of pay (from work) and a number of other items such as interest, profit and dividends (from capital). From a Norwegian viewpoint, the handling of interest payments in particular was completely wrong. The payment of interest had namely nothing to do with the capital production factor. This factor was *real* capital. The actual payment of interest was regulated by a number of arbitrary, institutional factors and should have been perceived as a transfer.

Outside the Nordic area, this approach won very little support. The English language does not even have any clear terms to highlight what, for Norwegians, is a crucial difference. If we look at Anglo-American literature, there was just one person who took up the case in favour of introducing such a difference. This economist, Earl Rolph, promoted a clear difference between products and services on the one side and different types of payment instruments on the other, and ended with national accounting principles which were virtually identical to those used in Norway (Rolph 1948). His proposal for dealing with interest payments was correspondingly similar; they had to be calculated as a transfer of income because they were not directly connected to the process which generated goods and services. Rolph's position was criticised, however, by his more prominent compatriot, Milton Gilbert, who presented rather moralistic reservations about Rolph's method of accounting for interest. The method explicitly labelled the recipients of interest and dividends as unproductive. One of the most extreme consequences of this labelling, according to Gilbert (1943), was that it led to capitalists and independent gentlemen falling into the same category as poor, under-supported people.

It was exactly this connection that constituted one of the exclusive characteristics of Kiær's method of categorising the adult population according to rank and position. In Kiær's system, there was, as mentioned, a general distinction between productive and unproductive categories. The first category of people worked; the second did not. Whether or not they had income was irrelevant for categorisation. I should like, here, to refer to Kiær's account of how people who registered their names on the census lists as part-owners of shipping companies were treated. Those people who had

an address where shipping companies actually operated could be adjudged to be shipowners, that is, engaged in work to run a shipping company. Those who lived a long way from the towns where the shipping companies operated were registered as pure capitalists, as passive owners of a share. For Kiær, these people belonged with small children, pensioners, the disabled, and the poor — they were unproductive. There is, thus, a clear line of understanding from Kiær to Bjerve and Aukrust as to what and who contributes to national production.

There is, of course, the big question of how Kiær's interpretation of what was productive — which was not defined explicitly in statistics after 1910 — became known to economists who were involved with somewhat different problems a generation later. Or is this just a coincidence? I believe it is more than a coincidence, but that is another story.

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NOTES

1. We do not wish to overemphasise too many peculiarities of the categorisation that Kiær made in the census of 1865. In this census, not only were position and status considered irrelevant, but trade and industry disappeared altogether as an occupation. It now formed part of another main category, 'crafts and manufacturing industry'. In reality, Kiær erased the difference between trade and industry by calling everything 'industry'. In his introduction, he wrote of 'big' and 'small' industries, but these categories were not reflected in the design of the forms. Rather, sub-categories were created according to the type of product, or the raw materials that were processed — 'processing of metals and ores', 'processing of plating; joints; sinks, etc.'
2. Not even in later censuses, where secondary jobs were specified. See Simen Skappel's (1922) work on the cottager system. No one has acquired such a thorough knowledge of censuses and farming statistics in the nineteenth century as Skappel — except, perhaps, for Kiær and Mohn. Simen Skappel consistently avoids referring to figures from the 1865 census in his analysis of the development of the cotter system. See, for example, his comments on page 176.
3. Mohn's survey was exhaustive, because some proposals supported the idea of giving voting rights to people based on specific rank and position criteria, whereas others supported giving voting rights to those who paid tax (a proposal that took no account of the scale of tax paid). There were also proposals in which simple income limits were the condition for acquiring the right to vote. This meant every adult man had to complete a form, specifying details of income, tax paid, and social category. These forms then had to be collected.
4. 'Instruktion for Tællerne', bilag No. 13 til *Oversigt over de vigtigste Resultater av de statistiske tabeller vedkommende Folketællingen i Kongeriget Norge i Januar 1891*, Kristiania 1898: 153.
5. 'Forhandlinger ved der i Kristiania den 4, 5 og 6 Juli afholdte fællesnordiske statistiske Møde'. (Negotiations of the Nordic conference held in Kristiania on the 4th, 5th and 6th July). Tillegg No. 1 til *Meddelelser fra det Statistiske Centralbureau*, 1889: 26 ff.

6. In Norwegian, this group is labelled *selvstendig arbeidende* and it corresponds to the French term *isolés*.

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