Class 8: The traditional society and economy
Sociology/Anthropology/Folklore 2230
Newfoundland Society and Culture

The family fishery
- Said to characterize traditional Newfoundland society
  - Since about 1850
  - Main fishery of Newfoundland
  - Major determinant of traditional Newfoundland society
  - Variations represent impact of outside world

Outline of the family fishery
- Basic economic unit: the family, either:
  - Nuclear (parents and dependent children) (less common) or
  - Patrilineal, patrilocal extended family (more common)
    - ‘Patrilineal’: based on male line of the family
    - ‘Patrilocal’: residence in males’ home or community
    - ‘Extended family’: composed of individuals beyond nuclear family

Communities, villages, or outports
- The largest functioning social units
- Essentially isolated from:
  - Each other
  - Outside world
  - Except through
    the merchant

Politics
- Mediated through the merchant
- Government played little role in community life

Organizational simplicity of communities
- Lack of marked class or status structure
  - Merchant
  - Fishermen/fishing families
- Egalitarian ethic
- Lack of occupational specialization
  - Simple division of labour
  - Mechanical solidarity (Durkheim)

Occupational specialization - division of labour
- Took place within the family
- Gendered
  - Men’s work and women’s work
  - Separate but (perhaps) equal
• Porter/Faris debate
• Age graded
  • Children producers more than consumers
  • Aged worked too

8  □ Occupational pluralism
• Each family involved in all activities
  • Fishing
    • Catching
    • Curing (processing)
  • Farming
  • Hunting/gathering (e.g., berries)
  • Woods work
  • Boat building, &c.

9  □ Economic singularities
• Lack of economic opportunities outside the fishery
• Lack of economic choice
• Economic conservatism
• Technological conservatism
• Production for subsistence
  • Not profit

10 □ The truck system
• Economic relations dominated by
  • Truck (payment in goods, not cash) and
  • Credit (supplies not bought for cash)
  • Sometimes called ‘credit system’
• Merchant monopoly
• Absence of
  • Wage work
  • Cash

11 □ Pre-capitalist, pre-modern economy
• Relationship of merchant to fishing families
  • Patron and client/paternalistic
  • Personalized and generalized
  • Not between capitalist owner and worker
  • Not between independent capitalists
  • Not economically ‘rational’
  • Embedded in pre-modern moral economy
    • Regulated by community norms
    • Not pure material self-interest

12 □ A more ‘natural’ society
More in touch with nature
The relationship between humans and nature was marked by reciprocity and familiarity (Kennedy 1997, p. 301)

More directly affected by nature
Social and economic structures are more ‘natural’
- Family
- Fishing

Issues in traditional Newfoundland society
- Family and gender
- Merchant (versus industrial) capitalism
  - The fate of the traditional economy
- Origins of the traditional economy, the family fishery

Gender and Family
- Intimately linked
- Centrality of family in traditional Newfoundland society
  - The family fishery
- Importance of family
  - In modern societies
- But in traditional Newfoundland
  - Played a different role
  - Performed a greater range of tasks
  - Wide range of roles

Reproduction and production
- Production: things produced for exchange
  - Modern economies, capitalism
    - In wage economy
    - In the ‘work place’
  - Traditional Newfoundland
    - Salt cod
    - Exchanged with the merchant
    - In the moral economy

Reproduction and production
- Reproduction: the restoration of individuals, families, and generations
  - Capitalism
    - In the family
    - Outside the wage economy
  - Concepts hotly debated
    - Rough and ready definition
      - Production: for money (or equivalent)
      - Reproduction: not for money (or equivalent)

Separation of production from reproduction
- Separation in modern, industrial societies
• Production (‘work’) in the public sphere
• Reproduction (‘home’) in the private
• No separation in the family fishery
  • Family basic unit of production
  • Family basic unit of reproduction
    • Fish catching - by fathers, sons, and brothers
    • ‘Fish making’ - by the shore crew, fishermen’s wives, rest of family

18  □  Gendered division of labour
• Men did some things
• Women did others
• Division of labour
  • Explicit - clearly defined
  • Sharp - rarely transgressed

19  □  A patriarchal fishery?
• James Faris
  • Men’s work on the water
  • Women’s work on shore
  • Division - explicit and hierarchical
  • Communities defined by male activities

20  □  A shore crew

21  □  Or Separate but equal?
• Marilyn Porter - More than 50%?
  • Sun-dried cod
    • Spliting
    • Salting
    • Washing
    • Drying
    • ‘Made the fish’ a commodity
  • Status and power not as hierarchical

22  □  Making fish

23  □  Pocius?
• How does Pocius treat gender?
  • Not separate at all?
  • Separate and unequal?
  • Separate but equal?
The sort of question you could expect on exam.

24 Merchant capitalism and the family fishery
- Traditional Newfoundland as merchant capitalism
- Merchant capitalism
  - Precedes modern industrial capitalism
  - Fundamentally different from industrial capitalism
- Merchant capitalism
  - Economic system
  - Mode of production

25 Industrial capitalism
- Based on the production of commodities
  - Things that are sold
  - Profits from producing commodities
    - Cheaper than they are sold
    - More efficiently than others do
- Characteristic of the modern world
  - ‘Normal’ capitalism
  - The free market

26 Classes in capitalism
- Capitalists
  - Owners of the means of production
    - Factories
    - Businesses
  - Things that produce commodities
- Workers
  - The primary producers
  - Work for the owners
  - For wages (usually cash)

27 Logic of capitalism
- Growth in the technical aspects of production
  - Machines
  - Factories,
    - Organization of the work place, &c.
- Capitalists make money, profit, when they
  - Produce things cheaper than their competition
  - By technological change, mechanization

28 Logic of merchant capitalism
- On exchange of commodities
- Profit comes from
  - Buying commodities cheaply
• Selling for more
• Strategies for
  • Gift giving
  • Creating ‘social obligation’
  • ‘Moral’ debt
  • Not narrowly economic

29   Merchant capitalism characteristic of
• The early modern world
  • 1500-1700
• The margins of the ‘modern’, the First, world
  • Third world
  • Fourth world

30   Classes in merchant capitalism
• Merchants (merchant capitalists)
  • Obtain commodities through trade
  • Control exchange not production
• Independent commodity producers
  • E.g., peasants
  • Own the means of production
    • Farm
    • Fishing boat, stages, &c.
  • Exchange a finished product with merchant

31   Characteristics of merchant capitalism
• Growth in technical aspects of production not central
  • Merchant capitalists do not control the means of production
• Independent commodity producers control
  • Newfoundland fishing families own
  • Boat
  • Gear
  • ‘Production facility’: Stage, flakes, ‘room’

32   Fur trade as merchant capitalism
• Native peoples produced fur for
  • Merchant capitalists Hudson Bay Company (HBC)
  • Originally traded goods for things native peoples producing
  • Furs part of traditional native life
  • Attempts to increase trapping
  • Gift giving into credit/debt system

33   Gifts to commodities
• Initially did not supply basic subsistence products
  • Fur traders dependent on native peoples for subsistence
Native peoples become dependent on fur trade for subsistence
- Gifts became commodities
- The Micmac
- But not the Beothuk

34 Merchant capitalism in Newfoundland
- The ‘truck’ or ‘credit’ system
- Credit from merchant for supplies in spring
  - Fishing gear
  - Food, &c.
- Truck, fish for goods rather than cash
  - Flour
  - Molasses
  - Salt meat, &c.
- Payment credit from spring

35 Central aspect of the ‘family fishery’
- Fishing families sold
  - Product of their labour, salt fish
  - Not their labour, i.e., wages
- Free to organize their work
  - Crew
  - Time
  - Place
- But not what, salt cod

36 A subsistence economy?
- Produced some of their own subsistence
  - Depended on the merchant for necessities
- Owned the means of production
  - Depended on the merchant to finance
- Differs from modern industrial capitalism
  - Worker sells labour
  - Organized by the capitalist, owner
  - Owned by the capitalist

37 But
- Fishing families did not produce commodities, salt cod, primarily for domestic consumption

38 Relationship between merchant and fishing families
- Exploitative
- Nature of exploitation different
  - Not simply economic
• Generalized, complex, and diverse
• Paternalism
• Deference
• Generalized exploitation

39 Origins

40 Traditional Newfoundland society, theories
• Model for traditional Newfoundland society has been that of
  • A peasant society
    • Small and rural
    • Technologically relatively simple
    • Economic relations (1960s) not ‘modern’
  • Merchant capitalism/domestic commodity producers
    • Not industrial economy.

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42 Historical origins?
• Traditional Newfoundland society did not develop:
  • Out of the dissolution of a tribal society
  • By the penetration of merchant capitalism
  • Unlike most peasant societies
• Merchant capitalism part of Newfoundland society from original fishery

43 St. John's Harbour, c. 1780

44 Anthropological assumptions
• Existed for as long as there was resident fishery
• Traditional economy arose out of the peasant backgrounds of settlers
  • English
  • Irish
• Traditional economy continued because
  • Technological constraints
  • Environmental constraints

45 An economic backwater?
• In a time-lock? Due to:
  • Isolation
  • Newfoundland environment (fishing)

46 Was the traditional fishery really traditional?
• Did ‘traditional’ fishery exist from start?
  • Stephen Antler
  • Ellen Antler
  • Gerald Sider
• 1970s and 80s
• ‘Family fishery’ or
• ‘Household-based fishery’
  • The traditional fishery.

47 ☐ The making of traditionalism
  • The family fishery as a creation of merchant capitalism
  • Two major changes in economy and society
  • First, migratory fishery changed to a resident one
    • Migratory fishery a ‘modern’, capitalist, economy
    • Based on relationship of employer and employee, on wages

48 ☐ Resident fishery or ‘planter fishery’
  • While resident, still capitalist, modern
    • ‘Modern’, capitalist, economy
    • Based on relationship of employer and employee, on wages
      • Planters and servants
      • Fixed wages not shared profits

49 ☐ Creation of the family fishery
  • Planter fishery replaced by family fishery
    • ‘Traditional’ Newfoundland born
  • Family fishery not ‘modern’/capitalist
  • Relations of production family fishery
    • Familial
      • Fathers and sons
      • Wives and daughters
      • Complete by mid-19th century

50 ☐ Fish flake, n.d.

51 ☐ Newfoundland (under)development
  • Gerald Sider (1986)
    • Modernization held back by merchants
      • Monopoly of economic and political power
    • Newfoundland not a modern industrial society
      • Not lack of development
      • Underdevelopment by merchant capital
    • Merchant capitalism created ‘traditional’ Newfoundland
      • The family fishery

52 ☐ How merchants made the family fishery
  • Discouraging agriculture
  • Made agricultural property illegal
  • Kept outpost isolated
● From other outports
● From outside world
● Except through the merchant
● Fishing families kept dependent on the merchant

53  Results for Newfoundland society
● Economy and society:
  ● Isolated from the outside world but
  ● Sensitive to world economy
● Agriculture
  ● Commercial agriculture suppressed
    ● Because no trade between outports
    But
  ● Subsistence agriculture encouraged
    ● Because necessary for survival

54  A pre-industrial society?
● England, Europe
  ● Merchant capital starting point for industrial capitalism
    ● Europe
    ● England in particular
  ● Traditional society to
  ● Industrial, capitalist, society
  ● Via merchant capitalism

55  A pre-traditional society?
● Newfoundland
  ● Merchant capitalism destroyed capitalist society
  ● Created a ‘traditional’ society
    ● Family fishery
    ● To maintain merchant wealth and control
  ● Capitalist society → traditional society
  ● Stopped normal development of modern, industrial society

56  Continued debates
● Sean Cadigan (1995) - Sider is wrong
  ● Family fishery since first settlement
    ● Planters were family fishery
  ● Family fishery not creation of merchants
  ● Lack of commercial agriculture important but
    ● Due to Newfoundland environment
    ● Not the the merchants

57  The moral economy of fishing
Family fishery because Newfoundland completely dependent on the fishery
  - Family fishery

Merchants exploited fishing families but
  - Relationship paternalistic
  - A ‘moral economy’

The debates continue ...

Other aspects of traditional Newfoundland
  - Main focus of sociologists, anthropologists
    - The economy
    - Work
    - Family
    - History
  - Wadel, Faris, Porter
    - Lecture
  - Folkslore interests?

Pocius: Folklore
  - Traditional Newfoundland society and culture
  - Focus on space, rather than
    - Kinship
    - Economy

But deals with same issues
  - Gender
  - Property and social differentiation
  - The division of labour (work)
  - Occupational pluralism
  - The nature of the communities
  - Household structure

One view of traditional Newfoundland
  - No ‘correct’ opinion of on exam
  - The dominant paradigm
    - Sociology
    - Anthropology
    - Folklore