

## **Rock of Ages on Edge: Newfoundland and Labrador**

Gail R. Pool

---

Volume 28, Number 2, Spring 1999

URI: [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad28\\_2re04](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad28_2re04)

[See table of contents](#)

---

### Publisher(s)

The Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

### ISSN

0044-5851 (print)

1712-7432 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

### Cite this document

Pool, G. R. (1999). Rock of Ages on Edge:: Newfoundland and Labrador. *Acadiensis*, 28(2), 153–166.

## Rock of Ages on Edge: Newfoundland and Labrador

INQUIRY INTO THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND of Newfoundland fishers, and the patterns of development in their communities, has been a consuming passion of anthropologists and sociologists for 40 years. The number of anthropological studies has diminished slightly in recent years while the work of sociologists has increased.<sup>1</sup> Still, Newfoundland, if not Labrador, is one of the most studied regions of Canada as far as anthropology and sociology are concerned. One wonders at first why so much attention has been given to this region, but after reading the books under review, it is clear that there is much more to be learned.

What brings Newfoundland and Labrador together under one rubric is the history of colonial domination, first by Great Britain and since 1949 by the rest of Canada. How has this colonial society intersected with mainstream Canada and why should the rest of Canada be interested? Some social and economic features are obvious. There is a distinctiveness in the Newfoundlanders' language and popular culture. Newfoundland has not only the highest rate of unemployment but also the lowest educational attainment in Canada. And the dependency on fish has placed it in a vulnerable economic position, one most recently exhibited by the decline in cod stocks which led to the 1992 cod moratorium.<sup>2</sup> While the books under consideration here were written mostly before the effects and duration of the cod moratorium were fully comprehended, the resilience of Newfoundlanders to crises in the past should serve them well. Given the recent crisis, outsiders may wonder why anybody is left on the island. Certainly, the cod crisis has affected attitudes to migration. Surveys of Newfoundlanders show that many either plan to or expect to migrate in the next five years.<sup>3</sup>

While migration has been a common phenomenon in Newfoundland for decades and "going down the road" is almost expected, Newfoundlanders have a profound attachment to place. What causes such rootedness is a question that many have asked.

- 1 The Institute of Social and Economic Research's (ISER) own studies have been among the best. Early books by Tom Philbrook, *Fisherman, Logger, Merchant, Miner: Social Change in Three Newfoundland Communities* (St. John's, 1966), James C. Faris, *Cat Harbour: A Newfoundland Fishing Settlement* (St. John's, 1972) and Melvin Firestone, *Brothers and Rivals: Patrilocality in Savage Cove* (St. John's, 1967) were followed by later studies by Dona Lee Davis, *Blood and Nerves: An Ethnographic Focus on Menopause* (St. John's, 1983) and Evelyn Plaice, *The Native Game: Settler Perceptions of Indian/Settler Relations in Central Labrador* (St. John's, 1990). I thank Phillip Buckner and Jim McDooling for their comments on this review.
- 2 There were certainly signs of a crisis in both the amount and size of cod being caught by the late 1980s. See Craig Palmer and Peter Sinclair, *When The Fish are Gone: Ecological Disaster and Fishers in Northwest Newfoundland* (Halifax, 1997).
- 3 More than 30 per cent of the residents surveyed by Palmer and Sinclair believe they will be forced to move in the near future and two-thirds of those under 30 expect to be living elsewhere within five years: Palmer and Sinclair, *When the Fish are Gone*, pp. 10-11. Kennedy states that "people are looking elsewhere to maintain their standard of living": John C. Kennedy, "At the Crossroads: Newfoundland and Labrador Communities in a Changing International Context", *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 34, 3 (August 1997), pp. 311-12.

Gail R. Pool, "Rock of Ages on Edge: Newfoundland and Labrador", *Acadiensis*, XXVIII, 2 (Spring 1999), pp. 153-166.

The answer may be simple: as one person put it, “There’s no better place than here”.<sup>4</sup> While the satisfaction of being at home is expected, outsiders can only glimpse its depth vaguely in the case of Newfoundland. How can people survive in the face of cold winters, a lack of fertile ground for agriculture, or extensive forests for logging and with difficult and extreme working conditions in the fishery? As one researcher has noted, “the land prompts visitors to ask, ‘How do you till this land? with a pickax?’”<sup>5</sup> Surprisingly, it is not as extreme (though nearly) as it first appears, and there is more than meets the external observer’s eye.

Reading historical novels by Newfoundlanders may help outsiders to comprehend the extremes of hard times and contentment. Novelists portray the tragedies and triumphs of ordinary people struggling to keep their footing on the slippery slope of hunger and deprivation, even as they suffer the disdain of those more fortunate.<sup>6</sup> Bernice Morgan’s *Random Passage*, for instance, provides wonderful insights into life in one of Newfoundland’s outports in the early 19th century, and the sequel *Waiting for Time* brings the story up to the present. Wayne Johnston’s novel *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, begins around 1912 with a young Joey Smallwood who is attending private school. The headmaster, disdainful of all things Newfoundland, comments that D.W. Prowse’s *History of Newfoundland* could not be great “because there is no greatness in Newfoundland. I have not read, and will not read the book you speak of, of course, but I have no doubt that it is a well-researched, competently-written chronicle of misery and savagery, full of half-educated politicians and failures-in-exile like myself and their attempts to oversee and educate a population descended from the dregs of the mother country”. Harsh words for a harsh life indeed!<sup>7</sup>

It is without question that the physical environment of Newfoundland has many drawbacks but the perception of it may be distorted by an agro-centric bias. Sir Wilfred Grenfell said that “back to the land” simply meant “face to the sea”, which is what drew people to the island in the first place.<sup>8</sup> The idea that Newfoundland is a “rock” surrounded by water is perpetuated in local jokes, such as the one about the Newfoundlander who, upon flying in a plane for the first time, looks down and says: “If it weren’t for all the trees and water there’d be nothing there!”

But Newfoundlanders cannot live by the sea alone and this is certainly obvious in John T. Omohundro’s *Rough Food: The Seasons of Subsistence in Northern Newfoundland* (St. John’s, ISER Books, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1994). This ethnography is a detailed study of selected communities on the 300-

4 Ralph Matthews, “No better place than here”: *Social Change in Three Newfoundland Communities* (Toronto, 1976).

5 A.F. Williams, “The Decline of Small Scale Agriculture in Outport Fishing Communities in Newfoundland”, unpublished paper, 1964, cited by John T. Omohundro in *Rough Food: The Seasons of Subsistence in Northern Newfoundland* (St. John’s, 1994), p. 146.

6 Autobiographies also are vivid, such as Elizabeth Goudie’s *Woman of Labrador* (Toronto, 1973).

7 Bernice Morgan, *Random Passage* (St. John’s, 1992); Bernice Morgan, *Waiting for Time* (St. John’s, 1994); Wayne Johnston, *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* (Toronto, 1998), p. 38.

8 Grenfell was actually referring to Labrador. The full quote is: “In Labrador in the past we had always worked on the axiom that ‘back to the land’ simply meant ‘face to the sea’”. He was actually dismayed at the lack of success in agriculture but he fought the discouragements “one by one”: Wilfred Grenfell, *Forty Years for Labrador* (London, 1933), p. 265.

kilometre-long Great Northern Peninsula. It is most specifically a book about how people “lived off the land, as unyielding as it is, for a significant proportion of their food, shelter, and fuel” (p. xiv). The phrase “rough food” in the title refers to “easily stored, raw cooking ingredients purchased in bulk” (p. xiv). It includes stored home-grown potatoes, turnips, preserves and wild foods as well. Rough food symbolizes self-sufficiency in the face of unreliable income from fishing and logging. There is a realization that rough food, as opposed to transfer payments, creates the marginal room required to survive. Rough food is also symbolic of the special skills necessary to live in Newfoundland.

Omohundro shows how strategies of survival have changed. He argues that varying conditions in the physical environment and in the world market have created the self-sufficient tradition that we see today. However, in recent decades another conditioning element has been added to the picture: “a pervasive governmental regulatory and welfare bureaucracy” (p. xviii). This new element, like the others, shapes how people live. Governments now survey and label the landscape and specify how it will be used. They have, in effect, taken charge of the fish, the forest and the wildlife which had for generations been the mainstay of the rural Newfoundland lifestyle. As well, governments provide money for development projects and provide transfer payments which create expectations that become embedded in the norms of rural life. But such transfers may just as easily be withdrawn.

*Rough Food* is divided into four parts. Part I describes the rise and fall of Main Brook as a pulpwood company town. Omohundro compares it with two other settlements, Conche, a fishing community on the eastern shore, and Plum Point, another pulpwood community on the western shore. The variations in rural strategies are interesting. Workers in Plum Point, like those in Main Brook, relied on income from pulpwood, but they had to migrate seasonally to woods camps to earn wages. Plum Pointers were closely tied by kinship to nearby communities that relied more on fishing. Both Main Brook and Plum Point were settled by English Newfoundlanders of Anglican persuasion. Conche, on the other hand, was settled by Irish Catholics who engaged almost exclusively in cod fishing. Since he began his study in 1979, Omohundro appears to have done most of his fieldwork in Main Brook but he visited and surveyed Plum Point and Conche between 1980 and 1991. Part II is an overview of 300 years of home food production and the impact of Confederation on those activities. Part III describes the seasonal round and contains two attractive photo portfolios of land and sea activities. In Part IV Omohundro concentrates on Main Brook’s adaptation to the departure of the pulpwood company and considers changes in the natural and political environment, along with prospects for the future.

Main Brook was settled in the late 1920s. The settlement, which is at the end of a deep 12-kilometre-long bay, began as a few homes built away from the harsh Atlantic seas. People would move from “inside” to the sea, or “outside”, in a pattern of seasonal transhumance characteristic of many other communities. While living “inside”, people cut trees for firewood, trapped fur-bearing animals, caught salmon and some cod, collected berries, grew potatoes and hunted for rough food. They raised some livestock as well. Main Brook became a company town between 1945 and 1970 and, unlike Conche which depended on fish, its residents worked at the Bowater pulpwood collection depot. “We’d never see a codfish”, said one person (p. 18). Most Main Brookers tended to work at the depot or cut wood nearby. Camps further

afield employed workers from communities like Plum Point in the Strait of Belle Isle. Omohundro provides excellent detail concerning how people coped in Main Brook:

Uncle Ralph Whitehead set large potato gardens in the sawdust piles on his point; he was known throughout the region for the huge vegetable marrows he ripened under glass. But because Main Brook was hemmed in by wilderness, most of the gardening, berrypicking, and herding was conducted on islands around Hare Bay. . . . When hot summers dried up the shallow wells near the houses, people took a barrel and dipper in a boat to Ballhead Point, across Belvy Bay from the settlement, where a spring on the beach gushed cold water. . . . Putting food by for the winter was a primary occupation throughout the summer and fall . . . . Purchasing supplies necessitated a four-hour trip in a small boat to St. Anthony, on the “outside” of the bay. If the weather turned bad, travelers could be gone a week. From spring breakup until December, someone made the boat trip at least once a month, carrying out firewood or lumber to sell and returning with groceries, hardware and dry goods (pp. 19-20).

During the winter people traveled by dogsled on a 60-kilometre journey, stopping at cabins built by the Grenfell mission or at homes along the way. Omohundro notes that “even by Newfoundland standards, winters are harsh and long on the Great Northern Peninsula, and snowstorms can pin down residents for days”. One of his informants recalled: “We had lines tied to the kitchen door and out to the barn, only 50 yards away, so we could go out there to feed the horses without getting lost” (p. 20). There were changes in the 1940s when a merchant established a shop to provision the sawmills and their crews. Once snowmobiles came into common usage, residents were quick to get rid of their sled dogs since they had to be fed, were difficult to handle and posed a danger to livestock (p. 242). By the late 1960s all the dogs were gone.

Underlying the lifestyles of these northerners, and perhaps most Newfoundlanders, is the attitude that one must seek all opportunities, whether it be a job or exploiting a natural resource. At the same time they share extensively among each other to maximize flexibility. The contradictions between rough food activities and other work are paramount in the lives of the people Omohundro studies. For most Newfoundlanders the balance involves land and sea. In the case of Main Brook, when the Bowater depot closed, many residents found it difficult to remain, but the community has survived even if it is much diminished. Newfoundlanders tend to live in two different universes, each of which demands the heaviest labour during the same seasons. Their work strategies are designed to reconcile the competing demands. Thus, potato growing, which is seen as essential, must be quick and use little labour. Families spend less than a week in their potato beds. As one resident said: “potatoes are easy, really. They’re only three days’ work: a day to set them, a day to trench them, and a day to haul them” (p. 144). Omohundro believes this informant may have ignored the time they spent fertilizing their “lazy beds” with as much as 12 metric tons of fish and 15 to 25 metric tons of seaweed (done by men) and weeding them. Nevertheless, the lazy beds of residents yield 5-6 kilograms per labour-hour (pp. 143-5, 350, n. 5) and allow 18 kilograms per person per month (p. 350, n. 1). Omohundro

uses environmental detail such as this to defend the gardening practices of residents from criticism by both past and modern “experts” who advocate “progress” in agriculture. His arguments are convincing. Detail about other food procurement is meticulous. The land activities Omohundro describes, including the lazy beds which are often built in abandoned pits and along roads, contribute to a conceptualization of the land as open access commons, although it has usually been nominally controlled by paper, railroad and mining companies. Newfoundlanders are reluctant commercial farmers, in part because farming interferes with fishing but also because land activities tend to be symptomatic of trouble at sea (p. 109). This attitude toward agriculture may also be a product of the truck system, which prompted people to produce their own food and perhaps exchange it among kin and neighbours, but impeded the development of markets and the production of agricultural commodities (p. 113).<sup>9</sup>

There is less history than ethnography in *Rough Food*, but parts of the book do use primary and secondary sources to discuss changes and to consider how Newfoundlanders lived in the more distant past. Omohundro sets aside separate chapters for discussion of change. In the chapter entitled “Environmental Change: The Natural” he considers whether the residents of Main Brook will be able to support themselves in the future, given the environmental degradation that is occurring and increased government restriction on their traditional means of making a livelihood. Salmon and timber resources have been reduced and there may be yet further depletion given the modern technologies Main Brookers have acquired. Alternatively, they may develop a conservationist ethic. Omohundro discerns widespread concern that externally generated goods and income will overwhelm and diminish home production, contributing to dependency on these outside sources, and he wonders whether “home production in a welfare state” is “feasible or self-contradictory” (pp. 265-6). Main Brookers are aware that over-exploitation will destroy the environment. Adaptive strategies that supported marginal living in the past may now expose them to disaster. In the past, dependence on a highly variable resource led to a lack of restraint, since restraint did not necessarily have an impact on future availability. The rewards were for the opportunists. In addition outsiders have encroached on

9 This argument is supported by historical evidence. Gerald Sider, and H.A. Innis before him, cited a report of the 1838 House of Assembly:

The policy heretofore pursued by the parent government . . . at first to forbid residence, [. . .] anon to deny agriculture; in fine to fetter the resources and cramp the energies and blast the prospects of the people, has produced the natural result. *Native gentry there is none; a resident landed proprietary there does not exist, and consequently society is reduced to two classes. . . .* The native inhabitants of Newfoundland are sighing for the promotion of agriculture. . . . The merchant sees the accomplishment of their wishes the grave of his monopoly. [for if agricultural produce be raised in the country the profits of the merchant in the importation of provisions must proportionately decline.]

Gerald Sider, *Culture and Class in Anthropology and History* (New York, 1986), p. 115, emphasis added by Sider. For a more complete quotation, see H.A. Innis, *The Cod Fisheries* (Toronto, 1954), p. 388. Rosemary Ommer also noted that the truck system contributed to “economic retardation and underdevelopment”. “The Truck System in Gaspé, 1822-77”, *Acadiensis*, XIX, 1 (Autumn 1989), p. 114.

resources, producing what may be called the “tragedy of incursion”, insofar as Main Brookers believe it is others, not themselves, who are responsible for depletion.<sup>10</sup> Home production too can be competitive, leading to excessive extraction to demonstrate skill or repudiate allegations of laziness, a serious charge in these communities. And, local cooperation is vulnerable to changes in the scale of society and the development of bureaucratic authority and contractual relationships, “all of which have been occurring on the Great Northern Peninsula in the last four decades” (p. 277).

Omohundro discusses these challenges and contends that Main Brook and the other communities are receptive to development efforts concerned with management of the commons. An example of this was the establishment of an eider duck hatchery in Main Brook. By 1990 it employed 28 people and was the third largest employer there. It promoted public education aimed at ending the reflex response of “if it moves, shoot it” and it invited children to adopt a duck to discourage their elders from shooting “my duck”. Main Brookers now speak of “our ducks” and support efforts to discourage outsiders from killing too many (pp. 283-4). Of course, external agencies have a role to play in regulating household relationships with nature and market forces, but the effect of government on home production is indeterminate. Omohundro reports declines in gardening, animal husbandry, sealing, needlework, clothing manufacture and general construction and repair.

So what can people do to make a living? The government solution of resettlement was disastrous. Governments today have a different, yet insidious, strategy of providing the main source of income for rural communities:

Unemployment insurance, long-term welfare for the disabled, child support, retirement pensions, short-term special assistant work, rural development projects, and municipal improvements like upgrading the water and sewer system, coupled with a handful of long-term government jobs like river warden, postmaster, and highway maintenance, together represent well over half the cash income in town (p. 287).

Transfer payments present obstacles to home production insofar as the cash income available year round reduces the need for rough food. They also increase dependence. Previously a dollar made selling potatoes was equivalent to one made in lumber or fur trapping, but now a dollar saved in home production is small relative to the dollar earned through wage work, since future unemployment returns have to be considered. An “eight pound salmon is sold for \$24 in cash, but also represents an additional \$270 in unemployment benefits, so it is too expensive to eat or give away” (pp. 288-9). On the other hand, there is government support for home production and initiatives that support community development of the local food supply.<sup>11</sup> Another development

10 Bonnie McCay and Raoul Andersen, “Human Ecology of the Commons”, *The Question of the Commons* (Tucson, 1987), p 29.

11 The Newfoundland Royal Commission on Employment and Unemployment suggested that an agrifoods industry should be developed that would rely in part on home production for the tanning of seal, caribou and moose hides that are usually thrown out. It also suggested that there was potential for the commercial production of seal meat. The Royal Commission pointed to significant declines in

possibility that Omohundro discusses is the so-called Grenfell Trail, a 27-kilometre road which would link Main Brook to the Viking Highway, reducing the time for a trip to St. Anthony and making Main Brook a point on a loop instead of the end of the road. The Grenfell Trail would encourage tourism and reduce the time to St. Anthony from three hours to three-quarters of an hour. Main Brookers may view the road as their salvation, but it might simply multiply outside influences, promote dependence on external services and unreliable income, and spell an end to the way of life they wish to maintain. Nor is it clear whether tourism is a viable alternative for this and other northern communities.<sup>12</sup>

Lawrence F. Felt and Peter R. Sinclair's *Living on the Edge: The Great Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland* (St. John's, ISER Books, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1995) explores many of the same questions that Omohundro poses. While Omohundro's book is ecological/environmental anthropology, *Living on the Edge* is sociological and anthropological, using large-scale quantitative methods and community participant observation. It includes an introduction by Felt and Sinclair, articles on life satisfaction, conflicts in the fishery, unpaid work and living off the land (by Omohundro), youth unemployment, women's relationships to property, women's political activity and a case study of locally controlled development. The chapters provide a cohesive understanding of how life is lived and maintained in the region. According to the 1986 Census, the Great Northern Peninsula has low household incomes, with more than a third of their monies coming from transfer payments. In terms of educational achievement, the region has the second worst performance in Newfoundland and it has three times the national rate of unemployment (pp. 3-4). Nonetheless, there have been impressive changes in this underdeveloped region of a marginal area of Canada. As a resident of Flower's Cove recounted:

You must remember 30 years ago this coast was completely cut off, almost. You couldn't even get a radio station to find out anything in Newfoundland. . . . There was no T.V. or nothing like that. The boat came twice a month, and what information you got after that wasn't a hell of a lot. You could have someone dead belong to you for a month and not even know it (p. 4).

Even today the isolation is "impressive". So why, Felt and Sinclair ask, do people stay and how "do they cope with life on the margins of an advanced industrial society?" (p. 4) To answer these questions, they advocate a form of analysis that explores how

agricultural production since union with Canada. Contrary to popular belief, there may be more than 250,000 acres of land and 5,000,000 acres of peat suitable for agriculture. *Final Report: Building on Our Strengths. Newfoundland Royal Commission on Employment and Unemployment* (St. John's, 1986), pp. 167-71.

12 Rosemary Ommer suggested that there may be room for ecologically sustainable communities which involve tourism as well as small-scale development. She completed her assessment of present and past fisheries crises with a series of questions. Rosemary Ommer, "One Hundred Years of Fishery Crises in Newfoundland", *Acadiensis*, XXIII, 2 (Spring 1994), pp. 19-20. Tourism too may offer some potential for employment. A background study for the Royal Commission on Employment and Unemployment indicated that only 9.4 per cent of Newfoundland's labour force was employed in tourism in 1981, the lowest of any province. The Canadian average was 11.1 per cent and included local use of services such as gasoline, transportation and food. Annette Stuckless, *The Tourism Industry of Newfoundland and Labrador, Background Report # 28, Newfoundland Royal Commission on Employment and Unemployment* (St. John's, 1986), pp. 46-9.



people shape the outcomes of development by their actions, within structures created by local and external forces (p. 6).<sup>13</sup>

The book's authors employ a number of methods for doing this. In Chapter 2, "Home Sweet Home", Felt, Kathleen Murphy and Sinclair examine the results of a 1988 survey of all adult members of 250 Peninsula households. Differences in life satisfaction are, they suggest, related to specific historical and cultural features of a society, but subject to rapid change (p. 42). Satisfaction is closely linked to factors such as age and employment and marital status. Despite widespread unemployment, the authors conclude that most people in the region have a high level of life satisfaction because they have a realistic appraisal of the opportunities available to them. They emphasize "the positive features that life there has to offer them. Those who remain on the Peninsula normally receive lower incomes than their urban counterparts, but they are likely to own their own residence, participate in informal labour exchanges with friends and kin, and engage in a wide range of outdoor recreational pursuits" (p. 54). Their grievances are not small, however, and these ties provide a foundation for resistance as well as for cooperation in community-based development (p. 55).

The most satisfying chapters of *Living on the Edge* are qualitative studies based on fieldwork done in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Craig Palmer's chapter on "The Troubled Fishery" shows how the growth of a large offshore dragger fleet (in numbers and boat size) has led to conflicts with the inshore cod trap fishers. Incomes for both inshore and offshore fishers declined with the increasing scarcity of cod, but inshore fishers with incomes of only \$4,000, faced extinction. The technological differences in the industry could give rise to class distinctions as well, particularly in communities with large dragger fleets. Class tensions are, however, constrained by social and cultural values. In *Rough Food*, Omohundro accepted Sinclair's 1985 conclusion that class distinctions had appeared in some outports, but questioned Jim McDooling's prediction that class stratification might develop between successful and unsuccessful fishermen, depending on who obtained the new longliners and who did not.<sup>14</sup> Felt, Murphy and Sinclair argue that informal or unpaid work in subsistence activities allows people to substitute for what they cannot afford, but this tendency holds more for those who have the minimum income needed for the capital inputs — tools, gasoline or building materials — than for those who do not. They feel that the labour reserve theory of peripheral economies<sup>15</sup> and Pahl's view that income and labour rich households are the most likely to substitute informal work for wage work<sup>16</sup> both have

13 Norman Long, "Creating Space for Change: A Perspective on the Sociology of Development", *Sociologica Ruralis* 24 (1984), pp. 168-73.

14 Peter R. Sinclair, *From Traps to Dragnets: Domestic Commodity Production in Northwest Newfoundland, 1850-1982* (St. John's, 1985). Omohundro said that in "Conche those strata have not formed, because almost all crews have longliners in 1990. Fishermen themselves accept no permanent distinctions among themselves, claiming that no fishermen consistently catch more fish than any others". *Rough Food*, p. 178. James McDooling states that the change did not take place since there are now only three longliner licence holders in Conche (personal communication, 1999). See James William McDooling, "The Fishermen: Transition in a Northeastern Coastal Community in Newfoundland", M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1982.

15 Bryant Fairley, Colin Leys and James Sacouman, eds., *Restructuring and Resistance: Perspectives from Atlantic Canada* (Toronto, 1990).

some merit. Felt, Murphy and Sinclair suggest that cultural expectations help explain why most people do their own work or produce their own food supplies (pp. 80-1). This blurs status boundaries as both richer and poorer households engage in informal work. The authors consider a variety of these informal work activities — such as home construction, domestic work, self-provisioning and labour sharing between households — combining statistical analysis with interesting interview excerpts. The following exchange concerning domestic work provides an example:

Question: Who does the dishes?

Wife: Both of us, I guess.

Husband: Both of us. If I'm home, I'll do them, right? (Thirty seconds of silence.) If I'm home, right? (Another 30 seconds of silence.) (Grinning) I'm not home very often. (Followed by joint laughter.) I help her. Sometimes — when I'm home.

The authors note: “This sort of reconsideration would not show up in the survey data” (p. 89). Indeed. It is the combination of statistical and interview data that make this chapter and book so accomplished.

Craig Palmer's chapter “Growing Female Roots in Patrilocal Soil” explores changes in male-female roles, particularly as they concern inheritance patterns. The social effects of the cod trap, which was shared by a man and his grown sons and then passed down to them and their sons, has been examined in detail before.<sup>17</sup> Despite the advent of expensive draggers, traditional inheritance patterns have changed only to a limited extent. The value of draggers — worth from \$500,000 to \$1,500,000 — makes sharing ownership more difficult, but crews still do it. For women the biggest change has come with the arrival of fish processing plants that provide wage incomes of as much as \$10 per hour. Women do most of the processing in the Northern Peninsula and they can also qualify for unemployment benefits. Their husbands may still be fishing cod traps and if they come up empty they may exclaim ““good thing the wife's cutting fish today!”” (p. 156).<sup>18</sup> Despite changes in the fishery, patrilocality has not changed significantly along the northwest coast. People there have a deep sense of community. The exceptions are highly illustrative of how deep this commitment to community continues to be. In one instance a middle-aged man explained that his grandfather had no access to fishing gear since the men in that community had worked in a lumber camp. When the camp was closed, the man's grandfather had settled with his wife's people and worked on his father-in-law's crew. The grandfather's descendants still believe they are “not from” the community where they now live but “belong to” the community where their grandfather was born (p. 158).

16 R.E. Pahl, “Some Remarks on Informal Work, Social Polarization and the Social Structure”, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 12 (1988), pp. 247-67.

17 Melvin M. Firestone, *Brothers and Rivals: Patrilocality in Savage Cove* (St. John's, 1967).

18 Dragger crews often sell to the plants where the spouses of cod trap fishermen work, placing the trap fishermen in the ambiguous position of being grateful to the draggers for providing employment for the women even though they blame the draggers for catching the fish that would have come to the inshore traps. See Craig Palmer and Peter Sinclair, *When the Fish Are Gone*, pp. 47-9.

Murphy's chapter on "Maternal Politics" in a Northern Peninsula community shows how women have been able to use the role they are assigned within the domestic sphere to achieve power, despite a macho male ethos, supported by religion, that casts the man as the hard-working boss. This is a significant achievement. She notes:

If we could don ethnographic decoder glasses to examine the whispers and shadows of women's resistance to the symbolic authority of men, we would observe that women are able to manoeuvre and work around this domination through the use of their own image as "good women," who are clean, hard working, maternal, and the care-takers of the family, the home, and even the community (p. 165).

Murphy's ethnography on the Labrador Sea Development Association (LSDA) shows how the women became convinced that private industry could not be counted on in hard times and why women believe they have to fight both government and industry to survive. By using a variety of religious and kinship ties women were able to participate in the decisions of the LSDA, and to fill the positions of president, secretary, treasurer, coordinator and director — all but one of the places on the executive (p. 172). Once the LSDA was operational, it began developing projects that would use local resources, diversify local industries and create employment for women, including a handicraft industry, a crab processing plant and a woodchip plant that would burn waste products and create energy for the region. Murphy's study provides an interesting example of "taking charge"<sup>19</sup> and of what Marilyn Porter calls "the latent power of the organized women of Newfoundland"<sup>20</sup>.

In the final chapter, Felt and Sinclair examine another development corporation, the Great Northern Peninsula Development Corporation (GNPDC). In what might be called an organizational ethnography, the chapter analyzes the GNPDC's structural and communications problems and considers whether locally-controlled community development is a workable alternative to provincial and federal initiatives. While there were weaknesses in the structure of the GNPDC and tenuous links with a panoply of provincial and federal agencies with weak funding potential, the authors conclude that locally-controlled development is possible. They note that the GNPDC has expanded into aquaculture, lumber production and tourism and continued assistance to local entrepreneurs (pp. 222-5).

Frances Ennis and Helen Woodrow, eds., *Strong as the Ocean: Women's Work in the Newfoundland and Labrador Fisheries* (St. John's, Harrish Press, 1996) provides vivid, personal illustrations of the themes raised in the sociological and anthropological work under review.<sup>21</sup> The volume relates the stories of ten women of

19 See Cato Wadel, who shows how wives took charge of their families when their husbands were unemployed, *Now Who's Fault is That? The Struggle for Self-esteem in the Face of Chronic Unemployment* (St John's, 1973).

20 Marilyn Porter, "The Tangly Bunch: Outport Women of the Avalon Peninsula", *Newfoundland Studies*, 1 (1985), p. 89.

21 For another example in this genre, see Marian Frances White, *The Finest Kind: Voices of Newfoundland and Labrador Women* (St John's, 1992). For historical approaches to the roles of women in Newfoundland, see Linda Kealey, ed., *Pursuing Equality: Historical Perspectives on Women in Newfoundland and Labrador* (St. John's, 1993).

different ages and with varied life experiences. All of the women speak of their struggles to look after home and family as they engaged in wider paid work. Excellent photographs of women piling and culling salt fish, gardening, working on the line at a fish plant or on fishing boats as partners with their husbands are interspersed with the stories which are drawn from a series of extended interviews. The transcripts were edited with an eye to audience and to ensuring that the story continued to belong to the storyteller. The experience of Denyse Sheppard, a fish plant worker who developed a mussel farm with her husband, shows how aquaculture might be developed in the region. After a few years the operation has become a success, with the husband doing most of the harvesting and the wife overseeing the plant and looking after the marketing and accounting.<sup>22</sup> Sheppard relates some of the difficulties she experienced making inroads into the male world:

I am dealing in a man's world, and it is very frustrating. There was one guy who came in looking for work at the plant. He wanted to speak to the manager, and I said, "Yes, can I help you?"

"No, he said, "I want to speak to the man manager."

I called my husband up, and he said, "You were already talking to the lady that does the hiring."

The man looked at me and he said, "I guess I just blew it."

I said, "Yes, you did." (pp. 74-5)

The stories are varied and well told. The extensive photographs of the women doing their work helps the reader relate to the women and their struggles, and the accounts are sufficiently detailed to provide a glimpse into how their lives have changed. Theirs has not been a struggle without rewards.

If making a living is difficult in the Northern Peninsula, what about Labrador? John C. Kennedy's *People of the Bays and Headlands: Anthropological History and the Fate of Communities in the Unknown Labrador* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1995) provides answers to this as it explores issues raised by the other studies, in the context of southeast Labrador. Here, communication by road is virtually nonexistent, rural services are limited and the weather even more extreme. In the first half of the book, Kennedy examines the history of the area, from early human habitation to union with Canada. This includes analysis of George Cartwright's role in establishing settlement in the area and the impact of various fishers who visited the region on a seasonal basis.

More interesting is the history of the permanent settlement that came after 1800. Kennedy accepts that much of the southern Labrador experience parallels that of other areas of the province, but he suggests that there are important differences. Many of

22 There is a photo of Sheppard standing in front of the company sign which has a plaque below it which says: "Do you want to speak to the man in charge? or The woman who knows what's going on!" (p. 73).

the first settlers married Inuit, which is not only different from Newfoundland but also from northern Labrador. Southeastern Labrador, unlike northern Labrador, was not influenced by Moravian missions. Furthermore, Kennedy argues that relations between rival merchants, between merchants and their servants, and between merchants and planters are best characterized with words such as “‘domination’ and ‘competition’ [rather] than ‘interdependence’ and ‘reciprocity,’ as would appear to be the case in the Newfoundland model” (pp. 68-9). The domination that settlers faced provoked resistance in the form of covert dealings with other merchants. It may come as a surprise to learn that relations between merchants and fishers in Newfoundland would be characterized as interdependent and reciprocal, in light of the work by Gerald Sider and others.<sup>23</sup> Kennedy argues that before the 19th century Labrador was a legal vacuum where fierce competition and anarchy prevailed. Despite such claims, it may not have been much different from much of Newfoundland. There was no local judiciary in Newfoundland until 1791 and real property was prohibited, despite some *de facto* property possession by the late 1700s.<sup>24</sup> In Labrador there was perhaps less of a concept of property ownership since the settlers practised seasonal transhumance, exploiting the inside resources of trapping and the outside resources of seals, sea birds and fish. In some cases, people wintered in different places from year to year, perhaps as a response to shifting resources (pp. 91-2). Kennedy also notes that the settler-merchant truck system was weakened in Labrador as residents could sell their goods to American merchants (pp. 76-80).

Kennedy examines the legal and social structures provided by the state and considers their impact. Labrador received few services from the Newfoundland government in terms of education, medicine, welfare, transportation and communication. In fact, the absence of such services led to the establishment of the Grenfell Mission in the late 19th century. Kennedy notes its effects on all aspects of Labrador life, including the tendency for large, centralized communities to develop around the mission stations and their hospitals (147-8). Kennedy looks closely at the mission’s fourfold “medical, educational, industrial and agricultural” mandate (pp. 149-58). He also looks at its efforts to establish cooperative stores to circumvent the truck system. The mission’s efforts, he notes, were often counter to self-sufficiency, being “centralist and incompatible with the centrifugal nature of a lifestyle which, while meagre, was more self-sufficient than that which followed” (p. 157). The development of company towns around forest resources and military installations further eroded a self-sufficient lifestyle in Labrador, but it was not until the 1960s that government promoted resettlement as a policy. It remains an emotional issue. When Kennedy raised the question of resettlement in interviews, he sensed that people had “confronted the state with a sense of desperation. Resettlement has removed people from the land, increasing their dependency on government, and with that, their vulnerability” (p. 205).

23 Gerald Sider, *Culture and Class in Anthropology and History*. In most locations the truck system was a form of debt servitude since there were no alternatives and the state accepted the legitimacy of the trade. See Rosemary E. Ommer, ed., *Merchant Credit and Labour Strategies in Historical Perspective* (Fredericton, 1990).

24 Sider, *Culture and Class*, p. 111.

Kennedy examines various attempts at development, top-down and otherwise. Labrador has long been considered Newfoundland's "resource pantry" and decisions concerning exploitation of its riches are likely to continue to be based largely on province-wide priorities. The 1999 provincial election, for instance, was fought in part on how development of the huge nickel deposits at Voisey's Bay should be handled. The Liberal government of Brian Tobin argued that it needed a mandate to negotiate a deal which would guarantee smelting and secondary industries for Newfoundland and Labrador, thus providing jobs beyond those generated by mere resource extraction.<sup>25</sup> As Kennedy put it, until the discovery of the Hibernia oil fields, there was a popular notion that "any oil in the area *must* be off Labrador" (emphasis in text, p. 215). Little did anyone realize that nearby was a very large and rich source of nickel, the most significant find in many years.

Of course, fishing remains the main renewable resource of Newfoundland and Labrador. Constant pressure on bureaucrats to expand the number of licences and sizes of boats in order to solve unemployment in the region was one of the reasons for the fisheries crisis. The pressure was political, but the inappropriate responses were grounded in scientific/bureaucratic errors. It was apparent to fishers by 1987 that fish were becoming scarce and small. Some fishers thought they were incompetent until friends advised them that "everybody" was having to put "liners" in their nets.<sup>26</sup> Scientific research did not provide good stock predictions and managers saw the light only when it was too late.<sup>27</sup>

When a region such as Newfoundland and Labrador has developed around a single resource, such as fish, it is difficult to pose alternatives. Looking at the wider picture, though, it is possible to suggest ways of dealing with the problems. If there can be sustainable development in the high arctic,<sup>28</sup> surely it is possible to weather the current crisis in Newfoundland and Labrador. How has Iceland managed to survive? Ragnar Arnason suggests that "Iceland's status as a sovereign state may have had a great deal to do with its relative economic success" since Icelanders have been forced to rely on themselves for their livelihood.<sup>29</sup> This has led them to push for an exclusive fishing zone and rigorous exchange policies. In Newfoundland's case, some may seek a

25 Inco Ltd. and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador reached an impasse in negotiations at the end of July 1998. The provincial government broke off negotiations saying that "Inco offered too little in the way of in-province processing facilities". L.W., "Negotiating impasse halts Voisey's Bay development", *Engineering and Mining Journal*, 199, 9 (September 1998), p. 15. When the provincial Liberal Party announced the election, Brian Tobin stated that the outlook for 1999 was for 3.5 per cent growth, the strongest in the country, but he also said: "Above all, I ask for your support to ensure that our people receive a full and fair share of benefits from the resources of our province, whether those resources are nickel from Voisey's Bay or hydro electricity from the Churchill River or oil and gas off our shores". See <http://www.liberal.nf.net/election/body.htm> (18 January 1999), p. 1.

26 See Craig Palmer and Peter Sinclair for a comprehensive examination of the northwest Newfoundland fishery, *When the Fish Are Gone*, pp. 33-75.

27 Alan Christopher Finlayson, *Fishing for Truth: A Sociological Analysis of Northern Cod Stock Assessments from 1977-1990* (St John's, 1994).

28 See Elaine Smith, ed., *Sustainable Development through Northern Conservation Strategies* (Calgary, 1990).

29 Ragnar Arnason, "Icelandic Fisheries and Fisheries Management: Adaptation to a Limited Resource Base", in Ragnar Arnason and Lawrence Felt, eds., *The North Atlantic Fisheries: Successes, Failures and Challenges* (Charlottetown, 1995), pp. 264-5.

solution in the rest of Canada, leading to population loss or perhaps another form of transhumance. Instead of people moving inland for the winter, they may instead go to Alberta, returning to shoot moose and turrs and enjoy life at home, once they have saved enough money and qualify for unemployment.

It is perhaps presumptuous to suggest alternatives, especially since policy alternatives have already been proposed by more than one royal commission. What the recent social research shows is that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have a great wealth of cultural capital on which to draw for sustenance. It is the very lifestyle they value so much that could be the source of their strength, as they confront the large-scale, industry-centred development plans of central governments and struggle for control of their own resources and for ecologically sustainable management of them. As Ralph Matthews has so clearly shown, government strategies of forced resettlement and industrialization were abject failures.<sup>30</sup> Can the rural communities of Newfoundland and Labrador wrest power from centralized bureaucracies which have the support of the state or will real control remain outside their grasp? Whatever the outcome, the social and cultural cohesion of the people will be central to the struggle.

GAIL R. POOL

30 *The Creation of Regional Dependency* (Toronto, 1983), especially pp. 118-36 and 169-93.