Fishing
Fishing

• An important way in which food and raw materials are produced
• The fishery alters the aquatic environment
  • It is environmentally disruptive
• Fishing generates place, landscape, ways of life
  • Vulnerable to economic, environmental change
Fishing

• We’ll focus on two regions of Canada:
  • Newfoundland & Labrador and elsewhere on the Atlantic coast
  • Pacific Coast
Atlantic Canada

• Extensive continental shelf with lots of shallow sunlit sea
• Where warm waters from the Gulf Stream meet the cold nutrient-filled Labrador current
  • Drives productive marine food chains
Atlantic Canada

- Rugged coastline with lots of small bays and islands
  - Harbour le Cou
  - settlements worked well in the days of the traditional fishery
Fishing pre 1950

• Traditionally fishing emphasised small boats (dories)
  • Operated direct from shore
  • Operated from a schooner

• European commercial fishing & whaling on the Atlantic coast from C15th
  • Red Bay in southern Labrador
Lunenburg NS

- Classic port for fishing schooners
  - Home of the Bluenose
- Settled by Germans
- Now a UNESCO world heritage site
- Tourists are now catch of the day
Bluenose II
• A fishing dory
Preserving the Fish

• Before freezing & refrigeration
• Split and gut the fish
• Dry the fish on wooden racks or flakes
• Pack the fish in salt, brine
Fish flakes, Battle Harbour, Labrador, 2012
Ackee & Saltfish
Industrial Fishing

• Fishing industrialised after 1950
  • Large ocean-going trawlers
  • Emergence of freezing, refrigeration
Industrial Fishing

• Fish processing has to industrialise
  • Expensive ocean-going factory trawlers which process on board
  • Cheaper to develop on-shore fish processing plants
Industrial Fishing

• Fate of small fishing communities becomes connected with the survival and management of the fish plant
  • Burnt Islands NL
Industrial Fishing

• Modern trawls damage sea-floor habitat
• Influx of foreign vessels fishing Canadian waters
• Catches of Atlantic cod collapse in the 1990s
Fishing

• Some kinds of fishing are more sustainable
  • Lobsters, crabs, oysters
• Inshore catches by local boats, in theory without ruining sea-floor habitat
• But Atlantic continental shelf ecosystem is now badly disturbed
  • Exploding populations of jellyfish, green crabs
Fishing

• An area where Aboriginal vs Non-Aboriginal faultline is evident
  • First Nations now asserting the fishing rights granted by treaty
  • At the expense of non-aboriginal fishing
  • Metis fishermen run risks if they exercise aboriginal rights.

link
Newfoundland & Labrador

• Landscapes, places, ways of life shaped by the fishery
  • And badly disrupted by its changes
• A coastline accessible by sea
  • Open to ocean-going connections from early times
Newfoundland & Labrador

- 528,817 pop 2017
- Population peaked 1986-91 at 568,000
- Urban centres:
  - St Johns 109,000 pop 2016
Provincial Economy

• 2005 GDP approx. $14 billion
• $8 billion from service industries
• $2.5 billion from mining
• $0.44 billion from fishing
• $0.36 billion from tourism
Newfoundland & Labrador

- Settlement is coastal
- Interior is empty
Newfoundland & Labrador

- Makes it similar to Australia
  - but it doesn’t mythologise its “outback”
  - It mythologises its sea
- Ode to Newfoundland
- More mythologising
Grand Banks

• Extensive area of shallow sunlit seas
• Zone of mixing of the warm Gulf Stream and the cold Labrador current
  • Lots of nutrients and light to feed plankton, marine food chains
  • Abundant fishing grounds
• Offshore oil and gas deposits
Climate

- Labrador northern, cool.
  - Cold winters, cool summers (-20ºC W 10ºC S)
  - NW winds, NE storms

- Newfoundland
  - Cool winters, mild summers (-4ºC W 16ºC S)
  - Gets NW winds and SW Gulf Stream winds on south coast
  - Fog where warm & cold currents meet
Marine hazards

• tendency for fog
• icebergs (eastern coast)
Icebergs

• Icebergs calve off the Arctic glaciers
• Carried by cold Labrador current to Newfoundland
• Hazards to shipping
• Potential tourist draw
The humpback of Notre Dame.
April
The Cod

• When Gulf Stream warms bottom waters warm above 5°C in summer
  • Cod move inshore to spawn (main fishing phase)
• In Fall, cod move offshore, onto Grand Banks
Fishery

- Newfoundlanders develop an inshore fishery
  - close-to-shore fishery for Cod (short summer season)
  - lobster, crab, capelin fisheries
  - sealing
  - some farming
  - highly seasonal
Sealers
Fishing

• Employs 26,000
• Contributes only $440 million to provincial GDP in 2006
• Only slightly more important than tourism
Ethnic Variety

• The Grand Banks attracted huge and varied fishing interests
  • French, Basques (to present)
  • Portuguese
  • Americans (to 1912)
  • English, Irish
• Complex dialect legacy in Newfoundland
Newfoundland

- France extinguished its claims on the western French Shore only in 1904
- St Pierre & Miquelon remains French.
  - wedding
Settlement

• Inshore cod fishery leads to
  • scattered coastal “outport” settlement
• 3/4 had fewer than 200 people
• but most people lived in the larger centres
Dependence on the Sea

• Fishing as a % of Production
  • 1884: 67% (Newfoundland) 13% (Maritimes)
Dependence on the Sea

- Fishing as % of exports
  - C19th: 90% of exports
  - 1901: 86% of exports
  - 1912: 77% of exports
Dependence on the Sea

• Has decreased since confederation, 1949
• but still greater than the Maritimes
Confederation 1949

• Brought transfer payments, money for economic and social development to Newfoundland & Labrador
• Province lost control of import duties revenue, control over its continental shelf
• Vital fishing industries after 1949 regulated by Ottawa, not St Johns.
Confederation

• Closure and consolidation of the smaller outport settlements
Ireland’s Eye Nfd
Confederation

• Fishery in decline by 1970s, collapse in early 1990s
  • Salt & dried fish replaced by refrigerated/frozen fish in early 1950s
  • Confederation cost Newfoundland its control over the fishery
• Offshore industrial trawling destroyed much of the inshore fishery
Their “trust in cod” sharply diminished, demonstrators (left) at St. John’s harbour cheer a convoy of Canadian trawlers bound for the Grand Banks last March. Their message to foreign vessels was peaceful but blunt: “Stop overfishing now.”
Collapse of Cod Fishery

• Transfer payments fund retraining schemes
  • mostly for other jobs in the fishery
• Changes in Employment Insurance Rules
  • threaten the seasonal fishing/fish plant economy
1992 Cod Moratorium

• An economic disaster for the coastal fishing communities of Newfoundland
  • Isle Aux Mortes
• Many fish plants closed
  • Isle Aux Mortes, Rose Blanche
• Population losses
Settlement Closure

• Labrador:
  • Williams Harbour closed 2016
  • Norman Bay down to 19 people, losing its ferry service
• McCallum: South Coast of Newfoundland
  • still functions, but probably facing closure in the medium term
Leaving Norman Bay, Labrador Aug 2016
Pacific Coast

• Continental shelf is much narrower than on the Atlantic coast
• Rich coastal fisheries connected to mighty rivers
  • Important for salmon
Fraser River

• Was probably the world’s best salmon river
• Rich salmon fisheries sustained several aboriginal civilizations
  • Enabled them to establish permanent villages
Commercial Exploitation

- Outsiders begin settling SW BC suddenly from the late 1850s
- Begin commercial exploitation of the rich salmon fishery
  - Created an industrial landscape of canneries and worker’s housing
Canneries

• Dangerous industrial work packing various fish species
• Racialised work environment
  • The most dangerous and difficult jobs went to Chinese, Japanese, Aboriginal workers
Commercial Exploitation

• Commercial overfishing, water pollution and the 1913 Hell’s Gate slide damaged the Fraser salmon fishery permanently

• Most canneries close

• Commercial fishery continues on what’s left of the wild fish stocks
Commercial Exploitation

- Major attempts to farm fish, especially salmon on the BC coast
- Concerns that this harms wild fish stocks
  - Claim that farmed fish are a source of disease
BC Salmon farm
BC Salmon farms
Fishing

• Ways of life tend to shape place, landscape
  • And shape culture

• Fishing in Canada, and globally not well managed
  • Industrial fishery has a poor track record of resource destruction
  • A precarious resource for those who depend on it