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
• 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 & Brewis
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
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, Torbay NL
July
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 trawling by huge foreign fleets destroyed 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
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
Title: Richmond, B.C. Canneries. Half Pound Cans in Warehouse
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