

Book Reviews

ELLIS, Carolyn *Fisher Folk. Two Communities on Chesapeake Bay*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1986. xi + 202 pp., notes, references, index. \$ 20.00 (cloth).

The east coast of the United States is dotted with isolated settlements where independent petty fishermen and their families strive to maintain their way of life. Until now, anthropologists have paid little attention to the 'watermen' of Chesapeake Bay. *Fisher Folk* is therefore a welcome contribution to ethnographic knowledge of this region. Sociologist Ellis did fieldwork on Fishneck Peninsula and Crab Reef Island (pseudonyms) for extended periods between 1972 and 1984. Her short book "explores the different ways bay residents struggle with their identities and the conflicts and contradictions that occur when contact with mainstream America increases" (p. 3). In seven chapters, Ellis vividly portrays the two fishing communities, paying special attention to their social, religious and economic organization. By using a comparative approach, she throws light on similarities and differences in the residents' response to assimilation into 'the American way of life.'

Fishneck, a community of approximately 600, comprises six shabby marshland settlements. At the core of its social and economic organization is the family. Kinsfolk work and spend their leisure time together, and have reciprocal obligations and responsibilities. Men are mainly breadwinners, women mothers and homemakers. Women do, however, sometimes earn extra income through wage labour in one of the local fish packing plants. Ellis deals at length with sexual permissiveness in a community where divorces are nonetheless rare. The seven churches, of four denominations, do not and cannot interfere with sexual attitudes. Religion is preeminently an individual experience for Fishnecker. In social life, the churches are of little importance.

Quite the contrary is true of Crab Reef Island, a community of 650 living in well-kept houses. The Methodist church is the linchpin of social life. It plays a dominant role and serves as the local government, providing several services to the community. As such, it exercises a strong hold over the life of its members, urging them to put their energy at the service of the community, e.g., in one of the church-based voluntary associations. If a problem arises, the church (and not some kin group) will try to solve it. Kinship is still important, however, but only at the level of nuclear families. Women keep house, guard the household budget, help their husbands when necessary, and are the backbone of voluntary organizations. Even so, divorces are common.

Maritime pursuits dominate the economy of both Fishneck and Crab Reef. Fishnecker work with small, relatively inexpensive boats, and fish for crabs, oysters, or clams according to the season. During summer, fishing for hard crabs (i.e., crabs with hard shells) is their main economic activity, in winter oystering, while clamming and other 'fill-in' work, for example wage labour in one of the local fish houses, provide an alternative source of livelihood. Decisions to go out or stay home, and about which species to pursue, are made on a day-to-day basis. Incomes therefore fluctuate, a situation exacerbated by the unstable prices seafood fetch on the market. Yet the watermen value their independence more than the accumulation of wealth. They spend their money when earned; saving and reinvesting for upward mobility are rare; and those who adopt such a strategy often leave Fishneck or become fish house owners or storekeepers. These middlemen usually build up a network of loyal clients by offering credit and loans.

Crab Reefers also fish for crabs in summer and oysters in winter in one-or-two-person operations. They use larger diesel-powered boats, rigged with various kinds of gear, which

cost more than the craft used on Fishneck. Many own two boats, one for crabbing and one for oystering. In most cases, those who fish soft crabs (i.e., crabs that have shed their shells) act as their own middlemen to control marketing. Hard crabbing is less capital intensive and profitable, however, and the catch is sold to one of the local crab packing and canning houses. Oystering is usually done to bridge the season and yields lower profits than soft crabbing. Crab Reefers value their independence, hence they despise wage labour. It provides a living 'for those who cannot make out.' An ethos of hard work prevails and money earned is reinvested in vessels and gear, but there are three limits to upward mobility. One is conservation laws, which restrict expansion of the operations; a second is the emphasis on independence; and a third is communal norms and values. The latter inhibit overt competitiveness, invidiousness and achievement differences, and stress mutual help, cooperation and communitarianism. Nonetheless, this egalitarian ethos is in part a facade, and watermen do strive for success and prestige, though in a covert way. One can achieve prestige, for instance, if one becomes an economic broker or a leader in community (usually church) affairs.

Following her ethnographic account, Ellis rigorously compares the two communities. She painstakingly traces similarities and contrasts, especially with regard to their economic, social and religious organization, and norms and values. She aims to show that such communities cannot all be lumped under the heading *Gemeinschaft*, because doing so would obliterate marked distinctions: "Fishneck and Crab Reef differed visually, in how people living there experienced community life, in the culture of work and work values, and in their mode of organization" (p. 141). Therefore, Ellis reintroduces John Embree's concepts of 'tight' and 'loose' communities. Whereas Fishneck is a loose and open community, Crab Reef is tight and restrictive. In the former, the family is the focus of organization, integration, and solidarity; in the latter, it is formal institutions, especially the church. Fishnecker enjoy considerable personal freedom, while Crab Reefers publicly conform to community norms and values, since the residents exercise a strict social control on each other.

In the last chapter, Ellis tries to explain why the two communities took different routes of social change. Though they once were quite similar, Fishneck and Crab Reef "have diverged for more than the last 150 years" (p. 164). She argues that this is so owing to their different response to growing economic opportunities and the importance of the church in Crab Reef's social organization. Whereas Fishnecker resisted integration into and dependence upon a money economy, Crab Reefers readily accommodated it, not least because of the labour ethos promulgated by religious leaders. Yet, things are changing rapidly. Fishnecker are increasingly exposed to contact with the mass society and culture, especially through their children, who visit mainland schools. They no longer resist integration into it. Paradoxically, it is exactly this contact that makes them aware of their 'otherness' and sharpens their sense of themselves as a community. By contrast, Crab Reefers have been exposed to mainstream values and customs for a much longer time, thanks to tourists and islanders who have moved to the mainland. This has led them to question traditional community values and institutions. Though in both communities social change owes largely to increasing contact with mainstream society, on Fishneck "contact is leading to cohesion and emergence of a sense of community that moves across family ties", whereas on Crab Reef "change is contributing to cleavage and breakdown

of consensus" (p. 181).

Ellis's book is an interesting ethnography that enhances understanding of the different responses of domestic commodity producers to contact with the outside world. Nevertheless, there are critical points to be made. Firstly, social change is almost entirely attributed to adaptation to external forces. We hear little about endogenous dynamics. Secondly, Ellis is not very clear as to when the communities began to diverge; was it 200 years ago (p. 187), 150 years ago (p. 164), or even more recently? It is also confusing to read in one section that "the two communities are similar in resistance to assimilation" (p. 3), while elsewhere Ellis maintains that "Crab Reefers' ties with the larger society were established, mainly by market relations, much earlier than on Fishneck" (p. 181). Are we to believe that the communities previously were self-sufficient 'primitive isolates'? This does not seem likely. Thirdly, why does she use Embree's hotly debated concepts of 'tight' and 'loose' communities? These tautological labels have little analytical value. Moreover, I wonder if Fishneck really is a 'loose' community. The data Ellis presents toward the end of her study seems to contradict this viewpoint. Fourthly, too little is said about how formal or informal access to marine resources is regulated. Apparently, the Bay is a common property resource. There are, however, conservation laws, but Ellis omits information about the county, state and federal political and judicial regulatory systems. Ellis does not even mention the States in which these communities are located. Why not? She reiterates much information, while some observations need elaboration. Given the title of her book, one would expect a more detailed account of fishery management, fishing operations, marine ecology, territoriality, patterns of occupational inheritance, and so on. Lastly, the arrangement of data is somewhat odd. Why, for instance, is the history of both communities presented only near the end of the book? All in all, Ellis contributes to ethnographic understanding of these Chesapeake Bay communities, but is weak in her analysis and unbalanced in the presentation of her data.

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AUBAILLE-SALLENAVE, Françoise, *Bois et bateaux du Vietnam*. Paris: SELAF (Ethnoscience 3), 1986.

This highly technical book illustrates the originality of naval architecture in Vietnam. The author is the daughter of a former colonial civil-servant responsible for water conservation and forestry in the French protectorate of Tonkin (North Vietnam). His first-hand knowledge of traditional Vietnamese ship-building provided the groundwork for this book. The first part is arranged around two opposing theories concerning mechanical resistance of naval craft. The European theory stresses resistance through rigidity, the Asian adaptation through flexibility. Vietnamese build their boats by combining lightness and resistance. First, there is the judicious choice of plant materials (timber, resin, lianas), selected for physical and mechanical properties best suited to meet the various requirements of each part of the boat. Then comes caulking, which is of prime importance in Vietnamese craft with their woven bamboo bottoms. The first stage in shipbuilding is the right choice of timber in the forest according to species and tree-shape. The

timber trunk is dragged, floated and rafted to the shipyard, where it is then made ready for use. Descriptions of tools and of various techniques of rip-sawing and bending are given along with a specialized vocabulary.

The second section of the book examines 138 species of plant materials used in different parts of Vietnamese craft. The author bases her analysis mostly on materials her father gathered during his stay in Vietnam. She apologizes for not having travelled to Vietnam during the Second Indochina War, but given her non sensitive subject it is quite incomprehensible why this was impossible. Even nonspecialist travellers today can see in the seaports and coasttowns how the Vietnamese devoted themselves to the repair of their traditional craft. The famous bay of Halong, near the port of Haiphong, presents a vivid museum of all the jonks the author's father described in the thirties.

For the social anthropologist who hopes to find information on Vietnamese fishing communities or social organization, this book is no help. From the studies of Langrand (1945) and Moréchand (1955), the author uses only some technical details. One wonders, having in mind Malinowski's superb description of Trobriand ritual and magic in canoe construction, what rituals and ceremonies attend shipbuilding in a mainly Buddhist society. The theoretical ambitions behind this book are modest and certainly subordinate to any interest in material culture. Nevertheless, readers interested in technical description and details of traditional Vietnamese shipbuilding will find here a good reference work.

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HOUSE, J.D. (Ed.) *Fish versus oil: Resources and rural development in North Atlantic societies*. (Social and Economic papers no. 16). St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1986. xii + 197 pp., notes, references, photos. Cdn\$ 13.95 (paper).

During recent fieldwork among Norwegian small-scale fishermen I noticed that some of them were also involved in the oil business. Due to strict state regulation of the fisheries, expansion of the industry is hardly possible. Since the oil industry is based on a free-market system, some fishermen have tried their luck in this industry. They use their old fishing vessels as service-, supply- or standby-boats.

My impression that the oil industry is a major influence on fishing is confirmed by Bjørn Hersoug's article in which he describes the results of fieldwork done by a group of students at the Institute of Fisheries at the University of Tromsø. Hersoug focuses on small fishermen firms which have entered the oil industry and act as important intermediary agents linking fishermen with the relevant qualifications to the oil jobs. This article is one of the twelve essays dealing with the implications of the coming of the oil industry for the fishing industry in several North Atlantic countries in the book edited by J.D. House.

The book had its origin in the 1982 annual conference of the Atlantic Association of Sociologists and Anthropologists. After the discovery in 1979 of oil off Newfoundland and natural gas off Nova Scotia many in this part of Canada began worrying about the likely effects of an offshore oil industry upon established industries and communities.

It was for this reason that the conference choose 'Fish and Oil' as its theme. The concern of the book is rural development: "... the interaction between fish and oil has to be understood in terms of the wider and longer-term context of social and economic development in rural areas" (p. xi).

The authors differ about the severity of the conflict between the oil and fishing industry. Aspects of this conflict are: Debris caused by the oil industry, for instance debris dumped from platforms and pipelaying barges which causes damage to nets and gear of fishing vessels. Lack of access to fishing grounds due to restricted areas around rigs, platforms and pipelines. Pollution of fish stocks by oil, caused by accidents on platforms or with oiltankers. Competition for such resources as harbour space and repair facilities. And finally market effects: higher prices for goods and services and loss of labour to the oil industry.

Jentoft, writing on Norway, deals with this last aspect. He asks if there is a conflict between the fish and oil industry with respect to the labour market. He maintains that there are few fishermen in the oil sector in Norway today, though the changing job opportunities in coastal communities will affect the fishing industry. Jentoft says that the number of Norwegian fishermen has dropped drastically since 1945. This decline has caused fear among community members and government personell about the survival of the fishing industry and coastal communities. The lack of interest in the fish industry in certain communities is indeed worrying, but Jentoft does not mention that this decline is also caused by modernization and restrictive government rules. In the 1950s, for example, crews of purse-seiners consisted of 20-25 men. Due to modernization they need only 10-12 men today.

Though the authors differ about the severity of the conflict, most agree that the arrival of offshore oil has been harmful to the fishing industry. According to Mackay however, who writes on Scotland, conflict is too strong a term. In recent years the two industries have cooperated to the benefit of both. There were problems in the early years, over debris and competition for harbour facilities, but most of these have been solved by compensation agreements between the oil and fish industry.

House argues that it is not so much the nuisance problems (debris, pollution etc.) that pose the main threat to the fishing industry in Atlantic Canada. These problems can be dealt with, for example, by measures such as compensation funds. More serious are the fundamental problems: the economic and financial dependency of the local economy and the government upon the oil industry; loss of people from, and of people's commitment to, the fishing industry; and the erosion of fishing communities and cultures.

McNicol and Blackadder's papers demonstrate that oil is unlikely to serve as a replacement economy. Even where it does it will only be for a limited period. McNicol's contribution systematically examines oil's economic impact on several rural areas in Scotland. He shows that disappointingly few linkages develop between the oil sector and the other sectors of the local economy. Oil persists only as an enclave economy. Blackadder demonstrates for the Shetland Islands that many people are working in the oil industry, that the unemployment rate is one of the lowest in the U.K. and that people are earning more money than before. So far, the impact of oil has been beneficial. But Blackadder is pessimistic about future developments because of the unpredictable nature of oil. The island economy is dependent upon the oil economy and the traditional industry is on the decline.

According to him the problems in and even the decline of the fishing industry (and other traditional industries) cannot be attributed solely to the impact of the oil industry. But the development of the oil industry certainly hastened their decline. This is also the opinion of Byron concerning the Shetlands.

From Goodlad we learn that during the first years of oil exploration fishermen's associations on the Shetlands reacted slowly. The national government also paid little attention to the interests of the fishing industry. Goodlad concludes that the bargaining position of the Shetland fishermen has not improved. Andresen notes the same issue for Norway and points to the fluctuating influence of the Norwegian fishermen's organisations. Heber concludes that the Nova Scotia fishermen are poorly organized to take any effective part in development planning for the offshore industry.

Almost all contributors agree that the fishing industry needs to be protected during the oil era, and by means of government regulations. Unfortunately, the interests of central governments are often much greater than those of small peripheral communities. Hersoug is rather pessimistic about the fishermen's ability to compete with large national oil-service companies also because of the absence of special government support programmes. Canning notes that there is consensus that traditional industry makes a valuable contribution to Newfoundland's economic life and there is a growing commitment to protect it from external disruption. Blackadder summarizes the Shetland Islands Council's strategy for future development. It envisions a central role for the fishing industry which has been adversely affected during the first decade of Scotland's oil era.

The last contribution by Marchak is an overview. She concentrates on general and theoretical issues which the preceding chapters raise, such as the nature of staple economies as dependent economies and the relative economic and political powers of peripheral regions. She maintains that the task of social scientists in such situations is "... to alert governments, demonstrate the consequences, show comparative data and provide a voice for the less powerful" (p. 186). This of course is a very noble ideal, one which should be incorporated in social science, but one which, unfortunately, is not very realistic. Besides, it is very easy to say such things but gratuitous remarks are better omitted.

Though not all contributions are of the same weight 'Fish versus Oil' is an interesting and stimulating book for those interested in the fisheries. From a comparative perspective, the consequences of the oil industry for the fisheries appear to be much the same everywhere.

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