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REALLY NO MERCHANT: AN ETHNOHISTORICAL
ACCOUNT OF NEWMAN AND COMPANY AND THE
SUPPLYING SYSTEM IN THE NEWFOUNDLAND
FISHERY AT HARBOUR BRETON, 1850-1900

by

David Anthony Macdonald

B.A. (Honours), University of Manchester, 1973

M.A., Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1979

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in the Department
of
Sociology and Anthropology



David Anthony Macdonald 1988

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October 1988

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A P P R O V A L

NAME: David Macdonald
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EXAMINING COMMITTEE:
CHAIRMAN: Gary Teeple

IAN WHITAKER
SENIOR SUPERVISOR

MICHAEL KENNY

JACK LITTLE

CHRIS MORGAN

ERIC W. SAGER
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
HISTORY DEPARTMENT
UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA
EXTERNAL EXAMINER

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REALLY NO MERCHANT: AN ETHNOHISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF

NEWMAN AND COMPANY AND THE SUPPLYING SYSTEM

IN THE NEWFOUNDLAND FISHERY AT HARBOUR BRETON,

1850-1900

Author:

(signature)

DAVID ANTHONY MACDONALD

(name)

25/11/1988

(date)

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I examine the conduct of the inshore fishery in Newfoundland during the second half of the nineteenth century. The main source of data is the business papers of a mercantile firm, Newman and Company, that operated on the south coast of Newfoundland during this period. As other contemporary merchants, Newmans did little fishing on their own account but advanced supplies to and received in payment the catches of independent fishermen - what I call (following contemporary usage) the supplying system, also known as the credit or truck system.

The supplying system has been misrepresented in previously published accounts owing to neglect of the supplying merchants' crucial productive role. The merchants have rather been seen as engaged in distributive activities and the supplying system has been depicted as a means to mercantile ends - binding labour and expropriating surplus; yet it has not been shown that the supplying system could have had such effects, let alone that it did. In addition to their mercantile activities Newmans engaged indirectly in production because little fish could have been caught without their supplies. The supplying system replaced an earlier system of production in which merchants' ships caught fish with hired crews. During the study-period the supplying system broke down to the detriment of the inshore fishery.

The theoretical framework of this thesis is drawn from the writings of Eric Wolf, who advocates a more historical approach to anthropology than is traditional. I have, however, departed from Wolf's assumption that the purchase of labour as a commodity distinguishes between mercantile (distributive) and capitalist (productive) activities and I have also, unlike Wolf, attributed a productive role to merchants.

"The merchant is really no merchant here, - that is, no fair speculator, under the usual and proper understanding of that term in trade; he is simply a great commercial gambler."

- Robert McRae, Lost Among the Fogs, 1869

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Newfoundland, showing study area

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- CNS = Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University, St. John's.
- ISER = Institute for Social and Economic Research, Memorial University, St. John's.
- JHA = Journals of the (Newfoundland) House of Assembly.
- MHG = Maritime History Group, Memorial University, St. John's.
- Newman = Letter addressed to Newman & Company, Newfoundland; Newman, Hunt and Company papers, Public Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador.
- PANL = Public Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador, St. John's.
- USPG = United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel papers, PANL, St. John's.

CHAPTER 1INTRODUCTION

During the nineteenth century the Newfoundland fishery was conducted for the most part by inshore fishermen who owned and operated small boats and produced salt-cod for export markets. The merchants who exported the finished product seldom caught or processed the fish themselves but supplied the fishermen who did so. Fish went to market only once or twice a year and the problem of maintaining the fishery's labour force over the year was a serious one. Given the structure of the fishery as it had developed through the nineteenth century, merchants extended a range of supplies to fishermen and fishermen came to depend on these supplies for the maintenance of their families and for the conduct of the fishery. The role of the exporting merchants in production and reproduction was indirect but important. In this thesis I will examine that role as it was assumed by a mercantile firm.

No scholarly account of a Newfoundland fish-merchant's operations has been published and existing accounts, based on anecdotal evidence, have neglected the productive role of these merchants. They have, therefore, been seen as doing only what merchants do - that is, buying short, selling long and pocketing the difference - and the supplying system has been explained as a means of helping them do so by enslaving workers and appropriating surplus value through the extension of credit and by dealing, without cash, in truck. The dire social consequences of this system of working have frequently been

spelled out, most recently by Sider (1986). It is my conclusion in this thesis that conventional accounts of the operations of Newfoundland fish-merchants err in fact, being based on no empirical evidence, and this thesis is intended to make an original contribution to historical ethnography in this regard. More than this, conventional accounts suffer from analytical shortcomings and fail to define terms and concepts: it has never been shown that the merchants' alleged practices could have had the effects attributed to them, let alone that they did.

My thesis is that the merchants' operations are better understood through consideration of their productive, rather than their mercantile, roles; this perspective has implications for matters of economic development, though they lie outside the scope of this study. A theoretical framework for the consideration of the productive role of fish-merchants has been drawn from the writings of Eric Wolf, though I have had to depart from two of Wolf's assumptions: firstly, that mercantile activity belongs to the sphere of distribution, whereas capitalist activity belongs to that of production; secondly that the distinction between them is of purchase of labour as a commodity in the latter case. Capitalist activity is not, therefore, always and everywhere the same.

The study is focussed upon the level of the firm, not that of the industry or the producer, and this must be justified as it is far from usual anthropological practice. So also must I justify a case-study approach such as I have taken in this thesis - whereas it is customary to do so in anthropology it

appears to run counter to Wolf's criticism of such practice and I have taken Wolf (1982) as my theoretical point of departure (see Chapter 2 below). It might, moreover, have been expected that I would have followed a recently-dominant trend in British social anthropology (c/f Barth, 1966) and sought to discover how the processes of social life led to the regularities of social structure. Very briefly: I chose the analytical level of the firm because of the nature of the research materials and the nature of the facts in the particular case under study; the case-study approach because of the state of development of the anthropology of mercantile capitalism and that of the Newfoundland saltfish trade especially; and the focus upon an economic institution in preference to processual analysis because, following Gluchman (1965), I believe that it is necessary first to 'map' social systems before proceeding to their analysis.

The research materials - a mercantile firm's business papers - lent themselves naturally to analytical focus upon the level of the firm. This should not be taken to imply that the merchants were the only actors in the conduct of the industry or that all initiatives for change stemmed from them. I give examples in Chapter six of innovation by planters and others and the evidence shows that the degree to which the planters were the creation of the merchants has been exaggerated in conventional accounts of the supplying system. Supply was, however, the dominant economic institution of the period and most other activities had to flourish in its shade if they were to flourish at all. I do not consider it impossible to write a

processual account of the conduct of the saltfish industry during the study period, using the Newman papers and other contemporary sources, but it might be very difficult; and it would be premature to do so before the supplying system had been described and analysed. Sider has recently attempted to write a cultural analysis of the industry, but for the forementioned and other reasons I consider the attempt unsuccessful (see Chapter 7 below). The other reason that analysis at the level of the firm in the present case is most appropriate is that the crucial productive decision - who to supply - was taken by the merchants and not by the producers.

In Chapter 2 I write at some length of Wolf's criticisms of anthropological case-studies and yet this thesis is such a study, not an analysis of the conduct of the saltfish industry as a whole nor of the relations of political economy that it engendered. Wolf's call for historical accounts of the origins of social institutions may be answered without turning all questions into historical ones: what Evans-Pritchard called sociological history is still sociological as well as historical enquiry. Moreover, any general theory of the growth of the world market would be open to the same objection raised to a general theory of evolution - there can be no general theory of a unique occurrence, but only a theory which links different manifestations of the same process. Case-studies are needed for this and to elucidate the theoretical problems of particular regional studies. In Newfoundland historiography such a process is not far advanced.

Gérald Sider's recent (1986) work about the Newfoundland saltcod trade and the outport society and culture that grew on the basis of the trade has attracted some attention. I discuss this work in more detail in Chapter 7, but some word on Sider's book is appropriate here, as what follows in this thesis contradicts it at many points. Sider's is essentially a functional model of a system that tended to static equilibrium; yet my data show no such equilibrium. On the contrary, during the study period the operations of the supplying system tended to restrict progressively its own scope to a point at which, late in the nineteenth century, the system virtually ceased to operate at times. The present study also departs from Sider's concept of the nature of the merchants' activities, focussing rather on their productive than their distributive roles; from his view of the merchants' power over the fishermen, which was variable and never unlimited; from his view of the structure of outport communities in the nineteenth century, finding less homogeneity within and between communities than Sider supposes; and upon the subject of the supposed prominence of the family fishery. A work such as Sider's is premature until we have described and analysed the main economic institution of the period.

The study-period - from 1850 to 1900 - was chosen for three reasons. One was the availability of records: Anglican church records and shipping registers, for instance, are sparse before this period but unbroken during it, though the Newman papers are available for earlier periods as well as for the study-period. Second, the study period was that in which the south coast of

Newfoundland moved from being a sparsely-settled frontier region of fishing stations with a largely transient population to being a permanently settled area with a self-sustaining population. An indigenous culture and way of life was in process of being formed in this, the last 'traditional' period of Newfoundland's history before the railway, forest industries and mines marked the advent of the industrial age. The more populous and longer settled eastern districts had passed through the frontier stage a century or so earlier, when few written records had been kept, so the south coast in the study-period is a recorded example of a transition from frontier to settled living. Thirdly, the study period was one in which crucial changes occurred in the organisation of the fishing industry: that is, the period was one in which credit dealings in the supplying system declined, with damaging effects upon the conduct of the industry.

The main source of information used in Chapter four is the Anglican church records of Harbour Breton parish, which are kept at St. Bartholomew's Church, Harbour Breton; partial copies are also housed in the Provincial Archives in St. John's. The records of the Catholic parish are not available, having been destroyed in a fire early in the twentieth century. The Anglican records of births, marriages and deaths are continuous throughout the study period and some records have also survived from the 1830s and 1840s. Reconstitution of families from the Anglican parish registers presented virtually no problem in establishing record-linkages (c/f Macfarlane, 1977; Wrigley 1972) and the number of persons under study was small enough that reconstitution could be done by hand. All entries in the

marriage registers give the name, age, marital status, occupation and place of residence of each of the marriage partners plus the name of at least one parent - in most cases both and also the occupation and place of residence of the parents. Baptismal entries give the names of both parents, their place of residence and the fathers' occupation. Burial entries give the name, age and place of residence of the deceased and usually add the names of the parents of a deceased minor and the name of the living spouse of the married person.

The main source of information used in Chapter five is the business papers of Newman and Company, filed in the Provincial Archives as the papers of Newman, Hunt and Company (the English parent firm). These are continuous throughout almost all the study period - the series ends in 1899 - and date back in all to about 1775. I have made most use of the Newfoundland letter-books, which consist of letters from head office to agents in Newfoundland, the passenger lists (recording passages, mostly of their servants, to and from England between 1864 and 1891) and a diary kept by T.H. Newman, later head of the firm, during a sojourn at Harbour Breton from 1847 to 1849. It would be worth much to have the agents' replies to their principals' letters, but these are not available, except in those cases where their replies can be inferred from subsequent correspondence. It is often considered that business correspondence is one of the most factual types of historical material - that is, least in need of evaluation, but it should be allowed that there is a rhetorical (Paine, 1981) aspect to these materials, much as there would be in letters from a bishop to his priests who had also to struggle

with mammon and the flesh on a daily basis and risked losing sight of the spirit. Letters from principals to distant agents advise, warn, and remind of the ultimate purpose of the endeavour as well as imparting factual information and are subject to the same biases as any other correspondence. Indeed, these letters comprise a kind of mercantile ethnohistory as much as a record of activities taken and intended to be taken; as such they reveal the moral basis of the supplying trade as well as the mechanics of its conduct.

Other useful sources may be summarised briefly. Copies of Anglican church records relating to south coast parishes other than Harbour Breton are held in the Provincial Archives and cover varying portions of the study-period; Catholic records are few. Reports, usually quarterly, from Anglican priests to the parent society in London are held in the Public Archives as the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (USPG) papers. The memoirs of two clergymen (Mountain and Tocque) and one doctor (Fitzgerald) who were based in Harbour Breton during the study-period are also available. I have made some use of the shipping registers, held in the ~~Provincial~~ Archives: every vessel of more than fifteen tons burden was supposed to be registered upon acquisition or transfer of ownership, though evidence suggests that the registers went for lengthy periods without being updated and so ownership of larger vessels frequently went unrecorded. Useful published sources included summaries of the censuses of Newfoundland, which were conducted at somewhat irregular intervals from 1836 onwards, and commercial directories of inhabitants, several of which appeared

in the second half of the nineteenth century; they are of variable completeness and accuracy. An especially useful manuscript source, though strictly falling outside the study period, was the draft copy of the 1921 census - that completed house-by-house by the enumerator; this is the earliest surviving manuscript copy of the census to include the south coast. The Journals of the House of Assembly, especially the appendices which include officials' annual reports, gave much useful contemporary information about the conduct of the fishery and the incidence of poor relief among other things. Lesser contemporary sources include newspapers and abstracts of births, marriages and deaths drawn from them and courthouse records - the latter promised to yield an interesting account of patterns of conflict within the community, but they cannot presently be located. The Maritime History Archives at Memorial University have extensive holdings relating to Newfoundland, most of them from a period earlier than the period of study. Of published sources concerning the fishery I have made most use of Matthews, Innis, Ryan and Alexander as well as Changs thesis about Newman & Company during the period 1780-1815; for the south coast in general I should mention Dollimont's valuable compendium of statistics and other information.

During the study-period the supplying system progressively broke down, largely because increased Norwegian competition caused difficulties in markets. To understand why Newmans restricted supplies as they did it is necessary to see supply as a system of investing capital (in this case circulating capital) in production. As in any other such system, the response of the

firm to difficulty in selling the product is to invest less capital in production, which leads in time to a lower level of production and of sales. The difficulty in markets was not, in this case, that less fish could be sold, for Newfoundland's exports did not decline during the period (though Newmans' collection of fish did). Nor did prices at market simply fall; they rose greatly in the first half of the period and declined in the second half, though remaining far above the level of 1850. The greatest difficulty at market was that Norwegian competition made Newfoundland's fish slower to sell, so that the merchant was longer in recouping his capital outlay in the catching of the fish. The extension of credit therefore became riskier and Newmans became reluctant to supply those unlikely to repay their advances quickly - that is, chiefly the small-boat fishermen. Difficulties at market led to the restriction of supplies which led to a lesser production of fish as less capital was invested in the industry.

Newmans experienced difficulty in managing the catching, as well as the marketing, aspect of the fishery during the study-period. Increased domestic competition for the planters' effort and catch arose, chiefly from those engaged in the American and French Bank-fisheries with their associated demands for bait-fish. Because of this, Newmans took steps in the 1850s to amend and regulate the supplying system; these measures proved ineffective for reasons discussed in chapter six. I am, however, inclined to attribute Newmans' declining catches and extension of credit during the study-period more to their problems in selling fish swiftly than to their problems in

ensuring effort and reciprocity in the cod-fishery by the planters. My reason for this conclusion is that it was just those fishermen who were least likely to engage in the bait trade - the small-boat planters - who were most likely to find their supplies curtailed. The large-boat operators, on the other hand, had both the productive resources to pursue a diversified fishing operation and the financial resources to settle with their supplying merchants regardless of the success of the year's voyage. The merchants, therefore, were readier to continue to extend credit to the large fisherman than to the small.

It must be asked in what measure Newmans' methods of dealing were typical of fish-merchants in general, a difficult matter to resolve in the absence of studies of other supplying merchants in the Newfoundland fishing trade. Not all merchants were supplying merchants; many smaller firms were engaged purely in the retail trade and performed no productive function, though large houses all supplied to some degree. Newmans were untypical of contemporary merchants in certain ways: they were, for instance, the last of the absentee-owned outport firms and they were simultaneously engaged in other businesses abroad, for example, the wine business. By their own account Newmans were more cautious than their competitors in pricing and in the extension of credit and it is shown in Chapter 6 that their invariable response to uncertainty was to reduce risk, even at the cost of doing a smaller volume of business. What evidence there is suggests that Newmans' commercial difficulties and their response to them was typical of the fish-trade generally.

Their complaints of the problems of conducting the trade and the ultimate cause to which they ascribe these problems (the Norwegian competition) paralleled those of a contemporary St. John's merchant (Murray, 1895). So also typical of the trade, it seems, was Newmans' response to the problems.

In the middle of the nineteenth century winter supply was being restricted more than before to planters with credit-balances. In 1868 a magistrate wrote:

"The idea seems general that the fisheries will support themselves only during their continuance and that the Revenue must support the fishermen and their families during the interval, say six months in the year. At any rate this is the principle upon which the fisheries are now evidently prosecuted" (quoted in Hiller, 1987, p. 5)

In particular, credit was no longer available to poorer men.

In the 1880s - the decade which Alexander (1973) says marked the limit of the growth of the traditional economy - there were frequent complaints that credit was being curtailed and supplies issued only as returns were made. After 1880 the merchants of St. John's withdrew capital investment from the fishery, preferring to invest in small manufacturing industries and speculation in mining and forest-industry leases. Sager notes that the crisis of the traditional economy, evident by 1880, was not caused by undercapitalisation but by declining returns to labour and capital in the fishing industry: "The real failure of capital investment in the marine sector of the economy came after the crisis, not before it" (Sager, 1979:83). It will be shown below that circulating capital, in the form of supply, had already been progressively withdrawn from the fishery since the 1850s and that this hastened the decline of the industry. The

problems of the fishing trade led to financial crisis in the 1890s, which most exporting firms survived. The exporters withdrew, however, from the direct outport trade, sold their branch stores to local traders and concentrated on the wholesaling and exporting side of the business. Newmans, on the other hand, preferred to withdraw from the fishing business altogether.

CHAPTER 2THEORYHistory and Anthropology

I have described this study as ethnohistorical and must explain this term by placing it in the context of the relationship between history and anthropology. The two disciplines have common chronological and intellectual origins (Evans-Pritchard, 1950). Until the eighteenth century anthropology was a part of history and both are "deeply embedded in the historical experience of Western Europe from the fifteenth century to the present" (Cohn, 1981:227). Beginning in the late eighteenth century, anthropology and history came to study different subjects; the reconstruction of events that could be causally and chronologically linked to the present became the province of history and the study of those peoples for which no such reconstruction was possible fell to anthropology. The anthropologists' field of study became:

"...a kind of non-history, since it dealt with societies which were unchanging, or at best slowly moving-societies which could not have history because they had no chronology" (Cohn, 1981:229).

The study of the historical - i.e., datable - past was therefore above all concerned with the history of nations, chiefly the Western colonial powers, whereas anthropologists studied the non-western peoples which fell under colonial rule (op.cit:231).

The observance of a distinction such as Hodgen (1974) draws between the dated and undated past might clarify many disputes about the historicity of nineteenth and early twentieth century

anthropological theories. Nineteenth century evolutionists assumed that the societies they studied were survivals from earlier stages of cultural development through which European societies had passed and this perspective rendered inquiry into the dated past of non-western societies largely irrelevant. They were interested, however, in the origins and antecedents of social institutions and of social systems, used documents such as missionaries' and travellers' reports and indulged in hypothetical reconstruction of the past of societies, a process which has been (pejoratively) called conjectural or presumptive history (Sturtevant, 1966:12; Carmack, 1972:227).

Anthropologists of two schools reacted, early in the present century, against prior attempts to explain social institutions by unilinear evolutionary development: the diffusionists, who observed that social and cultural development often resulted from borrowing and the functionalists, who used an analogy between biological and social systems. Evans-Pritchard has written:

"The functionalist critics of both evolutionists and diffusionists should have challenged them, not for writing history, but for writing bad history. As it was, they dropped the history and kept the pursuit of laws, which was often precisely what made the history bad. Moreover, they were ignorant of historical research and seem to have thought that the spurious history they were attacking was typical of history as a whole, and so rejected historical explanations of any kind" (1962:47-8).

From the 1920s to the 1960s the dominant British and American schools of anthropology avoided, for the most part, historical inquiry in favour of detailed synchronic studies of societies and fieldwork, not documents, was the main source of

anthropologists' data. Kroeber (1935:558) describes American anthropology as "anti-historical in tendency" though Carmack prefers to term it "a-historical in certain fundamental ways" (1972:227). In Britain, Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski were averse to historical inquiry and justified their position with reference to the biological analogy central to structural-functionalism and the distinction between generalizing and particularizing sciences.

Anthropologists and historians have become more interested in each other's subjects since World War 2 and some of each group now see common ground between the two disciplines. Kroeber (1963) argued that history and anthropology were similar in that they develop weak generalizations with few causal statements, study civilization as a tradition of historically accumulated patterns and are natural rather than experimental sciences. Evans-Pritchard concurred with Kroeber's opinion that the work of anthropologists and historians showed more similarities than differences and that the differences were of technique, emphasis and perspective rather than of aim or method. I have already mentioned Evans-Pritchard's claim that functionalists erred in rejecting all history because of its speculative use by their predecessors. He held that, in fact, the very concepts of structure, function and society could be validated only by historical study; the term structure, for instance, could refer only to a set of relationships known to be enduring (1962:55). Evans-Pritchard, though he worked in the structural-functionalist tradition, departed from that tradition's a-historical conclusions which stemmed, he believed,

from the application of an inappropriate biological analogy to human societies: "To have an intelligent understanding of a complex phenomenon we have to know not only what it is but how it came into being" (Evans-Pritchard, 1962:51). It is clear that Evans-Pritchard is calling for diachronic functional studies that would explain the development of social institutions - for what he calls sociological, as opposed to narrative, history. Sociological history is not only the record of what has happened before the ethnographic present but also the process by which the present came into being: "History is not a succession of events, it is the links between them" (1962:48).

Social anthropologists have become more interested in history during the past thirty years because of changes in the societies that they traditionally have studied and because of their dissatisfaction with structural-functional assumptions about homeostasis which made the study of social change difficult (Gluckman, 1965). Anthropologists have dealt often, if not always systematically, with historical matters (Lewis, 1968) and have sought new theories that might explain both continuity and change (Whitten & Whitten, 1972). All such theories, whether of the new evolutionists (Sahlins & Service, 1960) or the transactionalists (Barth, 1966, 1967) require that anthropologists deal with time, which does not necessarily mean that they practise either sociological or narrative history. Within British social anthropology the orthodoxy that the anthropologist's task is to isolate and compare regularities of social behaviour, which derives from Radcliffe-Brown (1952), was

challenged by Firth (1951) and Leach (1954) and their position was formalised by Barth (1966, 1967), who held that the proper object of study was how the processes of everyday life gave rise to structural regularities. Among American anthropologists Sahlins (1961) has analyzed the lineage system of the Nuer in terms of its efficiency in promoting territorial expansion. Common to all these studies are concern with social strategy and adaptation and theories that allow constant adaptation should constraints and rewards change and see continuity resulting from a persistent balance between rewards and constraints.

While anthropologists became more interested in the past of their societies some historians became more interested in applying anthropological concepts to historical societies. This has led some historians to believe that history and anthropology will converge after their two hundred-year separation (Cohn, 1981:242), but other historians remain skeptical of the value of such an alliance and assert the principles of narrative history, perhaps broadened in scope as a result of the influence of social scientists (Stone, 1979). Some historians who are amenable to an alliance between anthropology and history would urge caution upon the historian and criticise the selectivity of history's borrowings from anthropology, claiming that historians have often taken anthropological concepts out of context, used them chiefly to make sense of the otherwise inexplicable events of the historical record (Davis, 1981) and borrowed "only what was most like history as currently practiced: studies concerned with ideas" (Adams, 1981:253). More sanguine commentators have, however, noted the contribution that anthropology (especially

fieldwork) can make to history (Evans-Pritchard, 1962:57-8) and that history can make to anthropology by re-establishing its intellectual legitimacy and resolving some of its inner conflicts (Cohn, 1981:245).

Ethnohistory

It is controversial whether ethnohistory is a distinct sub-field of anthropology, though most of its practitioners feel that it has a distinct subject-matter, however vaguely defined and that this, together with the use of the historians' methods, qualifies ethnohistory as a distinct sub-field of anthropology (Carmack, 1972:234). The subjects most frequently studied by ethnohistorians are

- (1) specific history, more often called culture history
 - (2) historical ethnography - the reconstruction of past societies and cultures, which is what usually passes as ethnohistory in anthropology
- and (3) folk history, which examines the view a society has of its past (Carmack, 1972:235-42).

Carmack concludes that ethnohistory is not an independent discipline because its aims are those of anthropology, there is no ethnohistorical theory and there are no specifically ethnohistorical techniques. Ethnohistorians use the historians' techniques of source preparation and criticism but they also draw upon the methods of archaeology, ethnography, linguistics and paleo-biology (op.cit:231-4). Other authors would add ecological evidence (Schwerin, 1976) and physical anthropology and oral history (Vansina et al, 1964) to Carmack's list.

Axtell (1979) observes that ethnohistorians generally combine anthropological concepts with historians' and others' methods, but the term ethnohistory is not used identically by anthropologists and historians. Sturtevant (1966:1-2) opines that history and anthropology have similar subject matter - i.e., culture - in which their common interests lie rather than in each other's theories and methods and that ethnohistory occupies the boundary at which the two disciplines meet. Cohn (1981:251), by contrast, remarks that it is simple to find matters of interest to both historians and anthropologists but harder to delimit a common epistemological space. Trigger (1976:12) locates ethnohistory between pre-history and the ethnographic present and distinguishes it from history by its subject. Ethnohistory is:

"...the study of change among indigenous peoples, as opposed to history, which studies the activities of Europeans both before and after they settled elsewhere" (Trigger, 1982:3).

History and ethnohistory therefore call for different techniques, documentary sources for the past of native societies being few. Other scholars would, on the other hand, define ethnohistory by the use of just such documentary sources:

"Ethnohistory consists of the use of primary documents - library and archival materials - to gain knowledge of a given culture as it existed in the past and how it has changed" (Hickerson, 1970:6).

Ethnohistory is one of a number of historical techniques for reconstructing past societies, others being archaeology, diffusion and acculturation studies, linguistic analysis, cross-cultural studies and oral tradition (Ibid.:chapter 2).

As some anthropologists have used the methods of historians, so some historians have used anthropological concepts. Many ethnohistorians have, in practice, accepted the principles of narrative history and avoided analysis (Hodgen, 1974; Schwerin, 1976). Others have attempted to integrate documentary and oral records with cultural ecology (Bennett, 1969, 1982; Netting, 1981), with paradigms of cultural change (Wallace, 1978), and with development theory (Geertz, 1965). Historians have used anthropological concepts in studies of community (Lockridge, 1970; Prest, 1976; Beeman, 1977; Macfarlane, 1977), witchcraft (Macfarlane, 1970; Thomas, 1971; Boyer & Nissenbaum, 1974), law (Colman, 1974), the family (Shorter, 1975) and the fur trade (Ray, 1974).¹ I should also mention the work of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure (Laslett, 1965, 1972; Wrigley, 1972; Macfarlane, 1977) and of the French Annales school (Bloch, 1953; Braudel, 1976; LeGoff, 1980).

Trigger remarks that early general discussions of ethnohistory were taken up with introspection about the scope, goals and subject-matter of the discipline and even about if it constituted a discipline at all:

"It was debated whether ethnohistory was a separate discipline, a branch of anthropology or of history, a technique for analyzing particular kinds of data, or merely a convenient data-quarry for other disciplines. In the same vein, it was queried whether ethnohistory was related more closely to anthropology or to history or was a sort of bridge or no-man's land between the two disciplines. It was also discussed whether the ethnographic reconstruction of early historic cultures, or what has been called historical ethnography, and the

¹. Ray is a geographer who teaches in a history department.

study of native cultural change since the time of European contact constituted two distinct branches of ethnohistory, as most ethnohistorians accepted, or only the latter activity could be regarded as ethnohistory in the strict sense. None of these problems has ever been definitively resolved. There merely seems to be a tacit agreement that ethnohistory uses documentary evidence and oral traditions to study changes in non-literate societies from about the time of earliest European contact" (Trigger, 1982:2).

Trigger continues that these unresolved questions have become increasingly irrelevant as ethnohistory has matured, especially as scholars with training in history have entered a field previously occupied by anthropologists. Trigger would allow no more disciplinary independence to the study of native history than to Russian or French history, though he adds that ethnohistory, owing to its peculiar problems, is the area of history that would benefit most from interdisciplinary study (op. cit:16-7).

Eric Wolf

Wolf, in his seminal work Europe and the People Without History, critically examines both the relationship between history and anthropology and the focus of anthropology upon the study of the ethnographic present. He particularly objects to anthropologists' (and other social scientists') conception of human societies as separate, bounded systems and to their neglect of the fact that human societies have been connected in the past as they are in the present. Wolf's main assertion in this book is that:

"...the world of humankind constitutes...a totality of inter-connected processes, and inquiries that disassemble this totality into bits and then fail to reassemble it falsify reality. Concepts like 'nation',

'society' and 'culture' name bits and threaten to turn names into things. Only by understanding these names as bundles of relationships, and by placing them back into the field from which they were abstracted can we hope to avoid misleading inferences and increase our share of understanding" (Wolf, 1982:3).

Anthropology has been limited by its assumption that societies are self-regulating, bounded systems - the "comparative study of single cases" - and has ignored processes that transcend single cases; as examples Wolf cites the slave trade and the fur trade (op.cit:16-17). Evolutionists and diffusionists did deal with relationships between societies but the central position which the functionalists gave to fieldwork - notwithstanding the contributions this method made to anthropology - led them to concentrate on single cases and to accord explanatory powers to what was really a heuristic device:

"...a methodological unit of enquiry was turned into a theoretical construct by assertion, a priori. The outcome was series of analyses of wholly separate cases" (op.cit:14).

Recent developments in anthropology have failed to correct this error, despite promising beginnings in the cases of a few theoretical approaches. Cultural ecology, the new evolution and symbolic anthropology have all, in practice, concentrated upon the study and comparison of single, bounded cases (Ibid.). Ethnohistory's main contribution has been to demonstrate, in case after case, the fallacy of seeing societies as closed systems. What is needed in anthropology, Wolf says, is a perspective that will link single cases at theoretical as well as at empirical level and this will be possible only when disciplinary boundaries have been transcended (1982:19).

Wolf argues that we cannot explain the present world unless we trace the growth of the world market from the fifteenth century onwards and the development of capitalism since the late eighteenth century. A theory of such growth and development is needed and must encompass the processes that affected the lives of local populations. Wolf seeks such a theory in the writings of Marx, the last major figure to attempt a holistic social science and especially in Marx' concept of the mode of production (op.cit:21). Each major way of organising social labour is a mode of production and Wolf distinguishes between the capitalist, tributary and kin-ordered modes and examines how the expansion of the capitalist mode over the past two centuries has affected the other two modes (op.cit:75).

The kin-ordered mode of production need not concern us here, but something must be said of the tributary mode as it was here that merchants were of most importance and it is in connection with this mode that Wolf has most to say about merchants. In the tributary mode of production, overlords extracted surpluses from primary producers - who still had access to the means of production - by "other than economic means," which means by coercion. Lordship and servitude therefore characterized the tributary mode and the deployment of social labour depended upon the exercise of political power (Wolf, 1982:80-1,267). The role of merchants in this mode was to distribute the surpluses that the rulers had extracted and until the late eighteenth century the extraction of tribute set the terms under which mercantile activity could be conducted.

Merchants' activities made "a major contribution to the development of capitalism" (Wolf, 1982:309). They created mercantile networks of which capitalists were later able to take advantage, amassed wealth, indirectly encouraged regional specialization and the growth of commodity-production and even altered the organization of work in some cases. Some of their marginal activities, such as the putting-out system, bordered upon capitalism but, as they lacked essentially capitalist relations, Wolf consigns them to the tributary mode. Merchants may have amassed wealth but they did not take the further step of converting it into capital and did not use their wealth to acquire and transform the means of production (Wolf, 1982:86-7, 119-20, 309). Wolf therefore disagrees with those, including Weber, who would have industrial capitalism a linear descendent of mercantile wealth, which was but "the pre-history of capital. Merchant wealth did not function as capital as long as production was dominated by either kin-ordered or tributary relations" (Wolf, 1982:85).

Wolf's central interest is, then, in the capitalist mode of production, which he distinguishes qualitatively from mercantile activity, which produces wealth but does not transform it into capital:

"As long as wealth remains external to the process of production, merely skimming off the products of primary producers and making profits by selling them, that wealth is not capital. It may be wealth obtained and engrossed by overlords or merchants.... There is no such thing as mercantile or merchant capitalism, therefore" (Wolf, 1982:79).

Wolf follows Marx in holding the distinguishing mark of the capitalist mode of production to be the purchase of labour.

This the merchants did not do; though some of their quasi-capitalist activities did develop a long-term lien upon labour, surplus was still extracted through unequal exchange. Wolf disassociates himself from world-systems and dependency theorists - he explicitly contradicts Wallerstein and Frank - who define capitalism as a system of production for the market which is motivated by gain and focus on how economic surpluses are transferred from peripheral to core regions rather than on the modes of production under which the surpluses were generated in the periphery. The capitalist mode of production, Wolf says, did not arise before the late eighteenth century and previous overseas expansion entailed "mercantile relations anchored in non-capitalist modes of production"; industrial capitalism produced a new mode of production and a change from a mercantile to a capitalist market (op.cit:298).

Whereas "In the capitalist mode, production determines distribution" (op.cit:77), mercantile activity was essentially distributive and tribute-taking, obtaining commodities by unequal exchange:

"Mercantile activity had sought profit in buying cheap and selling dear, what is generally known as nonequivalent or unequal exchange. To this end, merchants obtained goods in a number of ways...merchants used money and goods bought with money to gain a lien upon production, but they remained outside the process of production itself. They implanted their circuits of exchange in other modes of deploying social labor, using a mixture of force and sales appeal to obtain collaboration and compliance.... The merchant was always dependent on his own state to back up his claim. At the same time he was obliged to sweeten the disposition of his trade partner so as to perpetuate their unequal exchange" (op.cit:305).

Of the role of merchants in the production of commodities under capitalism Wolf says little except that it was marginal, or in the best case subsidiary, to the activities of capitalists, although merchants remained important in a few areas of the world. Precapitalist patterns of mercantile wealth survived and the activities of merchants remained important in some regions not overtaken by the advance of the capitalist mode, which included the fringes of North America. In these areas mercantile activity often enabled groups to continue in the tributary or kin-ordered modes of production, though usually at the price of their autonomy as they:

"...confronted a gradual reduction in their ability to control their means of production, especially as widening exchange eroded their ability to reproduce these means through the mechanism of kinship or power" (Wolf, 1982:307).

Elsewhere, in the nineteenth century, capital took control of commodity-production and gradually ousted merchants or converted them into agents of capital.

Wolf, of course, says nothing about Newfoundland fish-merchants and he has little to say about merchants under capitalism in general, except that their role was, in a literal sense, tributary. His description of mercantile activity in the tributary mode is, however, important to this thesis because it is echoed by the authors of those regional studies that I have occasion to criticize below (see chapters 5 and 7). These writers have seen fish-merchants in Newfoundland as engaging purely in distributive activities, amassing wealth and extracting surplus by means of unequal exchange (in this case with fishermen) without possessing or transforming the means of

production, just as Wolf has seen merchants in the tributary mode. In some of these studies there is the addition that the Newfoundland merchants are themselves seen as tributary rulers, not just as the distributors of tribute exacted by others. I must say here that I do not find Wolf's view of merchants applicable to the present study. It is one of the central positions of this thesis that Newman and Company were engaged in productive and not just in distributive activities. These merchants' role in production leads us to re-examine the distinction between mercantile and capitalist activity being based upon the purchase of labour as a commodity in the latter case. Newmans were engaged in activities very close to the purchase of labour, but not in the complete form found in industrial capitalism. If this distinction be strictly applied to the case under study we would find that Newmans went against the course of history by forsaking the employment of productive labour late in the eighteenth century in favour of becoming mercantile takers of tribute. I cannot, therefore, see the present case as one in which pre-capitalist patterns remained anachronistically alive in the age of capitalism, nor can I see Newmans as being engaged in only distributive activities. My point is rather that these merchants were engaged in productive activity and that this is the key to understanding how their operations were conducted during the period under study.

Economic anthropology

Wolf, then, identifies mercantile activity with the sphere of distribution and capitalism proper with production (though he

admits a few marginal, quasi-productive, forms of mercantile activity) and holds the distinction between mercantile and capitalist activity to consist in the latter's purchase of labour as a commodity. In insisting on the centrality of this distinction he is at odds with Wallerstein (1974), who finds the beginnings of a capitalist world system in the sixteenth century and with Frank (1969), who stresses the importance of a territory's position in the international division of labour in determining the degree of under-development or development of the forces of domestic capitalism. Wolf's insistence upon drawing a qualitative distinction between mercantile and capitalist activity is unfortunate because it deflects inquiry into how, and under what conditions, the one is transformed into the other - and, indeed, into the question of whether this is always the direction of development.

Political economists and economic anthropologists have, in the last two decades, debated whether they should focus on production or distribution. The two most influential advocates of the primacy of distributive relationships in the evolution of world-wide capitalism have been the political economists Frank and Wallerstein. Frank (1969) relates patterns of development and underdevelopment to past and present relationships of domination and subordination between metropolitan and satellite countries and Wallerstein (1974) holds the dynamic of capitalist expansion to be the accumulation of economic surplus in core countries as a result of unequal exchange with the periphery (which means most of the world other than the core countries). Recent dependistas (e.g., Laclau, 1971; Chilcote, 1974) have

departed from both Frank² and Wallerstein in that they look to productive, not distributive, relationships to explain the international distribution of development and underdevelopment - as does Wolf, though not for the same reasons. These later dependency theorists retain the Marxian concept of mode of production and use it to examine the articulation of co-existent modes of production and the ways in which surviving pre-capitalist forms of social relation may serve to reinforce capitalism (c/f Foster-Carter, 1978). These debates are still unresolved though Nash (1981:402-3) notes that capitalism may take root through international trade but proceed to the integration of production on an international level. We should also note that, in the case of the Newfoundland supplying system, the distinction between productive and distributive systems is neither fruitful nor easy to make (see below, Chapter 5).

Economic anthropology traditionally has followed classical economics in focussing on relationships of distribution rather than those of production, though writers such as Firth (1967) were interested in Marxian economic ideas. Opposition to the orthodox focus of economic anthropology emerged in the 1970s, especially from Meillassoux (1972), who tried to rework Marx' concepts, in particular those of mode of production and the distinction between base and superstructure (Orlove, 1986), to apply them to pre-capitalist economic formations. Not only

2. Frank (1980) has moved to a position closer to that of Laclau: a single world capitalist system embracing several modes of production.

French structural Marxists such as Meillassoux but also cultural ecologists, notably Harris and Sahlins, have departed from the classical economic anthropological focus in recent years, showing more interest in the properties of systems than in the choices of individuals and attempting to relate cultural forms to economic factors.

The mode-of-production approach has been hailed by some as the start of a new economic anthropology (Clammer, 1978), though others are more sanguine about the structural Marxists' achievements (Ortiz, 1983). Hart (1983) denies that a cogent neo-Marxist economic anthropology is in immediate prospect and charges that Marxist ideas have been incorporated "in an extremely unsystematic and casual fashion" into economic anthropology (1983:105); the central concept - mode of production - for instance, is used in a manner quite alien to Marx' way of thinking (op.cit:116). Hart opines, indeed, that the structuralists' approach does not derive from Marx at all, but is:

"...a version of structural-functionalism sufficiently different from the original to persuade Anglos they were learning Marxism and similar enough to allow them to retain their customary mode of thinking which had been temporarily discredited" (Hart, 1983:127).

Banaji (1977) has also argued that Marx' concept of the mode of production has been misapprehended (and misapplied) by recent theorists; he argues in particular that modes of production must be distinguished from relations of production, which must in turn be distinguished from forms of exploitation of labour. Banaji claims that Marx' intention was to write a natural history of human society and to discover its laws of motion,

each historical period having laws of its own. Therefore it is not admissible to abstract categories from one period and apply them to another:

"The dialectic in Capital was thus nothing else than the rigorous, systematic investigation of the laws of motion of capitalist production, in the course of which a series of simple abstractions (wage-labour, money, etc.) were historically concretized as bourgeois relations of production, or abstractions determinate to capitalism as a mode of production; that is, reconstituted as "concrete categories", as historically determinate social forms.

It follows that modes of production are impenetrable at the level of simple abstractions. The process of "true abstraction" is simultaneously a process of "concretization" of the definition of specific historical laws of motion" (Banaji, 1977:9).

If this account be accepted it follows that attempts to characterise modes of production by the forms of exploitation of labour found in them will be invalid; in practice, Banaji notes, both feudal and capitalist enterprises have been supported by a variety of forms of exploitation of labour, both free and unfree. These examples of exploitation of labour pertained to feudal and capitalist relations of production respectively and were not co-existent relations of production which had in some way to be articulated. Banaji also denies that the world market has been capitalist from the beginning; world commodity exchanges before the eighteenth century derived from the consumption needs of aristocrats and not from the requirements of capital production (op.cit:30-1). Capitalist activities are, therefore, those which follow the laws of motion of capitalism.³

³. These being:

"...the production and accumulation of surplus-value, the revolutionization of the labour-process, the production of relative surplus-value on the basis of a

In recent years several writers who have studied the persistence of small commodity production under capitalism have used the concept of form of production in preference to that of mode of production, which they have criticised as lacking conceptual rigour and being based on unwarranted assumptions about the role of capitalism in producing the dynamic of small commodity production (Smith, 1984:201-2; Sinclair, 1985:14-5). Scholars have also found difficulty in defining a distinctive non-capitalist mode of production in cases where households engage in several modes at once; cases have been described in which "reproduction of the social relations of production for one mode is dependent on the continuation of other social relations of production found in other modes" (Long & Richardson, 1978:186). For these and other reasons some writers have preferred to define small commodity production by the organization of labour in such enterprises and to leave open the question of how they are maintained or transformed and how capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production are related.

A form of production is defined by the structure of the basic unit of production (Friedmann, 1978:552-3; Sinclair, 1985:21). Such a definition does not specify the links between

capitalistically-constituted labour process, the compulsion to increase the productivity of labour, etc." (Banaji, 1977:10).

It must be admitted that after 1850 the supplying system did not fulfil all these conditions - it seemed incapable of revolutionising the labour process or of increasing the productivity of labour, while competition between suppliers caused capital to be withdrawn from the industry rather than more capital to be invested in a search for higher productivity. However, supply met the other basic requirement of a capitalist activity and was one of a number of competing uses for capital.

productive units and the social formations in which they operate and the same form (for instance small commodity production) may exist in conjunction with a variety of modes of production - small commodity production exists in conjunction with capitalism, feudalism and state socialism (Sinclair, 1985:22; Hill, 1983:7). Forms do, however, derive many of their characteristics from the social formations in which they operate and Smith (1984:211) suggests that it may be necessary to refer to both the organization of labour and the social formation to specify a form of production.⁴ She explains:

"Different forms emerge as different elements in the productive process (land, labour, raw materials) become market commodities, as labour processes are organised in different ways and as labour recruitment changes. One assumes that the combination of external market conditions and internal labour dynamics determines both forces and relations of production as well as their relationship to each other in any particular form. One finds, therefore, no single 'logic' to any particular form, such as SCP. The logic of a system is given instead by the combination of elements within it, combinations that are neither endlessly diverse nor lacking determinate internal relationships, but that do vary historically in significant ways" (Smith, 1984:202).

Much of the work that uses the concept of form of production has concerned a particular form which, following Sinclair (1985:15), I call domestic commodity production, by which is meant:

"...a form of production in which labour is supplied and organized according to the organizational structure of the household itself. In this context the term household defines a work group that functions with no greater objective than simple reproduction" (op. cit.:15).

Domestic commodity production is, then, a form of production that replicates the structure of the household and uses the

⁴. Friedmann (1980) has reached the same conclusion.

labour of household members. The aim of such an enterprise is simple reproduction, not accumulation as in capitalist forms, and therefore domestic commodity production must be classed as a non-capitalist form of production. Nevertheless, this form of production depends upon a capitalist economy for markets and the acquisition of consumption goods and the means of production (which are usually, though need not be, owned by the household) and the mercantile or industrial capitalist may appropriate value from the domestic producer through unequal exchange (op.cit:17-22).

Most of the literature concerning domestic commodity production centres upon what is likely to become of that form. Most students of the subject have, like Marx, predicted its eventual disappearance under capitalism and the reduction of the small producer to the status of labourer (see Sinclair, 1985:22ff). Some recent analysts have been more optimistic about small producers' survival, pointing out that in some cases small commodity production survives because it is functional for capital that it do so. Sacouman (1980) asserts that small producers in marginal areas of industrial countries serve as a reserve of cheap labour for capitalist production; Mann & Dickenson (1978) show that small commodity production persists in areas of production that are not amenable to large-scale methods because of a long productive cycle, the perishability of the commodity or the seasonality of operations. Some other writers have concluded that domestic commodity producers may, in some circumstances, be able to maintain their independence by means of political organization, state intervention or

subsistence production or owing to the dynamics of small commodity production itself (Friedmann, 1978, 1980; Hill, 1983; Armitage, 1985; Sinclair, 1985).

The foregoing accounts of domestic commodity production have classed it as a non-capitalist form of production, opposed to but conditioned by capitalism in cases where domestic commodity production and capitalism co-exist. A few scholars, notably Chevalier (1983) and Shenton & Lennihan (1983), have described cases in which small commodity production has been subordinated to capitalist forms of production. Chevalier has called for a redefinition of capitalism that would avoid the two extremes of classifying all relations of production within the world system as determined by capitalism and "a rigidly eroded definition to which everything else is externally articulated" (1983:153). Chevalier particularly wants to show that some (though by no means all) forms of simple commodity production are explicable by the logic of capitalism and are therefore integral to its functioning. Chevalier asserts that, in some cases, simple commodity producers value both their labour and the goods that they produce by market rates, which value labour power below subsistence rates; to the extent that such producers engage in market transactions and wage-labour, capital is provided with both cheap goods and cheap labour, both of which are undervalued by the local market. Labour in such cases is commodified - subordinated to capital - without being formally subsumed by it. Such cases, Chevalier argues, are consistent with the Marxist theory of labour-value and although the labour-power of such small producers has no exchange-value its value is in practice

realised by the producer by means other than direct sale on the market (op.cit:161). Chevalier therefore concludes that the existence of domestic commodity production should not be taken as necessarily betokening the presence of a pre-capitalist economic formation, that the definition of capitalism must be redrawn to allow commodification of labour by means other than direct sale and that the self-employed whose labour-power is restricted to producing exchange-values can be dispossessed of the surplus value he produces even though he still owns the means of production (op.cit:170-1).

Smith (1984) has taken exception to certain parts of Chevalier's thesis. She would concede, in a case such as he describes, that material constraints and values are imposed by capitalism on non-capitalist forms of production but not that capitalist relations of production dominate such an economy. Such a concession would do "considerable damage to our understanding of capitalism" by severing the link between forces and relations of production which is central to Marx' definition (1984:207). Smith would accommodate Chevalier's case by arguing that all modes of production take various forms and that what needs to be re-thought is not the nature of capitalism but the way it works in particular cases. In Chevalier's case even capitalist forms could not operate by capitalist logic and therefore those who might operate as capitalists in one context may be compelled to act as non-capitalists in another. A case such as Chevalier describes, in which labour is partly commodified, could be neither capitalist nor pre-capitalist (op.cit:212-4).

Shenton & Lennihan (1983) describe a case in which, as Chevalier's, commodity production is subordinated to capitalism. The authors argue that capitalist relations of production arose among cotton growers in Northern Nigeria in the late nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries and that these small producers did produce surplus value through which they were exploited by Nigerian middlemen and by Lancashire cotton interests. After 1850 merchant capitalism supplanted indigenous capitalism and colonial rule was imposed, slavery abolished and rural producers given unmediated access to European traders' goods. European traders exchanged manufactured goods for the rural producers' agricultural commodities which the traders then turned into money to realise merchants' profits. This did not transform social relations of production although merchant capital was formally subsumed under industrial capital (1983:50-1).

In 1902 Lancashire cotton manufacturers, faced with difficulties in obtaining raw material from traditional sources, set up the British Cotton Growers Association (BCGA) to organise a cotton-export industry in Northern Nigeria, which was already a major producing area for local consumption. The Colonial government granted the BCGA monopoly rights to buy cotton at a fixed price and required producers to pay tax in Sterling, which was most readily obtained by selling cotton to the BCGA. Although the BCGA was the sole exporter of cotton, the producers actually sold at regulated prices to merchants to whom the BCGA allowed a commission on the cotton that they bought. Merchants gave advances, usually in cash, to producers and by this means, the authors argue, cotton production became commodified,

imported goods came to be required by social practice and the simple reproduction of the producing household became dependent upon imported goods (1983:57-8). Advances, though tolerated by the authorities, were in theory illegal and could not be recovered at law; merchants therefore risked not being repaid by giving advances to small producers but ensured trustworthiness in such cases by paying the producers' taxes and withholding the receipt until repaid. In 1924 the merchants stopped giving advances for a while; cotton producers had to grow grain to pay their taxes, starvation ensued and cotton production fell. The end of the advance system and the ensuing food shortage differentiated the large producers, who were able to weather the lean years, from the small producers, who were often compelled to sell their land to, borrow money from or work for wages for the large producers. When, after a three-year lapse, advances were resumed, large producers were able to use their advances as productive capital while the small producers used their advances to pay taxes or buy food, or else had to work as labourers; thus rural society became differentiated into the exploiters and the exploited (op.cit:59-60). In this way, the authors argue, merchant capital which acted as the agent of industrial capital transformed the social relations of production and commodified the conditions of production and reproduction of Hausa society.

To return to Wolf: I adopt his position that anthropologists must study historical processes before they will understand the development of social institutions but find his grounds for distinguishing between mercantile and capitalist activities untenable. He also fails to address crucial debates

within economic anthropology during recent years. On grounds of fact the argument cannot be sustained that the use of wage-labour is the sole province of industrial capitalism or that it relies on no other form of control of labour and on theoretical grounds it is inadmissible to equate a mode of production with a form of exploitation of labour held to be characteristic of that mode. Capitalism has operated without wage-labour and other modes of production have operated with it. It does not, moreover, seem appropriate to assign mercantile activity to the sphere of distribution and capitalist activities to the sphere of production, as cotton merchants in Nigeria and fish merchants⁵ in Newfoundland performed vital productive functions and were not merely takers of tribute. It may instead be true that the way labour is controlled is itself a function of the way in which capital is applied to production

Mode-of-Production analysis, which has proved difficult to apply to empirical inquiries, will not bring out the distinctive features of the supplying system used by Newmans. The concept of form of production must also be rejected in the present case. Some of its comparative value appears to be compromised by the admission that a form of production cannot be specified without reference to the social formation in which it is found and, in the Newfoundland case, it is not appropriate to focus upon the

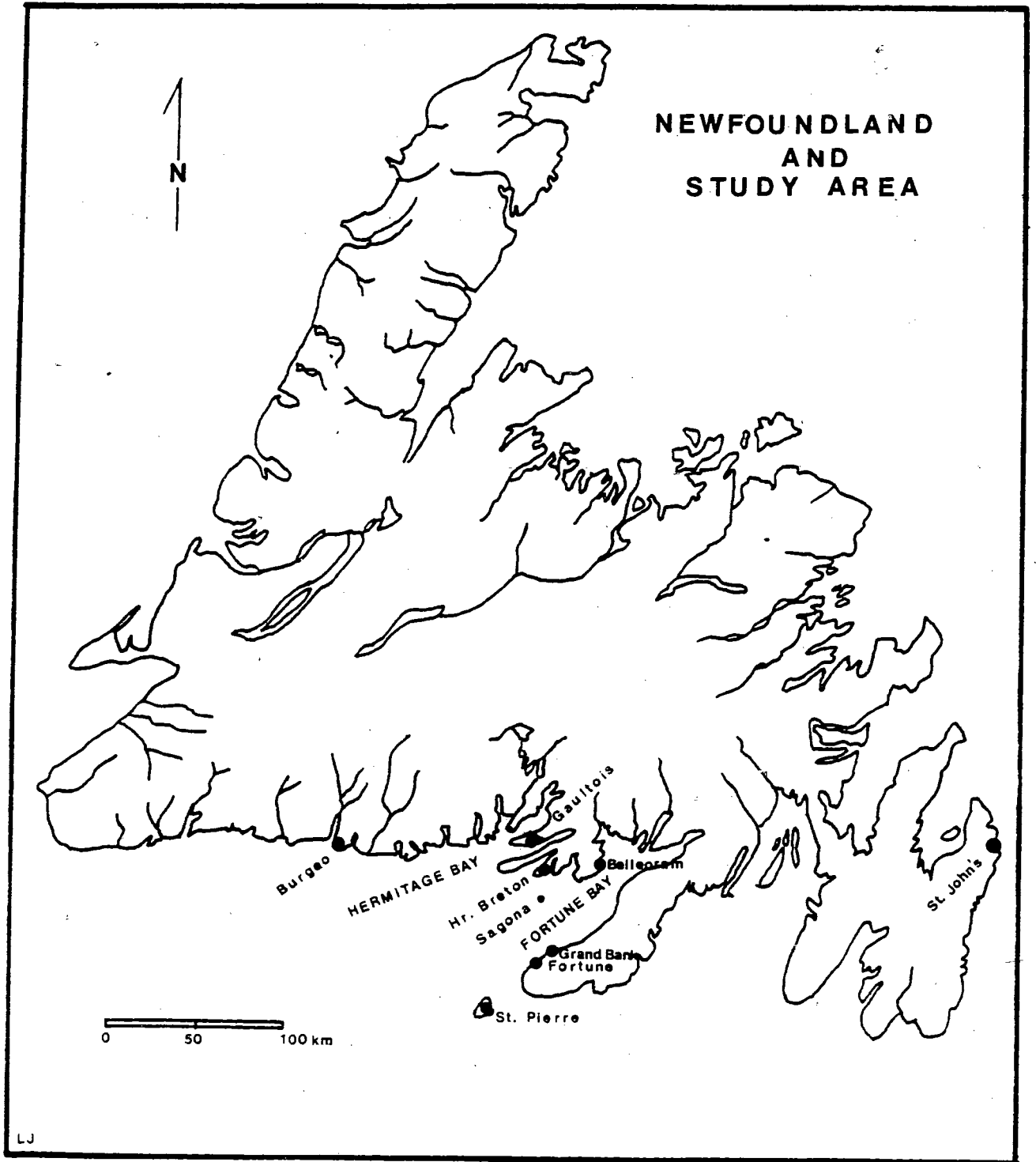
⁵. We might, for the sake of consistency, argue that they were no more merchants than a factory-owner who marketed his own products, but to do so would blunt the force of the concept of system of production; various systems of production may be possible under capitalism and not all of them will resemble cotton-production in Manchester. It may, on the other hand, be that most merchants were engaged in distribution only, but some were engaged in more than just this.

producing unit when the crucial productive decision - who is to be supplied - is taken by the merchant, who is therefore responsible for more than setting the rewards and constraints to which the small producer responds. The analytical level crucial for understanding the supplying system is that of the mercantile enterprise, not the individual productive unit.

CHAPTER 3THE INTERNATIONAL FISHERY AT NEWFOUNDLAND

European exploitation of Newfoundland's waters began early in the sixteenth century, when Portuguese, Spanish and French vessels were crossing the Atlantic annually to prosecute the summer fishery; it was later in the century that English fishermen joined them in numbers. Newfoundland fish was consumed in Europe and in later centuries new markets were created in the West Indies and Brazil (Innis, 1954:13-26; Matthews, 1968:chapter 2). Abundant as were the marine resources of Newfoundland, problems of distance, transportation and organization had to be solved before they could be exploited. Newfoundland is two thousand miles from Europe and was populated only by a small number of indigenes who had no interest in fishing, so Europeans had to commute to catch and cure the fish. This involved complicated organization in getting together men, ships, fishing gear, food and clothing each year, in organising ships' companies and in catching and curing fish, in arranging extra shipping to take the catch to market and in distributing the finished product (Matthews, 1968:20).

The nature of the staple industry - salt-cod production - gave Newfoundland a pattern of early settlement unique in North America. Other staples being extracted in other areas of the New World required settlement upon land, but fishing in Newfoundland needed only the seasonal use of the coastal strip for landing and drying the catch and for obtaining timber and



fresh water. In most cases there was only a summer fishery and so, for several centuries, it was more convenient for European fishermen to commute to Newfoundland each year than to settle there. The pattern of early settlement in Newfoundland, therefore, was small numbers of settlers, discontinuity of numbers and persons among those who did settle and scattered, isolated coastal settlement (Matthews, 1973:84).

Despite the lack of inducements to settle, a few did so. Early attempts at formal colonization were unsuccessful (Cell, 1969) but a number of colonists stayed on, some 'winter men' were left behind by fishing ships to take care of boats and premises and a number of planters¹ had settled on the east coast as early as 1630 (Matthews, 1968:121). The population grew only slowly - in 1700 there were perhaps one thousand permanent residents² and not three thousand fifty years later, though there was a native-born population in some eastern districts before 1700. Owing to such factors as war and the variable success of the fishery, early settlement tended to be impermanent and many family names found in early lists of inhabitants are no longer found in Newfoundland, or where they are there is no firm evidence of lineal descent to the present

1. Planter: "1. A settler in Newfoundland as opposed to a migratory English fisherman; merges in certain contexts with sense 2.
2. A fisherman and owner of fishing premises, boat or small vessel who, supplied by a merchant, engages a crew to work on the share system" (Story *et.al*; 1982:382).

2. For three different formulae for calculating the true permanent population see Head (1976), Handcock (1977) and Macpherson (1977).

(Seary, 1977). The persistence of the migratory fishery and the relative ease of entering or leaving the sedentary fishery made removal to Europe in bad times attractive and the transfer of persons from the migratory to the sedentary fisheries and back was so great that there was no clear distinction between the two branches in the seventeenth century (Matthews, 1968:173-81).

Portuguese and Spanish fishermen withdrew from the Newfoundland fishery by 1600, in large measure because of the predations of their competitors (Matthews, 1968:49-51), leaving France and England to vie for control. The Portuguese and Spanish withdrawal opened export markets in those countries as well as in other Mediterranean countries. French ships were fishing at Newfoundland as early as 1504 or 1506 (Innis, 1954:15; Prowse, 1895:17) and by 1578 France was sending the largest contingent of ships to Newfoundland - 150 sail in that year (Innis, 1954:39). French ships engaged in two distinct types of cod fishing and each product went to a separate market. The ships of Normandy and Brittany fished offshore on the Grand Banks and produced a heavily-salted cure for the Parisian market whereas the Basque ports engaged in the shore or 'dry'³ fishery for the nearby Spanish market. Because of English occupation of the east coast and for proximity to the Grand Banks the French fished on the south and north coasts of Newfoundland as well as

³. Wet fish was preserved by packing in brine. Dry fish was cured by exposure to sun and wind after the application of salt; though more sparing of salt than the wet cure it required tedious labour in turning the drying fish to cure it evenly and in removing it to cover in adverse weather. It also required the construction of large wooden platforms (called 'flakes') on which to cure the fish. The process of drying and curing the fish was known as 'making' the fish.

at Cape Breton and the Gulf of St. Lawrence (op.cit:45-9). Until the end of the seventeenth century the English fishermen produced a shore cure. Fishing ships were owned and frequently captained by merchants, who hired fishermen on wages. The fishing was done from small boats, not from the fishing ships; the catch was landed daily and cured by separate shore-crews, or sometimes by the fishermen. The merchant in this system acted as a capitalist who hired labour and relied on the sale of the product for his profit:

"In this system the merchant supplied virtually all the necessities - men, provisions, equipment - for his own operations and depended for his profit on the sale of his fish" (Chang, 1974:2).

Although John Cabot is credited with discovering Newfoundland for the English Crown in 1497 English fishermen made little use of Newfoundland waters before the 1570s. The early English fishing efforts were to satisfy French markets (there being little sale for the product at home) and were greatly expanded with the opening of the Spanish and Portuguese markets to foreign fish. The expansion of maritime commerce, the needs of armies, direct English governmental encouragement and a fluctuating French supply owing to religious conflicts were other factors which increased what had been a small fishery. The preference of southern European markets for a dry cure rather than the wet cure of the Bank fishery led English fishermen to rely on the shore fishery from the late sixteenth

century to the early eighteenth century⁴ (Innis, 1954:50-1; Matthews, 1968:44-5).

After the Spanish and Portuguese withdrawal France and England competed for control of the Newfoundland fishery; to an extent they also competed for export markets, though the French fishery mostly was for domestic consumption, the 153 meatless days of Catholic France affording an ample market, especially in Lent. Both England and France claimed sovereignty over the island though conflict resulted in a clear de facto division of territory. To establish her claim to sovereignty and to protect her fishery France founded a colony in 1662 at Placentia on the south coast which sent offshoots to other southern harbours including Harbour Breton. The French fishery reached its peak between 1678 and 1689 but thereafter was greatly impeded by war. Although there was sporadic raiding of English and French settlements in Newfoundland, the conflict was decided by the outcome of wars in Europe. Under the provisions of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 France acceded to English sovereignty over Newfoundland and other North American possessions but retained fishing rights on the north and west coasts of Newfoundland, the so-called French Shore or Treaty Shore. The boundaries of this territory were revised in the Treaty of Paris in 1763 and France

4. Innis (1954:50-1) ascribes the English preference for the dry cure to lack of a domestic source of salt, which Matthews (1968:41) discounts. He explains English practice by the fact that dry fish lasts twice as long as wet and that it was always 'given the preference' in European markets.

acquired an offshore base with the return of the islands of St. Pierre and Micquelon off the south coast of Newfoundland.⁵

In the seventeenth century the English fishery at Newfoundland was under the control of the West Country ports, chief among them Plymouth and Dartmouth (later Poole and Dartmouth) and it continued to expand until 1620, in which year three hundred English ships sailed for Newfoundland. Thereafter wars, piracy and poor fishing seasons much reduced activity and the English fishery fell into a long decline from which it did not recover until the 1730s (Matthews, 1968:89, 307). During most of this period the 'Western Adventurers' found themselves in command of the Newfoundland trade in large part because it was only episodically profitable and no-one else wanted it; it was, moreover, the only important trade of many West Country regions and the livelihood of thousands depended upon the Newfoundland fishery and its ancillary trades (op.cit:16-7).

The revived English fishery after 1730 differed from earlier efforts in that, faced with poor inshore catches, the visiting ships turned to the Bank fishery and left the shore fishery to the planters and to a new category of fisherman - the by-boat keeper, who put his boat 'by' in Newfoundland but commuted annually on fishing ships. In fact, passage money became an important source of income to the Banking ships which replaced

⁵. Placentia was ceded to England in 1713 and the French expelled, though colonists who took the oath of allegiance could remain (Prowse, 1895; Report of William Taverner, 1714). St. Pierre, seasonally occupied by the French before 1713, was held by England from 1713 to 1763, when France regained it. It was recaptured three times by England between 1763 and 1815, after which it remained French. The French Shore remained a thorny issue until resolved in 1904 (Thompson, 1961; Neary, 1980).

the old fishing ships (op.cit:313). From 1748 to 1775 the English fishery flourished and the resident population quadrupled, though still only numbered twelve thousand in 1775 (Mannion, 1977:5).

The growth of the English fishery at Newfoundland and the opening of Mediterranean markets in the late sixteenth century led to the exploitation of new fishing grounds in the Gulf of Maine and elsewhere in New England as early as 1603 (Innis, 1954:70-1), but the fishery developed differently in America and Newfoundland. There were early connections between the two fisheries, the same merchants engaging in both (Matthews, 1968:129), but by 1637 the Western Adventurers had found it more profitable to establish permanent fishing stations in America than to commute: in fact the same staple that retarded the settlement of Newfoundland promoted settlement in New England, where a winter fishery could be supplemented by farming and logging in the summer (Innis, 1954:76-8). American fish was of lower quality than the Newfoundland product and was sold in Virginia and the West Indies; thus Newfoundland and American fish were not competitors in most markets (Matthews, 1968:123). The New England fishery promoted shipbuilding and trade - including trade with Newfoundland - and after 1675 New England was a major supplier of Newfoundland and a haven for migrants during bad fishing years and continued so until the revolution of 1775 cut off trade between Newfoundland and the former continental colonies (Innis, 1954:78, 147; Head, 1976:111-2). The Treaty of Versailles in 1783 allowed American fishermen onto the Grand Banks and the British Newfoundland shore, though they

could not land and dry fish there. This arrangement was abrogated upon the outbreak of war in 1812 but most of the former liberties were restored by the Anglo-American convention of 1818, except that American fishermen were now limited to specific areas of the south-west, west and north coasts (Innis, 1954:210, 224-5; Neary, 1980:114-5).

The formative period of the Newfoundland population was between 1780 and 1830 when there occurred the only large European immigration the colony has enjoyed. The American and French wars disrupted the migratory fishery while creating a great demand for its product. The planter fishery (and with it the resident population) grew while the visiting fishery, notwithstanding a brief revival in the late 1780s and early 1790s, declined and virtually disappeared by 1800 (Matthews, 1968:534ff, 590). Even so, when substantial immigration did occur it tended to flow along the channels established by the migratory fishery. To a degree unprecedented in the New World the population of Newfoundland was drawn from two highly restricted sources, which were those most identified with the visiting fishery - the West Country of England, chiefly Devon and Dorset and the adjoining parts of Somerset and Hampshire, and the area within a thirty-mile radius of the city of Waterford⁶ in south-eastern Ireland (Mannion, 1977:7-8).

The passing of the migratory fishery and the growth of a resident population led to changes in the organization of the

⁶. Less because Irish merchants were engaged in the Newfoundland trade than because English fishing ships were in the habit of filling vacant berths at this, their last port of call before Newfoundland.

Newfoundland fishery and the centres from which it was controlled. The interest of the West Country merchants continued but they were joined in the late eighteenth century by 'interlopers' from Scotland, Canada and the West Indies. Merchants now preferred to deal with the resident fishermen, exchanging supplies for fish caught by others rather than fishing on their own account. The advantages of this supplying system to the merchants were that they could spread the risk involved in the outlay of money for one year over a number of years through adjustments in the price of supplies and the price given for fish (Chang, 1974:24) and that planters who used family labour could produce fish more cheaply than merchants or boatkeepers because they had not the expense of servants' wages (Innis, 1954:305-6). The advantage of supply to the planter was that he was protected from starvation in bad fishing years, though independent fishermen could do and did better in good years (Chang, 1974:24).⁷ The change to the supplying system robbed the West Country merchants of the advantages they had enjoyed under the migratory regime - namely command of the best fishermen and rooms⁸ - and now anybody with capital could enter the trade however little he knew of the fishing industry. Many of the old firms either withdrew or moved their headquarters to

7. It appears to have been in the 1790s that merchants first made strong efforts to keep specific fishermen dealing with themselves only (Chang, 1974:24).

8. Rooms: "A tract or parcel of land on the waterfront of a cove or harbour from which a fishery is conducted; the stores, sheds, 'flakes', wharves and other facilities where the catch is landed and processed and the crew housed" (Story *et.al.*, 1982:417). The singular and plural are identical.

St. John's (Chang, 1974:54). Others, such as the Newmans of Dartmouth, withdrew to the outports.⁹

With the growth of a large settled population Newfoundland progressed from the status of a fishing station to that of a colony, official discouragement notwithstanding (Chadwick, 1967:14-5). Colonial status was granted in 1824 and self-government in 1832, although de facto recognition of a permanent population had come earlier.¹⁰ Owing to the peculiar pattern of settlement and the links formed by the migratory fishery, Newfoundland lacked a natural centre capable of integrating the regions into one community until the rise of St. John's as the commercial and political capital late in the eighteenth century (Matthews, 1968:487-93). It was the rise of St. John's that made colonial politics possible and the city became the centre of political agitation (Noel, 1971:5-6). During the 1820s a reform movement grew in St. John's and popular agitation, mostly supported by the Irish Catholic element in and near the city, brought about Representative Government in 1832. This was a bicameral system of government in which executive power rested with the crown-appointed governor and legislative council rather

⁹. Outport: "A coastal settlement other than the chief port of St. John's" (op.cit:363).

¹⁰. A regular local judiciary was appointed in 1791, a customs service set up in 1764 and a year-round resident governor appointed in 1817. Naval commanders had been appointed as governors since 1729 but did not winter on the island. Justice was dispensed in summer by the notorious fishing admirals - captains of the first vessels to reach each fishing harbour in spring - until their replacement by a civil court. Justices of the peace had been appointed from among the planters since 1729 but they were powerless in summer against the fishing admirals and so were known as winter justices.

than with the elected lower house. The West Country merchants opposed home rule (Prowse, 1895:428) and the St. John's merchants sought to limit the powers of the elected assembly through their control of the upper house (Innis, 1954:388). Conflict between the two houses was continuous, the merchants resisting lower-house attempts to impose an import tax to finance public improvements, and the constitution was suspended from 1842 to 1848. Popular agitation continued and the Home government in 1855 granted Responsible Government - still a bicameral legislature but with executive power now vested in the cabinet of the lower house. Mercantile interests were for a while able to dominate through a denominationally-based system of patronage but from the 1870s onward they were challenged by a new breed¹¹ of politician-developer which favoured the development of non-marine resources (Neary, 1980:118; Hiller, 1980:128).

The fishery in the nineteenth century

With the decline of the migratory fishery and the rise of the planter fishery St. John's became the commercial centre of the island. In the first half of the nineteenth century the trade became increasingly concentrated in St. John's and most of the West Country firms withdrew. Of forty-three firms named in 1785 as the most important traders in Newfoundland thirty had disappeared by 1800 and only two are known to have survived beyond 1850 (Chang, 1974:61). Their place was taken by resident

¹¹. Though not socially to be distinguished from politicians supporting mercantile interests (c/f Kerr, 1973).

outport firms and by St. John's businesses that maintained outport branches. Late in the nineteenth century St. John's firms established hegemony over the outports as the larger resident and absentee outport businesses failed, to which the introduction of steam on the Labrador and in the seal fishery contributed (Ryan, 1984:148; McDonald, 1971). St. John's merchants found it more profitable and less risky to supply credit to small outport merchants and traders who in turn dealt with individual fishermen than to deal direct with fishermen themselves (Ryan, 1984:151) and this led to the credit pyramid so often denounced by observers (e.g., Great Britain, 1933:79-81, 102-6).

The relationship between merchants and fishermen also changed during the nineteenth century. During the American war the West Country merchants began to concentrate on supplying planters rather than on fishing on their accounts.¹² The planters hired migrant servants who worked either for a share of the catch or for wages and the ties between merchant and planter became closer to the point almost of permanence (Chang, 1974:14, 24). Antler (1975) argues that the large-planter fishery, which hired fishermen and shore crews for wages, declined between 1800 and 1840 as the fishery became less profitable and that the household-based fishery, which hired sharemen to catch the fish and used family labour to cure it, took its place. However, he notes that in the late eighteenth century only 25% of fishing operations were owned by large planters (1975:52). As units of

¹². Matthews notes that merchants had supplied planters as early as the seventeenth century (1968:177-8).

production became smaller, merchants curtailed supplies to individual planters but found it in their interest to supply as many small units as possible. In an oft-quoted passage it is claimed that in 1836 merchants ended the established custom of giving their planters enough supplies to tide them over the winter (JHA 1882; appendix pp. 615-9). This development affected the northern districts more than the southern in which a winter fishery supplemented the summer voyage (Ryan, 1980:44) and Newmans continued winter supply until 1867. Ryan also notes the presence after 1832 of a government which would grant poor relief (Ibid.).

The small-boat inshore salt-cod industry, which produced largely by family labour for export markets, dominated the Newfoundland economy throughout the nineteenth century and remained the major source of employment and income for the population well into the twentieth century (Alexander, 1973:11). In the northern districts the seal hunt and the Labrador fishery were important factors in the spread of settlement (Sanger, 1977) and supplemented earnings from the cod fishery until they declined late in the nineteenth century (McDonald, 1971). In the southern districts attempts were made late in the nineteenth century to revive the Bank fishery but met only limited success (Andersen, 1980). Salt-cod was a highly unstable foundation for an economy, though the industry remained viable until the 1880s. The boom conditions of the Napoleonic war years were not repeated in the remainder of the nineteenth century. From 1815 to 1854 the value of Newfoundland's salt-cod exports increased by an annual average of 0.9% but the population by an annual

average of 2.5%, though whether this means that labour-productivity and living standards also fell is uncertain. From 1855 to 1884 the condition of the fishery was healthier, though there were always bad years. Export value increased by an annual average of 2.1% during this period and the population by only 1.7%. It was during this healthy period, it should be noted, that Newmans felt compelled to curtail their credit dealings. The year 1884 is taken to be the year in which the traditional fishing economy reached the limit of the numbers of fishermen it could support - 60,000 fishermen were enumerated in that census year, up from 38,000 in 1857¹³ (Alexander, 1973:12-18).

Alexander has argued that the Newfoundland fishery of the nineteenth century was a traditional economy marked by little capital, simple equipment and a small scale of production and that it exhibited a crucial feature of such economies - namely that population increases as does production so that traditional economies tend to a subsistence level for all (1973:5). Control was made more difficult in this case because the sea is a common-property resource to which it is difficult to restrict access (Gordon, 1954). The traditional economy reached its peak in absolute and relative size in the 1880s (Alexander, 1973:18); from then until the end of the century the Newfoundland fishery was in a crisis. Export prices fell by 25%, export value by 36% and fishing employment fell from its 1884 peak of 60,000 fishermen to 37,000 in 1891, after which it increased only

¹³. See, however, Chapter 4 below.

slowly. Population growth was "close to stationary" and widespread emigration occurred (op.cit:24-8).

That Newfoundland's exports of salt-fish did not expand to the same extent as her population is unfortunate, as world demand for salt-fish grew during the nineteenth century while Newfoundland's share of world production declined considerably. Not only did Newfoundland fail to expand her trade but also she lost some of her most important markets to competitors. Newfoundland's main markets were the West Indies, Brazil, Spain, Portugal and Italy. The Brazilian market was the one bright spot - Newfoundland became her chief supplier after 1808 and expanded sales rapidly if unevenly, especially after 1850. The West Indian market, which absorbed the poorest grade of fish, remained fairly stable though other producers gained ground at Newfoundland's expense. Italy was the least important of the three European markets throughout the nineteenth century, though here again Newfoundland lost ground. The biggest disappointments were the Spanish and Portuguese markets. In Spain sales of Newfoundland fish fell heavily through the second half of the nineteenth century to the advantage of other exporting nations, especially Norway. Subsequently, Norwegian exports made substantial inroads into the Portuguese market, though the volume of Newfoundland's exports did not change much. Although Newfoundland's exporters waxed most indignant about French competition, the expansion of the Norway trade was more damaging to Newfoundland's European exports. As Norway's share of world markets rose Newfoundland's declined considerably until

by 1900 Norway had become Newfoundland's major competitor in the salt-fish trade¹⁴ (Ryan, 1980).

After the Treaty of Utrecht ended French claims to sovereignty over Newfoundland the French fishery was restricted to the French Shore (or west coast) and the south-coast islands of St. Pierre and Micquelon. From 1775 to 1815 war and revolution disrupted the French fishery, which was at times abandoned altogether (Matthews, 1968:499-500). After the Napoleonic wars the French government introduced a system of bounties to revive their fishing industry and to reserve the French home and colonial trade for French fish (Innis, 1954:218). These bounties were increased on several occasions and led to improved methods of fishing and a rapid extension of the Bank fishery, based at St. Pierre, after 1850. The Bank fishery, conducted with the 'bultow' or long line, required great quantities of bait-fish which were not available in the vicinity of St. Pierre and which were therefore purchased from fishermen on the south coast of Newfoundland, especially the Burin area and Fortune Bay. The bait trade also expanded the existing smuggling trade between the Newfoundland coast and the French islands (c/f Prowse, 1895; Wix, 1836). St. Pierre merchants competed with the supplying merchants in southern Newfoundland, even to the extent of giving out credit themselves in expectation of return in the form of bait-fish. The Newfoundland merchants had advanced supplies to the planters in

¹⁴. 1815-9 Newfoundland exported more than five times as much salt-cod as Norway, in 1880-9 only 11% more (Ryan, 1980:59). In 1900 Newfoundland was, however, still the world's largest single exporter (Alexander, 1973).

the expectation that it would be repaid in codfish, which it was not if the fishermen were engaged in bait-catching and trading with the French (Innis, 1954:375-9).

In theory the bait trade with the French Bankers was illegal, as no duty was paid on the export of bait-fish. An act of 1786 had forbidden the sale of bait to foreigners, though the trade continued regardless. In 1845 the colonial government, at the behest of the mercantile lobby, imposed an export tax on bait-fish which had the chief result of encouraging Newfoundland fishermen to carry their catches to St. Pierre rather than the French ships coming to collect their supplies of bait-fish as formerly; a secondary effect, arising from this new practice, was to exclude the small-boat fisherman from the bait trade. The expanding French fishery was thought by the merchants of St. John's to pose a severe threat to Newfoundland's international trade, though these fears were exaggerated and the French used as a scapegoat for market uncertainties and shortcomings in the organization of the local trade. Moreover, given the turbulent state of Newfoundland politics at the time, opposition to the French "provided an issue around which people otherwise badly divided could unite" (Neary, 1980:103). The French bait trade, though beneficial to the south coast planters, was opposed by St. John's merchants (as well as the south coast suppliers) not only because they hoped that to arrest the bait trade would be to eliminate the competition of the French fishery but also because the interests of the metropole of St. John's lay in subjugating this section of their hinterland (Neary, 1980:98-9). The trade was made illegal by the Bait Act of 1888 which was

enforced despite main resistance by the south coast fishermen who were the principal sufferers by the measure. The measure failed to halt the French fishery as, after some initial difficulties, they found other sources of bait (Thompson, 1961) and the introduction of trawling in the twentieth century ended the need for a bait supply altogether. The other remnant of the French North American empire, the Treaty Shore fishery, had declined by the end of the nineteenth century to "an affair of a dozen old brigs" (Prowse, 1895:478) but the French government clung to the territory as a bargaining counter in international negotiations. This incomplete sovereignty over the west coast, which was believed to be rich in mineral, timber and agricultural resources, was seen in St. John's as an impediment to the goal of economic diversification pursued by successive Newfoundland governments in the later decades of the nineteenth century (Neary, 1980:105). French fishing rights on the Treaty Shore were finally abrogated under the terms of the Entente Cordiale of 1904.

The fishery in Fortune Bay

Fortune Bay is a large bay situated on the south coast of Newfoundland, separated from Placentia Bay to the east by the Burin Peninsula and from Hermitage Bay to the west by the Connaigre Peninsula. From the tip of the Burin Peninsula to Pass Island, at the entrance to Hermitage Bay, is 56 kilometers and the bay extends 105 kilometers inland. It is deeply indented with numerous smaller bays and contains several islands, the principal ones being Sagona, Brunette, St. Pierre

and Micquelon. The water reaches a depth of 100 fathoms and is deep up to the shore (Smallwood, 1984:340). The climate is similar to that of St. John's and the bay's southerly location protects it from invasion by sea-ice, unlike the northern parts of the island. The deeper reaches of the bay are not well suited for cod-fishing (which is better on the islands and outer headlands) though these areas were formerly visited by large shoals of herring. Land resources are marginal, salmon localised and not abundant, though lobster is widespread. Proximity to the Grand Banks made Fortune Bay a centre of the deep-sea fishery (Newfoundland, 1954).

The history of early European exploitation of Fortune Bay is uncertain. The name Fortuna appears on Basque or Portuguese maps as early as 1505 (Smallwood, 1984:340) and explorer Jacques Cartier encountered French fishing ships at St. Pierre in 1536 (Innis, 1954:24). However, maps dating from before 1671 are noticeably vague about the topography of the south coast west of Placentia Bay, frequently showing a straight line between St. Lawrence and Port aux Basques; St. Pierre alone is marked. The French established the first known settlements in Fortune Bay by 1687 though they appear to have been abandoned by 1704, Havre Bertrande among them.¹⁵ It has been concluded that the south

15. French census material from Censuses of Canada, 1665-1871, Statistics of Canada, Ottawa, 1876; and from Ressencement de Toute La Colonie... pur l'anne 1693, Recensement Des Habitans...1704, Recencement des Matelot Pecheurs...pour l'anne 1701, Recensement des Famillies de La Colonie...en 1705 (also 1710), Rolle des gens 1671 (also 1673) - all Centre for Newfoundland Studies, xerox.

coast, including Fortune Bay, was little exploited by the French although it formed part of their territory (Head, 1976:159).

Taverner in 1714 reported favourable prospects for English settlement in and exploitation of Fortune Bay but the English made little use of the area from 1713 to 1763. Almost nothing, indeed, is known of Fortune Bay during this period as fishing admirals appear not to have submitted reports (Dollimont, 1968:1). Captain Cook, travelling the south coast in 1765, found only a handful of sites occupied - seven in Fortune Bay including Harbour Breton. English merchants had been displaced from St. Pierre in 1763 under the terms of the Treaty of Paris and some had relocated elsewhere in Fortune Bay (Whiteley, 1975). Since 1763 settlement has been continuous.

Thornton (1977) has drawn attention to the importance of trade, rather than productive activities, in the settlement of North America and finds this especially true of settlement in Newfoundland:

"Settlement takes place and population expands in fairly direct proportion to the avenues of trade open to the colonists. In Newfoundland, perhaps more than in any other part of North America, it was the commercial, or more specifically the mercantile, organization that created and fashioned initial settlement" (1977:153)

Dollimont writes that the first recorded English settlements in Fortune Bay were near the mercantile centre of Harbour Breton and that an increase in the bay's population during the 1780s coincided with the establishment of the Newmans on the south coast (1968:2-3).

Fortune Bay had a small resident anglophone population by 1763, how small being difficult to determine owing to the

presence of migratory fishermen in summer and transient men-servants in the winter, few of whom can be classed as permanent residents. A safe estimate would be that from 1763 to 1786 the permanent, year-round settled population of Fortune Bay did not exceed one hundred and we may entertain doubts of the permanence of some of these.¹⁶ From 1786 to 1809 the number of families wintering in Fortune Bay fluctuated between 57 and 290 (Dollimont, 1968:table 1). No census was taken between the last fishery return in 1809 and the first Newfoundland governmental census in 1836,¹⁷ when the number of families enumerated was 454 and the total population was 3,000. Though it is usually considered that the population of this district was later to develop than the populations of the eastern and northern districts, evidence from later genealogical sources and from a list of those dealing with Holdsworth Newman (a relative of the principals of Newman and Company, to whom he sold out a few years later) suggest that the foundations of the later settled population were laid in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁸ The origins of the early inhabitants are hard to ascertain as many of their surnames are from more than one

¹⁶. See note 2, this chapter.

¹⁷. In 1836 Fortune Bay Electoral District embraced virtually all the south coast west of Placentia Bay. The southwest coast comprised Burgeo-La Poile District in later censuses. Two of the chief towns of Fortune Bay, Fortune and Grand Bank, were, however, in Burin District throughout. The 1836 number of families quoted here is in fact the number of dwelling houses (see Census of Newfoundland, 1836).

¹⁸. See Newman papers, PANL, Little Bay ledger, 1790-1. Tracing families from later parish records is bedeviled by the persistence of immigration from the same source areas - the same surname cannot be taken as evidence of kinship.

country (c/f Seary, 1977), but an English majority with Channel Island and Irish contributions is most likely, with perhaps a few French settlers. Passengers from England and Jersey are noted in the fishery returns from 1766 to 1809 and from Ireland from 1786 to 1790, though there were Irish Catholic settlers earlier than this (Dollimont, 1968:19-21). There is evidence of a movement of population from the longer-settled areas of the east coast into Fortune Bay in the 1790s (Staveley, 1977; Head, 1976) in addition to original immigration from Europe.

Little can be said about the nature of economic activity or about the distribution of population in Fortune Bay in the late eighteenth century. In 1765 Cook recorded settlement at only seven places in the bay, including Harbour Breton, Fortune and Grand Bank (Whiteley, 1975) and the only merchants were Clark and Young at Harbour Breton. Later in the century another merchant operated in the bay but he was insolvent in 1799 (Chang, 1974:42-62). Holdsworth Newman bought the premises of one Parsons at Little Bay West, a few miles from Harbour Breton, in 1790 and Newman & Company acquired them a few years later after his insolvency. Merchants from Jersey were located in the bay as early as 1780 (Dollimont, 1968:11). We cannot from this evidence be sure that the spread of population followed mercantile establishment and not the reverse and it is pertinent to note the observation of a magistrate who toured the bay in 1811 and recorded that the planters were:

"...not constant dealers in any Establish'd employ here getting their Supplys from Different Stores. Sometimes from Halifax Traders or Coasting Vessels belonging to this Island" (Court Records, PANL, 5/1/c/1, Fortune Bay Circuit, 1802-19).

Evidence drawn from the fishery returns (Dollimont, 1968:table 1) does not suggest that an abundance of cod can have been responsible for the spread of permanent settlement in Fortune Bay in the late eighteenth century. The median catch for seventeen years between 1763 and 1809 was only 217 quintals¹⁹ per boat, no better than that recorded for the older parts of the island, which were believed overfished by that time; for five of the seventeen years for which statistics are available the median catch fell below the 'saving' minimum of 200 quintals per boat (c/f Head, 1976:68). These catches are lower than one would expect of a district which offered a winter as well as a summer fishery.²⁰ Salmon was exploited before 1800 but has never been abundant in Fortune Bay. A herring fishery was noted in 1797 but was said to be prosecuted mainly by visiting boats (op.cit:226). It may be noted that a "considerable contraband trade" was carried on between Newfoundland and St. Pierre after 1763 (Prowse, 1895:568).

From earliest settlement the English fishery in Fortune Bay was a resident shore fishery and the majority of fish was caught by the inhabitants rather than by fishing ships. Exceptions were a few years in the late eighteenth century when the Bank

19. A quintal is 112 lbs. (unless otherwise stated).

20. The extent of a winter fishery in Fortune Bay at this time and its importance in promoting year-round settlement is questionable if Holdsworth Newmans trade was representative. The quantity of cod he bought in the winter of 1790-1 could have been caught by a single large boat and the value of timber and furs he bought was also small. It is possible that Mannion's (1977:265) contention that "the growth of the bait trade was of vital importance in the spread of settlement along the south coast" may have been equally applicable to the founding of settlement there. Boat-building by the winter inhabitants was also noted.

fishery was at its height and from the late nineteenth century when the Bank fishery was revived and the Fortune Bay ports became its centre. The shore fishery being the more important branch in the eighteenth century, the majority of the summer population wintered in the bay (Dollimont, 1968:table 1).

Dollimont writes that "the general tendency from the beginning was to use boats that employed approximately five men" but he notes the presence of smaller boats which became more numerous when wars cut off the supply of servants (1968:33). A commentator in 1811 also noted "some fishing in boats and others in skiffs single handed" and we know from court records that servants were employed for wages in the fishery in the early nineteenth century.

From 1809 when the fishery returns cease to 1836 when the first government census was conducted there is an absence of records of the population and fishery of Fortune Bay. In 1836 the population was well established and more than two dozen communities had been settled; the only sizeable movement of population thereafter occurred from the 1860s to the 1880s into the sparsely-peopled north-east corner of the Bay, close to the major herring-fishing area. From census information it appears that the Fortune Bay fishery continued to be a predominantly small-boat inshore fishery, though some fishermen had larger boats and employed fishing servants. Although the majority of the population was of English Protestant descent there was a Catholic minority in the Bay - Irish Catholics had been noted in Fortune Bay as early as 1763 and conversions of Protestants to Catholicism were known to have occurred in the 1790s (Byrne,

1984). The Catholic population was fairly widespread during the nineteenth century but tended to concentrate in settlements with a Catholic majority or large minority.

I have noted the introduction of small fishing boats to Fortune Bay before 1800 and that by 1836 the Fortune Bay fishery was predominantly a small-boat affair - at Harbour Breton in 1836 the census recorded no large boats. It is probable that the 1830s marked the nadir of the large-boat fishery as there is evidence of their being rather more abundant in the 1840s and 1850s, though small boats still predominated. A visitor in 1850 recorded of the fishery at Harbour Breton that "I could only hear of there being three large boats and nine punts, the former employing about twelve and the latter about fifteen men" (JHA, 1851:appendix p. 142). Schooners were even less abundant, Canning in 1856 recording none except at Grand Bank and Fortune (JHA, 1857:appendix p. 372). We should however note that the larger boats, with their bigger crews, accounted for a higher proportion of fishermen than their numbers would suggest. Regrettably, no observer saw fit to record the basis on which the boats were crewed, though the evidence is that large boats were crewed by hired servants rather than by family labour, servants being both local men and English youngsters.²¹ Indeed,

21. Mountain (1857:9) writes of the large-boat fishery in Fortune Bay:

"There is still another class of fisherman, namely those who, having gained a small capital, embark on a larger scale. They keep a decked boat besides the skiffs; and as soon as the fishery fails on their own immediate shore, they go off with a crew of two or three servants to any part of the island where they hear of fish and returning after an absence of a month or so, unload their cargoes to be 'made' i.e., dried by the women and children and again set sail on

given the very high rate of emigration among young men (see below, Chapter 4), enough sons to crew a large boat would not have been available in most cases. Kinship ties were sometimes used to purchase (and presumably therefore to operate) boats; about one quarter of the schooners registered during the study period were in the names of more than one owner of the same surname, though the remainder (three quarters) had a single owner and this proportion is quite constant regardless of the size of the vessel. The south coast, including Fortune Bay, is the only area of Newfoundland in which there is a winter as well as a summer cod-fishery, though the extent of this fishery must be qualified - it seems that, then as now, winter fishing was largely confined to owners of decked boats and small-boat men could participate only in unusually mild weather.

This conclusion also casts doubt upon the antiquity of the winter fishery in Fortune Bay, as the use of large boats was comparatively late in developing there. Wix states that the Fortune Bay fishery was suspended from Christmas to spring, "the fishery generally failing for a season, they come ashore and make boats, etc." (1836:70). Mountain writes that "after a time

another trip. The boats are, for the most part, thirty or forty tons burden and can be worked by two hands, though they usually carry four when engaged in fishing...they are seldom able to procure good tackling or sufficient gear." Mountain adds that these boats had, in recent years, gone to the Western Shore (meaning the south-west coast). Nielsen, writing forty years later, referred to:

"...the better-to-do fishermen and planters who work with shipped crews and are in possession of crafts and expensive gear such as cod-traps, seines, etc." (Newfoundland, Department of Fisheries, 1895:51).

Nielsen adds that these fishermen were "the only ones to deal direct with merchants" (*Ibid.*).

the fishery in these parts was extended to the winter" and ascribes the winter fishery to the large boats only (1857:5-9). Other contemporary observers differ on whether there was a winter fishery at Harbour Breton (JHA, 1863:394-7) or was not (JHA, 1857:91-2) or whether only some men engaged in it (JHA, 1869:516). These differences involve definitions of winter as well as matters of fact; Newmans, for instance, considered all fish caught from September to June to be winter fish. Some clues to the extent of a winter fishery in 1847-9 can be gleaned from the diary of T.H. Newman (PANL, Newman papers). Exceptionally mild weather allowed "fishing without interruption" even in January and February but rough weather prevented fishing in April even though fish were plentiful. Newmans were, however, complaining of the decline of the winter fishery at Harbour Breton as early as 1861 and of its disappearance by 1880.

Herring was the other major marine resource exploited by Fortune Bay fishermen and its use for food was far less important than its use for bait. In the latter capacity it was used by the planters themselves but, more importantly, it was sold to the Bank fishing vessels of other nations which were forbidden to catch such bait for themselves within territorial waters. Herring for food was shipped by Newmans to the West Indies and by Halifax traders via Nova Scotia to the United States, where it went largely to feed slaves; this trade ceased

with the end of the Civil War.²² The supply of bait by Fortune Bay planters to the French Banking fleet based at St. Pierre was evidently thriving by the time of the visit of Archdeacon Wix, who found French provisions, clothing and household articles in every house he visited in Fortune Bay (1836:157). The 'French trade', as it was known, was in theory illegal by Acts of the Newfoundland legislature but no serious attempts were made to enforce these provisions until the 1880s (Smallwood, 1984:4). To the planters it was a lucrative supplement to earnings from the cod-fishery - it was estimated by one observer to have been worth L55,000 per annum which, if true, means that the value of herring rivalled that of cod to Fortune Bay planters (JHA, 1857, Report of John Canning). The French trade involved planters in relations with merchants in the French islands, where prices were said to be 60 or 70% cheaper than those charged by English merchants.²³

The French Trade was brief but intensive in its season, the peak whereof was the second half of April when the first French Bankers of the year arrived at St. Pierre and sought bait for their first fishing voyage; at this time herring fetched from 12 to 15 Francs per barrel though later the price fell to as little

22. JHA, 1857:98-105, 356ff. An act of 1849 allowed duty-free export of bait and herring to other British colonies and this was followed by a rapid increase in the herring trade (Innis, 1954:405).

23. Widely quoted but doubtless exaggerated. Comparing the prices Newmans charged for two staples - flour and pork - in 1856 with what Canning says these two items cost in St. Pierre the difference in price is only ten to fifteen per cent.

as one Franc.²⁴ In June caplin would be sold for bait at 6 or 7 Francs per barrel, after which in July and August herring were hauled once again. It was claimed that one thousand persons in Fortune Bay were engaged in the French trade and that it formed half the year's voyage for those engaged in it; indeed, in some areas (such as Belleoram) there was no other trade.²⁵ At Sagona Island, close to Harbour Breton, one Benjamin Keeper (for Keeping):

"...a very respectable planter resident at Sagona says that on the 23rd and 24th of June he sold L90 worth of herring...and since then L100 worth, the catch of two small and one large boat. He claims that the Sagona (cod) fishery will yield two hundred quintals per man, but notwithstanding Mr. Keeper states that the herring fishery pays him best and he is one of those well equipped for the purpose" (JHA, 1857, Canning's report).

The same report claims that St. Pierre took annually ten thousand quintals of Newfoundland fish, though most of it came from Burin rather than from Fortune Bay District.

The French trade, then, was a traditional source of income for Fortune Bay fishermen and perhaps a major source of their income for a minority.²⁶ During the second half of the nineteenth century an additional source of income presented itself in the form of the American Banking fleet, allowed access

24. L1 Sterling = 26 Francs. A barrel was 200 lbs.

25. JHA, 1957, Canning's report; JHA, 1862, Gaden's and Hamilton's reports; JHA, 1866, p. 651; JHA, 1881 and 1885, Philip Hubert's reports.

26. The herring fishery provided only a supplement to the incomes of most. Even when the American bait trade was at its height, Newmans claimed that few could make a living solely from herring (PANL, Newman papers, letter to J.O. Fraser, St. John's, 6th February, 1879).

to Newfoundland waters under the Reciprocity Treaty of 1854, though rare visitors to southern Newfoundland before the 1860s (Reeves, 1971:13). The American bait trade led to a number of technological innovations and to an increase in the class of large planters. Access to the American bait fishery both required and permitted the acquisition of schooners and herring seines - the former because the largest accumulations of bait fish occurred in sparsely-populated regions of the Bay and the latter because the Americans preferred fresh to salt-bait; herring could be kept alive in seines as they could not in nets (Innis, 1954:329-30). The season for the American bait-trade was from December to February, which did not conflict with the French trade though it did interfere with the winter cod fishery (JHA, 1867, Heysham's report).

The advantage of the American bait fishery to the planter was not only that it was a valuable income supplement but also that it paid in cash, though American ships also did some trading. In 1866 it was reported that the American ships purchased not less than 25,000 barrels of herring the previous year and that the practice was leading to destruction of the herring stocks. As the purchasers would take only one barrel out of every four or five caught, the resultant dumping injured the cod fishery (JHA, Birkett's report). Regulations had already been passed to protect the herring stocks, though they seem not to have been strictly enforced and further regulations, with a fishery patrol to enforce them, were enacted in 1878 (Dollimont, 1968:58-9). By 1883 it was reported that herring

were no longer to be found in their old spawning grounds (JHA, 1883, Hubert's report).

Whereas large fishing boats had been few in Fortune Bay before the arrival of the Americans, they became common thereafter: from 1865 to 1898 no fewer than 269 schooners were registered to Fortune Bay owners, while in neighboring Hermitage Bay, where herring were not available, the corresponding number was eighteen. A contemporary ascribed this phenomenon to the American bait fishery:

"The herring fishery has done wonders for these localities since I last visited them thirteen years ago. There are now ten schooners to one at that time. The 'old fishing boat' with a goodly coat of coal tar is now exchanged for the smash schooner with every colour and variety of paint" (JHA, 1873:appendix, p. 793).

Details of the numbers and tonnage of schooners registered to Fortune and Hermitage Bay owners from 1855 to 1898 are given in table 1 below.

A distinction must be made between boats owned by fishermen and those owned by others²⁷ as they differed in size and in means of acquisition,²⁸ though most vessels in both cases had single owners. Most small schooners (under 30 tons) were owned by fishermen and they comprised the majority of fisherman-owned schooners; ownership of larger vessels was quite evenly divided between fishermen and others. Most fisherman-owned schooners

27. Where occupation of owners was stated 68% were fishermen or planters, 19% merchants or traders, 11% mariners or master mariners and 1% others. Not all schooners, therefore, were used for fishing.

28. Who built the vessels was not stated before 1877. Of vessels built 1855-76 20% were built abroad and 80% locally - i.e., there was a traditional movement of schooners from Nova Scotia to Newfoundland.

TABLE 1

Numbers and tonnage of schooners registered to Fortune and Hermitage Bay owners by quinquennia, 1855-98

	<u>Numbers registered</u>	<u>Tonnage</u>		
		<u>15-29 tons</u>	<u>30-44 tons</u>	<u>45 tons & up</u>
1855-9	6	4	2	-
1860-4	19	13	6	-
1865-9	51	39	11	1
1870-4	33	20	12	1
1875-9	31	23	5	1
1880-4	32	11	8	10
1885-9	85	36	14	32
1890-4	28	11	10	5
1895-8	31	10	5	11
	<u>316</u>	<u>167</u>	<u>73</u>	<u>61</u>

Source: Shipping registers, 1855-98, Public Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador.

- Notes:
- (a) In 15 cases, tonnage not given.
 - (b) I have included transfers of ownership in the above totals, so that the same vessel may be counted more than once if it changed hands.
 - (c) I have included vessels for which there is no record of first registration if, upon transfer of ownership, the date of first registration is given.
 - (d) Have included Fortune and Grand Bank, though in Burin District. Place of residence not given before 1855 and the records for 1899 are missing.

were self-built (66%), though there are signs of a small boat-building industry, 14% of fisherman-owned schooners being purpose-built.²⁹ The remaining twenty per cent of fisherman-owned schooners were bought second-hand, most of them from other Fortune Bay fishermen. Other owners were far less likely than fishermen to build their own schooners (30%) and more likely to have them built (29%) or to buy them second-hand (26%), most second-hand vessels being bought from Nova Scotia. A slight majority of schooner-owners lived in and near Fortune and Grand Bank on the east side of the bay and there was another, smaller, concentration of schooners in the vicinity of Belleoram. Schooners became less frequent as one moved north and west in Fortune Bay and were fewer still in Hermitage Bay. At Harbour Breton only thirteen schooners were registered in forty-four years, seven of the vessels being registered to Newmans.

The shipping registers show the growth of a class of large planter, especially after 1865 and especially in the Fortune-Grand Bank area and in the herring-catching region of the north-east of the bay. This group continued to expand, though at a somewhat reduced rate, throughout the study period. There also arose a class of local merchants, traders and vessel-owners with slightly larger vessels, most of them bought second-hand, which were used in coastal carrying rather than in fishing. After 1880 the large-vessel fleet grew, owned about equally by fishermen and others, and this period coincides with the rise of

²⁹. I have assumed to be purpose-built those vessels built other than by their owners in the year that they were first registered - in other words, those not operated by their builders.

the domestic Bank fishing industry. This spate of vessel-acquisition did little to create a local boat-building industry: most schooners were either built by their owners or bought second-hand, frequently from abroad.

As newer, larger vessels were adopted in the fishery during the period, so were new methods of catching fish. One was the use of herring-seines in place of nets,³⁰ the advantage of seines being that bait fish could be preserved alive in the water by this method. There were also innovations in the cod-fishery. One was the bultow or longline, introduced by French fishermen in the 1850s and adopted by Newfoundland fishermen in the 1860s (JHA, 1863:appendix p. 478). The cod-trap has not found favour in the water and sea-bottom conditions of the south coast (Chiaramonte, 1970), but references in the Newman papers and in censuses show that experiments were conducted with it. A more successful innovation was the cod-net; it was stated in 1894 (Newfoundland, Department of Fisheries, 1895) that only one cod-trap was in use in Fortune Bay but that the use of nets was increasing annually. More fish was now caught this way than by hook-and-line, the traditional catching method in those waters and the only one used by small operators. All these innovations were believed to have profited the large fisherman at the expense of his poorer neighbor.³¹ At Harbour Breton - though

³⁰. Seines were only used "since foreigners required the herring for bait" (JHA, 1863:appendix p. 478).

³¹. JHA 1867, Gaden's report; JHA, 1878 Erskine's report; JHA, 1863, petition of Stephen Cluett and others; Court records, PANL, 5/2/c/1 box 1, 1865; Newfoundland, Department of Fisheries, 1895.

not elsewhere - the fishermen agreed to ban the use of the bultow and seine (JHA, 1874:appendix p. 782).

Foreign fisheries on the Grand Banks provided employment and income to south coast fishermen as well as income from self-employment in the bait trade. Especially prized was a berth on an American vessel, not only because of the high wages³² but also because the successful fisherman could rise to command and whole or partial ownership of his own vessel (Fudge, 1960:709; Dominix, 1970:11; Evans, 1981:6-7). South coast fishermen also worked on Nova Scotian vessels (Innis, 1954:333) and on French Bankers. In 1876 the Newfoundland government introduced a number of measures designed to stimulate the growth of a domestic Bank fishing industry, which became especially concentrated in Fortune Bay (Ryan, 1984:146). The Newfoundland Bank fishery is poorly documented though it appears upon available evidence that larger Bank fishing schooners were operated by merchants; the acquisition of a smaller Banking schooner either preceded or followed entry into small trading ventures as it made economic sense to use the vessel in the coasting trade when it was not fishing (Andersen, 1980). Fishing hands on the Bankers were usually paid a share of the value of the catch, though difficulties in forming crews could lead to wages being offered (Andersen, 1978; Fudge, 1960:16). Fish landed by Newfoundland Bankers was made by women who were hired casually and paid 25c per quintal (Dominix, 1970:2).

³². In 1889 it was claimed that wages per season on Massachusetts vessels were \$400, on Nova Scotian vessels \$275, but on Newfoundland vessels the pay "does not average \$150", Evening Telegram, St. John's, 5th September.

The bait trade, especially that to the French fleet at St. Pierre, caused conflict between the Newfoundland government and the south coast fishermen (Neary, 1980:99). Ostensibly incensed by the bounties the French government offered to their fishermen, the local legislature enacted the Bait Act of 1888 which greatly restricted the sale of bait to the French fleet. The Bait Act, which has been dubbed "Water Street's economic panacea" (Hiller, 1980:133), was unsuccessful in its aim of restricting the French fishery as, after some initial inconvenience, sources of bait were found on the French Shore. The main sufferers by the measure were the fishermen of the south coast, who resisted the enforcement of the act by force of arms. After 1900 the French and American fishing fleets turned increasingly to the use of the otter trawl, which obviated the need for bait.

Harbour Breton

The French from Placentia were the first recorded occupants of Harbour Breton (which they called Havre Bertrande).³³ Occupation of the site is recorded in censuses of 1687, 1691 and 1693 but not in later censuses. In 1687 there were 36 inhabitants - one unmarried man and thirty-five servants - occupying one house and a church; in 1691 there was one married man but no wives, children or servants recorded; in 1693 one Pierre Germy lived at Havre Bertrande.³⁴ There are no further

³³. Families named Bertrand were recorded at Placentia during this period.

³⁴. For a list of French census, see note 15, this chapter.

reference to either Havre Bertrande or Gerny in the French censuses. Captain Taverner, exploring the coast on behalf of the Imperial government in 1718, found:

"Harbour Breton³⁵ is very Rugged Mountainous Land, in that harbour is a good Beech, a planters house and stage, the French reporting about Twenty years since they used to fish there in the Months of February, March and April, in which time they would take a 100 Quintls of fish p. boat but in the Times of the Warr left it" (Report of Captain Taverner, 1718:Centre for Newfoundland Studies, xerox).

This evidence suggests seasonal occupation by French fishermen during the 1680s and 1690s, perhaps using Placentia as a base. Whether English fishermen used the site between 1718 and 1763 is unknown, though the latter date is certain. Captain Cook, circumnavigating the island in 1765, found English merchants recently displaced from St. Pierre under the Treaty of Paris in 1763 established at Harbour Breton, which Cook accounted "the principal Harbour in Fortune Bay and the only one at present frequented by shipping" (Head, 1976:162). The emphasis here is upon the fine natural harbour, not the settlement. Cook mentions:

"Thomson's Beach³⁶ part of which is occupied by Messrs Clark and Young of Poole, whereon they lately built some good Buildings and made other improvements, is the best situated for carrying on a Fishery, or of any place on the No. side of Fortune Bay" (Ibid.).

35. This is the earliest record I have found of the name Harbour Breton and one wonders if it arose from Taverner anglicizing the French pronunciation of Havre Bertrande.

36. The name is still in use and its use by Cook may suggest use by visiting English fishermen before 1763. Matthews traces Thomsons as captains and ship owners in the West Country; on the other hand, one of Clark and Youngs own captains was named Thomson (Maritime History Archives, surname file Thomson). The beach is where Newmans established themselves, and the fishplant is there today.

Some information about the tiny settlement around the merchants' rooms comes from the 1763 fisheries report. There were 116 summer visitors but the resident population is listed as only thirty persons, half of them men-servants and the rest five masters, seven children and three mistresses. This suggests only three families and a true resident population not above thirteen persons (see note 2, this chapter). All the families except for one master and one servant had wintered on the island. There were seven Irish Catholics - three men, one woman and three children. After 1763 Harbour Breton was included with other settlements in the fisheries reports (Dollimont, 1968:table 1).

Merchants Clark and Young are included in a 1785 list of the most important traders in Newfoundland and Chang (1974:45) classes them (and the Newmans at that time) in a group of half a dozen firms below the very largest merchants in the Newfoundland trade. Clarks were involved in the Newfoundland trade in 1700 and Youngs in 1636 (op.cit:46), though it is unclear when the partnership was formed; both families are associated with Poole. Clark and Young are recorded at both Harbour Breton and St. Pierre in 1763 and probably the partners were Samuel Clark senior (d.1777) and William Young. By 1779 they had taken in an extra partner and were Clarke, Waldron and Young; when this partnership was dissolved in 1796 the partners were Samuel and John Clark, J. Waldron, Samuel Young and Thomas Youngbird. From 1798 to 1801 they traded as Clark and Waldron, in 1803 as Samuel and John Clark and from 1806 onward as Clark and Company (Maritime History Archives, surname files for Clark and Young).

The Clarks' tenure at Harbour Breton was longer than has been supposed. Chang (1974:62) suggests that the firm died out after the 1780s, its property being acquired by Spurrier. Fuller archival evidence than was available to Chang shows, however, that although Spurrier acquired their Placentia Bay properties the Clarks operated at Harbour Breton and in Hermitage Bay well into the nineteenth century, though they no longer engaged in the cod fishery. A letter dated 1803 from Samuel and John Clark of Harbour Briton (sic.), merchants, states that:

"For many years in part and now solely the concern in which we are engaged has been a salmon fishery... (in Hermitage Bay)...supplies and people coming from Great Britain" (Court records, PANL, 5/1/c/1, Fortune Bay circuit, 1802-1819, p. 29).

Samuel Clark was mayor of Poole in 1812, which suggests removal from Newfoundland in the previous nine years, but the firm continued to be represented by agents at Harbour Breton as late as 1819 and was sending ships to Newfoundland in 1821. The firm withdrew from the Newfoundland trade between 1820 and 1830, perhaps in 1822 when they sold their Hermitage Bay properties to Newmans (Ibid.). The Clarks' tenure at Harbour Breton therefore overlapped with that of the Newmans.

The Newman family was established in Dartmouth, Devon by the end of the fourteenth century as importers and exporters and engaged in the fish and wine trades during the sixteenth century, including fishing on their own account at Newfoundland in 1565; Newmans were also engaged in shipping (Newman & Company, 1951). Chang writes:

"By the middle of the seventeenth century, the Newman family and the Newfoundland fishery had become inseparable. They had formed connections in the ports of Spain and Portugal where Newfoundland fish found its best markets, and had founded at least seasonal fishing stations in Newfoundland" (1974:87).

In the eighteenth century various members of the family traded in partnership with each other and with others as well as on their own accounts; it has, indeed, been said that the family firm comprised more a trading bloc than a company (MHG, 1973). In 1780 three Newman brothers formed Robert Newman & Company, which operated in the St. John's area, and a fourth brother, unconnected with this company, entered the wine trade in Portugal. In five years the partners of Robert Newman & Company recouped their initial investments and after twenty years they were wealthy. Robert Newman & Company was renamed Newman & Company sometime after 1806. In 1783 one of the partners went to London and opened the house of Newman & Land, in 1803 renamed Newman, Hunt & Company which became the main family house and under which name they still trade. The Portuguese wine trade was conducted under the name of Hunt, Roope, Teague & Company (Newman & Company, 1951; Newman papers, PANL, letter to the Honourable A.W. Harvey, St. John's, 21st December, 1894).

In their size and in their family connections to Portugal - Newfoundland's largest fish market - the Newmans had advantages over other firms and they were able to expand their operations in the late eighteenth century, a time when other West Country merchants were declining or failing altogether. Their success also resulted from changing the basis of their operations, away from fishing on their own account to supplying the planters, to

which end they moved from St. John's to the south coast, though retaining a St. John's office until the 1860s. In 1784 they opened a depot at St. Lawrence in Placentia Bay, expanding to Little Bay West, near Harbour Breton in the 1790s, to Harbour Breton itself by 1812, to Gaultois in Hermitage Bay by 1826 (Rose, n/d) and to Burgeo on the south-west coast before 1840; they also operated other, smaller premises. The move to the south coast and the ensuing expansion taxed the firms resources and gave them a healthy fear of over-extending their credit (Chang, 1974:111). Their major Newfoundland stations were run by salaried agents not, as with most other merchants in the Newfoundland trade, by managing partners (op.cit:207).

The Newmans advanced in social position by their late eighteenth century expansion. They were already well-known merchants in Dartmouth according to Matthews: "In Dartmouth the Holdsworth and Newman families almost monopolised all maritime commerce for fifty years and held the prosperity of South Devon in their hands" (1984:139). The wealth obtained in the two decades after 1780 enabled them to transcend the status of merchant and to mingle successfully with the gentry, to which the next generation, born to manor houses and large estates, belonged by birth. The Newmans acquired large land and property holdings and during the nineteenth century produced a baronet, at least one Member of Parliament and several directors and one governor of the Bank of England (Chang, 1974:215-6; Newman & Company, 1951). Notwithstanding Dartmouth's long association with Dissent, they were Anglican.

The Newmans, then, did little fishing on their own account after the mid-eighteenth century, though they were still large employers of labour on their rooms and vessels. At each of their principal stations they maintained warehouses for storing provisions and fish, flakes and stages for curing fish, a retail shop, offices and a number of craft shops as well as accommodations for their workers and a fleet of coastal schooners used for collecting fish and distributing supplies to the harbours near their stations. Owing to the small population of the south coast in earlier years, enough labour could not be found locally and most of their workers were imported from England for terms of one or more years, paid a fixed wage and found in their keep. Systems of personalized labour relations such as this evolved elsewhere in North America under similar labour-supply conditions (c/f Pentland, 1981). Late in the nineteenth century Newmans recruited fewer workers from England and drew increasingly upon the resident population. Provisions, both for the workers and the planters, were also imported from England, with North America becoming an important supplier late in the nineteenth century. Newmans did not found Harbour Breton but it was from their operations that the town grew and from their establishment that it gained importance (Tocque, 1878). It was never a prime inshore fishing spot but rather a mercantile depot and for that reason became a centre for governmental services to the region. It has aptly been called an early company town (Newfoundland, 1954:15).

CHAPTER 4HARBOUR BRETON, 1850-99

In this chapter I shall examine certain aspects of the social structure of Harbour Breton, the site of Newmans' chief depot, during the period under study. The topics to be examined - sources of labour, occupational distribution and social differentiation - are all relevant to the nature and persistence of the supplying system. A merchant had to secure both a supply of workers for hire and a sufficient number of fishermen to make his business worthwhile, so local labour-supply conditions affected his scale and method of operation. Conversely, the merchant's demand for labour and his willingness to supply planters largely defined the local economic-opportunity structure. The present case, Fortune Bay, suffered a chronic shortage of labour (relieved little before 1900) together with a high and persistent rate of emigration of the young.

A supply of labour on a frontier was, then, one of the problems a merchant in southern Newfoundland during the period had to solve¹, and there are additional reasons for examining the social structure of a coastal community. Most accounts of the supplying system (see chapter 5 below) take as axiomatic a

¹. House (1986) has suggested that the supplying system was caused by a shortage of local labour willing to work on the merchants' ships. We do find in this case both shortage of labour and emigration of those who might have provided it, though we cannot use this to settle the matter: it may have been that young men unwilling to work for the merchants emigrated or it may have been that the merchants' unwillingness to hire these men sent them elsewhere for work.

supposed homogeneity within and between outports: communities were identical in function and their members were social and economic equals engaged in a single pursuit - the family fishery. I will not say here that Harbour Breton was typical of coastal communities - indeed, I conclude that they were not all of one type - though it may have been typical of coastal communities that performed one function, that of mercantile centre. In Harbour Breton during the study period we find a more complex and diverse set of occupational and social distinctions than most writers on the subject have assumed.

The settled population

In 1836, the year of the first governmental census, the settlement at Harbour Breton was not substantial. A century and a half after its founding the town could boast a population of fewer than 150 people, more than half of whom were servants of the merchants, and there were not more than fifteen households; in 1901 the population had grown to 493,² an increase of 231%. This measure understates the increase in the resident population once Newmans' transient servants are accounted for. Better measures of the growth of the settled population are the number of families enumerated in each census and twice the number of

². Two nearby hamlets, Broad Cove and Deadmans Bight, were first enumerated in 1891 but there is evidence of their occupation, perhaps seasonal, before that, so all or some of their population might have been included with that of Harbour Breton in previous censuses. In the parish records these hamlets are sometimes distinguished from Harbour Breton, sometimes not.

females in each census,³ both of which are given in table 2 below.

Table 2 shows a more rapid increase in the resident than in the total population. Whichever measure is consulted, growth in the resident population was roughly three per cent annual average until 1884, then slowed markedly and fell close to zero in the 1890s. Including the populations of two nearby hamlets which were first enumerated in 1891 would postpone the dramatic fall in growth rate from the 1880s to the 1890s but not materially affect the latter decade. Harbour Breton's resident population grew in step with that of Newfoundland but at a somewhat higher rate until the 1880s.

TABLE 2

Population, number of families and resident population,
Harbour Breton, 1836-1901

<u>Census year</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Number of families</u>	<u>Resident population*</u>
1836	149	15**	86
1845	241	20**	144
1857	271	29	200
1869	361	47	314
1874	386	54	350
1884	456	82	440
1891	484	93	466
1901	493	94	482

Source: Newfoundland, censuses of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1836-1901.

Notes: *Twice number of females enumerated in census.
**Number of dwelling houses.

³. On the basis that Newmans' transients were men. This is only a rough measure but a check with the 1911 census, after Newmans' removal, shows that this method understated the population by only 3%.

We might have expected the rate of growth of population in this frontier district to have exceeded that of the more settled districts by a greater margin than we find. Analysis of the numbers of births and deaths in the Anglican parish registers (Catholic being unavailable) shows that natural increase alone would have raised the population faster than actually occurred, so we must look to immigration and emigration to explain the comparatively slow increase (Gee, 1981:280). Families immigrated to Harbour Breton at a steady rate throughout the study-period and it was they who caused the resident population to rise, not natural increase: Harbour Breton was not holding it's young. The south coast was the last area of Newfoundland outside St. John's to receive substantial immigration from Europe (Handcock, 1977) and about one-third of Anglican immigrant heads of households was from England. The largest source of immigrants to Harbour Breton was, however, from within its own and adjacent parishes. Once resident, families seldom moved on.

With the unmarried it is a different matter. It may be said that once married a majority stayed in Harbour Breton but that only a minority stayed long enough to marry. Table 3 below

shows that, during the period in question⁴, a majority of the town's young emigrated before marriage.

TABLE 3

Emigration of children baptised to Harbour Breton residents, * 1850-89**

	<u>Decade baptised</u>	<u>Died unmarried</u>	<u>Married and settled***</u>	<u>Emigrated or unknown</u>	
<u>Boys</u>	1850-9	5%	58%	37%	(N=19)
	1860-9	29%	12%	59%	(N=17)
	1870-9	24%	26%	50%	(N=46)
	1880-9	31%	31%	38%	(N=58)
	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
	1850-89	25%	31%	44%	N=140
<u>Girls</u>	1850-9	18%	23%	59%	(N=22)
	1860-9	7%	26%	67%	(N=27)
	1870-9	23%	20%	57%	(N=30)
	1880-9	21%	26%	58%	(N=53)
	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
	1850-89	18%	24%	58%	N=132

Source: Anglican parish registers, Harbour Breton.

Notes: *Whether born in Harbour Breton or not if parents immigrated during child's minority.
 **1889 Final date because if 1899 taken then too many children would have been unmarried at 1921 census.
 ***Settlement at Harbour Breton need not have been permanent - baptism of first child at Harbour Breton counted as settlement there. As we have seen, few moved after marriage.

4. It appears to have been a chronic condition. Few baptisms were recorded before 1850 but by taking those we have and adding those children from the 1853 church membership list that we can presume to have been born in Harbour Breton or to have moved there during their minority, we have a sample of births between 1830 and 1849. The proportion of this sample that married and settled in Harbour Breton was 33% of boys and 39% of girls (n=36 and 28). This method underestimates the frequency of early deaths and departures.

In summary: the settled population of Harbour Breton grew rapidly, if unevenly, from 1850 to 1899 and the rate of growth is higher if one excludes the transient population. Persistence of male heads of households co-existed with steady immigration and with persistent emigration of the unmarried⁵ in the face of which natural increase would not have maintained the population. Harbour Breton's population grew largely from immigration by English servants who married local women and from fishermen from the same and adjacent parishes who had married Harbour Breton women, usually some years before taking up residence at Harbour Breton. This does not seem to have formed part of a general movement from fishing stations into the mercantile centre: Harbour Breton's population formed 26% of the population of its catchment⁶ area in both 1857 and 1901 and this proportion varied little in between. From available records it does not appear that Catholic families contributed nearly as much to the growth of the resident population as did Anglican families, and very little at all after 1869.

The transient population

Newmans' activities gave Harbour Breton its importance as a micro-regional centre and their need for labour and raw materials gave the town a distinctive occupational structure.

⁵. Children baptised elsewhere who later moved to Harbour Breton were as likely to emigrate as were those baptised in Harbour Breton - retention rates were 27% and 30% for boys and girls respectively (n=37 & 37).

⁶. The parish on the mainland from Great Harbour to Boxey (both inclusive) and Sagona and Brunette Islands. The farther reaches of the parish had few contacts with Harbour Breton.

The town was always a mercantile rather than a fishing centre and, although fishing was conducted from Harbour Breton, it never occupied a majority of the workforce during the study period (see below, next section). Newmans' Harbour Breton station was, like their others, run by a salaried agent assisted by a staff of (usually five) clerks and a retail storekeeper. A number of craft shops employed skilled manual workers⁷ such as blacksmiths, sailmakers and shipwrights for fitting and repairing ships and coopers for making barrels, then the only important packing material used in the fishing industry. A fleet of small coasting vessels, used to collect fish and distribute supplies around the bays, called for skippers and crewmen and the making of fish needed shoremen. Much of the workforce was, however, composed of general labourers or 'youngsters'.⁸

In 1850 Newmans filled most of their needs for labour by importing workers from England for terms of one or more years,⁹ to be found their keep in addition to their wages, a solution used in other regions of Canada in which the local supply of labour was insufficient in either quality or quantity (Pentland, 1981:24ff). Such indentured workers were termed 'shipped servants.' Imported labour was supplemented by the hire of

7. Unlike the case reported by Ommer (1981) in Gaspé, Quebec, skilled work was not exported from Harbour Breton to a European metropole.

8. Youngster: "In the British migratory fishery in Newfoundland, inexperienced man brought out or 'shipped' for two summers and a winter (Story *et al*, 1982:624). The term referred to inexperience rather than necessarily to youth.

9. The usual term was for two summers and a winter.

casual local labour in peak business periods.¹⁰ As the century progressed, difficulties in obtaining labour from traditional source-areas in England and the increased resident population led Newmans to substitute local for imported labour when possible, though English workers continued to be imported into the 1890s. Certain of the skilled trades were proving difficult to obtain by 1850 and tradesmen from St. John's were hired on short-term contracts to make good the deficiency.¹¹ By the 1870s Newmans were offering inducements to their most satisfactory unskilled workers to remain for longer periods:

"...every year there is a greater difficulty in procuring (these youngsters) at home besides which the longer they stay the more disposed they become to remain or to go out again" (Newman, 14.12.1875).

There is some truth to this assertion; few of these youngsters stayed long enough to found local families, though a higher proportion of their skilled brethren did so and filled Newmans' skilled labour requirements through occupational succession, son following father in his trade.¹²

We may examine the careers of these transients - who are missed by the use of conventional demographic techniques

10. "...the system they have at Harbour Breton for the cure of the Planters fish, when that is necessary...by means of the inhabitants, women and children, etc., who did not fish, who would be glad of the employment and who would take up their wages at the store" (Newman, 11.8.1860).

11. Newman, 19.4. and 12.6.1850.

12. The only index we have of the substitution of local for imported labour is the number of foreign-born recorded in censuses, which would include some of the older generation of planters plus some officials; foreign-born in census years were: 1857=84; 1869=57; 1874=74; 1884=48; 1891=41; 1901=17. Newmans' use of labour at any one station was highly seasonal and there is no indication of the months in which the censuses were taken.

(Thernstrom, 1964) - through the passenger lists, which are the records of workers shipped from England on the first vessel of the season and returned by the last vessel; these two ships were called the passenger vessels. These lists cover the years 1864 to 1891 inclusive and do not include all workers brought from England; some, especially in the skilled trades, could not be got in time for the departure of the passenger vessel and had to be sent in later ships. These numbers, therefore, understate the number of workers imported from England and especially understate the proportion of skilled workers in the labour force.

The transient population accounted for perhaps one-half of the total flow of persons through Harbour Breton over the study period and, though few settled, those who did contributed significantly to the growth of the town's population. From the passenger lists we may identify 710 persons who came out to Newmans' establishments in Newfoundland during a twenty-eight year period; not all are shown to have come to Harbour Breton, but by interpolating from the proportions so identified I estimate that 450 of these workers did, of whom 16 married and settled there and fifteen more elsewhere in the parish. More than 60% of all the imported workers came for a single tour of duty and most of them returned in the year in which they came out or in the year following. Of those who returned for a second tour fewer than half returned for a third. There is little sign here of these transient workers engaging in a career in the service of Newman and Company; more probably a tour of duty in Newfoundland was either an occupational career stage or

a source of work for those periodically unemployed at home. Those who did return were seldom promoted although their wages rose appreciably on their second tour; only the merest handful were promoted to skilled positions.

Our only knowledge of the social and geographical origins of these imported English workers comes from the small number who married in Harbour Breton and in nearby settlements, though the evidence therefrom is wholly consistent with Handcock's (1977) conclusions based upon marriages on the South Coast generally during the second half of the nineteenth century. The immigrants were drawn predominantly from Dorset and Somerset - in fact from an area adjoining the borders of the two counties - not, as one might suppose, from Devon; in fact, only five per cent of those married in Harbour Breton parish were Devonshire men.¹³ We also concur with Handcock that most immigrants were from small towns rather than rural areas and were of the poor - though not the poorest - class; where occupation of father is stated on the marriage register, in only 46% of cases is it 'labourer'. The remainder had a trade of some kind - carpenter, shoemaker, butcher, gamekeeper, gardener and farmer being examples.

There was, then, no sign of a career path in Newman's English workers and only one in six came out more than once; in fact more than half served a single term of one or two years and were heard of no more. The fate of first-term workers for whom

¹³. Though Newmans were based in Dartmouth, Devon and in London they recruited labour through Bird & Company of Sturminster Newton, Dorset (Handcock, 1977:36).

an entry and return record can be found (that is, the length of their term of service can be determined) is shown in Table 4 below.

TABLE 4

Fate of Newmans' English workers on first recorded term of duty, 1864-91

Returned to England (and never repeated)	41%
Ditto (but repeated)	17%
Settled in Newfoundland	4%
Unknown or deserted	38%
	<hr/>
	100%
	<hr/>

Source: Newman papers, passenger lists.

- Notes:
- (1) Underestimates proportion of settlers because of repeaters; the true proportion of settlers was 6%.
 - (2) Settlers from Harbour Breton and Gaultois parish records. More may have settled elsewhere; Smith (1980) says that numbers of Newmans' former workers went to Fortune and Grand Bank.
 - (3) Category of 'unknown' may include unrecorded returners and those who returned after 1891.
 - (4) I have not included agents, clerks and storekeepers in any calculations in this section (see below).

The repeaters tended to be the more skilled workers, the more satisfactory unskilled workers and those who stayed longer than usual in their first term of duty. Skilled manual workers were more likely than unskilled to repeat due to Newmans' policy of sending skilled workers home for the winter when possible to save the expense of their wages (Newman, 19.10.1875). Workers adjudged to have been satisfactory at the end of their first term were more likely to repeat than others; of those judged unsatisfactory 9% repeated, of those judged middling 29% and of

those judged good or very good 46% came out again. Length of stay on the first trip - as Newmans' surmised - correlated with propensity to come out again. Of those who returned the same year as they came out (most of whom were fired) only 6% repeated; of those who returned after one year 20%, of those who returned after two years 32% and of those who returned after three or more years 34% repeated. Of those who came out a second time only a quarter came out a third time, and of them only one third (ten persons in all) came out a fourth. Surprisingly, half of those found unsatisfactory on their second trip were welcome back, a measure perhaps of Newmans' difficulty in recruiting experienced hands.

The occupations of the imported workers may be got from the passenger lists, but I have made one adjustment. More than two-thirds of workers were recorded on arrival as youngsters but a much lower proportion so recorded upon return, which suggests that 'green' hands were initially shipped as general labourers and only assigned to specific tasks once their work capacity had been assessed. I have adjusted for this changed proportion of youngsters upon arrival and upon return in Table 5 below. The proportion of skilled manual workers appears too low, to judge by information given in censuses and in directories of inhabitants; the proportion of boatmasters is certainly too low. This suggests that these categories were more commonly filled from local sources (and St. John's) than was true of unskilled labour. Knowing the numbers employed at the establishments in certain years, the numbers of workers imported each year and the length of time for which they were wont to stay, we may

TABLE 5

Occupational breakdown of imported workers, 1864-91

Skilled manual trades	7% (N=48)
Boatmasters	2% (N=16)
Midshipmen and foreshipmen	30% (N=200)
Shoremen	10% (N=66)
Youngsters	45% (N=302)
Others	7% (N=47)
	<hr/>
	100% (N=679)
	<hr/>

Source: Newman papers, passenger lists, 1864-91.

- Notes:
- (1) Figures relate to arrivals, not persons. Total less than total of arrivals (or of persons) because some were not given an occupation.
 - (2) Salaried workers and paid passengers not included.
 - (3) Skilled manual trades comprise blacksmith, bricklayer, carpenter, cooper, engineer, joiner, mason, painter, sailmaker, shipwright.
 - (4) Others comprise cook, fireman, fish culler, gardener, sawyer, steward, super-cargo, undercook, understorekeeper.

estimate the proportion of their labour requirements that Newmans were able to supply from local sources. By this method a rough estimate would yield 20% local labour in the 1860s, 40% in the 1870s and 70% in the 1880s.

We have established that it was not the chance of occupational mobility that induced English youngsters to ship with Newmans either once or repeatedly. There was little such mobility and no case in the passenger lists in which a manual

worker crossed the divide into the white-collar world.¹⁴ Of those coming out for the first recorded time for whom an occupation is listed both upon arrival and departure, 6% (7/127) experienced significant occupational mobility;¹⁵ four of these seven did not come out again. On a second recorded trip, 10% (6/62) experienced such mobility; only one of the six returned for a third trip, though one other married and settled at Harbour Breton. Altogether there was little mobility for an unskilled worker into the skilled manual trades, though on board ship there existed such an avenue through progress from youngster through foreshipman and midshipman to boatmaster; exceptionally a youngster was apprenticed to a skilled trade. It seems that those who did win promotion were likely to seek their fortunes elsewhere with their newly-improved credentials and the conclusion is inescapable that the labour market of southern Newfoundland was, during the study period, an extension of that of the West of England, to be resorted to when work dried up at home.

What of the settlers? The marriages of fifty-four of the men included in the passenger lists are found in the records of Harbour Breton and Gaultois parishes; of these ten returned to England with their new brides. Eleven of the remaining forty-four grooms later returned to England with their wives and

14. If the Frank Cockrell who shipped out as a youngster in 1864 is the same person as Frank Cocarell, storekeeper and clerk of Pussthrough in the 1898 directory, this would be an exception.

15. These data are taken from occupations upon arrival modified for the proportion of youngsters on arrival who returned under some other trade. Occupation upon arrival was usually given but upon departure less often so.

children, so that more than seven hundred immigrants made a lasting contribution of not three dozen families to the population of the two parishes in more than thirty years. Their length of service appears to be the main criterion distinguishing settlers from their more transient brethren. Only six of the fifty-four were skilled tradesmen, four of whom returned to England after various intervals. For those who remained, little promotion came their way; one youngster became a skipper, one foreshipman a blacksmith and the rest remained servants, labourers and sailors or became small-boat fishermen. I can find only one who made a new life in the New World - John Courage of Sturminster Newton, Dorset, shipped out to Harbour Breton as a youngster in 1866 and eventually became a magistrate via a spell of schoolteaching.

Shortage of work, rather than the prospect of advancement, has been suggested as what brought imported workers to Newfoundland. Certainly there was little in Newmans' pay scale to tempt them; in 1862 the following were the standard rates of pay:

Shoremen	22/6d per month advancing at new engagements from 1/- to 2/6d according to abilities and experience until they reach 35/-
Foreshipmen	25/- by 2/6d to 30/-
Midshipmen	32/6d by 2/6d to 42/6d
Boatmasters	45/- by 2/6d to 80/- (Newman, 5.7.1862).

Youngsters' pay was from 20/- to 25/- per month and the skilled manual trades, from the passenger lists, earned 60/- to 80/-, very exceptionally more. Single men, in addition to their wages, were found in their keep, which in most cases cost

Newmans more than their wages did (45/- per month) (Newman, 15.8.1870).

White-collar staff - clerks, agents and storekeepers - are not included in the preceding analysis because they were paid an annual salary, not a monthly wage, and were hired for longer terms than manual workers. Clerks were hired for five-year terms which might be extended at the discretion of the clerks; in fact the median tour of duty of clerks was five or six years and only a quarter stayed for ten years or more. Origins of clerks can in most cases only be presumed - that is, those who returned to England at the end of their term are presumed to have come from England. On this assumption, two-thirds of clerks were recruited from England and a further 15% (all after 1880) from Jersey. The remainder, roughly 20%, were from Newfoundland and most of these were the sons of agents and storekeepers; only one clerk hired by Newmans during the study period was a Harbour Breton resident but not the son of one of their white-collar employees (he was a doctor's son). Place of origin in England is available only for the handful of clerks who married in Newfoundland but if these were typical then clerks were drawn from both the West Country and the Home Counties. Unfortunately the social origins of clerks can only be guessed; it is possible that they were drawn from a background similar to that of the employees' sons - that is, literate but without prospects. Those with prospects would hardly have been enticed to Newmans' service in Newfoundland, where their chances of advancement were very limited.

A clerk usually began in Newmans' service in his mid teens at a salary of L5 and his progress was quite clear to chief clerkship, which an able candidate could reach in his middle twenties. The salary for this position was capped at L100 per annum, which the clerk would reach in his thirties should he remain so long, which few did. Thereafter the only possible promotion was to agent and, unlike most of the firms engaged in the Newfoundland trade, Newmans did not make their agents partners in the firm. Agents' positions did not fall vacant often: the Harbour Breton station had seven agents in 65 years and the Gaultois station six in 62 years, these 13 positions being occupied by nine individuals. The path to agency of the senior Harbour Breton station lay through chief clerkship at Harbour Breton to agency at Gaultois and then to the agents position at Harbour Breton. Not one-third of chief clerks, however, managed to follow this procedure; unlike manual workers, clerks never engaged in repeat migration - once gone, they stayed away.¹⁶

Occupational distribution of the workforce

Alexander (1973) has concluded from census summaries of the nineteenth century that the great majority of the Newfoundland

¹⁶. Those clerks who would stay the course hoping to become agents had to suffer certain deprivations - for one thing, they were required to stay single under pain of dismissal. To one clerk who proposed to marry, Newmans wrote that "We have the most decided objection to it and we are also quite certain that it would be most improvident for the clerk himself" (Newman Papers, PANL, letter to George Mole, Gaultois, 15.6.1875). The same rule did not, however, apply to storekeepers providing that their intended spouses met with the approval of the partners (Newman, 7.1.1865) nor to agents.

workforce consisted of inshore fishermen - in 1857 ninety per cent and in 1884 eighty-two per cent of the workforce was so engaged and the absolute number of fishermen rose between these two dates from 38,500 to 60,400. In 1884 the traditional economy reached the limits of the number of people it could support and thereafter the importance of the inshore fishery to the total economy declined both absolutely and proportionally (Alexander, 1973:17-25). There occurred a massive shift of labour out of the fishing industry into other occupations, probably into transport, communications, public utilities and construction (op.cit:38). If the Newfoundland economy was undergoing such a change in occupational distribution in the second half of the nineteenth century, it is not discernible at Harbour Breton. My data do not suggest that the proportion of the workforce engaged in fishing was ever as high as the census summaries would lead one to believe,¹⁷ nor do they show that labour moved out of the fishing industry after 1884 - in fact, rather the reverse.

The census summary for Harbour Breton in 1857 shows a labour force of 110 persons of whom 99 (i.e. ninety per cent, the colonial average) were "persons engaged in catching and curing

17. Census enumerations of occupations are of dubious reliability and comparability because (a) categories used varied from census to census (b) changes in the distribution of the labour force shown in the census summaries are sometimes quite implausible in view of other information given - for instance the Harbour Breton labour force is supposed to have grown by 36% from 1884 to 1891 while the population increased by only 6% (c) categories used in censuses reflected the opinions of the St. John's officials who designed the censuses of what the occupational structure of the outports was likely to be. It is evident that 'fisherman' was often used as a residual category.

fish," yet we may not assume that only fishermen were included in this category. Other sources (Newman, 28.7.1860) show that Newmans' workforce at Harbour Breton that year totalled seventy-seven, of whom seven can be accounted for under other occupational categories in the census. This leaves us with 29 rather than 99 fishermen in 1857 - quite likely, as there were 27 fishermen in 1851 (JHA 1852:appendix pp. 142-3) and the population increased little in the intervening six years. This means, if true, that 26% rather than 90% of Harbour Bretons workforce in 1857 consisted of fishermen; the remainder of the 90% engaged in the fishery was the merchants' labourers and seamen. The 1884 census summary lists sixty-two persons engaged in catching and curing fish, an absolute and proportional decline since the 1857 census, but there is now a miscellaneous category comprising forty-four more people. If all these sixty-two persons were male this would mean that the numbers and proportion of fishermen in the labour force had risen since 1857 (taking my assumed true figure for that year) but this is unlikely to be true; for, in the 1891 census, we find sixty-five persons engaged in catching and curing fish, but only forty-two (23% of the labour force) were fishermen. The most plausible conclusion to be drawn from these conflicting shreds of evidence is that the number of fishermen at Harbour Breton rose in step with the population from 1857 to 1891 and formed a fairly constant one-third or one quarter of the workforce. Evidence from other sources, given below, does not quite support such a conclusion.

So far from the Harbour Breton labour force moving out of fishing into other occupations in the late nineteenth century, there is evidence that the opposite occurred: the proportion of fishermen in the workforce increased. As far as the settled (though not the transient) population is concerned, evidence of increased numbers and proportions of fishermen comes from the marriage and baptismal registers. From 1850 to 1879 inclusive, twenty-six per cent of grooms for whom an occupation was given at marriage were fishermen; from 1880 to 1899 the proportion was fifty-six per cent. If we take occupation stated upon the baptism of the first child, the corresponding percentages were forty-five and sixty-four respectively. In the 1898 directory fifty-four per cent of occupied males were fishermen.¹⁸ This is strong and numerically consistent evidence that the number and proportion of fishermen in the Harbour Breton workforce rose, rather than shifted to other occupations, in the late nineteenth century. It would not be admissible to generalize this conclusion to the whole colony because these were the years in which the Bank fishery, which was heavily concentrated on the south coast, was becoming of importance.

No reliable estimate of the distribution of the workforce during the study period can be attempted. Such evidence as we have suggests that in the earlier part of the period fishermen, seamen and labourers each comprised twenty to thirty per cent of the workforce and that the skilled manual trades and non-manual workers comprised about fifteen per cent; later in the period

¹⁸. Fifty-two per cent of known Anglicans and fifty-nine per cent of others.

the proportion of fishermen rose and the proportion of seamen and labourers declined. One change in occupational distribution should, however, be noted and that is the increase in shore-based employment other than that in the merchants' service, especially in government employment. In 1850 Harbour Breton was the seat of a single government employee - a customs officer-cum-magistrate, but thereafter public employment expanded slowly as schools, lighthouse, police, postal and other services were established. In 1898 there were nine such office-holders plus two telegraph employees and whatever number of female teachers was not included in the list of inhabitants.¹⁹ This increase in land-based work partly offset the effects of Newmans' more restricted scale of operations (c/f also Nemeč, 1973).

Two further occupational groups deserve attention - women and youths. The extent to which female labour is included in census tallies of the number of employed persons is not known, though inspection suggests that it varied from census to census and possibly from place to place within censuses according to the predilections of the enumerator. Nine per cent of Harbour Breton wives during the study period had an occupation upon marriage (invariably 'servant') and it is known that a number were schoolteachers before marriage though they are not marked as such in the register. For the whole parish the proportion of brides having an occupation upon marriage (again always 'servant') was about one-third from 1860 to the mid 1880s, after

¹⁹. The source of the listings in the 1898 directory is not recorded. Possibly it is from a voters list as the number of entries under Harbour Breton corresponds quite well with the number of males over 20 in the 1901 census.

which such designations became rare. This may indicate the end of servitude or its adoption by women below marriageable age.²⁰ A further source of female employment arose during the study period in that women were substituted for youths in making fish. There is reference to women being so employed as early as 1860 and employment at this task must have increased after 1880 as the Bank fishery grew, but whether single or married women were employed is not known. In the 1891 census twenty-three women were engaged in curing fish, in 1901 thirty-five. There is some evidence that the occupational distribution of single and married men differed - in particular that married men were more likely than single to fish. We have seen above that the proportion of fishermen at marriage was lower than that at the baptism of the first child and the usual case was that servants in the first instance became planters in the second. The 1921 census corroborates this and in fact shows widespread youth unemployment.

In summary, although our data on the occupational distribution of the workforce in the nineteenth century are unreliable and frequently confusing, we may make certain points concerning the interpretation of such data as we have. It appears certain that earlier censuses overestimated the proportion of fishermen in the workforce by using the designation "persons engaged in catching and curing fish" as a residual category and perhaps also by ignoring work done by women. Therefore the redistribution from primary occupations to

²⁰. In the 1921 census only one female servant was over twenty years old and some were as young as thirteen.

service occupations which Alexander ascribes to the 1880s probably took place earlier - from the 1850s onwards - and the proportion of fishermen was always somewhat below that which has been inferred from these censuses. While we must be wary of generalizing from the Harbour Breton workforce to that of the colony, we can hypothesize from the Harbour Breton data that the occupational structure of mercantile centres differed from that of fishing stations, Harbour Breton falling into the former category. Evidence to support this hypothesis is found in the marriage records of other communities in the parish.²¹

Social stratification

The pattern of social stratification of pre-Confederation Newfoundland has attracted little scholarly attention. The conventional view of rural Newfoundland is that until the middle of the present century (with the exception of St. John's and perhaps one or two of the other larger centres) it remained a traditional and relatively unchanging society in which "...a simple nineteenth century world of large patriarchal families, Victorian manners and morals, oil lamps and wood stoves,

²¹. We must distinguish between the occupational structures of mercantile centres and of fishing stations - Harbour Breton being the former - and note that all fishing stations were not identical. I have reconstituted Anglican families for three places near Harbour Breton: Jersey Harbour, a mercantile centre until the 1880s and Sagona and Little Bay West, both fishing stations without a resident merchant. Occupations of grooms at Jersey Harbour from 1850 to 1879 are similar to those of Harbour Breton, only 30% (n=20) being fishermen, but from 1880 to 1899 that proportion was 91% (n=22). At Sagona 67% of grooms (n=24) were fishermen from 1850 to 1879 but later 93% (n=28). At Little Bay West the corresponding proportions were 78% (n=18) and 95% (n=22). See also Wareham, 1980:148ff.

remained anachronistically alive" (Noel, 1971:262). Social stratification in rural areas is held to have been equally straightforward and unchanging, its chief feature being the gulf between a small number of 'haves' and the large, undifferentiated mass of 'have not's'. The same author writes concerning social stratification in the nineteenth and early twentieth century: "There was still no substantial middle class; a gross inequality of wealth continued to separate the upper class of merchants from the lower class of fishermen" (op.cit:21). The lower class comprised "...shore fishermen who, with their families, were the basic units of production in the cod fishery" (op.cit:5). Dillon (1968) concurs with this division of the population into two classes; writing of the Catholic outports of the Southern Shore,²² she notes the concentration of economic power in a few hands:

"The merchant's family constituted the local 'upper class'. Besides taking the fish and giving out supplies in return, the merchants usually dispensed road-work and other forms of government employment. Because of their position in the community they demanded certain tokens of respect from the ordinary fisherman. The story is told locally of a man who went to see a merchant about a job he hoped to get, working on the road. He entered the office wearing his cap. He was told to go out and to come in again and to take off his cap when he entered" (Dillon, 1968:78).

A two-class system, Dillon says, resulted from the growth of an indigenous merchant elite, to form the upper class and the fishermen-clients the lower. The upper class also included fishermen who owned one or two cod-traps and hired others to

²². That portion of the east coast lying to the south of St. John's - not to be confused with the south coast which was, in the nineteenth century, called the west coast. The west coast proper was called the French Shore.

work for them, while the lower class consisted primarily of fishermen with little capital equipment.

Nemec has criticised Dillon's two-class model as providing a descriptive rather than an analytical framework (1973:15) which is, in any case, more reminiscent of the eighteenth than of the nineteenth century. Nemec found at least three social classes during the nineteenth century in the Southern Shore town of Trepassey and observed that fishermen were found in all three classes, not necessarily confined to the lowest class. Nemec attributes the growth of an incipient middle class during the nineteenth century to the growth of government offices which could be combined with fishing if held singly or allow the holder to forewear fishing altogether if held in combination. The upper class consisted of the priest - at the very apex of the social structure in this Irish Catholic town - followed by "various authorities, officials, professional men and, last, but not least, certain primary producers." Among the variety of public office-holders some, such as the magistrate, were clearly more important than others, but Nemec finds it impossible at this remove to define exact status differentials between officials - though we shall have more success (see below, next section). Also prominent in the community were merchants and their agents, the MHA, doctor, teachers, telegraph operators and large fishermen. The higher social status of such persons resulted only in part from their relative affluence, as their roles as political brokers afforded them greater status than could be explained solely on economic grounds; indeed, Nemec opines that official appointment in many cases was a result of

strong ties to political patrons (Nemec, 1973:19. See also Nemec, 1980:chapter 5).

As the occupational categories of public official and fisherman were not irreconcilable, but were roles sometimes held by the same person, Nemec concludes that fishermen cannot be consigned en masse to the low class as Dillon would have them. Fishermen-officials could as well have belonged to the middle as to the lower class, though being still essentially manual labourers they ranked well below the elite. By collating census data with the recollections of elderly inhabitants, Nemec concludes that there was a crucial distinction between fishermen on the basis of size of vessel and amount and type of fishing gear owned and, to a lesser degree, on the personal attributes of the fisherman and his family. Nemec is able to distinguish three classes of fishing technology (and therefore of fisherman) during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Below all boatowners ranked sharemen, usually transient unmarried men from other communities who contributed only labour to the fishing voyage and owned no boats or gear. At the very bottom of the social scale was an underclass composed of deviant types such as peddlers, beggars, cripples, paupers, lunatics and criminals (Nemec, 1973a:19-20).

Nemec, then, finds a far more complex and diversified set of occupational and social distinctions and gradation of status on economic grounds during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than any two-class model would accommodate and notes that such quantitative considerations were more important to an individual's social status than qualitative measures of his

personal character. In particular, he relates the growth of a middle class in rural areas to the extension of public services during the nineteenth century and to the diversification of types of fishing technology during the same period. Our data from Harbour Breton generally concur with Nemec's three-class model and the basis on which individuals were assigned to their respective social strata. Wareham (1980:149-156), writing of another south coast town in the early twentieth century, also notes the status distinction between those who fished on their own account and those who fished for others and adds other occupational status categories such as labourers and those who depended upon public relief. He also distinguishes between commercial centres, however small their population, and their hinterland of fishing villages whose occupational structure was less complex.

Social stratification in Harbour Breton, 1850-99

I shall take Nemec's three-class model of social stratification as a source of hypotheses to be tested against the empirical evidence of social inequality in Harbour Breton during the study period, adding some amendments and clarifications to elucidate the Harbour Breton data. The following are the hypotheses to be tested:

(1). During the study period there were three social classes distinguished by economic criteria which differed significantly and systematically in the life chances offered to their members.

(2). The upper class consisted of merchants and their agents, clergy, professionals and senior public officials, whom I designate according to their functions as the 'official class' (House, n/d.). It is noteworthy that entry to this class required a higher degree of literacy than was then available to most people and the factor of full literacy may be taken as a distinguishing mark of these positions.

(3). Fishermen, instead of being confined to the lower class as the two-class model would predict, were distributed among all three classes according to the size of their operations. The crucial distinction is between large-vessel owners - who can be identified from the shipping registers - and small-boat fishermen.

(4). Tenure of one or more minor government offices ranked fishermen above the lowest class because it gave them a security of income denied to the poor, even if the salary attached to the office was small.

We have in the Harbour Breton data a number of occupational categories not mentioned by Nemec to fit into the three-class model - labourers, seamen, ships' captains, skilled manual workers and small traders and dealers. Above, I have distinguished membership of the official class by the degree of literacy required for such positions. To distinguish between the middle and low classes I shall adapt the concept of social improvement first proposed by Gagan (1981:99) to distinguish between successful and unsuccessful farmers in nineteenth century Peel County, Ontario. Gagan proposed four measures of social improvement which he called "attributes of material

improvement" (Ibid.) to distinguish between those who did and those who did not realise the promise of Canadian life - property ownership, improved housing, family structure and employment of domestic servants (op.cit:100). However applicable these measures may have been to Peel County, they will not suit the case of rural Newfoundland; land beyond the minimum needed for house and garden was of no economic value in the outports, I have no information on housing and we have already seen that the employment of domestic servants did not distinguish between social classes in Harbour Breton.

Nevertheless, I propose to retain the concept of social improvement and to devise a set of measures more appropriate to the rural Newfoundland case - acquisition of a schooner, tenure of a minor government office, engagement in petty trade,²³ possession of a skilled manual craft or command of a vessel, any one of such measures being sufficient to place the possessor in the middle class.²⁴ Conversely, absence of any measure of improvement locates the subject in the lowest class, which therefore consists of labourers, sailors and small-boat

23. Those marked as traders, general dealers and shopkeepers I have classed as improved planters, as these trades were usually pursued as subsidiaries by large fishermen (c/f Keough, 1975) and usually for a short time - of such persons listed in the 1898 directory in Fortune Bay little more than half were also so listed in the 1904 directory.

24. Large and small planters were not distinguished in the parish registers but other categories are drawn from contemporary usage, at least that of Reverend W.K. White, who spent forty years on the coast. Captains and skilled manual workers are marked as such in the parish registers as are traders and minor government officials even when they were also fishermen. These categories are distinguished in the parish registers from servants, which might include foremen, ships' mates, etc.

fishermen. If the model of three classes is accurate, we should expect them to differ systematically in the life-chances of their members, such as income, degree of literacy, marriage patterns, chances of social mobility both within and between generations and degree of community power and influence.

Details of pay rates can be got from the Newman papers and from government documents though, unfortunately, no accounts of the earnings of fishermen exist. The data concerning the income of workers other than fishermen support the three-class hypothesis. Examples of wages and salaries are given in Table 6 below.

The figures in Table 6 bear out the three-class hypothesis very well. With very few exceptions an unskilled manual worker's horizon extended to L30 per year, a skilled worker's to L50, and white-collar workers enjoyed incomes above the upper limit of any kind of manual worker. Teachers and clerks, both evident white-collar occupations, appear to contradict this rule but the crucial factor here is age. A clerk at age twenty-one had already surpassed the upper earnings limit of unskilled manual workers and four or five years later surpassed the skilled manual workers also. Teachers appear to have been young men en route to some other occupation, either government service or trade or, in one case, the Member for the district. Two skilled manual trades did exceed the L50 we have posited as the upper earnings limit - in one case because the trade was dying out (sailmaker) and in the other because the trade was novel (engineer). The engineer, who serviced the fish-drying machine and the engines of a steamship, is an interesting example of

TABLE 6

Wages and salaries in Harbour Breton, selected occupational categories, 1850-99

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Annual income, L Sterling*</u>
Doctor	212
Anglican minister	200
Newmans' agent (Gaultois)	150
Customs officer or magistrate	85
Newmans' storekeeper	75
Clerk, Newmans, over 21 years of age	35-100
Policeman	56
Sailmaker	53
Blacksmith	43
Carpenter, joiner or shipwright	45
Cooper	38
Teacher, male	25-40
Boatmaster	27-48
Seaman	15-27
Shoreman	12-21
Youngster	12-15

Source: Newman papers; USPG papers; Journals of the House of Assembly.

Note: *Newfoundland used the Pound Sterling until 1856 when a Newfoundland Pound (called the Pound Currency) was introduced and was itself replaced by a Newfoundland Dollar in 1865. Par values were L1 Currency=L0.833 Sterling=\$4, but I have converted all values into L Sterling using the rates current at the 1865 currency change, at which time L1 Sterling=L1.154 Currency=\$4.62 (calculated from table in JHA 1865, appendix pp. 576-7).

status anomaly; though paid more (L144 p.a.) than any employee of Newmans other than their agents, his subordinate status was made clear.²⁵

Though class differences, as we have defined them, are evident in the distribution of income, it is plain from the above data that there were no rich people in Harbour Breton; indeed, if the estimate that it cost L40 to feed a family of seven persons²⁶ is accurate then many must have lived in actual want. Some factors operated, however, to reduce income-differentials. Newmans' unmarried workers received their board and lodging in addition to their wages, though this ceased once they married; agent, storekeepers and senior skilled manual workers with particularly long records of service, or whose trades were in unusually high demand, might be found free housing and even (in the case of the sailmaker) paid a subsistence allowance. The earnings given above do not allow for more than one earned per household or for more than one job per individual; clearly the stage of the household cycle and the proportion of mouths to be fed to hands available to feed them determined which families were in want at any time. We must also consider the impact of subsistence production on incomes, as its imputed contribution to total income has been shown to be large in recent times (Brox, 1972). Subsistence production has

25. Newmans admonished their Harbour Breton agent that if the engineer "neglected his rank (he) should have suspended or dismissed him, as he would any other servant under similar circumstances" (Newman, 10.6.1890).

26. JHA 1855:appendix p. 259ff, evidence taken by the Select Committee on Pauperism.

never been as extensive on the south coast as in the north, though even recently it has been shown that it forms an important portion of total income in the case of the families of the seasonally employed and might have been more so in the past (c/f Macdonald, 1981). A significant omission from the above table is the earnings of fishermen, at which we can only guess; but, to judge from the slender evidence available, it is unlikely that the earnings of small-boat operators or of sharemen exceeded those of unskilled manual workers, while the earnings of large-vessel operators would, by itself, place them firmly in the upper class.²⁷ However, we shall see that they do not fare so well on other indicators of social improvement.

We have an index, albeit a flawed one,²⁸ of literacy in the

27. One source (JHA 1855:appendix p. 263ff) estimates catch per man on the south coast to be forty-five quintals per man in small boats and ninety in large, which accords very well with De Courcy's account of the Harbour Breton fishery in 1851 (JHA 1852:appendix pp. 142-3). At contemporary fish prices this would yield gross annual earnings of L22-25 for a man fishing alone and about the same for a shareman on a large vessel. The owner-operator of a large vessel would gross L100 or more, from which the expenses of the voyage had to be met; income from pursuits other than cod-fishing - herring-catching, coastal carrying and petty trade, would also have to be reckoned. Of course, the price of fish more than doubled later in the century but the position of small fishermen worsened rather than improved. For the large-vessel operator net earnings of L100 or more per annum were clearly possible and there are cases on record of fishermen banking that much at the end of a successful season. The small-boat man could add to his earnings by having a son fish with him for a partial share or no share at all (Neis, 1980), but in view of the high rate of emigration of sons this can have been no more than a temporary expedient in most cases.

28. Some confirmation comes from numbers able to read and write (or in some cases just to write) in censuses expressed as a percentage of the population over ten years old; thus we find 61, 51, 57 and 51 per cent in 1874, 1884, 1891 and 1901 and 67% and 64% in 1911 and 1921 respectively. These figures are very consistent with (though a little higher than) mine and they confirm the fall in literacy rates during the late nineteenth

ability to sign a name on the marriage register, either as marriage partner or as witness. We may at least take inability to sign a marriage register as a minimum indicator of total illiteracy in the case of those whose letters did not even extend thus far, even if those able to sign may have been otherwise illiterate. Table 7 below summarises the evidence from the marriage registers by decade of birth and by occupation of parents:²⁹

Table 7 shows that literacy did follow class lines, though with some interesting sub-group variations in the middle ranks. The data appear to show that the ability to sign was always universal among the children of the official class and almost so among the children of skilled manual workers and that this ability spread to skippers' families after 1860, more slowly to improved planters' families after 1870 and in small measure to the children of the lower class near the end of the century. The extent of illiteracy which these sources show is staggering³⁰ - at best one-half of the population can have been literate over the study period and two-thirds in the last decade of the century, although schooling was continuously available

century and their revival after 1900.

²⁹. In the case of those originating from outside the south coast I have taken their own occupations, not fathers'. Population is all marriage partners and all witnesses ten years old or more.

³⁰. In 1838 fifty-eight per cent and in 1893 ninety-four per cent of the population of England and Wales could sign the marriage register (Roberts, 1973:129). Roberts estimates, however, that in the early 1900s twenty per cent of the lower working class was illiterate and about as many more nearly so (op.cit:131).

TABLE 7

Ability to sign by decade of birth and occupation of parents

<u>Decade born</u>	<u>Officials</u>	<u>Skilled manual trades (SMT)</u>	<u>Skippers</u>	<u>Improved planters</u>	<u>Others*</u>	<u>All</u>
before 1850	100% (N=29)	78% (N=9)	12% (N=17)	- - - - -	29% (N=65)	49% (N=120)
1850-9	100% (N=6)	73% (N=11)	50% (N=4)	33% (N=3)	30% (N=27)	49% (N=51)
1860-9	100% (N=7)	86% (N=7)	100% (N=4)	43% (N=7)	30% (N=40)	54% (N=65)
1870-9	100% (N=8)	100% (N=3)	100% (N=4)	67% (N=9)	28% (N=40)	50% (N=64)
1880-9	100% (N=4)	100% (N=6)	100% (N=5)	77% (N=13)	49% (N=39)	66% (N=67)
1890-9	100% (N=1)	100% (N=4)	- - - - -	100% (N=6)	43% (N=21)	67% (N=32)
1850-99	100% (N=55)	85% (N=40)	50% (N=34)	68% (N=38)	34% (N=232)	53% (N=399)

Ability to sign by sex and occupational group, 1850-99

	<u>sons</u>	<u>daughters</u>
officials	100%	100%
SMT	76%	100%
skippers	33%	69%
improved planters	72%	65%
unimproved planters & c	32%	37%
All	52%	54%

Source: Anglican parish registers, Harbour Breton.

Note: *Unimproved planters, servants, sailors, others and no occupation.

throughout the period. Certainly the low and irregular school attendance was a constant complaint of school inspectors during this period and for many years afterwards.³¹ It also seems that a cultural change occurred in the last quarter of the century which gave greater importance to education, the effects of which would have been seen in the marriage registers after 1900; during the study period literacy even among young adults was not especially common and fifty years of schooling had failed to make it so. Literacy did not make for a more rewarding career for literate men, unless it assisted them in emigrating; for those who stayed there was little social mobility for literate and unlettered alike. The same does not hold good for literate women of the lower class, whose marriage prospects were definitely improved by the ability to sign.³² A large majority (73%) of those able to sign married into the middle and upper classes but only 10% of those unable to sign married into the middle (and none into the upper) class.

Social mobility within generations may be measured by comparing men's occupations at marriage with that at some point in later life at which occupational status may be judged to have

31. Newfoundland, Annual Report of the Department of Education, 1919-20, Report of Reverend Mr. Mercer, p. 15. Almost one-quarter of school-age children in Harbour Breton were not even registered as pupils. "No excuses can be offered for the absentees beyond the selfish parental ones:--'well, John (a boy of 9 years) helps me in the boat'; or 'I want Mary (a girl of 8 years) to nurse the baby'."

32. We must admit the possibility that ability to sign was only one function of some general ability whose other manifestations were equally or more important in making a good marriage prospect - for instance that those quick at learning their letters were also quick at learning domestic skills.

reached its peak: I have taken as the latter measure the highest status attained after the age of forty. This necessarily yields a small population concentrated in the later years of the century. The results are tabulated below:

TABLE 8

Final status of Harbour Breton grooms who married 1855-99* and reached age 40 by 1899

Highest status after age 40

Status at marriage	officials	SMT**	Skippers	Improved planters	Lowest class	N
Officials	3	-	-	-	-	3
SMT	-	6	-	-	-	6
Skippers	-	-	3	1	-	4
Improved planters	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lowest class***	-	1	2	5	16	24
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	3	7	5	6	16	37
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>

Sources: Anglican parish records, Harbour Breton; 1898 directory of inhabitants; shipping registers.

Notes: *Occupation at marriage not given before 1855.
 **SMT = skilled manual trades.
 ***Lowest class = unimproved planters, seamen, labourers, servants, others and not indicated.

Insofar as we may generalise from such small numbers in each category the conclusions are clear. Membership of the official class was acquired young or not at all and the same is true to a lesser degree of skilled manual occupations and skippers' positions. A degree of social mobility was possible from the lower occupational groups into the middle; in fact one-third of

such persons at marriage experienced (albeit fairly mild) social mobility and 44% (8/18) of eventual middle class position-holders had so risen. In all, however, 73% (26/36) of the total other than officials experienced no mobility after marriage and we shall see below that the apparent mobility out of the lower class is largely illusory.

With respect to mobility between generations we have again a small population and the requirement of comparing highest status of father and son after the age of forty limits us to births before 1860. The results are tabulated below:

TABLE 9

Occupational mobility between generations: highest status of men born before 1860 compared with that of their fathers

<u>Status of fathers</u>	<u>Status of sons</u>					<u>N</u>
	<u>officials</u>	<u>SMT</u>	<u>Skippers</u>	<u>Improved planter**</u>	<u>Lowest class</u>	
Officials	-	-	-	-	-	-
SMT	-	2	-	2	1*	5
Skipper	-	-	4	2	1	7
Improved planters	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lowest class	-	-	-	2	21	23
	-	2	4	6	23	35

Sources: Anglican parish registers, Harbour Breton; 1898 directory of inhabitants; shipping registers.

Notes: *Improved planter after 1900.
**Traders and general dealers included with improved planters.

No son of an official married and remained in Harbour Breton until age forty - the official class was filled from without and no middle or lower class resident managed to rise into it. The middle classes were in large measure self-recruiting, not only within social stratum but very often within specific trades; son followed father. There was very little mobility between generations out of the lower class. Comparing the above table with Table 8, we see that the apparent career mobility within generations from the lower to the middle class was illusory; mostly it related to different stages in the same career and the need to acquire capital before a schooner could be purchased or a small shop stocked, while minor government positions were not achieved until middle age. Classes as we have defined them were largely filled from within and the chance of a man rising above the station into which he was born was slight. Conversely, no son of an official and few sons of the middle classes attained a status lower than their fathers'.

An examination of marriage patterns reveals that classes were largely (though not perfectly) endogamous. The results are given in Table 10 below.

Marriages occurred more often within classes than is predictable from the proportion of the workforce formed by those classes. Officials were six or seven times as likely to marry within their own classes and the middle classes twice as likely to marry within their own class as chance would dictate. Of course we know nothing of the universe of spouses available to any of these persons when they began to seek a mate nor of the influence of demographic scarcity upon such marriage-choices.

TABLE 10

Occupations of fathers of marriage partners, Harbour Breton, 1850-99

<u>Groom's father's occupation</u>	<u>Bride's father's occupations</u>					<u>N</u>
	<u>Official</u>	<u>SMT</u>	<u>Skipper</u>	<u>Improved planter</u>	<u>Lower class</u>	
Official	8	1	-	-	3	12
SMT	2	2	2	2	7	15
Skippers	-	2	2	2	3	9
Improved planter	-	-	-	1	7	8
Lowest class	1	1	6	5	42	55
	—	—	—	—	—	—
	11	6	10	10	62	99
	—	—	—	—	—	—

Source: Anglican parish records, Harbour Breton.

Actually, most cases of anomalous marriage in class terms involved members of just five families - those of one official (telegraph operator), one skipper and one improved planter showed a distinct tendency to accept partners from a lower class and two families of planters showed a distinct tendency to marry above their station; in at least one of these cases we have reason from other sources to suspect an unregistered schooner, which, if it could be confirmed, would make them improved planters. Besides any shortcomings of the records, there is reason to think that some families were more respectable than others, which introduces an influence other than occupational

status into evaluations of status with the community, though it is markedly less important than class as we have defined it.³³

Last among the indicators of class differences we must consider the distribution of power and influence and it is in this respect that the social organisation of Harbour Breton least resembles that of pre-industrial England. Although the powers and degree of discretion enjoyed by the Harbour Breton official class outweigh that which their counterparts would exert today it is important not to exaggerate their sway. They were, after all, salaried officials, not hereditary landowners and we find no parallel to the rule of squire and parson in rural Devon (Martin, 1965:18) whose ascendancy was both organizational and psychological. To see what the extent and nature of the power of these officials was we shall review the literature on community power in pre-Confederation Newfoundland and consult what little we know of relations between officials and between them and the remainder of the population in nineteenth century Harbour Breton.

All sources agree that merchants and their agents, Members of the House of Assembly, priests and teachers were influential figures in pre-Confederation Newfoundland; some sources also put magistrates, nurses and doctors in this category. Their

³³. Some of these families are otherwise untypical, others not. Our one elite family was not (unless it be for the heads' Italian birth) and nor was one of our upwardly-mobile planters. The other two mobile planters' families show above-average literacy in their children - in one case universal literacy plus upward mobility in one son and all daughters. Our downward-marrying skipper was untypical in that he lost command periodically, had a downwardly-mobile son (one of only two such cases) and that all his sons and daughters married down.

influence extended beyond the limits of their occupational roles because in the absence of formal organs of local government it fell to local officials to mediate between the community and agencies in the outside world. What I have termed the officials thus functioned as both patrons and brokers (Nemec, 1980:chapter 5).³⁴ Clearly merchants and their agents controlled first-order resources (Boissevain, 1966) of a temporal nature while clergy dispensed resources of a more spiritual nature, though they had some access to money, land, housing, clothing and employment which bulked especially large in straitened economic times. Where there was no resident magistrate or doctor, clergymen had also to fulfil their functions (Nemec, 1980:195-6). Community leaders also acted as local political brokers, channelling messages involving individual and local problems, needs and desires to the MHAs, who were usually absent in St. John's (op.cit:200-1). In Catholic settlements the priest "made all the decisions and was recognised by the residents as the authority in all matters" (Hawco, 1979:47), though his influence diminished with distance from the parish seat and tended to be less absolute in areas of mixed religious composition (op.cit:75). Protestants had more of a tradition of lay representation than did Catholics and the temporal power of their clergy was correspondingly less, though a protestant

³⁴. Carlson says that clergymen and teachers were "administrative functionaries" in that "besides their regular work of teaching and holding church services, they both were called upon to fill out unemployment insurance forms, administer wills, write letters for people; and in some cases even survey lands" (1973:38). Literacy was then a rare skill virtually monopolised by the official class.

clergyman of ability and forceful character might become "the recognised voice and authority in the community" (op.cit:47). Teachers, being appointed by the clergy, shared vicariously in their authority and served as surrogate clergymen (op.cit:70-1). The only formally-constituted bodies in the outport districts were the school boards (generally nominal, as the clergy made all decisions relating to education) and the roads boards which existed to maintain the roads in each district by allotting government per capita grants (Faris, 1972:20-1; Hawco, 1979:47). Of officials employed by government - magistrates, policemen, customs officers - and of doctors there is seldom a mention in the literature.

In Harbour Breton we would expect Newmans' agent to be the most powerful figure in the community, as most of the working population was under his command and he made the crucial decisions on granting credit and supplies to the fishermen. It is unfortunate that the Newman papers contain only Head Office letters to the agents and not the agents' replies, as we should like to know more of the role of this important official, though we shall see a little more of him in chapter 5. From our knowledge we may hazard that the agent functioned as both patron and broker and would in interaction with his clients stress whichever aspect of his total role best suited him in the circumstances. The agent sat ex officio on the roads and school boards and so did some other of Newmans' senior employees. The MHA we may discuss briefly - he was never during the study period a Harbour Breton man and was usually a St. John's businessman or lawyer with connections to the Newmans, who

controlled his appointment until the secret ballot was introduced in 1887.³⁵

Carlson (1973:39-40) has recorded that within living memory the clergy in Harbour Breton did not exercise broad leadership roles; usually a priest was a transient outsider and even if long resident spent much of his time away from Harbour Breton visiting his scattered parish. There is reason to believe that nineteenth century ministers fulfilled a broader role; we may at least be sure that Reverend W.K. White, Anglican minister at Harbour Breton from 1854 to 1886, played a part in dispensing parish relief, acting as surrogate doctor and controlling education and the expenditure of monies thereon. In the last-named capacity he brooked no interference.³⁶ Clergy, magistrates and customs officers also sat on the roads and school boards - in fact, with merchants' senior officials they comprised the membership of these boards. The magistrate is a particularly interesting figure and it is a great pity that the court records of the period cannot presently be located, as they

³⁵. Mr. Bond (later Sir Robert), independent MHA for Fortune Bay, once explained that he did not need the support of the government as he had the support of Messrs. Newman.

³⁶. On one occasion Mr. White clashed with certain "evil-minded persons" (who were Newmans' and Nicolles' agents) who served on the school board over the distribution of the education grant for the parish. Mr. White records "I was compelled to appeal to the Government who supported me and removed the obnoxious members. In fact, they removed the whole commission and transferred the grant to the General Board "of which I am chairman" (USPG papers, PANL, W.K. White's report, 30.6.1866). On another occasion Mr. White quarrelled publicly with the school board inspector for having the temerity to inspect his school, saying that the inspector did not live in the parish and was therefore biased. The inspector's reply implies that Mr. White was excessively concerned with his own powers and that no better should be expected of him.

offer insights into this official's role in the community and into the nature of community conflict and the means of its resolution. Much of the magistrate's time was spent adjudicating community - and sometimes family - disputes, frequently of what seems the most trivial nature.³⁷

It may be true as Nemec says, that officials "individually stood to gain a great deal from a mutually satisfactory reciprocal arrangement" (1980:202) but there is evidence that such an accommodation was never reached in Harbour Breton during the study period. From the officials' correspondence and published works some indication of the lines of potential conflict may be drawn; not only conflict over jurisdiction but also philosophy, kinship and economic self-interest divided them. Clergymen did not always approve of the merchants' operations and some of them represented the voice of social dissent; Reverend Tocque wrote of the merchants' "despotic influence" which was "subservient of that independence of mind which every man ought to possess" (1878:186, 189). Reverend W.K. White was of a similar mind, describing the supplying system as the "continual working of a dead horse" and complaining of the merchants' "harsh treatment" of the planters "while it is obvious that large fortunes are made."³⁸ Mr. White

³⁷. Martin (1973) has noted the role of the present-day fisheries officer in resolving community disputes by virtue of his office but with the intention of avoiding conflict not, as here, of publicising it.

³⁸. USPG papers, PANL, W.K. White's report, 30.12.1877; Newman, 23.7.1860 and 16.12.1873. William Keppel White, b. Camberwell, Surrey in 1821 to George Keppel and Sarah White. Most of his associations were with the industrial north; his father was postmaster of Nottingham. Parish work in Leeds; m.

was regularly in conflict with the merchants and their agents over one matter and another, such as demanding free passage on Newman's ships for various of his relatives and quarrelling with the agent over whether a right of way existed across Newmans' premises leading to the church.

Government officials during most of the study period comprised the members of a single extended family who got along ill with the merchants' agents and little better, it seems, with the clergy and especially with Mr. White. Between 1831 and 1862 T.E. Gaden³⁹ was both magistrate and customs officer at Harbour Breton, after which he was promoted and returned to St. John's. After his departure his two offices were divided between his two sons-in-law, Thomas Birkett⁴⁰ and Philip Hubert.⁴¹ All had

Sarah Ann Greene. Ordained St. John's 1847; missionary at Harbour Buffett, Placentia Bay 1847-54; missionary and rural dean at Harbour Breton from 1854 to his death in 1886.

³⁹. Thomas Eppes Gaden, b. 1803 to George and Emma, merchant, St. John's; m. Jane Brine of John, merchant, St. John's, 1829. Customs officer, Harbour Breton 1830-62 and magistrate 1836-62; promoted and returned to St. John's where he died in 1878.

⁴⁰. Thomas Birkett, b. Holmbrook, Cumberland 1814, son of Betty and John, farmer. Married first in England 1834, posted to Jamaica in Imperial service where wife and six of seven children died in epidemic. Customs officer at Burin, Newfoundland 1846-63, second marriage to Ellen Hooper of William and Ellen, merchant and magistrate, Burin; wife and three of four children died of diphtheria. Variously magistrate, customs officer and postmaster at Harbour Breton 1863-76, third marriage to Tryphena Gaden of T.E. and Jane (q.v.) 1864; no children. Died Harbour Breton 1876. Two surviving children - a daughter by first marriage, married a doctor and settled in Fortune and a son by second marriage, emigrated to Canada c. 1867 and settled in Kingston, Ontario where he became treasurer of the Locomotive Works.

⁴¹. Philip Hubert, b. Jersey 1836, m. Eliza Gaden of T.E. and Jane (q.v.). Variously customs officer and magistrate, Harbour Breton, 1866 to 1898 when dismissed, though later reinstated; d. Harbour Breton, 1907. Three children, all died

disagreements with the merchants. Of Gaden Newmans complained that he interpreted regulations to extend his own powers, that he permitted trading from his house (galling, as the merchants rented it to him for a nominal sum) and that he was reluctant to pay his debts. Nor did his decisions as magistrate always favour the merchants, to the extent that in one instance he favoured a group of planters who had threatened to take supplies from their merchant by force at the end of a poor fishing season.⁴² Son-in-law and successor Hubert went further than casual trading and set himself up as a merchant in opposition to Newmans, acting as agent for the St. John's house of Baine, Johnson & Co.; he went bankrupt some ten years later.⁴³ Other son-in-law Birkett's judicial decisions were the cause of frequent complaint, including one that he "vexatiously impeded the business of the Establishment" though Newmans agent was counselled by his principals that it would not be "politic" to evict an unpopular magistrate from his house, which he also rented from them.⁴⁴ After Birkett's death and Hubert's insolvency in 1876 the magistracy passed to Newmans' Harbour Breton agent, though Hubert retained the customs house for more than twenty years longer.

unmarried, and also raised a nephew, Adolph Bernard. Partner in mercantile firm of Hubert, Gaden & Co., Harbour Breton, c. 1866-76.

⁴². Newman, 30.8.1850; 9.9.1859; 26.7.1862; Diary of T.H. Newman, 15.12.1847.

⁴³. Newmans were "delighted" to hear of Hubert's dismissal, saying "He was never any friend to us" (Newman, 3.2.1898).

⁴⁴. Newman, 8.10.1870, 3.6.1873.

There are some indications of amity between Hubert and Reverend White, though not so with his two relatives. Gaden appears not to have been a church member though he was an Anglican. His wife and children were church members and communicants until shortly after the arrival of Reverend White, when they are described as having "fallen away without cause except themselves."⁴⁵ Birkett's death was recorded without comment in Mr. White's quarterly letter, though he was a church member, as was Hubert. For all his disapproval of the merchants' methods Mr. White was on cordial terms with most of their managers, though at daggers drawn with Howe, Harbour Breton agent (1858-67) (see above, note 36). Doctors appear not to have been political figures, though they sat ex officio on various local boards. Dr. Fitzgerald refused a political office when offered to him by Sir Robert Bond, whom he is known to have admired (Fitzgerald, 1935). Fitzgerald and White do not mention each other in their writings; White is known to have been friendly with Fitzgerald's predecessor Drevan, though probably not with his predecessor Clinton who was not a church member.

What can we say in summary of social stratification in Harbour Breton during the study period and in particular of Nemec's three-class model? In general Nemec's model finds a good deal of empirical support from my data. Three classes were defined by economic criteria and systematic differences in the life-chances of their members. The model held good for salaries and incomes, though in the case of fishermen we are only

⁴⁵. Anglican parish records, Harbour Breton, list headed Communicants, 1855-6.

guessing at what their incomes were. These classes were self-recruiting and to a degree endogamous. What community power there was inhered in the official class, though it did not speak with one voice and had more sway over the poorer than the richer fishermen, who were in degree independent of any one merchant. The point on which we find least agreement with Nemeč is the class position of large fishermen. By income, though by no other measure, they would have belonged to the upper class but the literacy barrier was too powerful for them to break in the nineteenth century; though we have located improved planters in the middle class, for which there is justification, they are the least secure members of it. Nemeč's insight into the role of minor government offices leading to the formation of a rural middle class is also well taken; as these offices became available it was the sons of the middle class who took them up. In the case of improved planters it must be admitted that our tools are blunt; it would be worth much to know that the shipping registers were complete but every indication is that they were updated only irregularly and comparison with census data suggests that a quarter or even a third of all schooners escaped registration.

With the reduction in scale of Newman and Company's operations late in the nineteenth century and their eventual withdrawal from Harbour Breton in the early 1900s opportunities arose for local men to engage in the trade which Newmans no longer conducted. We find, however, no locally-born man achieving the status of merchant, though one son of a skipper (born in Burgeo and resident in Harbour Breton since childhood)

moved to nearby Jersey Harbour and became the merchant there. One Harbour Breton-born man, the son of a carpenter, had become a general trader by 1905 and comparatively early death may have robbed him of further business expansion; his son provides the most striking example of social mobility in Harbour Breton's history - he became Chairman of the Bank of Montreal. A number of local men became small dealers and shopkeepers. It is notable, however, that most of the new generation of local merchants which arose after 1900 were immigrants to Harbour Breton - Coady from Placentia Bay, Smith from English Harbour West, Rose from Little Bay West, Elliott and Porter from St. John's. It also appears that the middle classes were less successful in handing on their status to their sons after 1900 than before, though the lower classes were no more successful in rising. In the 1921 census, in those cases where the information is available, slightly more than half of the sons of the middle class held lower-class occupations and almost ninety per cent of the sons of the lower class either held lower-class occupations or were unemployed.

In summary, I have in this chapter addressed the issue of the labour-supply conditions faced by a merchant operating on a frontier, because the problem of securing labour under such conditions has been made central to the emergence of the supplying system. As I discuss in chapter 5 below, one analyst (Antler, 1975) has generated the development of both small, homogeneous units of production and merchants to exploit them from labour-supply conditions on a frontier with a common-property resource. The only way merchants might capture the

value from labour in such circumstances was to encourage the proliferation of small holdings (and control the colony's pricing mechanisms and foreign trade). Yet we do not find here the decline of the large-planter class but rather the reverse - the growth of a whole new class of schooner-owners. It is true, on the other hand, that as frontier conditions receded in Harbour Breton a Bank-fishery arose which used local hired labour, but I shall show in chapter 6 that Newmans entered this fishery to rescue rather than to supplant the supplying system.

I have also in this chapter examined the social structure of the frontier community that grew at Harbour Breton because one recent analyst has made outport social structure an important element in mercantile appropriation. Sider (1986) has made a connection between outports' social structures, mercantile power and the existence of the supplying system (see chapter 7), and many of his assumptions - for instance, of the extent of mercantile rule, the role of supply therein, and the technical underdevelopment of the fishery - are shared by some of the authors of the regional studies that I discuss in the next chapter. Briefly, this chapter offers no support for Sider's view of outport society. For his supposed homogeneity of outports we find instead differences in function and social structure; for his homogeneity of inhabitants of outports, ensured by their common poverty, we find not only differentiation but also social stratification; for his extinction of all but the smallest boats we find the growth of a middle-sized schooner fleet and the rise of the offshore fishery. We do not find, either, the existence of the kind of

hegemonic rural elite here that Sider posits. Harbour Breton did, as Sider says, grow in response to the needs of mercantile capitalism, but it did not grow into what he supposes.

CHAPTER 5THE SUPPLYING SYSTEM AND THE NEWFOUNDLAND FISHERY

The Newfoundland supplying system (also called the credit, truck, barter, and credit and truck system by various authors (c/f Great Britain, 1933; McRae, 1869; Coaker, 1920) has been frequently described - and almost universally condemned - yet only recently have credit systems in Newfoundland and elsewhere (see below) been the subject of comparative study or rigorous analysis. In the case of Newfoundland, description and analysis of the supplying system rest upon no foundation of empirical research and draw upon earlier non-empirical accounts which themselves have published antecedents not difficult to trace. In this chapter I will first summarise the ways in which the Newfoundland supplying system has been described, analyzed and explained, then refer to recent work especially that of Ommer (1981) and Vickers (1983, 1985) on credit systems elsewhere in the north-east of the continent. Finally I will present a novel analysis of the Newfoundland supplying system which I call, following Meillassoux, a system of production. Such systems are characterized by the ways in which capital is invested in production and the basic units of production reproduced.

The classic description (though itself derivative) of the Newfoundland supplying system has been that of Amulree (1933), chairman of the Royal Commission that recommended the replacement of Responsible Government by Commission of Government. Amulree opined that the supplying (what he called the credit) system had arisen in the mid-nineteenth century to

replace an earlier truck system under which fishermen were employed by merchants and paid in kind, though the merchant had certain "feudal" obligations to his fishermen:

"From the days when the country first came to be permanently settled until the middle of the nineteenth century, the organisation of the fisheries was largely feudal. The merchants or exporters who established themselves in St. John's and other centres employed a number of fishermen to catch fish for them. These fishermen did not receive wages but were provided by the merchants, in return for their services during the fishing season, with sufficient foodstuffs and other necessaries to maintain themselves and their families in tolerable comfort throughout the year. The merchants were shop-keepers or store-keepers as well as exporters of fish. In addition, the fishermen were supplied by the merchants with such gear, equipment and provisions as might be required to enable them to conduct their fishing operations. It was the practice of each merchant to support his own fishermen in bad times as well as good. Money did not change hands; indeed, it could have been said with truth only a few years ago that there were families living in Newfoundland who had never seen money in their lives. Under this system, similar to the old truck system in England, large fortunes were made by the merchants; the fishermen, though saved from the danger of destitution, were little more than serfs with no hope of becoming independent" (Great Britain, 1933:79).

This is not accurate history. There is no mention of the migratory fishery, no mention of the planter fishery, all fishermen being considered small operators "employed" directly by merchants, and there is no mention of the accounting system of this supposed truck system - the merchants pay the fishermen in kind rather than in cash, but we do not know how the amount to be paid was reckoned. We should also note evidence (Matthews, 1968) that early fishing hands were paid wages. Amulree's method of analysis is to match unfamiliar practices to those known to him: hence he manages to find the unlikely combination of early industrial methods of controlling labour

(employment and truck) with feudal obligations. We need not take his analysis - especially the label of feudalism - seriously, though some appear to have done so (Chadwick, 1967). Amulree goes on to say that, about the middle of the nineteenth century, feudal/truck relations between merchants and fishermen were superseded by the more familiar credit (what I am calling supply) relations between supplying merchants and fishermen:

"Vicious as this system was, it was not nearly so destructive as that which developed from it.¹ As the population increased, the old feudal practices were gradually modified. The obligation to support the fisherman in bad times, the only virtue of the former system, became the duty not of the merchants but of the state. It was obvious that the fishermen could not conduct the fishery from their own resources and the custom grew up under which each fisherman went to a merchant and obtained from him, on credit, supplies of equipment and food to enable him and his family to live, not for the whole year, but during the three or four months of the fishing season. At the end of the season, the fisherman returned to the merchant with his catch of fish dried and cured, to set off against his account. The price of fish was fixed by the merchants, as also was the price of the provisions, etc., supplied to the fisherman and his family in the spring. In cases where fish was valued according to quality, the quality of the fish tended by the fisherman was determined by a "culler" or valuer who himself was the employee of the merchant. In good years a balance was left to the fisherman, after deduction of the debt due to the merchant: this balance was paid to him in cash.² In bad years the value of the fish tendered to the fisherman was not sufficient to pay for his supplies and he, therefore, remained in debt to the merchant. The balance available to him in good years was often such as to leave him with no margin after he had provided for himself and his family for the rest of the year and the same process was, therefore, repeated in the following spring. In bad years there was no balance at all and while in some cases, which were considered specially deserving, merchants continued to make advances to

1. Elsewhere (p. 115) Amulree says the credit system is "nothing more or less than a truck system"

2. Nemec (1980) notes the reluctance of merchants to pay balances in cash; also see Chapter 6 below.

assist a man over the winter, thus adding to the burden of debt to be repaid during the ensuing year, the majority had no resource to fall back upon and, in default of other employment, were compelled to turn to the Government for relief.

Under this system, which has continued, in spite of criticism and repeated warnings, down to the present day, the merchants were given three chances of making a profit, first on the supplies made to the fisherman in the spring, secondly on the sale of fish to foreign markets, and thirdly on purchases by the fisherman from his earnings of sufficient goods to carry him through the winter. The fishermen, on the other hand, who had never been given a chance of becoming independent, were deprived of the right to look to their merchants for assistance in bad times and were compelled in emergency to seek public charity. True, in good years they now handled cash instead of receiving remuneration in kind, but most of the cash went back again to the merchants in payment for winter supplies and there was little incentive for saving when it was known that supplies for the fishery of the following year could always be obtained on credit.

The credit system thus came to be accepted as an essential element in the conduct of the fishery. Very few men today, even if they were in a position to achieve independence, would dream of outfitting themselves on a cash basis although their supplies would be obtained much more cheaply. The great majority would regard any such procedure as speculating with their own hard-earned money; they would prefer to speculate with the merchants' money and to hoard their own at home or deposit it in a Bank" (Great Britain, 1933:79-80).

I have quoted from Amulree's report at length because his summary of the major features of the supplying system has been little modified since his writing, though his analysis has been modified in certain respects by later writers, as considered below. In essence Amulree regards the supplying system as a means for merchants to appropriate surplus from the fishermen, the merchants having three annual chances to do so (a conclusion from which I shall depart in the next chapter). On the advantages of this system to the fishermen he is less clear. Early in the above passage Amulree states that fishermen "obviously" could not carry on the fishery from their own

resources, yet later he says that they would not do so if they could because the system acted to remove independence.³ That the outfitting of fishermen is a form of speculation he acknowledges in his final paragraph.

Amulree's account of the supplying system was based on no original research and it is not difficult to trace the written sources from which he drew his opinions (see Jukes, 1842; Prowse, 1895; Newfoundland, 1895; Pedley, 1863:204-5). Derivative though they were, Amulree's factual views on this subject have generally been accepted by later writers even when they have departed from his interpretation. I shall now discuss two later analyses of the supplying system in Newfoundland, those of Wadel (1969) and Overton (1978) before moving to recent historical research about credit systems in more general terms.

Wadel bases his analysis of the supplying system upon Amulree's description of its functioning but he sees the credit system as benefitting both fishermen and merchants, not just the exploitation of one by the other of which Amulree writes; moreover, Wadel examines the moral basis of the fisherman-merchant relationship. Wadel writes that "The outpost mercantile system might be seen as a system transforming fish and other resources into a living" (1969:20). The merchants were crucial to the prosecution of the fishery because they provided working and investment capital and access to markets and consumer goods. Merchants needed fishermen for commercial

³. Need for a hedge against misfortune when public systems of aid in the case of sickness, old age and mishap were little developed might have been noted.

reasons - to supply them with fish, from the export of which most of their profits came. "The merchant would continue to provide the necessary products of the outside world as long as the fisherman continued to provide the fish" (1969:18). Because the merchants supplied the fishermen on credit they had to control the fishermen's consumption to recoup their credit, carrying only basic items in stock; because cash came only from exporting and because this produced most of the profits the only way for the merchants to sell more goods was to have the fishermen catch more fish, which could not be ensured (1969:19-20). Fishermen dealt with merchants because it gave them access to resources otherwise unobtainable; they dealt with merchants on credit, even when they could afford to pay for their supplies, because by this means the merchants shared the risks of the voyage with the fishermen. "The fishermen thus seemed to calculate the value of the merchant sharing the risk of the fishery to be greater than the value to be gained by outfitting themselves" (Wadel, 1969:17). Wadel cites Amulree in support of this contention.

The credit relationship between merchants and fishermen would continue for years - sometimes for generations - and was normally on a non-cash basis; and -

"...the non-cash basis of the exchange itself acted towards the perpetuation of the relation, the fishermen always either being in debt to the merchant or drawing on his credit. The accounting would seem to have been secondary, symbolising more the necessity of the fisherman-merchant relationship than determining it" (Wadel, 1969:16-7).

The relationship between the merchant and each individual fisherman that he supplied was private and personal, with

obligations of privacy, trust and support on both sides (c/f Faris, 1972). Because the relationship between merchant and fisherman was personalised and because of the merchant's sole access to resources outside the community, the merchant performed the function of a broker and the relationship of merchant to fisherman was that of patron to client (Wadel, 1969:20). The merchant had to commit fishermen to their debts and ensure reciprocity - i.e., to convert debt into obligation - which he could do by observing the community's rules governing merchant-fisherman relationships; there was also the possibility of adjusting his prices to guard against the possibility of not being repaid, though there was danger in this practice:

"We can imagine a vicious circle in this connection: the lower the price of fish the greater the number of fishermen unable to balance their accounts and the greater the margin required to safeguard the merchants against losses, leading to a still lower price and so on" (Wadel, 1969:18).

This happened, however, only in times of steadily decreasing world prices; in general the merchants preferred to keep prices of goods low and pay a fair (i.e., acceptable) price for fish to keep a clientele.

Wadel's perspective is that of an economic anthropologist and his analysis of the supplying system is rooted in exchange theory. Thus it is differential access to valued resources - fish on the one hand, markets, goods and capital on the other - which brings fisherman and merchant together. That the merchant can turn the accounting to his advantage is conceded, but the relationship brings benefits to both parties. The relationship between a merchant and each of his dealers is a personal one -

the merchant must, after all, gauge the supplies he will issue to each fisherman in the light of what return in fish he can expect - and a fusion of debt and moral obligation ensures the perpetuation of the relationship. The advantage of Wadel's analysis over Amulree's is that Wadel examines the moral basis of the fisherman-merchant relationship while Amulree imposes a moral judgement upon the system; moreover, Wadel shows why the fishermen sought dealings with merchants whereas Amulree does not. Much of what Wadel has to say is unexceptionable, though I shall depart from his analysis in certain respects below. What Wadel does not show is why merchants and fishermen should have dealt on credit rather than on some other basis and what he portrays is the ideal workings of the supplying system, not the way it worked in practice.

Overton (1978) analyses the supplying system from the perspective of a political economist who is interested in development theory. Overton, who wants to explain why the Newfoundland economy has been underdeveloped⁴, holds that explanation requires an understanding of nineteenth-century Newfoundland's position in the British mercantile system as a supplier of salt fish, of how merchant capital became the dominant form in Newfoundland's economy and of how this stage of capitalism became a barrier to the development of later stages (1978:107). Overton argues that the ship-fishery gave way to the family fishery because the latter produced cheaper commodities. Having fishermen and their families provide their

4. If indeed it was (c/f Alexander, 1973, 1974).

own means of production (at least nominally) saved merchants some of the costs they would have to have borne were production organized directly under mercantile control (107, 115).⁵

Nominal ownership of their own means of production did not, however, make the fishermen truly independent of the merchants:

"Their 'independent' status does not indicate that they were free to produce whatever they wanted to, or that there was no merchant regulation over the quality of the product or the prices. They were not (*italics*) 'free' bargaining agents. In some areas, small entrepreneurs (planters) who were 'financed' by merchants organized fishing with several 'crews'" (Overton, 1978:115).

Merchants, being materially free from a role in production⁶ by virtue of the family fishery, operated mainly in the sphere of circulation, importing and distributing supplies and marketing fish, but they retained control over production by means of credit dealings with the fishermen, which also enabled them to appropriate surplus value. Most merchants:

"...were also involved in usury. Using the truck system, usually under monopoly conditions, merchant-usurers could set fish prices so low that virtually all of the surplus above a bare minimum could be appropriated.⁷ In times of depression, or when the terms of trade were declining, merchants pressed back upon the producers to maintain capital accumulation" (Overton, 1978:107-8).

In hard times fishermen would be refused or limited in their supplies by the merchants and would have to retreat into

⁵. Overton (p. 115) points out that the seasonal nature of the fishery was important here (c/f Sinclair, above). Nevertheless, credit was also given on the south coast where the fishery was year-round.

⁶. Overton (p. 115) says that merchants were involved in production to the extent that they owned transport, Banking and sealing vessels.

⁷. It is left unclear why it is truck, rather than just the monopoly position, that leads to "usury".

subsistence production. This was not, therefore, a peasant economy in which a surplus was marketed but "a system where merchants exercised direct and indirect control over production which was primarily geared to the market" (Overton, 1978:108). This is a conclusion with which I concur, but Overton goes on to say that merchants were not engaged in production but in circulation:

"The structure of the industry was archaic, and merchants had little desire to take over, organize and directly regulate cod production. For the merchants, the fishery was not (*italics*) a food industry in which capital investment led to production. Rather, cod served them as a form of bullion, something they took in exchange for imported commodities because the people had no money to pay for them.⁸ Merchants considered selling goods their main business, not producing cod" (Overton, 1978:108).

Merchants were, by this account, engaged in directing production for the market but, at the same time, engaged mostly in the sphere of circulation, an apparent contradiction that can be resolved only once (a) we have redefined the nature of capital investment to admit such cases and (b) we have abandoned any rigid distinction between the spheres of production and circulation.

Antler, an economist, addresses the same problem as Overton. An early period of prosperity and economic diversity was followed after 1840 by a period of stagnation - even retrogression - in the Newfoundland economy, including a marked decline in the capital/labour ratio and in the productivity of labour in the fishery. Marx predicted that, on a frontier, small-holdings would be eliminated by the government placing an

⁸. From Newman papers via Ryan, but see chapter 6 below.

artificially high price on land but, in Newfoundland, what occurred in the nineteenth century was not proletarianization and concentration of holdings but "dispersion and dissipation of capital, the proliferation of small holdings, and the virtual elimination of wage-earners as a class" (Antler, 1975:6).

Antler explains the stagnation of the Newfoundland economy, the rise of the small-boat fishery and the predominance of merchant-capital by the problems capitalists face in extracting economic surplus on a frontier.

On a frontier means of production are in the hands of producers, not capitalists, and because land is easily accessible there will be no class of landless labourer ready to work for wages. True capital - i.e., economic surplus extracted through the purchase of labour - can arise only if producers are barred from acquiring ownership of the means of production, which could be done by inflating the price of land. In the case of Newfoundland, however, the major resource was a common-property resource - the sea - to which differential access could not be ensured by governmental policy. As industrial capital, therefore, could not form, merchant-capital tended to predominate in frontier regions (Antler, 1975:18-21).

Surplus value can be captured on a frontier with a common-property resource in only two ways. The mother-country can ban colonization so that the common-property resources can be exploited by economic enterprises based (and presumably regulated) in the mother-country; this was the first strategy used in Newfoundland by the colonial powers. The second strategy is the opposite of the first - to encourage

colonization in the extreme; surplus value can then be extracted by those owning merchants' capital to the extent that they can control the colony's pricing mechanisms and monopolise foreign trade:

"To the extent that the single atomized unit of labor-plus-capital is too small to trade direct with foreign capitalists, the colony's foreign trade will be managed by merchant capitalists who, if they enjoy monopoly power as they sell imports and monopsony power as they purchase the colony's export staple, can appropriate surplus value generated in the colony" (Antler, 1975:24).

As common-property resources tend to be over-exploited,⁹ productive units exploiting such resources tend to homogeneity of size and merchants maximise their profits by dealing with as many productive units as they can afford, assuming that merchants can co-operate in setting prices.¹⁰ Prices must be set at a level at which each productive unit receives a value equal to the cost of its annual subsistence - less will not reproduce the unit. The merchants, to continue in the trade, need a rate of exploitation of labour high enough to ensure a rate of profit on capital no lower than that available from investments elsewhere (p. 25). Conditions in a frontier fishery would, in short, lead to the development of an independently-owned small-boat fishery from which merchants could extract surplus by unequal exchange.

Antler argues that certain changes in the legal basis of relationships within the fishing industry accompanied the

⁹. I.e., exploitation does not stop at the point at which the industry's returns are maximised (c/f Gordon, 1953).

¹⁰. And that merchants have the power to refuse supplies as a disciplinary measure (Neis, 1980:27).

transition from the eighteenth-century system in which fish was caught by large boats with hired crews to the nineteenth-century system in which fish was caught by small, household-based production units: the crucial legal judgement was delivered in 1841 (Antler, 1975:86). An act of 1775 had given fishermen a lien on the product of the voyage until their wages were met, which in practice meant that a supplying merchant was responsible for servants' wages whether they were employed by him or by a boatkeeper whom the merchant supplied. The merchant, should his payments to the planter fall short of the wages due to the planter's servants, was responsible for paying the balance (Antler, 1975:112-3). The merchant, in turn, held a lien upon the fish of the planters whom he supplied. Thus the supplying system operated until 1841 under what Antler calls the lien system, which was based on the principle that: "...any advance of supplies...constituted an implicit contract that the season's catch would be delivered to the party advancing the supplies" (Antler, 1975:42). This system had protected merchants (and, of course, fishing servants) who advanced capital to boatkeepers in Newfoundland in the days when colonization was not officially recognised and when obligations could not be secured in property (pp. 41-2). The merchants were unable, however, to capture all of the surplus of the voyage because some was retained by boatkeepers (p. 80).

The lien system was replaced by the truck system, under which the merchant no longer had a legal claim upon the product of the voyage (though he could sue for debt) but was no longer liable for servants' wages; the law thus came into line with the

reality that the fishery was now conducted by residents (Antler, 1975:26-7).¹¹ The crucial distinction between the lien and truck systems was:

"While the lien and truck systems are both systems of credit, involving little or no cash exchange, under the former system the implements of production have characteristics of capital, while under the latter system the implements of production have only the characteristics of tools" (Antler, 1975:46).

Antler at first says that it was in the interests of the merchants to encourage the growth of the small-boat fishery - "colonization in the extreme" - in which he agrees with Overton, but his references to frontier conditions imply that it may have been more in the interests of the fishermen to work for themselves than to work for merchants. House observes:

"The household fishery in fact emerged to replace an earlier planter fishery in which fishermen were hired directly by planters and merchants (Antler, 1975). Since this evolution from wage-labourers to independent commodity producers is contrary to Marx' predictions about the unfolding of capitalism, it requires some explanation. This is duly provided in Marxist functionalist terms.

The system is purported to serve the interests of the merchant capitalist class because the main costs of the reproduction of labour are absorbed by the fishing households."

House finds this type of analysis plausible but unproven and open to question on both logical and empirical grounds:

"It is not grounded in an empirical analysis of nineteenth-century merchants' actual motives and behaviour. It is at least equally plausible that the system was contrary to the merchants' best interests. Did they really maximize their profits through the household fishery? Returns to invested capital were low, merchants often went bankrupt and the merchant

¹¹. The object of laws enforcing the payment of wages was to ensure that labourers returned to England after the fishing voyage (Antler, 1975:26).

class as a whole suffered in the general decline of the Newfoundland fishery that began in the late nineteenth century. The merchant interest would have been better served had the planter fishery been developed into a modern industrial fishery like Iceland's. The Marxist account, relying on the imputed perceptions by merchants of their best interests, is unconvincing and, like other functionalist arguments, tautological.

An alternative explanation, at least equally plausible (but equally unsupported by direct empirical evidence) is that the planter fishery was replaced by the household fishery at the instigation of fishermen and their families. Better to be an independent producer, even one indebted to a local merchant, in control of one's own means of production and working conditions, able to supplement one's income from subsistence household production, living permanently within one's local community, than a poorly paid, overworked servant on a banking schooner that separated a man from his family for long periods" (House, 1986:186).

House might have added that nowhere do the analysts he criticises explain why merchants and fishermen, large or small, should have dealt on credit rather than on some other basis.

Antler has argued that exploitation of a common-property resource led naturally to small productive units and, that being the case, it was in the interests of merchants to supply as many fishermen as possible. Ommer, a historian at Memorial University, has like Antler taken Scott Gordon's (1953) model as a starting-point but has used it to show how credit dealings were a means of limiting the dissipation of economic rent to which the exploitation of common-property resources leads in Gordon's model. Her study was, unlike those cited above, based upon empirical research - the examination of the journals of the Charles Robin Company of Jersey, which operated in the Gaspé region of Quebec.

The fishery being a common-property resource with an

unprotected rent,¹² unregulated exploitation will lead to decreasing returns to capital and labour as a result of excess factor supply - in other words, unrestricted access to the fishery will result in more fishermen and merchants than the resource can support at a level of earnings above bare subsistence. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries merchants devised means of controlling access of both labour and capital to the resource, establishing what amounted to property rights in the resource and preventing dissipation of economic rent. Ommer writes:

"The early history of the British North American fisheries can be seen as the search by fish merchants for a strategy that would guarantee their profits by protecting their access to the resource and excluding competition" (1981:110).

The earliest strategy in Newfoundland was to prohibit settlement, though Robin tolerated and even encouraged settlement in Gaspe. His means of restricting access to the resource was the truck system, which is "...usually defined as the use of barter rather than cash as the medium of exchange in a local community, which results in a labourer's indebtedness to the company store" (op.cit:111). The use of the truck system was the major way in which a merchant minimised the risk of his control over the resource being challenged by independent fishermen and this system had a built-in mechanism to prevent competition between merchants - that is, the indebtedness of the fishermen. The attraction of truck to the fisherman was that

12. Economic rent: the difference between current earnings of a resource and what that resource would earn in the next best alternative use (Nemmers, 1970).

the merchant carried his risk of the season's capital outlay; he was protected against the instability of the fishery in return for guaranteeing his catch to the merchant who supplied him.

The fisherman's risk was transferred to the merchant, who could face bankruptcy in the case of a run of bad years in catching or at market. The merchant had, therefore, to guard against over-supplying and depleting his capital:

"While the truck system secured for the merchant control over the fish, fine judgement was needed in its application, so that maximum control was maintained at minimum capital outflow" (Ommer, 1981:111).

Competition between merchants was regulated by the use of truck and by care in setting fish prices. These were set at the beginning of the season with reference to market prices in the previous year; if other merchants were operating in the area their price would be also taken into account. We find, therefore, not so much collusion among merchants as caution in the use of price-competition:

"Excessive inter-merchant competition would have destroyed the whole basis on which the truck system rested, since it would have freed fishermen from debt. Price wars were not pursued, therefore, to the point where independence from the firm could have been gained and the economic rent from the catch lost" (op.cit:113).

Itinerant traders were less of a problem than competing merchants, because they only penetrated the area when rumours of a good catch reached them and did not appear in bad years. They did not threaten the truck system because they "preferred payment in cash in good years and no business in bad years" (p.111) though they could cause "an irritating seepage of fish out of the merchant system" (p. 113). Recalcitrant fishermen could be sanctioned by the refusal of further supplies while the

independent planters were tied to their merchants "in exchange for a buffer against bad years and capital depletion" (Ibid.). Fishermen and shore-workers employed directly by Robin posed no threat to control over rent as they were bound by indentures, paid in a mixture of cash and barter and sent back to Jersey once their contracts expired (p. 114). Finally, Ommer argues that the credit system intensified the weaknesses of a single-staple export economy and retarded economic development (p. 121).

To summarise, these writers have - between them - addressed a number of questions concerning the conduct of the Newfoundland fishery: the need for the fisherman-merchant relationship, its resting in credit rather than some other medium, to whose benefit the system worked and the defining characteristics of the credit (what I call the supplying) system. To these we might add the historical origins of the system and its effect upon economic development, matters which I do not directly address in this thesis. What questions a writer poses, as well as the answers he finds, of course depends upon the theoretical standpoint from which his analysis departs, but we can summarise these writers' questions and answers as follows:

(a) Merchant-fishermen relationships. Wadel discusses the persistence of such relationships rather than why they existed in the first place and finds the answer (per exchange theory) to lie in differential access to resources, from which it is but a short step to mutuality of benefit. Amulree likewise assumes the existence of both merchants and fishermen. Overton and Antler, by contrast, want to show why merchants chose to deal

with independent fishermen rather than hiring labour directly. Overton assumes that the one strategy was cheaper for merchants than the other (though House returns that it is equally plausible that the merchants could not form crews). Antler seeks to show that frontier conditions and a common-property resource would of themselves lead to both the development of small, homogeneous units of production and of merchants to exploit them through unequal exchange. Ommer notes that the company that she studied did employ fishermen and other labourers, from which we can assume that supplying independent fishermen gave rise to more trade than could be got by fishing solely on ones own account.

(b) Assuming the existence of both merchants and fishermen, why did the two deal on credit rather than on some other terms? Amulree notes that the fishermen could not conduct the industry from their own resources, but he does not develop this point. The (ethnographically) present credit system developed about 1850 as merchants shucked off their few previous obligations to the fishermen and exploitation thereafter characterised the system; merchants extracted surplus value from enslaved fishermen and had three annual chances to do so. Wadel accepts Amulree's point that credit is unequal exchange but also notes that the system had advantages, in the matter of risk-sharing, to the fishermen as well as to the merchants. Antler and Overton see credit dealings as a means for merchants to control production indirectly while - once again - extracting surplus value through unequal exchange. Ommer finds that credit (or 'truck', as she prefers) gave the merchants a stable, tied

clientele and gave the fishermen a buffer against the uncertainties of the industry.

(c) To whose benefit did the system work? That the merchant got the better of the exchange is taken as axiomatic (although only some writers will allege that the system existed for the benefit of merchants). Wadel and Ommer consider that the fisherman-merchant relationship was not altogether one-sided. Most assume that debt and obligation are synonymous but Wadel, following Faris (1972), writes that the one must be transformed into the other - therefore it is the normative morality of the community that allows the fisherman-merchant relationship to persist. Ommer also notes the importance of sanctions on the part of the merchant for fishermen who do not willingly reciprocate.

(d) What were the characteristics of the credit (supplying) system? These can be summarised, with degrees of emphasis varying from writer to writer, as credit - the issue of supplies in advance of payment; truck or barter - the exchange of goods in kind rather than of cash; and reciprocity - the obligation upon a fisherman (not in law after 1841, Antler says) to return his catch of fish to the merchant who supplied him. The terms credit, truck and barter are used, singly or in combination, to typify the supplying system and these terms need to be clarified, which is done in the next section.

Credit, truck and barter in the supplying system

Credit is a subject in which anthropologists have shown

little sustained interest since Firths (1964) pioneering effort.

Firth defines credit as:

"...the lending of goods or services without immediate return against the promise of a future repayment. It involves an obligation by the borrower to make a return and confidence by the lender in the borrower's good faith and ability to repay" (Firth, 1964:29).

Firth adds that the return may be of the same article or service as loaned or a different one, may or may not require interest and may be enforceable at law or only by social sanctions.

Firth finds it useful, though not always easy, to distinguish between loans to finance consumption and to finance investment, which he calls social and economic loans respectively, the former being as common as the latter in peasant societies.

Economic loans are frequently short-term and reciprocal, such as the routine loaning and borrowing of household implements or of grain or cash to tide over until the harvest. Long-term loans, from moneylenders or from credit associations, are also found. Credit operations in peasant societies tend to proliferate and it would be not only unwise but frequently impossible to service all credit obligations that arise¹³ (Firth, 1964:29-32).

We may, following Firths definition, readily concede that credit relations existed between a supplying merchant and a fisherman, who bore the obligation to reciprocate with his catch of fish for supplies tendered to him in advance of catching the fish; it is, however, another matter to make the extension of credit the defining characteristic of the relationship. If we were to do so, then we would have to ask why credit was always

¹³. Repayment may be in non-material services such as status, respect and obligation.

needed, why it was always sought from a merchant and why credit loans from a merchant to a fisherman were always personal, liquid, indivisible and non-negotiable. Moreover, we would have to ask why credit should - as is held to have been the case in the Newfoundland fishery - have led to relations of superordination and subordination between merchant and fisherman whereas it led to mutuality of interest between Arensburg's (1968) Irish farmers and shopkeepers. That it was either a convenience or a necessity for a fisherman, whose catch went to market only once or twice a year, to be able to obtain goods in advance of his ability to pay for them is clear, but that it should have led to the dominance of the supplying system is not. My conclusion is, therefore, that the merchant was the source of much more than loans to fishermen.

The supplying system is also equated with truck, which Ommer also makes synonymous with barter (erroneously, as we shall see) and several writers make truck the source of the fishermen's indebtedness and therefore of their dependence upon their employers¹⁴ or, in this case, their supplying merchants. References here to the truck system are really by analogy, or rather by syllogism - supply and truck both dealt in goods not in cash, therefore supply is truck. But we do not find truck characterising a whole industry; nor do we find either credit or debt figuring in truck. Moreover, provident workers avoided truck dealings whenever possible whereas, we are told, fishermen

¹⁴. We might as well observe in this regard that if debt bound the worker to his employer it would, by the same token, prevent the employer discharging an indebted worker.

sought it even when they were in a position to deal in cash. These are significant differences between supply and truck, which concentration upon the common practice of payment in kind will obscure.

Hilton, in a history of the British truck system, defines truck as:

"...the name given to a set of closely related arrangements whereby some form of consumption is tied to the employment contract. The devices comprising the truck system are distinguished in statute law and in economic literature from non-pecuniary payments of other sorts mainly by the allegation that they were means of reducing the employee's real wage below his nominal wage" (Hilton, 1960:1).

Hilton observes that if the purpose of truck was to reduce real wages then economic theory would not predict its success. An employer who practiced truck would be compelled to raise the level of nominal wages by at least the amount of the employee's loss at the truck-shop by way of compensation and, in fact, a competitive employer would do better to lower nominal wages, when that was possible, and have done with truck (1960:3).

Hilton finds two main forms of truck - a compulsion to take part of the wages in goods as a condition of employment and a compulsion to accept goods conditional upon the irregular drawing of wages earned but yet to be paid (that is, workers took advances upon their wages in truck).¹⁵ The first form was mainly found in combination with the putting-out system in the hand-made nail and frame-weaving industries; payment in cash was

¹⁵. Hilton finds it useful to distinguish between the two forms of truck, though he notes that they are better seen as two ends of a continuum: form two, for instance, could be converted into form one by lengthening the pay-period (1960:30, 37).

made by small factors with the understanding that some part of the wages would be spent at the truck-shop and the sanction for doing so was the threat of early discharge in slack periods (1960:14). The object of truck in these trades was to circumvent the payment of standard wages and it was not practised by the large employers, who tried to put down the truck system (pp. 16-7). Truck masters did not allow workers to incur debts at the truck-shops beyond what was expected to be paid at the next reckoning; that is, they neither extended credit nor permitted debt (p. 18). The second form of truck was found especially in coal-mining and its object was to avoid the difficulty and expense of maintaining a weekly cash-payroll in remote locations; pay periods were therefore lengthy and employees who needed to draw upon their wages between paydays were confined to the company store. Truck in these cases was an administrative device to cover the cost of making advances in wages. Employees with any choice in the matter avoided this practice and truck never, therefore, became universal even in the trades in which it was practised (p. 39).

The supplying system has also been seen as a system of barter. This is made most explicit by Ommer, who equates barter with truck on the grounds that in both cases goods rather than cash were exchanged and that in neither case was money the medium of exchange. That truck was not identical with barter we have just seen but there remain the possibilities that supplying was a species of barter and that cash was not the medium of exchange in either barter or supply.

Barter is generally held by economists to rest upon a double coincidence of wants - if one partner has a cow and wants a coat he must find another who not only wants a cow but also has a coat to dispose of; moreover the parties to a barter transaction must then negotiate terms of exchange that will vary with each transaction. Economists have often thought of barter as a natural outcome of a human propensity to truck and bargain. True barter, therefore, requires more than exchange without money: it requires that the terms of exchange be specific to each transaction according to the values the partners bring to the transaction.

Now this is not the case in all non-monetary transactions. Humphrey (1985) has shown that when goods are frequently exchanged the notion of an equilibrium price (i.e., one reflecting the balance of supply and demand) tends to emerge even when monetary values do not inform the exchange, so that the particularity of values of trading partners no longer sets the terms of exchange: common expectations emerge from frequent exchanges. In such cases the use of money as a means of exchange and as a means of payment would avoid the high transaction costs of barter unless the use of money itself had high costs; e.g., under hyperinflation or to avoid the attention of tax-men (Humphrey, 1985:50-1). Though Humphrey does not make the distinction, her analysis would seem to imply that we should keep true barter separate from non-monetary transactions that take place according to a notion of price: that is, distinguish between barter and exchange without the use of money (see Orlove, 1986).

The supplying system qualifies as an exchange without money but not as barter, because the goods exchanged between merchant and fisherman were valued at money rates without negotiation - that is, money values (and price) mediated transactions even though money was used neither as a means of exchange nor of payment. In one sense money thus acted as a medium, though not as a means, of exchange and as a standard of value even if currency did not. Moreover, dealings under the supplying system lacked the immediacy of barter, payment being delayed and specified in kind but not in quantity.¹⁶ Why merchants and fishermen did not exchange currency or other negotiable instruments in their dealings is, of course, another matter,¹⁷ which will be taken up below.

In summary, none of the above-mentioned explanations of the supplying system does justice to its prime features. Supply was not a variety of truck or barter and, if it included credit, it is plain that the merchant gave his clients more than just time to pay. We must question the universal contention that the fisherman's debts bound him to his supplying merchant and that it was the non-monetary nature of exchange that had this effect and we shall see in the succeeding chapter that merchants were reluctant to tolerate debts which exceeded the debtor's ability to repay. If the relationship between merchant and fisherman

16. Humphrey (1985) allows a category of delayed barter, but in the light of the foregoing this would be better seen as a form of credit.

17. The difficulty and expense of making cash payments in a district where there were no banks was not a factor, as other negotiable instruments, e.g., bills of exchange, could have been used.

continued it was because each felt a continuing need for the others services.

Credit systems outside the Atlantic Canadian fishery

Before I outline an original explanation of the supplying system in Newfoundland I shall discuss a number of cases in marine and land-based industries outside Atlantic Canada which appear to show similarities to the supplying system found in Newfoundland - the seventeenth-century Massachusetts cod-fishery and Nantucket whale-fishery, the nineteenth-century cod and herring fisheries in the Isle of Lewis in the Scottish Hebrides and the fur trade of the Hudsons Bay Company in the Canadian north.

The Hudson's Bay Company dealt with three categories of Indian in prosecuting the fur-trade - the fur-trappers who lived in the distant forest-zones, various groups of middleman which did the actual trading at the posts and the 'Home Guard Cree' who lived near the posts and supplied them with country produce (Ray & Freeman, 1978:40-2). Indian groups in the Canadian north participated to varying degrees in the fur-trade and even the main producers remained dependent upon subsistence hunting until the nineteenth century, though their demands for European goods could be satisfied only by devoting some of their time to trapping. The degree to which Indians became dependent upon the fur-trade has been greatly exaggerated (Morantz, 1980:39). They never depended upon the posts for food and their reliance upon the posts for arms and tools was limited. European goods supplemented traditional goods and did not supplant them

(op.cit:46-51). The situation of the Hudson's Bay Company dealing with Indians for furs thus differed in several respects from that of the Newmans dealing with the planters for fish. Newmans dealt directly with the producers, the fur company with middlemen and across an ethnic boundary. Newmans supplied the necessities of production and subsistence, the fur company few of the former and fewer of the latter. In short, there were different systems of production and reproduction in the two cases.

The Hudson's Bay Company valued furs and goods in Sterling but, because the Indians "had no conception of the use of money" (Ray & Freeman, 1978:54), these prices were converted into what were called MB (standing for made beaver) values, the standard being the value of a prime, whole beaver pelt. Trade goods, furs, skins and country produce were given MB values according to a standard set each year by the head office. Actual rates of exchange differed from the standard as factors tried to exceed the official rates by as much as circumstances allowed; the excess of furs obtained by thus advancing the terms of trade over the official standard was called the overplus¹⁸ (op.cit:54-5, 65-6). Ray and Freeman find no evidence of a relationship between the number of furs traded and the actual prices paid for furs: that is, price did not mediate supply and demand. The Indians in fact regarded European demand for furs as unlimited and the company could not control the quality or quantity of

¹⁸. The overplus was not a measure of profit but of the factors ability to drive bargains. The company kept a close eye on overplusses to judge the performance of the factors (Ray & Freeman, 1978).

furs it bought nor adjust the same to variations in prices in European markets. In this respect Newmans were their superiors as they could adjust prices to suit demand and regulate the supply through their extension of credit.

The Hudson's Bay Company did extend credit to the Indians and although recovering the debt was always a problem the credit situation before 1763 was manageable by trusting most in known repayers and trusting those who did not repay with less the next time. Abuses of credit reached unacceptable levels after 1763 as inland posts proliferated and the Hudson's Bay Company faced competition from the North-West Company:

"Indians often took their debts at one post in the autumn and traded their furs in the spring at another establishment usually belonging to a rival company. They were thereby able to obtain a double return on their hunts" (Ray, 1974:138).

To prevent this and to keep Indians dealing at the same post the fur companies tried to win the loyalties of the band-leaders: not successfully, as the two companies undermined each others efforts:

"...the increased importance of gift-giving and the extensive use of credit as an allurements to trade without an adequate system of collection meant that between 1763 and 1821 there was a continual decline of relative cost of goods to Indians (Ray, 1974:141).¹⁹

After the two companies merged in 1821 and the Hudson's Bay Company had hopes of exerting more control over the Indians than during the competitive period. Gift-giving was reduced, the Indians were limited to dealing at specified posts and credit was (as before 1763) limited to the amounts that individual

¹⁹. Yet their demand for goods remained fairly inelastic, alcohol taking up the slack (Ibid.).

trappers could be expected to repay. The company also tried to control consumption and wean the Indians from their dependence on imported clothing for fear that they could not otherwise pay their debts. In all this it was unsuccessful. It could not curtail debt, had still to give gifts to attract hunters and could not get them to increase their efforts. There was always some opposition from independent traders and some trappers would make long journeys to the Gulf to sell their furs and to trade; some families would send some of their furs to the Hudson's Bay post and the rest to the opposition. After 1821 the company appeared to have a near-monopoly of the northern fur-trade but it was still unable to direct the trade to its satisfaction (Morantz, 1980:55-6; Ray, 1974:196-7).

Credit was, then, one of several competitive devices used by the fur-companies to attract hunters to their posts and not those of others. The Indians who traded at the posts were not dependent upon the companies for subsistence and were dependent to only a limited degree for tools and clothing. The companies were dealing with subsistence hunters who also did some fur-trapping to satisfy their demand for European goods; this demand (and therefore the production of furs) remained quite static. Credit, or the granting of advances, thus played the same part in fur-trading and cod-fishing only in respect of competition and did not figure to the extent in Hudsons Bay that it did in Fortune Bay, where supply furnished both the means of production and of reproduction of the producing unit.

Mewett (1983) has examined the role of credit in the fishing industry of the Isle of Lewis in the Scottish Hebrides in the

second half of the nineteenth century. Crofters engaged in two fisheries - for cod and herring - which brought them into different relations with those who controlled the means of production. The summer herring-fishery was conducted by visiting boats from east-coast ports; Lewis men worked as paid hands, few being boat-owners. Fishing hands were paid a set wage and perhaps a bonus; Lewis women also worked as 'herring girls' on contract to itinerant curers who paid them by piecework. The herring-boats contracted with east coast curers to sell all their produce at a fixed price, though later in the period an auction system replaced these contractual dealings.

Crofter-fishermen also participated in a winter cod-fishery in Lewis waters, which involved them in relationships with curer/merchants who controlled the industry and owned the technical means of production. The winter fishery was conducted by boats with seven-man crews using handlines. The boats were owned by supplying merchants who took a boat share - one eighth of the total value of the catch - as recompense; each fisherman then received a one-eighth share of the value of the catch. Mewett argues that it was in the merchants' interest to keep control of the boats because they thereby gained property in the fish caught. Merchants were also boat-builders and were able to price boats beyond the means of local men.

Crews were engaged each year in the cod-fishery but debt, through credit and usurious prices, tied fishermen to their supplying merchants year after year. Fishermen settled fish-prices with their merchants at the start of each season, the merchants being able to cover the risk of giving advance prices

by manipulating the prices of supplies; payment for the fish caught was made only at the end of the season, though the fish were delivered to the merchants (to be cured by them) as they were caught. Mewett argues that cash payments by merchants to fishermen would have left the fishermen free to shop where they would and would have removed the merchants' power to appropriate surplus-value by selling the requirements of subsistence. Similarly, he argues, paying for the fish as it was caught (rather than at the end of the season) would have released fishermen from debt²⁰ and broken the bond that attached their labour to the merchants. Herring-fishing, though it paid in cash, did not give the crofters economic independence from supplying merchants. The proceeds of cod-fishing did not meet the debt to the merchant and so fishermen had to use part of the money from herring to settle their accounts.

Mewett has depicted the credit or truck system in Lewis rather as Amulree had the analogous system in Newfoundland and as it appears that Mewett drew upon nineteenth-century royal commissions for his data, his analysis of the Lewis case may be subject to the same reservations as apply to Amulree's analysis of the Newfoundland case. The biggest differences between the two cases are the existence in Lewis of a herring-fishery to supplement earnings from the cod-fishery (i.e., the two seasons did not conflict), the ownership by merchants of the fishing-boats in Lewis and their control over the curing of the fish

²⁰. If, as Mewett says, the merchants' bill was only partly covered by the proceeds of cod-fishing, this cannot have been true.

(and appropriation of the value added in curing). The boats used in Lewis were also larger than those typically used in the Newfoundland inshore fishery. We might also add that Lewis had an excess of labour during the period, not the shortage of fishing-labour of Fortune Bay throughout most of its history (c/f Mackenzie, 1974).²¹ Earnings in the Lewis cod and herring fisheries combined appear to have compared favourably with those available in the Newfoundland cod-fishery.

Credit relationships between fishermen and merchants were important in the development of the fishing industry in Massachusetts, though they were less important in the developed industry (Vickers, 1985). A fishing industry was organised by the Massachusetts Bay colonists to provide an export staple that would pay for imported goods. Colonists were reluctant to enter the fishery (and wanted high wages) so indentured servants, as in Newfoundland, were first used, engaged by either the Massachusetts Bay Company or private individuals. This early seventeenth-century servant fishery contributed little to local economic development:

"Owned, financed and operated by Englishmen, it channeled both the capital and the skills accumulated in New England waters back to the mother country. All the factors of production were imported, and all returned in one form or another to Europe" (Vickers, 1985:89-90).

²¹. Landlessness and overcrowding were a serious problem in Lewis at the time, emigration notwithstanding. Mewett gives no details of the context of the activities of fishing, including who the merchants and the fishermen were, and does not mention industries other than crofting. Cloth manufacture, distilling and smuggling were traditional in the Long Island and Lewis was the centre of an important lobster fishery in the late nineteenth century.

Measures were therefore taken to encourage the development of a resident fishery. Like all other industries on the periphery of the European world in the seventeenth century a fishing industry could be organised only with the aid of merchants' capital, as only merchants had the ability to unite sources of cod with foreign markets. The New England fishery operated from the first on credit from London; English merchants provided supplies and shipping, Bay merchants provided cargoes of made fish.

Most resident merchants chose to operate through independent fishermen²² whom they supplied on credit in return for the promise of their catch, though written bonds were seldom used (Vickers, 1985:91-3). Fishermen disliked being so tied to their suppliers but the law supported the principle that a supplying merchant had a lien on fish caught with his supplies, at least to the extent of the value of the credit that he had advanced:

"Had fishermen in an economy that was labor-poor been at liberty to deal with whomever they chose, they could always have found a host of dealers willing to bid for their produce. By restricting this freedom, the individual merchant could assure himself that the credit he had extended at the season's beginning would be transformed at the lowest possible cost into the fish he needed to meet his commercial obligations" (op.cit:94).

No fisherman could afford to outfit himself for even a single season, nor had he access to markets except through merchants. Credit seems not to have been a reflection of poverty - wealthy fishermen were as likely to have been in debt as poor - but

22. Vickers stresses (p. 92) the importance of having cargoes ready on schedule and says that hired men might work less efficiently. But if time was of the essence then surely hired men would be more easily controlled, even if supervision was costly.

rather credit was used by merchants, in an economy that was chronically short of labour, to create a clientele:

"Every outfitter of ambition had to devote much of his energies towards drawing fishermen away from the patronage of others and into his own fold. He could have accomplished this easily enough by reducing the prices he charged on supplies or paying higher sums for fish. This would have been expensive, however, and most merchants preferred another tack. We have already noted how credit was bestowed on companies to regulate the delivery of their produce; it was also used in individual accounts as an agent in the recruiting of men (op.cit:103).

The merchants were, in fact, competing in the Atlantic labour market, not only with each other but also with their counterparts across the ocean: this forced them to bid high. Credit was given generously on little or no collateral in return for an agreement to deal only with the supplier and such arrangements would continue as long as the fish continued to be brought in; debts of this magnitude were not incurred by farmers. In the seventeenth century there was little contact between fishermen and colonists: not only were Puritans reluctant to enter the fishery, they also disapproved of the bohemian lifeways of seafarers. Credit would not, in any case, be extended for any project that might reduce the fishermen's dependence on fishing and there was no avenue for fishermen or retired fishermen leading into agriculture; fishermen were thus dependent upon merchants and upon the fishery for subsistence. By the mid-eighteenth century large debts in the fishery were rare, from which Vickers concludes that "credit was no longer essential to the manning of the fishery" (1985:105).

Debt and credit relations of a different kind were found in the New England whaling industry: with the addition of legal

coercion they were used to keep the native population of Nantucket at the whale-fishery (Vickers, 1983). Once again the problem was to attract scarce labour, in this case land being plentiful (rather than irrelevant as in the fishery). The use of Indians as labourers in the whale-fishery grew out of earlier trading between the native and settler populations. Nantucket Indians were eager to trade and supplied the white population with grain and fish in return for clothing and tools. In the seventeenth century they bargained from a position of strength, especially as the native population declined and demand for their goods increased; the Indians remained subsistence farmers and hunters and had never to trade to secure the means of existence. The problem facing white traders was therefore to keep the quantity of goods supplied by the natives high without allowing the price to rise. The answer to the problem, according to Vickers, was credit.

Credit was used to control not land but labour: each Indian was advanced enough supplies (though never more than £10 worth) to keep him bringing in produce (1983:572). The support of the courts was essential to success; otherwise, like the Hudsons Bay Company in the competitive period, traders who advanced supplies had no guarantee of repayment. At Nantucket, courts were controlled by whites (often by traders), refuge was not to be found and debt-collection was correspondingly easy:

"The practice of advancing credit took hold on the island because the Indians appreciated the short-term advantages it afforded and because each English trader wished to build up a dependable circle of customers who would be obliged to supply him with trade goods on a continual basis. As the entire body of traders turned to this system, it became a type of communal labor

control, an informal brand of debt peonage. Its purpose was not to force the Indian to trade, for he was anxious to do that on his own accord, but to limit the competition over the fruits of his labor and thereby to control their price" (Vickers, 1983:574).

As Vickers emphasises, "coercion was...the key" (op.cit:581). The purpose of credit was to establish a legally-recognised claim upon the Indians' services, but it was white control of the courts, not civil debt, that bound labourers to suppliers. Credit, if I take Vickers correctly, was used to establish which Indians were bound to which trader.

When the whaling industry began at Nantucket late in the seventeenth century native labour was used but capital was firmly in white hands. It was not poverty which kept Indians from owning boats; the initial investment to go whaling was small, most equipment was got on credit and the returns from a single capture could repay all the outlay (op.cit:568-70); merchants would not, however, trust Indians with the outlay necessary to go whaling. Local whites were unwilling to work at the oars (mainly because of the low pay, says Vickers) and mainland labour was unobtainable: that left only the Indians, who could be coerced, to man the boats. Indebtedness was therefore used to secure native labour for the whale-fishery. Coercion was routine and whaling-masters could, in fact, bind their native seamen indefinitely if they took responsibility for their keep (Vickers, 1983:574-9).

Summary

We find, then, that credit co-exists with a number of types of productive relation and is buttressed by variable degrees of

legal sanction. In the fur-trade the Hudson's Bay Company dealt with subsistence hunters who also trapped furs and the company lacked adequate means of recovering debts. In Newfoundland and in seventeenth-century Massachusetts merchants advanced credit to professional fishermen who (at least nominally) owned the means of production and who had little or no access to markets or subsistence except through the supplying merchants. In both cases the law gave some protection to the merchant who advanced credit. In the Nantucket whale-fishery merchants used legal sanctions to enlist native labourers which stopped short of bound labour but has been described as informal debt-peonage. The Lewis case is imperfectly documented and we are not told what legal sanctions were available to the merchants. In the case of the white-fishery the merchants owned the means of production and advanced the means of subsistence on credit to contract-labourers.

All sources except Vickers' portray credit relations as essentially distributive - that is, merchants used credit relations to appropriate surplus-value from the producers. Most (Wadel is an exception) equate debt and obligation and assume the creditor is, by virtue of the debt, in a position to set the terms on which he deals with the debtor. As will become clearer in the next chapter, this was not altogether the case in Fortune Bay and there is additional evidence from some of the studies cited above that those who advanced supplies on credit sought where possible to limit the amount advanced to that likely to be repaid; certainly they were worried about the strength of

obligation being sufficient to secure the repayment of a more-than-moderate debt.

Dealings on credit are usually opposed to cash dealings and the absence or infrequency of cash transactions is taken to mean that monetary values did not mediate credit transactions. Wadel goes so far as to state that the accounting of merchant-fishermen relations was largely symbolic and Ommer, among others, equates the absence of cash payments with control of the fishermen by the merchants. I have already rejected the notion that credit dealings as in Newfoundland were a species of either truck or barter and pointed out that monetary values mediated transactions whether currency or its equivalent was used or not. The Hudsons Bay case is instructive here - the fur-company valued products at cash values and, the Indians having no concept of money, used a non-monetary standard of value, the MB standard. It seems that if the Indians had no concept of money they understood the concept of driving hard bargains and of turning the terms of trade to their advantage.

A novel understanding of the Newfoundland credit system - what I have called the supplying system - can be got from these studies and is, indeed, implicit in many of the accounts of the Newfoundland system: that is, that the supplying system was a productive system first and a distributive system only second, and that in a way contrary to what most analysts have supposed. In all the above cases other than the coercive Nantucket whalery and the lightly-documented Lewis cod-fishery individual merchants advanced credit as either the sole device or one of several devices used to attract labour to themselves and away

from their competitors in circumstances in which labour was in short supply. In this sense it was a distributive system which allocated surplus-value among merchants and not between merchants and fishermen: we cannot deduce the terms of trade from the fact of paper-debt.

Because credit can be found in a number of types of productive (and retailing) system it is necessary to distinguish, in the Newfoundland case, credit from supply. There was not one credit system but a number of productive and distributive systems that involved credit. Supply is, as many commentators have hinted but not fully recognised, a system of investing capital in production; in Newfoundland and elsewhere it replaced an earlier system in which fishing was conducted by merchants on their own accounts, merchants owning the means of production and fishing with hired labour.

Under supply the merchant controls the means of subsistence and of reproduction of the productive unit even when fishermen nominally own the technical means of production such as boats, nets and other gear. We may say that the fishermen owned tools whereas the suppliers controlled capital, as without their supplies little if any production would have taken place. I must on these grounds depart from Ommer (who follows Scott Gordon's well-known model) in her contention that the purpose of supply was to restrict access to an otherwise free resource; access to the sea may have been open but access to its products required capital, which could only be got from merchants.

Supplying was a productive system which involved credit to varying degrees but was not defined by credit. The granting of

advance supplies - what is called credit - was to the merchants a means of attracting labour without indulging in price-competition. It also allowed merchants to adjust the volume of fish produced to market conditions as credit could be restricted in periods in which fish was slowest to sell. The fact that supply rather than some other system of production was used had important repercussions upon the Newfoundland fishing industry's development, as fishermen found advances hardest to procure at just the times that they needed them most. What was a competitive device to the merchant was, to all but the most fortunate fisherman, the sine qua non of production.

CHAPTER 6NEWMANS AND THE PLANTERS

In 1850 Newmans had depots at Harbour Breton, Gaultois and Burgeo and an office in St. John's which oversaw movements of shipping and cargoes between the stations and acted as the principals' 'eyes and ears' in Newfoundland.¹ Newmans did not monopolise the Westward trade because the Jersey firm of Nicolle and Company had stations at Jersey Harbour (near Harbour Breton), Burgeo and La Poile (west of Burgeo). These two firms were the only sizeable traders established on the south coast west of Placentia Bay and relations between the two firms' branches in Fortune Bay appear to have been tranquil. At Burgeo, however it was a different matter, as trading difficulties and rivalry had emerged of a kind that would later develop in Fortune and Hermitage Bays.

Burgeo was first settled late in the eighteenth century but was little used until the 1830s when fishermen from Fortune Bay migrated westward, attracted by the higher catches of fish possible on the south-west coast. The first recorded merchant at Burgeo was one Cox who established there in 1834 and sold out

¹. Newmans closed their St. John's office in 1864 and thereafter conducted their St. John's business through local merchant-houses. Newmans had ceased to outfit St. John's planters before 1850 but still owned property and conducted a wine business in the city. The establishment of rural post offices in the 1850s and the completion of the transatlantic cable in 1866 made the co-ordinating function of the St. John's office less important because direct communication between head office and the south coast was now possible.

to the Newmans in 1847, leaving heavy debts behind him.² Nicolles, already operating out of La Poile, established at Burgeo in 1840 (Rose, n/d). From the first Newmans found the Burgeo planters to be more intractable than those with whom they dealt elsewhere; T.H. Newman complained of his visit there that

"I was not pleased with the reception given me by some of the Planters there. They were without exception the most discontented I have met with any where, but it appears to me it is from their being better off than their neighbours" (Newman papers, T.H. Newman's diary, 3.10.1848).

Chronic bad debts at Burgeo led Newmans to replace their agent there in 1850, but his successor could not do better for long. Newmans considered Burgeo a lawless place, their agent complaining of "...frequent outrages being committed at Burgeo, the people knowing as they do that they are almost beyond the reach of justice" (Newman papers, Newman & Co., St. John's, 20.12.1850). The proximity of the south west coast to other British North American colonies prevented Newmans and Nicolles from jointly monopolising the trade of the region. Newmans' agent reported "...several Halifax schooners touching there (at Burgeo) on their way to Fortune Bay and Ramea for herring" and "...craft that trade from Nova Scotia, P.E. Island and St. Peters to this place...I have seen from fifteen to twenty of them at a time" (JHA 1853:appendix p. 371). There was also resident opposition to the two large merchants - in 1851 a competing merchant set up at Burgeo; though his business was said to have been small he was held responsible for introducing

². The Newmans were at Burgeo earlier in the 1840s, working from premises leased from persons named Buffett (Newman papers, T.H. Newmans' diary; Newman 6.1.1866).

price competition to the community. Other traders established at Burgeo and elsewhere on the south-west coast in the 1850s and 1860s and it is alleged that many Burgeo planters moved farther west at this time because of complaints against Newmans and Nicolles and because a more westerly location made it easier to sell fish to Nova Scotia (JHA 1852:appendix pp. 107-12).

Newmans were not at this time unduly exercised by the problem of rival traders, though undoubtedly they caused some inconvenience and an irritating leakage of fish. What worried Newmans far more than the existence of traders was their rival Nicolles' reaction to the price competition that had been introduced at Burgeo and the repercussions Nicolles' behaviour had on prices in other areas of the south coast. Newmans wrote to their Newfoundland agents:

"We have remonstrated with Mr. Nicolle on the effect of the advanced price of fish at La Poile, which is a very serious matter, and we fear that if he persists in it we may be obliged to give the same not only at Burgeo but at Hermitage and Fortune Bays also" (Newman 26.6.1850).

Newmans succeeded in persuading Nicolles to standardise fish prices at all the south coast depots, using the lower Fortune Bay prices as the yardstick and both firms sent the following instructions to their Newfoundland agents:

"With regard to your prices of fish this season, we consider they ought to be the same at all the Establishments in Fortune and Hermitage Bays and at Burgeo and La Poile and that they ought not to exceed those in Fortune Bay last year. But you will of course hear what the St. John's prices are before you decide and they will as usual be some guide to you for Fish as well as for Oil" (Newman 30.8.1850).

Fish prices paid at St. John's were somewhat higher than those paid on the south coast but the passage above shows that St.

John's markets exerted some influence upon those of other regions; moreover, the restlessness of some of the Burgeo planters suggests that they were aware of the price fish realised in the capital. The attempt to hold Burgeo prices down to the Fortune, Bay level was unsuccessful, as in 1851 Burgeo fish prices were "valued at the average price of the St. John's market at the end of the season" (JHA 1852:appendix pp. 107-12).

In the early 1850s both the planters and the competition (most importantly Nicolle and Company) were proving difficult to control in Burgeo, though there were as yet no signs in Newmans' correspondence that the trade in Fortune and Hermitage Bays presented any such managerial difficulties. The only sizeable resident merchants in the two bays - other than Newmans and Nicolles - were branches of the Halifax firms of Hall Brothers and Foster and Company, both of which were more interested in herring than in fish (JHA 1857:appendix p 377). Other resident traders such as Cluett of Belleoram and Burkes of St. Jacques appear at this time to have been examples of the familiar planter-trader figures long established on the south coast - that is, successful fishermen who also traded in a small way, with their poorer neighbours - rather than true merchants.³ As

³. Cluett "trades with Halifax and most likely St. Peters" (op.cit). T.H. Newman wrote of Cluett and Reynolds (a Halifax trader at Belleoram) that "neither of them makes a fist" (Diary, 29.11.1848). John Eades, planter and trader of Hermitage, brought in L283 and L203 Currency worth of fish in 1859 and 1860, which suggests a total catch of about 250 quintals (Newman 4.5.1861). In 1856 Burkes of St. Jacques brought in L770 worth of fish and were also engaged in the bait trade (Newman 7.8.1857). Burke appears to have been one of the larger traders along with Penny of Hermitage Bay and these were the only two to survive Newmans' attempts to end dealings with traders.

well as resident traders there were visiting traders equipped, for the most part, by St. John's and Halifax merchants. It is recorded that in Gaspe (Ommer, 1981) floating traders would only show on the coast when reports of a successful year's fishing were circulating and in any case dealt only in a few basic items. It is likely that the same was true in southern Newfoundland and Newmans were confident that price manipulation would repulse peripatetic traders, as they wrote to their Newfoundland agents:

"We have no fears of Traders supplying the Planters under the prices we have recommended; and so far from it it appears from your letter that the Planters cannot get what they want because it is not in our Stores. All that the traders will do is to come and traffic with them when they have fish to dispose of, and if you are ever to do any good by lowering prices it is at those seasons and not when the Traders do not venture to make their appearance" (Newman 18.1.1855).

A more serious threat was posed by the local trader who relied upon the resident merchant to give out credit and then bought the fish from his planters. An old foe of Newmans tried just such an infringement upon their domain in Hermitage Bay in 1850 but was repulsed. Newmans wrote to William Gallop, their Gaultois agent:

"Mr Gallop mentions...Mr Evans intention of establishing himself at Pussthrough if he does so it will be clearly for the purpose of taking the fish we have paid for from our Planters. Mr Gallop must therefore be very careful in supplying planters in that neighbourhood and if any of them are found to abuse the trust we have placed in them by giving their Oil or Fish to Mr Evans whilst in debt to us they must be treated accordingly and they should not be supplied from our Stores except in barter. As long as we supplied the Grand Bank fishermen Mr Evans found his business a profitable one, but now that we no longer do so he finds he cannot get a living out of it and must needs have recourse again to the Planters we supply.

If Mr Gallop succeeds in preventing the Planters from supporting Mr Evans he will not remain at Pushthrough long" (Newman 25.10.1850).

As we read no more of Mr. Evans it is probable that Gallop did indeed succeed in preventing the planters from supporting him. Traders, it seems, were more of an inconvenience than a threat at this time and, other than at Burgeo, the planters' accounts gave rise to no concern. Fish prices were, however, low due to poor market conditions, and agents were enjoined to be cautious in dealings with the planters so that they would not be supplied beyond the value of their product.

Fish prices rose appreciably in the mid-1850s - a quintal for which Newmans had paid only 8/- in 1850 realised 15/- to the planter six years later - and higher prices were accompanied by difficulty in managing the planters. Newmans claimed that it also brought increased competition but if that was so the new competitors were only temporary; the numbers of traders enumerated in Fortune Bay District in the censuses of 1857 and 1869 were almost the same. In 1856 there existed "discontent among the planters" over the price they were paid for their fish, being less than that paid at St. John's. To remove this discontent Newmans changed their system of setting fish and supply prices and in so doing changed the basis upon which their trade was conducted. Previously, prices to be paid for fish and to be charged for supplies were fixed by agreement between Newmans' agents and their counterparts at the Jersey houses.⁴

4. "Mr Gallop Agent at Gaultois came over...for the purpose of consulting with Mr Ellis and Mr Chapman of Jersey Harbour Mr Nicols Agent what the Planters should be charged for the different Articles of consumption and also to determine what

Newmans now decided that they would pay the planters for their fish the price ruling in St. John's on September 15th each year and would increase the mark-up on the goods they sold to compensate for the higher fish prices.⁵ Thereafter their profit came from the sale of goods to planters and Newmans considered themselves fortunate to recoup the price they paid the planters in the European fish markets.⁶ In effect they ceased to be fish merchants and became retail merchants. The Newmans themselves observed "Our business is to offer the Planters supplies at prices which will pay us, receiving their Fish and Oil in payment, because they cannot pay us in money" (Newman 16.10.1860).

The proximate cause of Newmans' actions and the cause of the planters' discontent was competition, both direct and indirect, from St. John's, Halifax, St. Pierre and the Jersey houses, though why this competition should suddenly have arisen is another matter. A number of St. John's traders did attempt to establish themselves in Fortune and Hermitage Bays in the middle

should be given for fish....it was a long time before Mr Chapman could be brought to terms with regard to the prices of two or three articles" (Newman papers, T.H. Newmans' diary, 23.9.1847). Ellis was Newmans' agent at Harbour Breton.

⁵. The lowest price agents were now allowed to charge was for durable goods the price in Sterling converted into Currency and doubled and for perishable goods the price in Currency to be the invoice cost in Sterling and freight doubled. The selling price thus yielded about forty and fifty per cent profit respectively. "We do not think that less will make the Trade answer" (Newman 3.4.1856).

⁶. "Fish nine times out of ten leaves a positive loss at market" (Newman 16.1.1857).

and late 1850s but all had gone bankrupt by 1861.⁷ John Penny, founder of a mercantile house which still operates on the south coast, entered business in Hermitage Bay in 1856, though he was more interested in salmon, which he shipped to Halifax, and later in lobster than he was in fish. It is likely, on the other hand, that competition from foreign sources became more acute and two developments during the 1850s would account for this. Firstly, the US-BNA Reciprocity Treaty of 1854 opened U.S. markets to Newfoundland fish. The treaty had no very dramatic effects upon Newfoundland's penetration of American markets but a small but steady trade in large codfish and in pickled fish resulted. An American merchant house, Atherton & Hughes, established in St. Pierre and dealt with Fortune Bay planters, including those supplied by Newmans.⁸ Secondly, more serious competition came from French merchants⁹ in St. Pierre in consequence of the increased French fishing effort after 1850 - and in particular in consequence of the large French government bounties paid upon each quintal of fish (by whoever caught) exported from St. Pierre to the metropole. These bounties enabled St. Pierre merchants to attract Fortune Bay planters' catches by paying more for their fish than resident merchants

7. Newman 9.11.1861. Newmans held traders and their business ability in contempt.

8. There is evidence that Atherton had been active in St. Pierre in the 1840s. Atherton & Hughes went bankrupt in 1882.

9. Some of them were Newfoundlanders.

could afford to do.¹⁰ It is clear from Newmans' correspondence that planters were making the most of the situation, not only withholding their fish to get a better price for it but also attempting to use it as a bargaining lever to influence the merchants' prices for supplies. Newmans warned their agents "...not to be misled by Planters, some of whom will do all they can to produce competition and disagreement between us and Nicolles" (Newman 12.8.1859).

Changing their method of setting fish and supply prices was one of a series of measures that Newmans introduced with the intention of bringing the competitive situation back under control. Offering the St. John's prices for fish would, it was believed, remove the planters' discontent and put an end to their speculation.¹¹ Newmans tried to bind their chief rivals, Nicolles, to do the same and to that end drew up an impressive-looking compact agreeing on uniform fish and supply prices and exclusiveness of dealing each with his own planters. This has been interpreted as a littoral Yalta, carving up the south coast between the two great European powers (Fay, 1956) but in practice the agreement had little substance. Nicolles proved hard to hold to their bargain, "vacillating mischievously" in Newmans' words over the next several years and in 1858 Newmans

10. "Suppliers at St. Peters will ship more largely from Newfoundland this present year to the American market; last year they shipped from Burin alone 4000 qtls., and 6,000 from other places on our shores, and this trade will considerably increase on our coast" (JHA 1857:appendix p. 357).

11. Ordering their agents to pay the St. John's prices, Newmans predicted that "if this is once completely established the Planters will give up their speculations and you will have no further problems" (Newman 6.10.1856).

released their agents from the terms of the agreement because Nicolles no longer abided by it (Newman 5.11.1858). Nicolles may already have been in credit difficulties - the poor quality and irregularity of their supplies was noted in 1856 - and they attempted to draw business away from Newmans by price competition and (it was suspected) by dealing with their planters. This brought Nicolles no lasting benefit as they sank into bankruptcy in 1863 with liabilities of L54,000. The company was subsequently reformed and failed again in 1871.

Newmans, while attempting to check their major competitor, also sought to bring the planters more firmly under their control. In return for their 'liberality' (their term) in offering the planters high fish prices in return for higher supply prices, Newmans imposed the condition that their planters deliver all their catch to Newmans and take up all their balances in goods from Newmans' stores¹² - that is, no cash balances were to be paid. There may have been legal reasons for Newmans' insistence on exclusive dealings with those they supplied¹³ but it must have been a bitter pill for those who

12. "We beg to observe that it was in 1856 that we agreed, in consequence of the discontent of the Planters at our prices to give them the same as at St. John's on the 15th September with the understanding that they were to bring their whole catch to us and take up their supplies from our stores at our prices. These we had of course to raise to meet the loss on the Fish" (Newman 6.10.1860).

13. If it was still the common law, as it had been earlier in the century, that the supplying merchant had a lien upon fish caught with his supplies and could demand the fish in payment, it would have been important to have been the sole supplier; on the other hand, it does not seem to have bothered the Newmans earlier. This whole matter is very unclear; Antler (1975) suggests that the merchants' right to the fish was not recognised after 1841, but (see below) a judgement against Newmans in the

were traditionally 'not constant dealers in any Establish'd employ' to swallow - and one which at least some of the large planters were able to resist. Newmans imposed one further condition upon their planters: in future a planter was to be supplied on credit only to the extent of his average catch of the three previous years - the so-called 'three-year rule.' Newmans were confident that these new measures would alleviate their difficulties - the competition and the discretion of their agents were contained and the planters restrained and, at one fell swoop, the trade was to return to normal.

This was not, however, what happened. To judge from the censuses the number of resident traders in the District did not increase and their major competitor, Nicolle and Company, failed. However, two local men, Hubert and Gaden, set up as rival merchants in Newmans' stronghold of Harbour Breton, trading on behalf of a St. John's house. Hubert & Gaden did not extend credit and could therefore offer more attractive prices because they did not run the risk of incurring bad debts, though this firm failed in the 1870s. Above all, the planters were not as easily restrained as Newmans had predicted.¹⁴ An outright revolt against the new conditions was quashed by cutting off credit to the perpetrators but the planters effectively resisted being brought under Newmans' stricter control by the tightening of credit rules. Newmans' collection of fish declined and the planters' debts increased in each of the four years following

1860s may have been on this very point.

¹⁴. Newmans had assured their agents that "you require firmness with the Planters and that is all" (Newman 5.12.1857).

the 1856 edict and planters with balances in their favour were still able to draw them out in cash; in fact, the amount so paid in 1859 was treble that paid in 1854 (Newman 26.7.1860). Moreover, the quality of the cure of fish became a problem, first mentioned in 1858, as the fish was damp through the application of insufficient salt and deteriorated on the way to market.

At the root of the new set of problems was the three-year rule, the effect of which was that a poor season's catch was followed by a lean season's supplies. A planter thus left short of necessities by his supplying merchant had no choice but to dispose of at least part of his next season's catch to another trader which left his account with Newmans in even worse balance at the end of the second season, with the guarantee of still shorter supplies the winter after that. A run of bad seasons would pauperise the planter altogether whereas a single good season would not save him because his favourable balance of a good year would be applied to the debts he had incurred in previous years. Most probably this policy exacerbated the distinction between the large and small planter, the former having means of his own to survive a bad season and the latter lacking such independent means. But the new system also created problems for the merchant because supplies were the sine qua non of production, without which no fish could be returned; it also created quality problems as short-supplied planters had to choose between taking up salt and taking up foodstuffs.

Newmans had hoped to remove the problem of traders by their new measures yet succeeded in creating a greater demand for

their services, though the traders were likely to gain the less reliable of Newmans' clients. Newmans had, in fact, supplied a number of traders in the District (as well as conducting occasional trading voyages themselves) and gave these traders a discount on the cost of their supplies, a practice which they ended in 1858. Traders were now to pay planters' prices for their supplies, to deal with Newmans solely or not at all and agents were forbidden to deal with traders in cash. Fish offered by traders was to be accepted only to the value of supplies they had taken up and if they offered fish beyond this value "you will refuse to receive it on any terms - and let them take it where they please" (Newman 21.6.1858). Traders were to be treated as planters, which most of them were in addition to being traders. Clearly Newmans took these measures because of their new pricing policy, as their profit now came from the sale of goods and they could not profit from a transaction in cash as they could from one in truck,¹⁵ but measures intended to restrict the activities of petty traders could be dangerously counter-productive. One source (Keough, 1975) contends that merchants tolerated and even supplied petty traders who dealt with their planters because they feared the aggregation of all the traders' business in one set of hands - the possible result if they attempted to drive out all the traders and succeeded in all cases but one. Restricting traders could in this way lead to the creation of rival mercantile establishments. All but two

¹⁵. Newmans paid 3/- per quintal less for cash than for truck transactions but claimed that the expenses of their establishments plus deterioration etc. amounted to not less than 6/- per quintal.

of the traders whom Newmans supplied ceased business after the introduction of the new dispensation, though the turnover in petty traders was so high that it is impossible to know if they would have continued to operate under any other regime. The two exceptions - Burkes in Fortune Bay and Penny in Hermitage Bay - rose over the next generation or so to the status of merchant and shipowner.¹⁶

Newmans' 1856 measures, then, did not have the desired effect of regulating the competitive situation and were in some ways counter-productive. Yet market conditions were such as should have brought prosperity to merchant and planter alike. Fish prices paid in Fortune and Hermitage Bays rose from 8/- per quintal in 1850 to 15/- in 1856 and further to 21/- in 1867 (they peaked at 25/- in the 1870s), but prices of supplies did not rise so rapidly;¹⁷ yet higher prices could not call forth a greater supply of fish. Newmans' collection of fish in 1858 was 45,000 quintals (itself complained of) whereas in 1868 it was

¹⁶. It is difficult to judge how serious were Newmans' concerns about other traders. From census data the number of merchants and traders in Fortune Bay Electoral District increased only from sixteen in 1857 to seventeen in 1869. If the traders were more active it was due to Newmans' tight-credit policy and not to there being more competing suppliers.

¹⁷. This is Newmans' story (Newman 30.11.1860) but a south coast clergyman alleged: "The Price of Provisions almost double what it was three years ago, whilst the fish has increased only 1/10 in price" (USPG papers, PANL, Hermitage Parish quarterly report, n/d, prob. December 1856). Alexander shows that for Newfoundland as a whole fish prices rose by 1% and the value of fish exports by 2% per annum from 1850 to 1884 while the U.S. wholesale farm price index and the U.K. merchandise export price index both rose in the 1850s and 1860s and then fell to 1885; the implications of all this for the cost of living are uncertain (1973:17-8). Newmans' price for one staple - flour - was 48/- in 1850 and in 1862 and was lower by one-third in the 1890s.

only 24,000 quintals. A portion of the decrease can be attributed to the closure in 1862 of their Burgeo station, at which higher fish prices had only worsened existing debts. At Harbour Breton (i.e., in Fortune Bay) 21,000 quintals of fish were caught in 1857 but the catch diminished to 14,800 in 1859 and to 13,000 quintals in 1863 (Newman 26.7.1860, 14.11.1863). It was the start of this decline that led Newmans in 1857 to institute the three-year rule, of which they wrote:

"The Collection of Fortune Bay Fish is likely to be less than last year, which was itself very short, and we cannot help thinking that it is not altogether the fault of the fish. When the fish is to be caught the Planters are occupied in taking bait to St. Peters and they lose the opportunity of catching it at all and then instead of paying us with the proceeds of their traffic they come with a lame story about the fish not biting, when they want Supplies, but they must be brought to their senses...and when they find their supplies will only be in proportion to their catch they will be much more anxious to exert themselves, and when they reduce their average below what they require to live they must try some other employment" (Newman 11.9.1857).

The results of this edict were less salutary than Newmans envisaged. The Harbour Breton catch fell, as noted above, though that at Gaultois remained steady. Planters' debts, other than at Burgeo, were a problem first mentioned in 1859 (Newman 25.3.1859) while the worsened cure of fish led to an increase in the costs of Newmans' establishments as extra labour was required to complete the cure of fish to a satisfactory standard (Newman 15.6.1860). Newmans could neither exclude other traders nor prevent their planters from dealing with them, though, notwithstanding Newmans' fulminations upon the iniquity of such rivals, there is no evidence that they took more fish from them after 1856 than before. In particular, Newmans could not kept

their Harbour Breton planters at the cod fishery on their behalf, especially when the temptations of the American bait trade were added to the traditional distraction of supplying the French. It was, in fact, the winter fishery rather than the summer cod fishery which declined at Harbour Breton (Newman 23.3.1861, 10.8.1861), though not as far as can be told at Gaultois, where there was no winter herring fishery. The bait trade sponsored a wave of acquisitions of schooners in Fortune (though not in Hermitage) Bay which, by increasing the mobility of the planters, made them more independent of Newmans' supplies.

Despite their commercial difficulties and though they were unable to make the most of a decade of favourable market conditions, Newmans weathered the period after 1856 better than their rivals and even restricted planters were able to survive the winter without petitioning for government relief:¹⁸ in some cases, as the "striving men" of Pass Island, they actually managed to thrive. In the late 1860s, however, Newmans faced a threat to their market position from competition from the Norwegians, who were induced by higher prices to go more largely into the trade (Newman, letter to J. & W. Stewart, St. John's, 5.1.1867). This made Newmans pessimistic about the future not only of the Newfoundland fishery but also of the colony itself:

18. As governmental relief to the district in 1864 was only L15 it seems that planters were still able to get Newmans rather than the government to pay for their winter supplies. Constant complaints that the Harbour Breton agent was supplying too liberally and not adhering to the three-year rule were followed by his removal in 1867.

"We are sorry to hear that there is likely to be so much distress in Newfoundland but we hardly see how it is to cease, unless by the success of the Seal Fishery, because the prices of Cod-Fish are as high as they can be expected to be in foreign markets and if the quantity caught increased only a little the price would necessarily fall very much in proportion....It seems impossible for so many people to find the means of living in Newfoundland and to enable them to do so the Merchant is expected to supply them without profit....We fear it must end in a cessation of credit to the Planters - and those who have not means of their own being obliged to leave the Island and all the Government expenses will fall on those that remain" (Newman, letter to J. & W. Stewart, St. John's, 7.11.1868).

Newmans were being unduly pessimistic here, as fish prices continued to rise into the 1870s - but, there again, they were pessimistic people and their expectations of marketing problems must be seen in the light of supply problems in Newfoundland. The 1856 package of reforms had not relieved their domestic woes and the problem of bad debts which had closed their Burgeo station in 1862 appeared at Harbour Breton shortly afterwards and the winter fishery there practically disappeared (Newman 20.7.1867). Newmans concluded that "all confidence as it formerly existed is gone" (Newman 9.10.1869) and moved to end the practice of winter supply.

Traditionally a merchant, when accepting the catch of his planters in the Fall, allowed them supplies to carry them through the winter. If their voyage had been profitable they were able to cover the cost of their winter supplies; if not the merchant 'carried' them on his books until the next year. Declining profitability had put an end to this system in the

northern districts in the 1830s¹⁹ but it had continued on the south coast. By 1867 the winter fishery at Harbour Breton had declined to the point where Newmans would no longer advance winter supplies to planters who were unlikely to pay for them. Accordingly, Newmans wrote to their agents:

"With regard to Harbour Briton on the contrary a very great change must be made this season. The uncertainty of the Fishery there, and the probability of a return to lower prices for Fish, the dishonesty of many of the Planters, and the fact that they catch hardly any Winter fish makes it extremely hazardous to trust any of them in the fall; and therefore you must not issue any supplies on credit there to any Planter who has not independent means of his own or whose honesty you cannot thoroughly rely on, as we prefer giving up the business with any doubtful planter to running any such risk"
(Newman 20.7.1867).

Small planters, in other words, could no longer be relied upon to cover their accounts for the year if given enough supplies to carry them from one Fall to the next; the same applied to doubtful planters who were too heavily engaged in the bait trade. Newmans therefore cut off winter supplies to all but planters of "independent means" and cast adrift many of their dealers over the winter months. Supplies were now to be issued to all others in Spring, not in Fall, and planters were to be dealt with over the winter months on barter terms only and not on credit. This would not only balance the planters' accounts but also drive out rival traders altogether. By severely restricting winter supply "We shall not only avoid bad debts but...put an end to the traders and (make) our business larger

¹⁹. Ryan (1984) points out that it is no coincidence that a government which could carry the burden for them emerged in 1832. If given relief, planters were still supplied from the merchants store but with the difference that the government now reimbursed the merchant.

than before" (Newman 20.9.1867). If this belief seems curious, it should be explained that Newmans believed that petty traders could only function because supplying merchants bore the cost of maintaining the planters through the winter months on their credit; stop the credit, stop the trading business (Newman 20.9.1867, 18.1.1868).

Newmans' response to commercial difficulties had been, once again, to tighten control over their system of dealings and to reduce risk, even if it meant curtailing their business. Credit was now seen as one source of risk and was to be avoided as much as possible in order to "maintain our independence in dealing with the planters" (Newman 18.6.1870). Newmans now distinguished between three categories of planter:

Worthy planters - those of sufficient means and honesty to be dealt with on credit terms

Barter planters - those to be dealt with for immediate payment only; either independent men or discontinued former dealers

Green fish planters - those suspected of dealing with other traders who were condemned to sell their fish 'green' (uncured) so that they could not retain it long enough to dispose of it to others. Newmans collected their fish from them regularly. These planters were allowed credit but only to the value of their green fish. Newmans thus took over processing increasingly as the century progressed installing large flakes, an iron railway to move the fish about their premises and (later on) a mechanical fish drier

So-worthy planters were to be retained, their supplies being regulated according to the three-year rule, but no new planters were to be supplied on credit over the winter nor any at all in harbours far distant from Newmans' stations. Credit when issued was not to be more than a few months' supplies at a time, fish being collected and further supplies issued regularly during the season. To help supervise the planters, Newmans commissioned the building of a small steamship which could travel the coast in all weathers and visit the planters when they least expected it (Newman 15.8.1870).

This may seem a harsh response on Newmans' part, but it should be noted that winter supply had long since disappeared in the northern parts of the island and that other south coast merchants at this time ended credit altogether whereas Newmans just restricted it. Ending credit dealings did not save the other houses - Nicolles failed in 1862 and again in 1871 and in 1870 Ridleys, an east coast house with some south coast interests, failed with liabilities amounting to the colossal sum of L250,000. Newmans ascribed these failures to want of application of "strict mercantile principles" by which they meant price competition at a time when the credit of every house was severely tried (Newman, letter to J. & W. Stewart, St. John's, 22.10.1870; Newman 30.7.1870, 22.10.1870). At first Newmans had some difficulty in enforcing the 1867 dispensation. Planters who expected to be cast adrift over the winter tried to hold back part of their summer's catch, but those guilty were refused further credit and the revolt was quelled. Distress was evident in Fortune Bay that winter and government relief became

an established fact of winter life in a district where it had been little needed before.²⁰ Newmans held the character of the planters to be responsible for their new-found misfortunes: "We of course regret to hear the state to which the Planters have reduced themselves by their former dishonesty but they alone are responsible."²¹ 1868 was a poor year for the Newmans, their collection down to only half of the general level of the 1850s and the planters' debts increased by L4,000 over those of the previous year, which had themselves been serious enough to cause the replacement of the Harbour Breton agent. Thereafter Newmans' collection of fish, though variable, appears to have undergone no further diminution and stabilised at one-third less than formerly (Newman, 24.1.1878), though there were always good and bad years. 1873 and 1874 were "about the best you have ever had" (Newman 29.5.1877) while 1875 and 1876 were poor, due in part to ice remaining late on the coast. Then came 1877.

Upon the heels of the poor collections of 1875 and 1876 came market problems in Europe, the markets being glutted by Norwegian fish which had become a serious rival to the Newfoundland product. Newmans complained:

"The consumers are now getting so accustomed to the Norway that they will only make a small difference in the price in favor of the Newfoundland...as far as we

²⁰. In 1866 the only governmental relief was to the permanent poor; in 1867 the total of relief was L57, in 1868 L160, in 1869 L211.

²¹. Newman 25.4.1868. Mr. White, Anglican minister at Harbour Breton, noted that snow persisted late into Spring, 1868 and many livestock perished which "added to the general poverty and distress." The poor suffered most as they had not time to plant their gardens before the summer fishery occupied them (USPG papers, report of W.K. White for quarter ending 30.6.1868).

know the supply may be unlimited if so it must work a revolution in the Newfoundland Trade....At the present prices the Newfoundland Planter can barely live and if they are to fall from 5 to 10/- per quintal he will no longer be able to support himself by fishing" (Newman papers, letter to R.A. Alexander, St. John's, 21.3.1878).

Newmans did not intend to support him either if he could not clear his account and they resolved to restrict credit to the dependable only. Twelve Harbour Breton planters were to be refused further credit in 1877 and thirty more given a further year's grace (Newman 10.7.1877). The following year between fifty and sixty planters were discontinued (Newman 6.2.1879). Newmans explained that "Our object is to get a better set of Planters who will pay their way in average years" (Newman, 1.10.1878). All others pay cash. The business was, in future, to be conducted more by cash and barter transactions than on credit terms and even for those not yet discontinued "A tight hand must be held over the remainder, supplying them only from time to time in small quantities" (Ibid.) Other south coast merchants at this time eliminated credit altogether and distress was widespread that winter. Newmans wrote to 'their' MHA:

"Our Agents confirm their previous statement that there will be a great deal of distress on the Western Shore this winter as supplies are refused by those who have been accustomed to give them, the Fishery the last two years having been so bad. We hope no violence will occur but such a thing has happened before now and might happen again unless the Government takes some measure of relief" (Newman 11.12.1877).

Government relief to the District - L15 in 1864, L160 in 1868 - climbed to L548 in 1877. Discontinued planters reacted - as their counterparts had in 1867 - by attempting to withhold fish to store against the coming winter, of which Newmans wrote:

"We note that most of the Planters who we have discontinued this year and to whom we have shown such Kindness for some years did not send us the Fish they had belonging to us, this shows their dishonesty and how right we were not to trust them any more. You will not however after such treatment fail to recover from them what you can when they have any thing to repay us with."²²

Newmans were at a loss to understand why the planters' debts should have increased. They wrote to their Newfoundland agents:

"The fishery the last three years have certainly been bad; but previous to 1875, it had been good; and yet the Debts increased, instead of old ones being paid off; which they should have been. Although the quantity of Fish caught has been a third less than it was, the price has been doubled and a great many of the goods sold are cheaper than they were; therefore we do not understand how it is the Planters should have increased their debts so enormously....If it is, as you say, the Planters can only clear their accounts in good seasons, what happens in bad ones? Why we have to maintain the population out of our own pockets; as they never can according to your statement, even in good seasons, get any thing put to the credit of their accounts to meet bad times" (Newman 24.1.1878).

Later they decided that the Bank fishery was responsible for reducing the run of fish inshore, so that

"Where a man used to catch 60 qtls of Fish and keep himself and his family he can now only catch thirty which is insufficient to allow him to live and but for the Supplying Merchants who have trusted him so far he could not exist in the majority of cases" (Newman papers, letter to J.O. Fraser, St. John's, 6.2.1879).

However, an envoy sent from head office (a former chief clerk at Harbour Breton) to report upon the condition of the fishery - with special reference to the planters' accounts - decided that

²². Note that bad debts were never forgiven, even those of the discontinued, who were "as much our Debtors now as previously" and were to be pursued whenever they had fish to attach (Newman 24.1.1878). Debts were, in fact, hereditary and Newmans complained of sons emigrating to avoid paying their fathers' debts (Newmans 1.10.1878).

competition from the Norway fishery lay at the root of all the problems (Newman to Julius F. Callam 2.8.1879 and next letter).

At least in intention, Newmans' actions in 1877 changed the basis on which they conducted their trade from credit to barter - in other words, supplies would now only be issued once the quid pro quo of fish had been produced. Between 50 and 60 planters were discontinued in the fall of 1877 and smaller numbers in succeeding years. Regarding the fate of these unfavoured planters, Newmans mused:

"It appears that these bad Planters, whatever the cause of their failure is, will be obliged to emigrate in search of some other employment or be maintained by the Government" (Newman 3.9.1878).

Favoured candidates could still be supplied on credit - though "positive orders" were given not to supply beyond the three-year average (Newman 4.12.1884) and promising planters were to be courted with the offer of credit (Newman 29.4.1879).

These measures to restrict credit and reduce risk did not revive Newmans' fortunes. Markets continued year after year to be supplied with Norway fish and prices paid to the planters declined from their 1876 summit, though remaining well above pre-1856 levels. The problem of bad debts which had closed Burgeo in 1862 and troubled Harbour Breton thereafter appeared at Gaultois in 1878 and Hermitage Bay planters were being cut off in 1880. The winter fishery had virtually disappeared at Harbour Breton (Newman 31.8.1880) and declined to a mere 5,000 quintals at Gaultois (Newman 29.4.1879). The two stations had, during the 1850s, remitted as much as 24,000 quintals of winter fish in one year. Bad debts, in fact, became worse rather than

better after the 1877 measures, in part because Newmans' agents could not be restrained from giving out more supplies on credit than their principals wished; rival traders, it appears, were prepared to tempt planters with credit as Newmans did (Newman 1.1.1884). They ordered, once again, that:

"Our business in Fortune Bay, say Harbour Briton, in future must be conducted much more on a Cash and Barter system. This will probably curtail our collection and reduce our business; but it will have the advantage of stopping losses by bad debts....Mr Gallop must act on the same principles in Hermitage Bay" (Newman 26.8.1884).

Newmans also took several measures to increase their collection of fish which included increasing their number of trading voyages conducted at harbours too distant from their stations to trust the planters on credit. They also entered the Bank fishery, which the Colonial Government was attempting to encourage by means of bounties, though this was less for the purposes of increasing their collection of fish than for enabling their planters to work off their debts. Newmans reproved their Harbour Breton agent for misapprehending their purpose in entering the Bank fishery, which was not to get more fish

"...but to improve the condition of our planters. Year after year they have been living in idleness at our expense either from their own fault or from misfortune. It has been represented to us every year that there was no fish to be caught....If our planters object to avail themselves of the opportunity thus afforded them (unless they are doing well at home) we shall put down their shortcomings in late years to their dislike to earning their own living" (Newman 11.5.1880).

The supplying system, by the 1880s, had thus become so inefficient that reciprocity had broken down and Newmans had to

involve themselves in both the catching and processing sectors in order to secure an adequate supply of marketable fish.

From 1884 to 1899 the south coast fishery - and Newmans' fortunes in prosecuting it - declined still further. Newmans were left as the last European house dealing in Newfoundland in 1886 when the failure of a Jersey Bank caused the withdrawal of De Grouchy, Clement & Renouf, the last of their Jersey rivals. A similar fate had met Atherton & Hughes, the St. Pierre-based American firm, in 1882; of pre-1856 traders, only Burkes of St. Jacques remained in business in the District,²³ though the number of traders in the District was larger now than then. Sixteen traders were recorded in the 1857 census, 17 in 1869, 20 in 1884, 37 in 1891 and an astonishing 75 in 1901 - if the last figure is accurate there must have been quite enough traders to have ruined each others' business. The total catch of the District, however, moved in the opposite direction. Caution is needed in using catch figures from censuses because catches were variable from one year to the next, but the data in the table below will be some guide to changes in total catches and return to effort over the study period. We have some guide to the success or failure of the census years' fisheries from Newmans' correspondence. The 1856 fishery was "unfavourable on our coast" (Newman 26.9.1856), while 1873 was "about the best you have ever had" (Newman 29.5.1877). 1883 was probably an average

²³. John Penny, earlier at Great Jervis in Hermitage Bay, was now at Ramea on the south-west coast.

TABLE 11

Inshore cod catch and return to effort, Fortune Bay electoral district, census years 1857-1901

<u>Census year</u>	<u>Catch in quintals</u>	<u>Do. per 1,000 population</u>
1857	58,454	16,700
1874	89,170	15,400
1884	50,120	7,200
1891	39,018	5,100
1901	35,031	4,000

Source: Censuses of Newfoundland & Labrador

- Notes:
- 1) Censuses give the catch of the previous year
 - 2) Plus 3,760 quintals Bank fish 1891, total 5,600 per m. population
 - 3) Plus 20,720 quintals Bank fish 1901, total 6,400 per m. population

year or better,²⁴ 1890 a poor one (Newman 28.10.1890). Taking this together with the census data, it is clear that the District's fishery from the mediocre year of 1856 to the bumper harvest of 1873 grew considerably less than the population did and that the productivity of the fishery, both absolutely and in relation to effort, experienced a dramatic fall from 1873 to 1883 from which it had not recovered in 1890 or 1900. Newmans' collection of fish, as far as can be judged, fell roughly in proportion to the total product of the fishery. Of course, if the trend in the District followed that of Harbour Breton - that is, that the proportion of fishermen in the population increased

²⁴. Newman papers, letter to J & W. Stewart, St. John's, 12.8.1884, says that 1884 was below average and the catch much short of the previous year. For Newfoundland as a whole, 1883 was very close to the best year of the century.

after 1880, then the fall in return to effort was more than the figures the above table suggest.

We may wonder why the south coast fishery declined progressively after 1856. Overfishing of inshore grounds is a possibility and it has been contended that the inshore fishery was reaching the limits of its carrying capacity late in the nineteenth century (Alexander, 1973). In the present case not only the catch per fisherman but also the total inshore catch fell after 1873, whereas one would expect catches to reach a plateau when inshore grounds were at the limit of their yield. It was sometimes alleged - by the Newmans among others - that the foreign fishing effort offshore harmed the inshore fishery, as fish caught on the Grand Banks did not migrate within range of the inshore fisherman. We have seen that, at least in part, such claims were motivated by political animosity towards the countries (particularly France) engaged in the offshore fishery and it should be noted that in this century it has taken the enormous Soviet fishing effort of the 1960s to diminish inshore catches. Altogether, as we have no way of knowing how many fish were in the sea it is specious to attribute falling catches, in total or per man, solely to the limits of the fishing grounds' carrying capacity.

Competition from fisheries other than cod for the effort of fishermen may partly account for reduced inshore landings. We have seen that from the middle or late 1860s Newmans complained of the planters' herring expeditions interfering with the winter cod fishery and that the winter fishery declined more than the summer voyage. It is also true that the foreign offshore

fisheries which required most herring bait were conducted in the winter and greatly expanded in the 1850s and 1860s; yet in Hermitage Bay, where there was no herring fishery, the winter cod fishery declined after about 1880 and the prohibition of the French bait trade in 1888 did not revive the south coast cod fishery to the level of the 1850s. It is also possible that the lobster fishery interfered with the cod fishery (as Newmans' agents complained - Newman 15.4.1890) though very little is known of this fishery. The first mention of a south coast lobster fishery in either the fisheries reports or in the Newman papers is in 1878; it was not included in census reports until 1891 and thereafter declined sharply to 1901.²⁵ Lobster cannot, however, have been the cause of the decline in the codfishery in the second half of the century and - as with herring - the decline of lobster did not produce a revival of cod catches. No non-marine industry of any importance was founded in Fortune or Hermitage Bays during the study period. By a process of elimination we are inclined to ascribe the decline of the cod fishery to the growing reluctance of merchants, faced with foreign competition, to outfit fishermen on credit, an issue which will be discussed in greater detail in the concluding chapter.

²⁵. In 1898 Newmans said the lobster business was "all played out" (Newman 30.7.1898). While it lasted it may have been a valuable income supplement for the local fishermen, especially the small-boat men; the resource was widespread and small, fishermen-owned canning factories were dispersed throughout the district. Butler (1980:71) dates the beginning of the lobster-fishery in neighbouring Placentia Bay to 1878.

We read in the Newman correspondence from 1884 to 1899 more lamentations of decline. Collections fall while debts increase, agents are exhorted to give less credit and rely more on barter and given more 'positive instructions' to adhere strictly to the three-year rule and more unworthy planters are discontinued. Newmans annually bemoaned the state of the fishery in phrases such as "deplorable and gets worse every year" (Newman 27.8.1894), "as usual a perfect fiasco" (Newman 3.9.1898), or the pithy, telegraphic description of the state of their trade: "No fish, no bait no lobsters no whales no nothing" (Newman 8.7.1898). Year after year we read of foreign markets being blocked with Norway fish so that the Newfoundland collection was not entirely sold by the time the next year's Norway supplies began to appear at market; sometimes Newfoundland fish, more than a year old, proved unsaleable. Exchange rates fluctuated widely for no apparent reason, which alone could turn a saving voyage into a losing one while the cargo was on the high seas. Newmans complained bitterly of the reactions of St. John's exporters to these unstable market conditions - which included speculation, cut-throat competition and disorderly marketing among others.²⁶ In 1898 Newmans admitted "We wish we were well out of the trade" (Newman papers, letter to Baine, Johnston & Co., St. John's, 27.5.1898) - and soon they were, though they tried one last fling at the Newfoundland trade. Blaming credit

²⁶. Most of the St. John's houses failed in the bank crash of 1894 which was brought on by unsound banking and commercial practices.

for their difficulties, they ended it altogether, whereupon they hoped:

"...we shall hope to see the business take a new lease of life and go ahead again. If it doesn't the only way is to reduce the stock of goods gradually and close down" (Newman 10.11.1899).

In the event, they followed the latter course. They closed their Gaultois station in 1898 and Harbour Breton in 1902, selling both to the St. John's firm of Job Brothers. Yet for all Newmans' protestations of loss and decline, we find their 1898 profit described as "a very fair one indeed" (Newman 28.3.1899).

Problems of the fishery

During the study period Newmans faced problems of selling fish, meeting competition from other traders and ensuring a consistent supply of good quality fish at profitable prices from the planters. This thesis concentrates on the third of these problems - managing relations with the planters - but some discussion of marketing and of the organisation of the fish trade is appropriate. World sales of salt cod expanded markedly yet Newfoundland's total fish exports grew only modestly and her share of the world's total sales fell: a country which had dominated exports at the beginning of the nineteenth century controlled only 40 to 45% of the world total at the end of the century (Alexander, 1974). It cannot be claimed that no more could have been produced because in 1980 the Newfoundland fishery produced more than four times the annual volume of cod that it did in the previous century (Ryan, 1980). So markets

existed, it was by some means possible to increase production and in the third quarter of the nineteenth century there were monetary inducements to do so as the price of fish doubled and trebled the 1850 level. Yet a higher price could not call forth a greater supply of fish and it is to the conduct of the Newfoundland fishery that we must look for an explanation of this incapacity.

Both merchant and planter should have prospered from the 1850s to the 1880s. From 1850-4 to 1880-4 the gross value of Newfoundland's salt cod exports increased by 127%, her population by only 59%.²⁷ It is not apparent that the cost of living rose during the same period (Alexander, 1973:17-18) and Newmans charged one-third less for a barrel of flour at the end of the period than at the beginning. Yet from some cause the profitability of the fish trade was declining in the early 1860s to the extent that many mercantile failures occurred and that even one of the largest and longest-established St. John's exporters, Job Brothers, considered the possibility of liquidation (Ryan, 1984:151). Witness also Newmans' actions to reduce risk during this decade and their gloomy predictions of the future of the industry and colony. If we see the supplying system as the method by which capital was invested in the fishery (see below, chapter 7) then it is clear that capital investment in this industry became riskier in the second half of

27. Calculated from 1857 and 1884 censuses and Alexander 1973:table A-1.

the nineteenth century than it had been before.²⁸ Newmans responded to increased risk in each instance by attempting to extend control over the planters and (to a lesser degree) over their agents and, preferring a smaller, safer business to a larger, more speculative one, by reducing or eliminating credit to marginal and unreliable producers. The St. John's houses, by contrast, responded to increased risk by altering the basis on which they conducted their businesses. They found it preferable to withdraw from retailing, close their branch stores in the outports and concentrate on wholesaling, supplying small outport merchants who dealt with the planters and supplying the owner-operators of small coastal trading vessels. It was much easier for the St. John's merchants to control a limited number of these small merchants and traders than it was to control thousands of individual fishermen (Ryan, 1980:49) and the new system allowed wholesalers to share risk with retailers as the retailers did with the planters.

One may wonder why Newmans did not follow the St. John's houses but virtually alone continued to operate on the old system. Their reaction, it is true, to risk was always the conservative one, but it involved them in capital expenditure to underwrite the faltering system - fixed capital in fish processing, a fish drier, a steamship and, in the case of the

²⁸. It might be that the rate of return on capital fell relative to other uses. Baran (1957:303) notes that present-day agriculture in third-world countries is not an attractive investment when capital is scarce and dear and can be more safely invested elsewhere. There is controversy over whether there was capital-export from Newfoundland in the middle and late nineteenth century (Antler, 1975; Sager, 1979).

Bank fishery, even caused them to re-enter primary production on their own account. These investments, as I have observed, were not made in pursuit of new opportunities for profit but to remedy the shortcomings of a supplying system which no longer produced enough - or good enough - fish to satisfy foreign markets and to allow the planters to clear their accounts. When new opportunities for investment arose - particularly in the American bait trade and in the lobster fishery - Newmans were loth to pursue them, though one might have expected diversity of product to be as welcome to the merchant as it was to the planter. Newmans would neither enter these trades themselves nor equip others to do so. Their interests were fish and oil only and all other production by the planters was interpreted as a threat to their (Newmans) established interests. It seems that it was speculative rather than fixed investment capital that Newmans feared to commit to production and they resisted the planters' attempts to invest it on their behalf. It is tempting to conclude - though we have no evidence - that such speculative capital became either more difficult or more expensive to obtain during the study period.

Although they did not adopt the system of dealing through small local retailers as did the St. John's merchant houses, Newmans did in 1856 change the basis on which their trade was founded. In essence, they ceased to be fish merchants at all and became instead glorified provision merchants who accepted payment in fish rather than in coin. Their profits came thereafter from the sale of goods to planters and they considered themselves fortunate to recoup the price they paid

the planters in the overseas fish markets. They reminded their agents that "Our business in Newfoundland is not to buy Fish, but to sell goods, and we only take fish in payment, because the Planters have no money to give us" (Newman 30.9.1864). No word, we note, on why the fishermen had no money to give them. If it is true that the merchants were no longer fish merchants, it is also true that the credit system did not for very long remain a credit system. After 1867 (and more so after 1877) credit was not extended systematically to all planters at all times but to some and in fits and starts. Though credit was still available under limited conditions to favoured planters, and while it remained one enticement among many for attracting and retaining planters as a clientele, credit ceased to be the main medium of investment and the trade was conducted more on a cash and barter basis than on credit.

In altering the basis upon which and conditions under which they conducted their business, Newmans also undermined the moral basis of the relationship between merchant and planter and the system of reciprocity which derived from it. Newmans had no legal sanction to enforce the rules of the credit system. They found, in 1868, that "The Law is practically no protection to us under the present circumstances of Newfoundland" (Newman 26.9.1868). While no copy of the judgement thus complained of can be found, it is likely that the law no longer recognised the supplying merchant to be owner of the fish caught with his

supplies²⁹ (see Antler, 1975). Newmans, on the other hand, definitely considered themselves to be the moral owners of their planters' fish, which was "a debt they are bound to pay us in common honesty as without the advance they could not have caught the fish at all" (Newman 13.8.1870). Regarding their debtors, Newmans informed their agents:

"...we hope you do not misunderstand their actual position towards us and that you will take care in such a case that they shall see it in its proper light. The Winter Fish is due to us not for Supplies in May and June but for supplies advanced to them last September, October, November and December, and if they do not bring it to our Stores it is a dishonest evasion of the payment of their just debt contracted eight months ago...in this country before getting supplies in September or October they would be required to sign an engagement mortgaging their Winter Fish for the due payment of the debt and if they delivered the Fish to any other person they would be tried and put in prison for dishonesty. We have been content to trust them on their honor in which we hope we shall not be disappointed; but if we find we cannot do so we must discontinue to supply them except for immediate payment" (Newman 4.6.1870).

So Newmans had no legal sanction to compel their planters to reciprocate in fish for supplies issued. They could, however - and sometimes did - sue for debt, but this had to be used sparingly pour encourager les autres, for a planter sued into bankruptcy brought in no more fish. In fact, the force of virtually all of Newmans' retaliatory measures was the same - a planter could be sued into pauperism, have his house, boat or other property attached, be discontinued from further credit

²⁹. The problem here may have been that a fisherman was supplied by more than one merchant. There is a hint that such may have occurred in that Newmans counselled their agents to "proceed against Debtors before others step in and shut you out" (Newman 9.10.1869).

altogether or placed on the Green Fish list; but in all cases he brought in no further produce.

The moral dimension of obligation, therefore, was not the only weapon that Newmans had but it was the only one that would compel the planters to reciprocate in fish. This their actions of 1856 - when they imposed novel obligations on the planters - must have eroded, as also their actions of 1867 and 1877 when again they unilaterally rewrote the basis of the moral economy. From Newmans' perspective this was not only fair but "an extreme concession to the Planters" (Newman 3.4.1856). Their view of a planter's role in this system was quite uncomplicated: "We consider the first thing a planter has to do is to catch fish when there are any to be caught, the other matters can be attended to at other times" (Newman 1.6.1875). Having caught the fish on Newmans' account it was the planters' duty in common honesty to remit it to them. At times it sounds as much a privilege as a duty - Newmans said that they accepted the planters' fish "...for their accommodation...because they cannot pay us in money" (Newman 5.6.1860, 6.10.1860). All deviations from the ideal workings of the system were explained in terms of the planters' moral failings - the most frequently cited being their dishonesty, followed in popularity by their disinclination to exert themselves. Newmans counselled their agents that, to enforce the 1856 terms, "you require firmness with the planters and that is all" (Newman 5.12.1857). All subsequent domestic difficulties in the fishery are laid at the planters' door. The distressed condition of discontinued planters was one to which they "have reduced themselves by their former dishonesty but

they alone are responsible" (Newman 25.4.1868). True, misfortune was held occasionally to be a (minor) contributory cause of poverty but was held to be beside the point. When their agents observed that the planters could not catch enough fish to balance their accounts, Newmans would reply that they were not in the business of maintaining paupers. Sometimes they complained that this was just what they were expected to do.

It is unfortunate that we do not have documentary evidence of the planters' definition of the situation, but it can readily be gleaned by inference from their actions reported in the Newman correspondence. Perhaps we can allow it to be summarised by Reverend W.K. White, long-time Anglican priest in Harbour Breton:

"If the voyage is a good one all well and good, but if as of late the fish cannot be caught; the settlement finds the fisherman in debt. Now to ordinary people this appears like a speculation. If a gain a gain if a loss a loss. But in Newfoundland the balance remains against the fisherman....The system naturally destroys all feelings of self independence and self help. The poor man looks upon his case as utterly helpless and loses all sense of indebtedness"(USPG papers, Report of W.K. White for quarter ending 30.12.1877).

This was just what Newmans could not afford.

CHAPTER 7CONCLUSIONS

To state ~~my~~ conclusions in a single sentence - the supplying system was not a credit system, a truck system or a barter system and the merchants were not just merchants: they performed an essential productive role and were not only engaged in distributive activities. All other published accounts have seen merchants as performing only distributive functions and have explained the supplying system as furthering the merchants' aim of capturing economic rent. This view has been most recently - and comprehensively - stated by Sider (1986), who also links mercantile power to traditional outport culture.

Sider's contention is that the supposedly traditional culture of the outports was the creation of mercantile capitalism during the period of dominance of the family-based inshore fishery (roughly from 1840 to 1950): in fact, the family fishery and outport culture were both created by mercantile capitalism: "There is, in sum, a double bond between merchant capital and its producers. One bond is formed in the domain of production, the other in the domain of culture" (1986:191). I shall have less to say about culture than about production, though some of the issues raised in this thesis (particularly the matter of social differentiation in outports) clearly bear upon Sider's analysis of outport culture.

According to Sider, merchants gave up producing for themselves about 1790: the migrant fishery, prosecuted with the aid of servants hired on wages, ended. There followed, for a

few decades, a transitional period in which large planters still operated with wage-labour alongside the growing family-based small-boat fishery, but by about 1840 the large planters had disappeared and for a century, until the rise of the industrial fishery after World War Two, the Newfoundland fishery was almost exclusively a small-scale, kinship-based affair. This was the period of the family fishery:

"...in that the family provided the fundamental organization of the work process. Male kinsmen crewed the boats; women, kin to these men, were the core of the "shore crowd" that "made" the fish cure. The village was the social unit from which the boat crews and shore crowds were drawn...the unit both of support and of competition between and among fisher families. The merchant - usually one to a village - organized and dominated the connections between the village fishery and the field of larger forces that took a part in, and of, the fishery" (Sider, 1986:21).

The merchants abandoned production in favour of the family fishery because, says Sider, it was cheaper for them to do so - not, as is sometimes stated, because the villagers fed themselves, but because of the social and cultural domination of mercantile capitalism over the producers, which dominance was exerted at the point of exchange (1986:190).

Merchants, says Sider, dominated producers at the point of exchange through the medium of truck - merchants advanced the raw materials of production and laid claim to the product of labour by controlling the advance of supplies and by "laws that specifically supported the merchants' claims" (1986:146). As merchants went over increasingly to truck-dealings and abandoned their former productive role, the legal basis of the conduct of the inshore fishery was modified: merchants would no longer guarantee servants their wages and the servants' lien on the

product of their labour in support of a claim for wages was no longer recognised (1986:56). Merchants instituted truck dealings because they could manipulate prices - paid for fish and charged for supplies - and retain economic surplus; prices were not adjusted from family to family but prevailed throughout a community (1986:19-20). Merchants had to continue to supply at least some families that seldom covered their accounts because otherwise the merchants would not collect enough fish to make their businesses worthwhile and merchants could afford to do so because they could adjust prices to cover losses on delinquent accounts; those who paid their debts thus squared up also for those who didn't (1986:68).

Truck was, then, imposed by the merchants to serve their interests and it did so in two ways. First, it dealt with the problem of the fishery's variable success by transferring some of the merchants' risks to the fishermen; second, it kept producers from developing alternatives to the fishery by "substantially demonetarizing the village economy" (Sider, 1986:26). The main effects of truck were that it inhibited and sometimes prevented capital-formation in the outports and that it ensured continual poverty and kept equipment simple and therefore the size of catches small (1986:22-3). The fishermen were thus kept coming back for more credit (1986:147). The merchants had few local opportunities for investment that would not have interfered with the fishery and discouraged the producers from developing alternatives so as to ensure a labour-force for the inshore fishery. On two occasions during the nineteenth century an outport "middle class" arose - based on

the northern Labrador and seal-fisheries and the southern Bank fishery - but both were "broken and brought back within the ranks of common fisherfolk" (1986:25).

Although merchant capital dominated the family fishery, keeping the fishermen poor, suppressing other industries and manipulating the terms of trade to appropriate economic surplus, its domination was incomplete because the producers sold the products of their labour, not their labour itself, owned their own equipment and enjoyed free access to the sea. The result was that:

"The domination that fisher families encountered was so severe that it permeated all other aspects of their social life. It shaped the outlines of their economic activity, keeping them poor and their equipment small-scale, and thus limiting the size of their potential catch. Moreover, the specific forms that domination took...played a key role in the shaping of family life and village culture. Yet for all the constraints...fisher families controlled their own social relations of work, built and owned their productive equipment, and wove the various threads of this self-determination within the fabric of their social life, alongside and crossing the strands of imposed poverty and need. The domination that outport people faced occurred at the point of exchange, not production, and thus despite its severity the fishing villages retained a certain autonomy, partial but crucial" (Sider, 1986:27-8).

Mercantile domination of the producer was therefore incomplete in that the fisher-families owned their own equipment and controlled their own social relations of work rather than becoming a mass of propertyless labourers. This autonomy provided the basis of the existence and vitality of village institutions and culture (1986:157) and gave the community and the family roles in production. The village was the locale of production and the social unit from which crews were drawn and

mutual support sought (1986:21). Continual poverty inhibited the emergence of social differentiation - and thus the formation of social classes - within the villages and kept kinship and village institutions crucial to organising work and daily life (1986:25). Fishing villages were, in fact, class-like because of the fishermen's shared understanding of their situation:

"If a 'class' is formed not simply by a common position in the social relations of production, which makes it only an object of historical processes, but also by an understanding of their situation, then these communities are the equivalent of a class (the working class of industrial capitalism) in the particular context of merchant capitalism. The communities form into the equivalent of a class not simply by their common circumstances, their common poverty, or even by their common intentionalities, but also by their common understandings" (Sider, 1986:170).

Outport institutions, then, were to a limited extent autonomous and the same is true of outport culture, which fell under the hegemony of elite culture. Hegemony means "the cultural dominance of a particular class" (1986:119), or rather "the particular way elite culture is conjoined with the organization of appropriation" (1986:128) - that is to say, hegemony refers to the combination of political, economic and cultural constraints through which the merchants controlled the village fishery and, seemingly, kept the fishermen honestly employed about their tasks. Hegemony ensured reciprocity by the fishermen upon the merchants' terms (c/f 1986:121-2), and was successful because fishermen lacked the kind of ties that would have led to "counterhegemonic strategies: of a culture of confrontation and claim" (1986:126). Interaction within the villages was dominated by concern for family and self (1986:183-4). On the other hand, appropriation was never complete:

"Merchants could not penetrate and transform the village organization of work. They could shape it - keeping the boats small by continued impoverishment - and they could harness it to their own interests, but they could only accumulate wealth and not possess, transform and develop the means of production" (Sider, 1986:157).

Sider's contention being that the economic and cultural orders of the outports were induced by mercantile domination, what then is mercantile capitalism? The basic features of merchant capital are:

"The purchase of commodities from communities that generate these products through forms of work organization that they themselves control and supervise."

"Domination at the point of exchange, not in production."

"Community control over the reproduction of the local preconditions for production, including, for example, the reassembly of work crews year after year, the replacement of productive tools, and the reallocation of clan lands or family hunting territories."

"Incorporation of producing communities into larger social systems in a manner that, while bringing the communities within a larger and dominant social system, simultaneously emphasizes the social, cultural and economic divergence of these communities from the centers of power and domination" (Sider, 1986:34-5).

In their relationship to mercantile capitalism, Newfoundland fishermen were in these four ways like native American tribesmen in the fur or deerskin trades (1986:29).

Sider's analysis is at all levels functional and is open to all the criticisms made of that mode of analysis - teleological explanation, the assumption of static equilibrium and the difficulty of accounting within a functional framework for change among them. Of Sider's explanation of outport culture by reference to its relationship to mercantile capital I shall say little because the topic of culture falls outside the purview of this thesis; but it seems premature to deal with cultural

matters before the central economic institutions of the period - the mercantile system, which Sider makes causal - has been described, which in my view it has not. In passing, it may be said that if any one institution conjoins production and appropriation, it appears to be supply. Sider's productive model - and what he calls his "data organizing images" (1986:12) is, however, open to criticism on empirical grounds in the light of the findings of this thesis and he has made important errors in describing the mercantile system.

This thesis does not support three assumptions underlying Sider's model of the nineteenth-century mercantile system: that outports, fishermen and merchants were homogeneous. We have seen that communities were not all alike in function or in occupational structure - some were mercantile centres whereas others were fishing-stations (which were, perhaps, not identical in occupational structure). The homogeneity of outport families (ensured by their common poverty) which Sider asserts is reminiscent of the two-class model which Nemeč says applies to eighteenth-century Newfoundland; for the nineteenth century he prefers a three-class model, in which the findings of this thesis support him. Importantly, the 'planter', or large fisherman with a hired crew, did not die out in Fortune Bay during the study period and in fact became larger and more prominent as the period progressed.¹ Nor were all merchants

¹. That all fishermen did not operate on the same scale is hinted by Sider when he uses the term 'community of account' (1986:70-1). That it is sometimes held that the large planter declined in the nineteenth century is puzzling: we have censuses from 1836 and, if the number of large fishermen can be judged from the numbers of large boats recorded, their numbers

alike. Newmans (and other large south-coast merchants) did not resemble the small-scale community merchant, bound by the constraints of community membership, such as Faris describes for Cat Harbour and a further distinction - besides scale and allegiance - must be made between floating traders, who operated purely in the sphere of distribution, and supplying merchants, who also performed a vital productive role.

I have intended that this thesis make a contribution to both regional studies and ethnohistory. The thesis contributes to the historical ethnography of the region in that it makes use of Newfoundland merchants' papers and in that it describes merchant-planter relations using this source. The main contribution of the thesis to the ethnohistory of the region lies in its attention to the productive role of merchants, which leads to a new conception of the supplying system. Supply was, in fact, a system of investing capital in the fishery and it was the merchants' supplies that formed most of the capital investment. We do not see, in the Newmans' case, the survival of a pre-capitalist pattern of mercantile activity, as supply replaced an earlier system of production in which fishing was conducted by merchants. Misconceptions of supply have arisen

increased at each census. That additions to the fishing-fleet were mostly small boats is possible, but an increase in small boats is not the same as a decrease in large and as to their relative importance quite a small proportion of large boats in the fleet could still have caught most of the fish as a large boat produced more than a small boat. In an unpublished paper Lewis (1987) finds that the planter fishery was the dominant form in the Labrador fishery conducted from the northern port of Brigus until World War II, so we are not dealing with a phenomenon peculiar to Fortune Bay. If this be accepted, it means that we must doubt Sider's historical period of the 'family fishery'.

because merchants have been thought to have been confined to distributive activities, so that their productive role was neglected.

I have intended the thesis to make a contribution to ethnohistory in general by modifying certain of the theoretical positions of Eric Wolf. I have called this a work of ethnohistory and explained this term by reference to the relationship between history and anthropology - an early division of subject-matter, a later rejection by anthropology of history's aims and methods and a recent partial reconciliation of the two disciplines, with ethnohistory straddling the boundary between them. I have followed Eric Wolf in his assertion that anthropology has ignored historical links between societies and, by concentrating on the study of individual cases, has neglected the processes that transcend them. I have not followed Wolf in using the concept of mode of production, which is hard to define and to apply in practice (and have for the same reasons, not used the alternative concept of form of production); moreover, I believe that Wolf is wrong to equate a mode of production with a particular mode of exploitation of labour and to equate capitalism and mercantilism with the spheres of production and distribution respectively. The present study is of a firm of merchants that, in effect, engaged in productive activities and did so by using a variety of forms of labour - tied, free and self-employed. In this light, some refinement of Wolf's position regarding merchants under capitalism is required. Wolf, it should be noted, shares the theoretical view of merchants held by authors of our regional

studies - that is, that merchants were active in only the sphere of circulation. Newmans were engaged in productive activities also and, in the light of this case, we need no longer think of merchants on a frontier as merely exacting tribute by controlling distribution. We can go beyond the established idea that merchants are not involved in production.

Notwithstanding Wolf's argument in favour of processual analysis, this thesis is a study of a single case - i.e., a single mercantile firm - and both a case-study approach and the focus upon the level of the firm, rather than of the mercantile system as a whole or of the productive unit, must be justified. The case-study approach may be justified in Newfoundland historiography in the same terms as Gluckman (1965) justified it in social anthropology - as a necessary mapping of unknown terrain; the problems of the subject-area are not yet known. Approaching supply at the level of the firm is appropriate because one crucial productive decision - who is to be supplied - was taken at this level rather than at that of the productive unit; and because the essential features of supply have not yet been elucidated by analysis at the level of the industry or of the fisherman-merchant dyad. Moreover, through supply the firm controlled in most cases the reproduction of the productive unit on a commercial basis.

Misconceptions of the supplying system have stemmed mainly from (1) seeing it as distributive, tribute-taking activity and (2) what may be called the myth of mercantile power. The latter has led to the presumption that supply served mercantile interests and the former has said what those interests were to

be - binding and exploiting the producers' labour. This was done by systematically demonetarising the outport economy and dictating the terms of trade with the producers through truck dealings, which also prevented capital formation² and kept the fishermen poor and dependent upon further credit from the merchants. It may be true that supply demonetarised the outports if the alternative to supplying was dealing in cash and not in some other form of non-monetary transaction; in fact a mixture of cash and barter superseded the supplying system. It may be true also that supply turned the terms of trade in favour of the merchants and that this resulted in cash being unavailable for either capital investment or the payment of debts.

There are two questions here: whether the balance of advantage of the terms of trade lay with the merchants and, if it did, what role supply played in making it so. It must be said that this study does not show to whose advantage the balance lay, though I have not taken it as axiomatic that it lay with the merchants and we have seen that the planters were able to influence the terms of trade, as they did in 1856. There is also the matter of the role supply played in setting the terms of trade. I have found that supply decreased mercantile

². This argument denies the possibility of savings other than in cash - for instance in specie, bills of exchange, bonds or as a surplus on the merchants' books. If the absence of cash presented insuperable difficulties to the conduct of the rural economy, we might have expected this very fact to have made it worth the while of some individual to have introduced more cash; that this was not done suggests either that fishermen had no surplus to take up (in cash or otherwise) or that other negotiable instruments were pressed into service in lieu of cash.

competition and it may in this way have influenced the terms of trade in their favour. If, however, it be argued that truck-dealings in supply depressed the real rate of pay and in this way transferred more surplus to the merchants, then it must be rejoined that economic theory does not predict such a consequence and that truck has not elsewhere been associated with debt or with a long-term lien upon labour. Few but the most successful fishermen could afford to outfit themselves from their own resources and therefore supplies on credit were something that was sought by fishermen, not avoided as leading to poverty; indeed, it seems from the Newman papers that credit was sought in rather larger measure than the supplier wished to grant it and issued in more cases than the principals of the firm thought wise. It might, in short, have been the poverty of the planters which drove them to seek credit supplies as much as the supplying system which ensured their continual poverty.

The assumption that the object of the supplying system was to enable merchants to appropriate surplus from the bound labour of fishermen must therefore be questioned. It has yet to be shown that this was (or could have been) the object of supply and, in any case, neglects the supplying merchants' crucial productive role. In the light of the present study it is also necessary to question the power of supplying merchants over the planters and the extent of the supplying system's dominance over the fishing industry. That both were considerable is undoubted; that they were absolute is questionable. As to the power of the merchants over the state, if the merchants had had their way in 1832 there would have been no Home Rule; if they had had their

way in 1854 Responsible Government would not have been introduced; and governmental attention to the fishing industry decreased in the late nineteenth century in favour of new industries (Neary, 1973). It should also be noted that the merchants' hold over the product of the planters they supplied was more limited than they felt it should have been. We have seen that Newmans held that a planter they supplied should tender the whole of his voyage to them because without their supplies the fish would not, in most cases, have been caught; but the law upheld a supplier's interest in the fish and oil only to the value of the supplies advanced (Lewis, 1987). Supplying merchants thus had no legal basis for the way they operated, though they may have had other sanctions to apply to recalcitrant planters, such as refusing further supplies. Exaggerated views, such as those of Sider, of the extent of mercantile power must therefore be dismissed.

I have described the supplying system as the dominant economic institution of the period, but its dominance should not be overstated. First of all, supply appears to have pertained only to the cod fishery and not to the herring bait and lobster fisheries which arose in Fortune Bay during the study period; Newmans were adamant that they wanted no credit extended for these pursuits. Some fishermen were not engaged solely or even mainly in the cod fishery and there was always a number of independent planters who outfitted themselves without the benefit of a supplying merchant, while some large planters dealt with a supplier only as a matter of convenience. Late in the nineteenth century a Bank fishery, in which shipowners (some of

them merchants) did directly control production arose in Fortune Bay; Newmans did engage in the Bank fishery, but only in an attempt to shore up the declining supplying system. Merchants had much less control over large planters than over small, but the latter predominated and virtually their only recourse was to turn to a merchant for supplies. In this sense the supplying system was the dominant economic institution of the times.

During the study period, capital (in the form of supplies) was steadily withdrawn from the fishing industry. Markets became more difficult, though not always less remunerative, as Norwegian competition made Newfoundland fish slower to sell, and therefore the extension of credit riskier to the merchant. At the same time, the larger (and from the merchants' position, more profitable) planters were drawn from the codfishery to the herring bait trade. Credit was progressively withdrawn from all but the most reliable small-boat fishermen and, in effect, became merely a competitive device to entice large planters from the service of rival merchants.

The issue of supplies gradually became, then, less part of a productive system than a distributive mechanism, allocating surplus among merchants as a form of non-price competition rather than, as when more generally applied, ensuring the reproduction of productive units that lacked the resources to sustain themselves on a commercial basis. Production in the codfishery, therefore, fell sharply in the later part of the study-period. Why the supplying system was instituted is a matter lying outside the study-period, though I have observed that the region suffered a chronic shortage of labour until near

the end of the nineteenth century; the demise of the system is, in the Newmans' case, more certain, as the supplying system suffered from internal limitations. It worked best when the planters had least need of it; when they needed it most, it functioned not at all.

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