

# (Re-)Assembling Rural Places?



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# Presentation Outline

- Relational geographies of the rural
- 'Assemblage Theory'
- Assemblage Theory and rural places
- Using Assemblage Theory to research globalization
- Case study: The outports of Newfoundland
- Towards a new research agenda?

# The Relational Rural

- Rural places are not discrete, bounded territories that share an essential absolute rurality
- Rural places are complex assemblages of diverse social and physical elements that each part of wider networks and relations
- Rural places are always connected to other places (both rural and non-rural) through social, economic and political relations
- The rurality of place is always defined in relation to other places
- ***How do we develop the theorisation and application of the relational rural?***

# Assemblages

“a collection or gathering of things or people”

Dictionary definition.

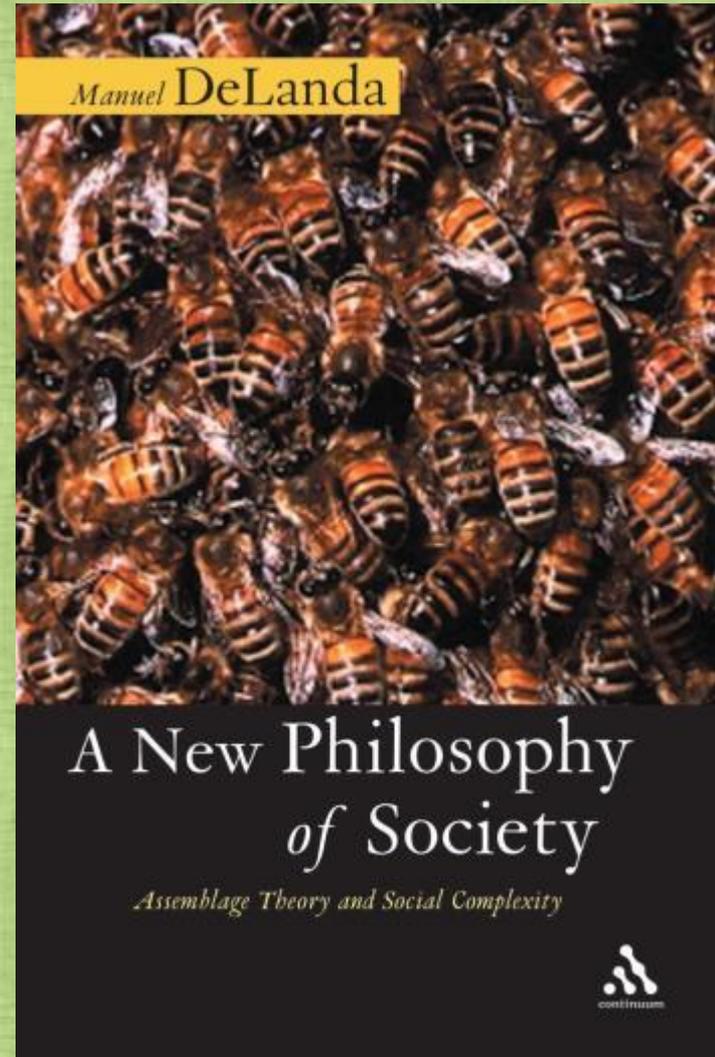
“assemblages are composed of heterogeneous elements that may be human and non-human, organic and inorganic, technical and natural.”

Anderson and McFarlane (2011) in *Area*, p 124

“The term is often used to emphasise emergence, multiplicity and indeterminacy, and connects to a wider redefinition of the socio-spatial in terms of the composition of diverse elements into some form of provisional socio-spatial formation”

Anderson and McFarlane (2011) in *Area*, p 124

# Assemblage Theory



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- An assemblage is stabilized and destabilized through processes of *territorialization* and *detrterritorialization*
- “assemblages always ‘claim’ a territory as heterogeneous parts are gathered together and hold together” (Anderson and McFarlane, 2011, p 126)

# Assemblage Theory

- An assemblage comprises *material* and *expressive* components
- An assemblage is stabilized and destabilized through processes of *territorialization* and *deterritorialization*
- An assemblage is given an identity through *coding* and *decoding*

# Assemblage Theory

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- Assemblages are characterised by ‘relations of exteriority’
- “[The capacities of an assemblage] do depend on a component’s properties but cannot be reduced to them since they involve reference to the properties of other interacting entities” (De Landa, ANPS, p 11)
- “a component part of an assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different” (De Landa, ANPS, p 10)

# Assemblage Theory

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# Assemblage Theory

- Assemblages are characterised by ‘relations of exteriority’
- Assemblages are dynamic and constantly changing
- “this can only ever be a provisional process: relations may change, new elements may enter, alliances may be broken, new conjunctions may be fostered” (Anderson and McFarlane, 2011, p 126)

# Assemblage Theory and Place

- Assemblage theory has gained popularity in human geography and sociology
- Emphasis on ‘translocal assemblages’: processes and networks operating across space
- Applications in rural geography/sociology:
  - Global land-grabbing assemblage (Murray Li 2013)
  - Global biofuel assemblage (Hollander 2010)
  - Forest management (Murray Li 2007)
  - Rural microfinance (Rankin 2008)
- Little examination of *places* as assemblages

# Places as Assemblages

- Chapter of *ANPS* on 'cities and nations' as assemblages:
  - Buildings as material components
  - Iconic skylines as expressive components
  - Territorialization through residential practices
  - Deterritorialization through gentrification
  - Interactions between town and countryside as relations of exteriority

# Rural Places as Assemblages

- **Material components:** Landscape, buildings, crops, livestock, wildlife, economic commodities
- **Expressive components:** Aesthetic qualities of landscape, 'rural idyll', folk culture, emotional attachments, sense of identity
- **Territorialization:** Working the land, family inheritance, administrative boundaries
- **Deterritorialization:** Migration, loss of rural services, amalgamation of municipalities
- **Coding:** Description as 'rural', eligibility for rural development programmes
- **Decoding:** Changing meaning of rurality

# Rural Places as Assemblages

- Relations of exteriority:
  - Interactions with local towns and the region
  - Migration flows
  - Economic transactions
  - Power relations
  - Intersections with ‘translocal assemblages’

*Understanding the relational constitution of rural place in the context of change, restructuring and globalization*

# Assemblage Theory and Globalization



**Globalization is not a steamroller**

# Assemblage Theory and Globalization

- Globalization is not an unstoppable, homogenizing force imposed from above
- Globalization is reproduced through local places in acts of negotiation and contestation (Massey 2005)
- Emergent 'global countryside' as a hybrid space (Woods 2007)
- DERREG FP7 project shows differentiated regional outcomes, shaped by regional contexts, catalysts and individual agency
- Need to examine the micropolitics of globalization in rural localities

# Assemblages and Globalization

- How does globalization transform the material composition of rural places through the introduction, removal, substitution and circulation of material objects including commodities, technologies, crops, financial capital etc.?
- How is globalization 'performed' in rural space through the behaviours, cultural practices and mobilities of migrants, tourists, entrepreneurs and public officials? *What impact does this have on the expressive composition of rural places?*
- How does the stretching and multiplication of social and economic relations in globalization alter the territorialization of rural place? *Are rural places being stretched over more expansive territories?*

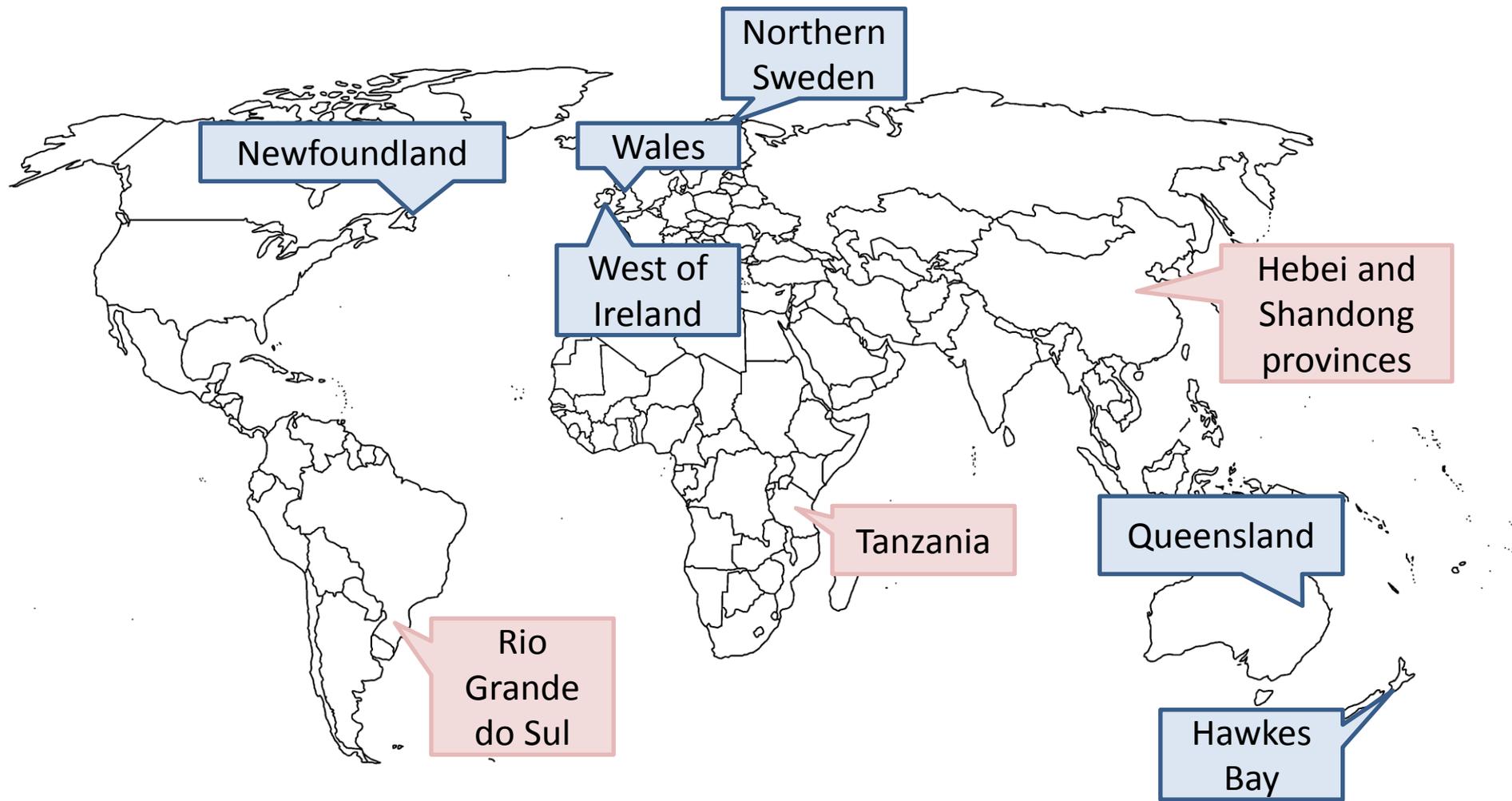
# Assemblages and Globalization

- How is the rural discursively constructed as a global space in social, economic and environmental terms? *How are these translated to the local level through the coding and decoding of rural places?*
- How are contemporary rural experiences of globalization historically situated? *What are the legacies of earlier global engagements and the resultant assemblages?*

# GLOBAL-RURAL



- European Research Council Advanced Grant
- “The Global Countryside: Rural change and development in globalization (GLOBAL-RURAL)”
- 5 years from February 2014
  
- **WP1: (Re-)Assembling the Global Countryside**
- WP2: Mapping and Narrating the Global Countryside
- WP3: A Countertopography of Everyday Globalization
- WP4: Differential Global Engagements in Emerging Rural Economies
- WP5: Rural Assemblages and Grounding Global Challenges



# GLOBAL-RURAL Case Studies

WP1

WP4

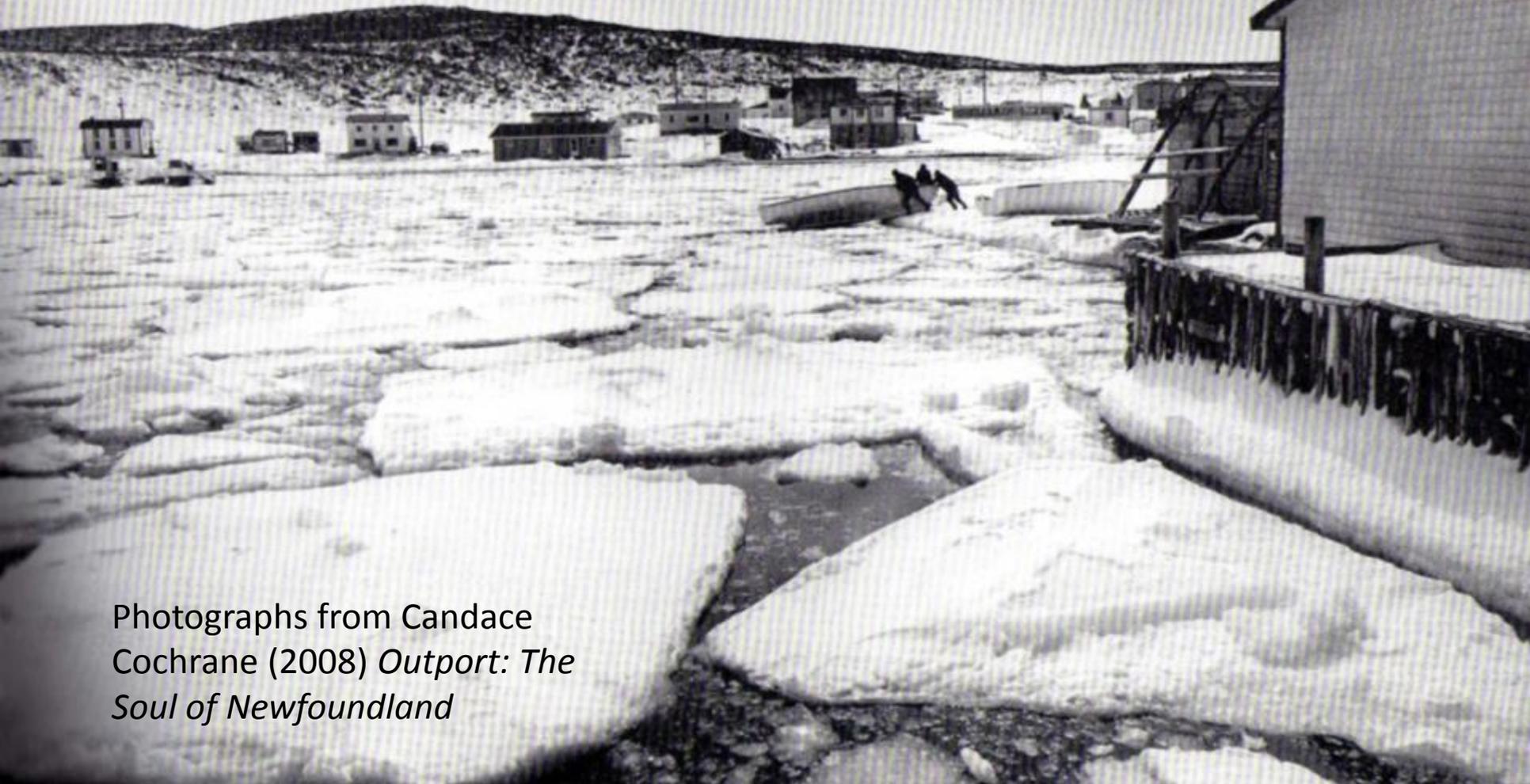
# Outports of Newfoundland





Expressive components:

Isolation, Harsh climate, Resilience, Community



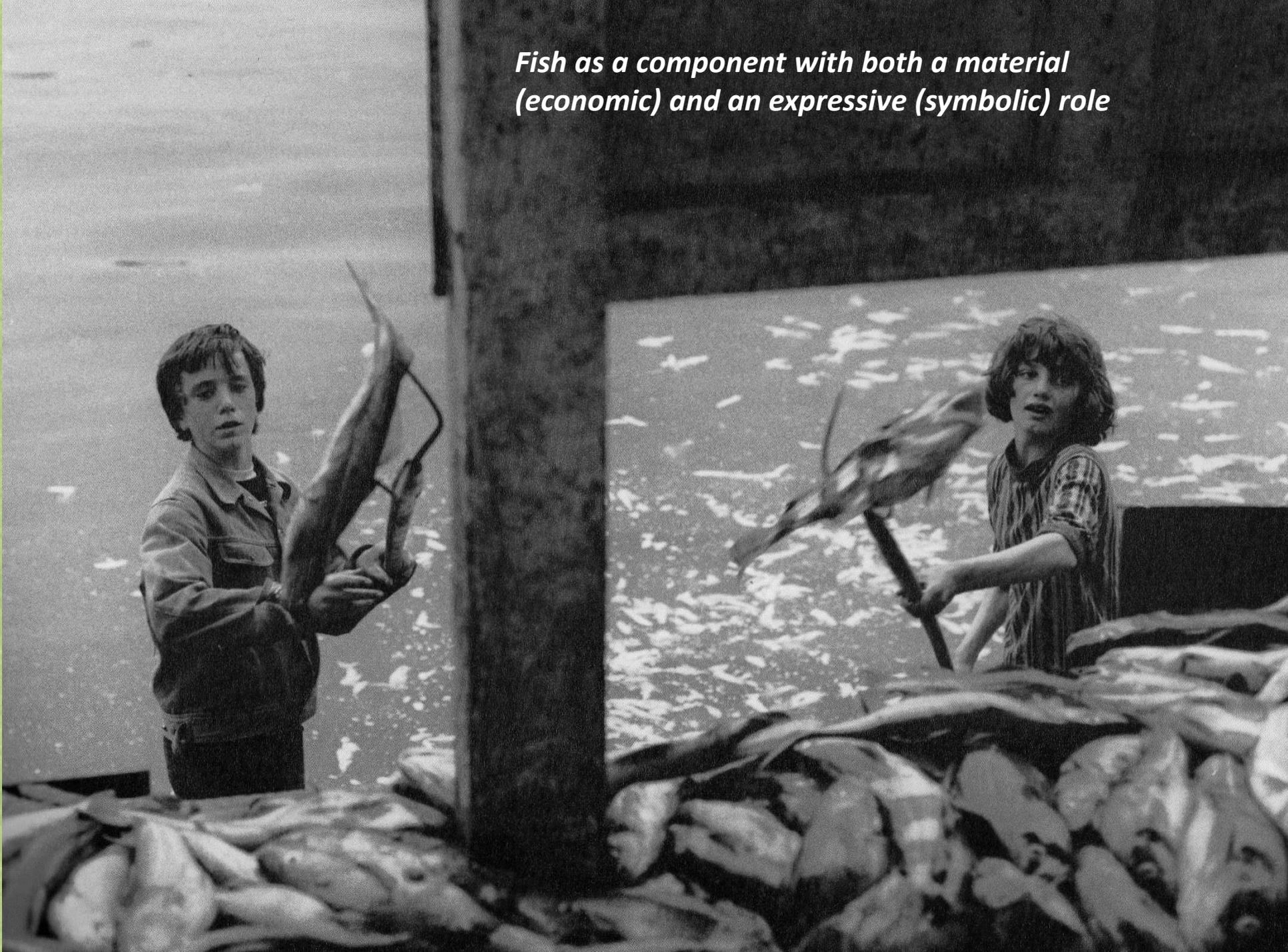
Photographs from Candace  
Cochrane (2008) *Outport: The  
Soul of Newfoundland*

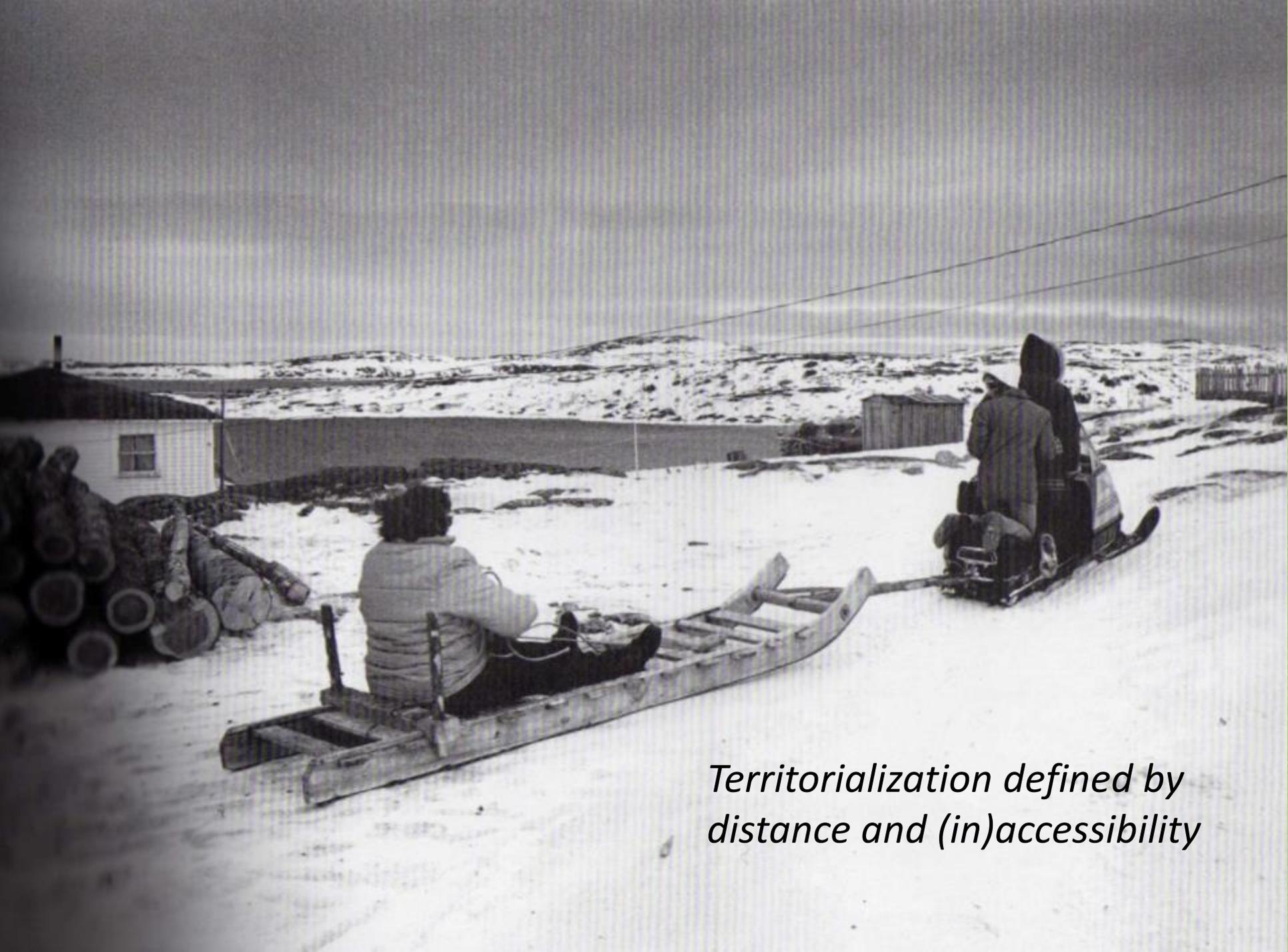


## Material components:

- Landscape
- Buildings
- Boats
- Sea
- Fish

*Fish as a component with both a material  
(economic) and an expressive (symbolic) role*





*Territorialization defined by  
distance and (in)accessibility*

*Territorialization of place  
extending out to sea*



*New material components reshaping  
external relations*



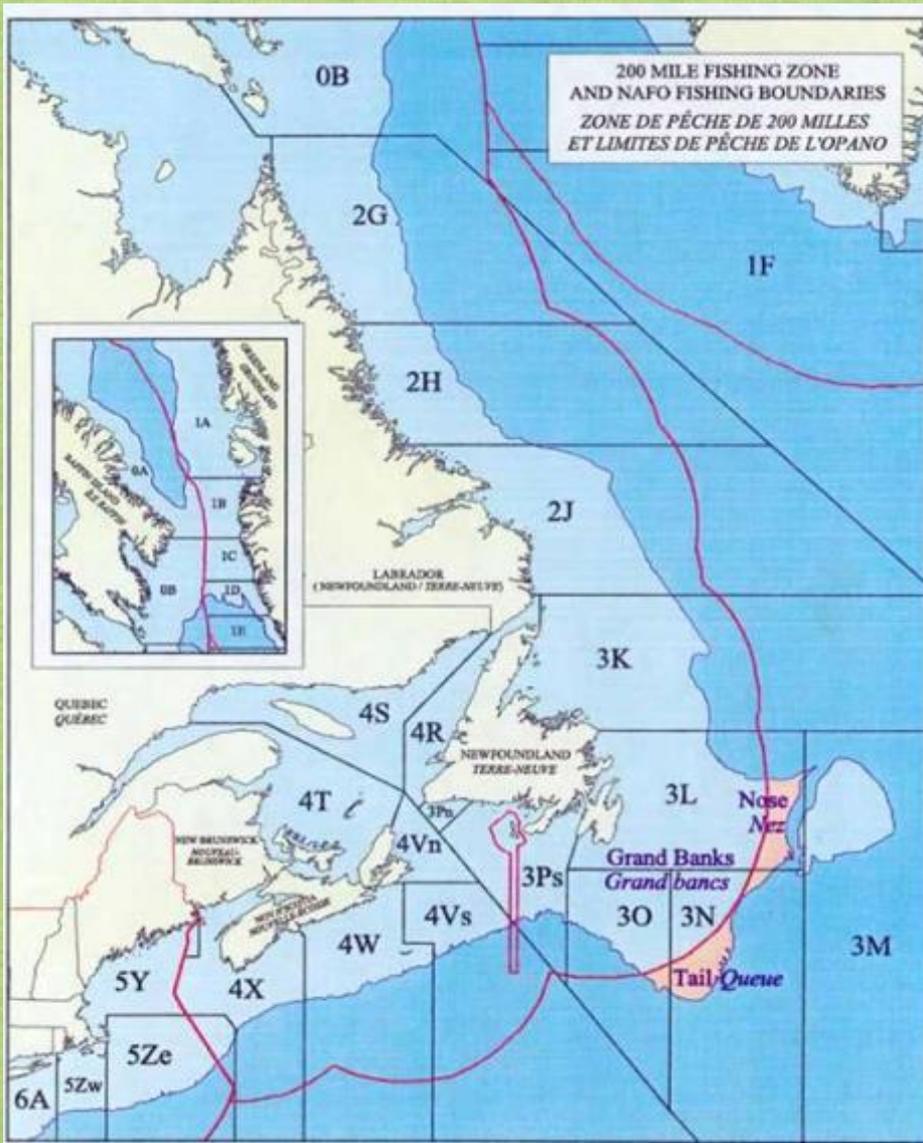


Families To Be Paid  
For Leaving Villages



Outposts Likely To  
Become Thing Of Past

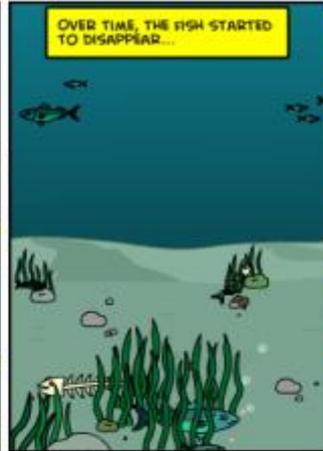




*Encountering the global fisheries assemblage...*



THE COD FISHERY WAS 500 YEARS OLD.



OVER TIME, THE FISH STARTED TO DISAPPEAR...



THIS CAUSED 40,000 PEOPLE TO BE PUT OUT OF WORK. IT DEVASTATED HUNDREDS OF COMMUNITIES THAT DEPENDED ON FISHING FOR THEIR PRIMARY INDUSTRY.

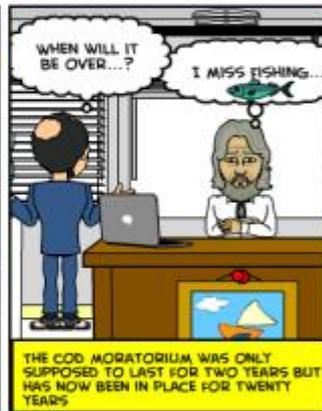


THE CLOSING OF THE COD FISHERY CAUSED 75,000 PEOPLE TO LEAVE THE ISLAND.



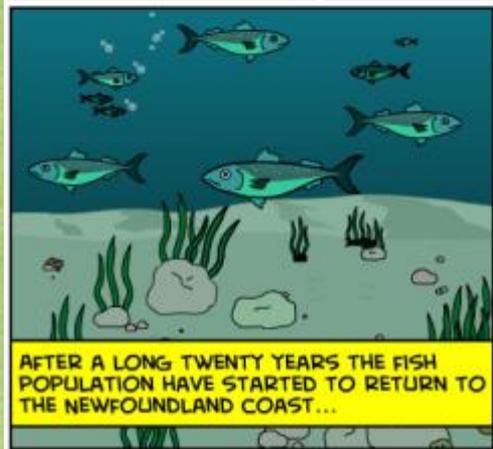
MANY NEWFOUNDLANDERS HAD TO LEAVE THE ISLAND IN SEARCH OF NEW JOBS...

MOST OF THEM WENT INTO THE OIL INDUSTRY IN THE WEST.



WHEN WILL IT BE OVER...?

THE COD MORATORIUM WAS ONLY SUPPOSED TO LAST FOR TWO YEARS BUT HAS NOW BEEN IN PLACE FOR TWENTY YEARS



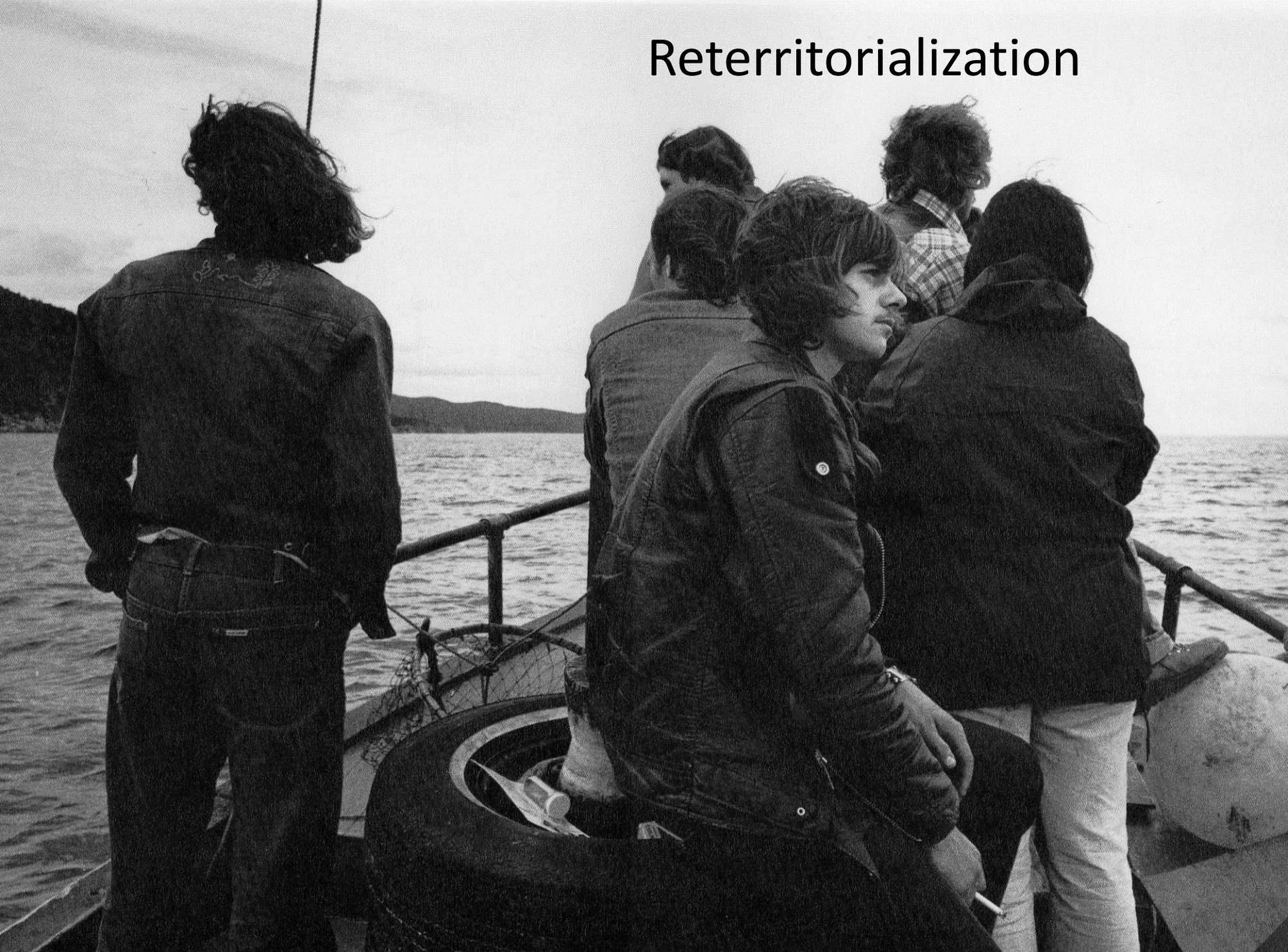
AFTER A LONG TWENTY YEARS THE FISH POPULATION HAVE STARTED TO RETURN TO THE NEWFOUNDLAND COAST...

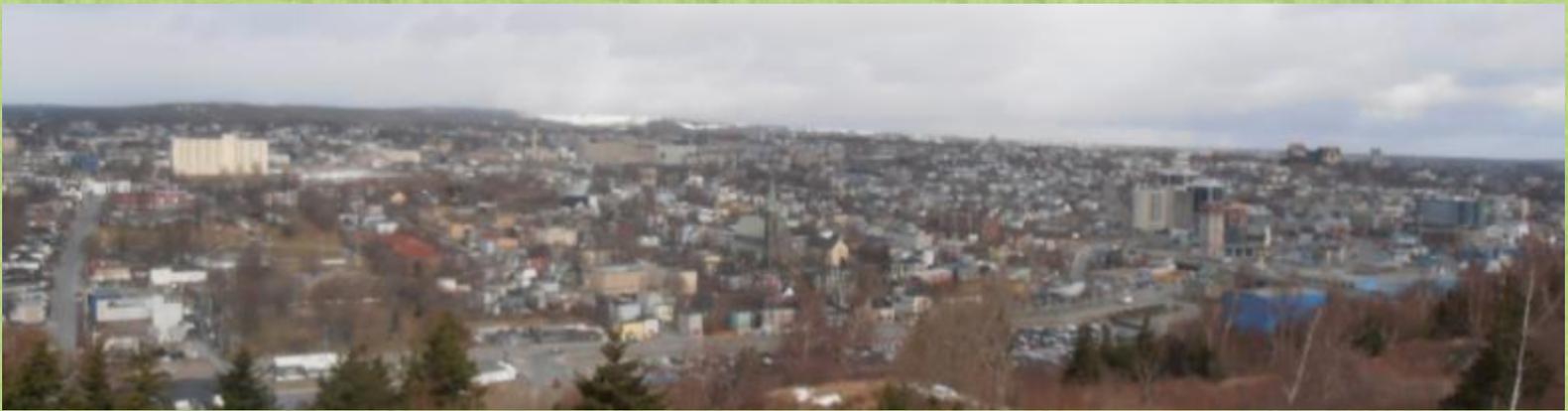


HOPEFULLY SOON, ALL THE FISHERMAN WILL BE ABLE TO DO WHAT THEY LOVE AGAIN... FISH!

THE END

# Reterritorialization





St John's



Hibernia oil field



Alberta tar sands





# Towards a New Research Agenda

- Assemblage theory can help to unpick the composition of rural places
- Assemblage theory provides insights into how rural places change in response to external pressures, including globalization
- Assemblage theory highlights the significance of external relations in driving change
- But also allows examination of how social relations are configured in place and the role of individual agency
- Assemblage theory links the material and the non-material

# Towards a New Research Agenda

- Case study research that is not bounded by conventional localities but follows connections
- Ethnographic research that can reveal and experience expressive components of place as well as material components
- Mapping of the territorial and social form of relations that constitute place (e.g. qualitative GIS)
- Textual analysis of the coding and de-coding of rural places in media, policy and lay discourses
- Historical and longitudinal research to capture the dynamic character of rural places

# Towards a New Research Agenda

- Globalization and the Global Countryside
- Modernization, Social, Technological and Political Change
- The shifting form of the farm as an assemblage
- Food as a material and an expressive component for rural localities and cultures
- New economic activities as relations of exteriority (including tourism)
- Interaction between the global food security assemblage and individual rural place-assemblages
- Sustainable development as an assemblage and tensions with expressive components of rurality

## ***The continuing relevance of the rural and the persistence of rural places....***

“Through these entanglements, intersections and entrapments, the experience of globalization changes rural places, but it never eradicates the local. Rather, the networks, flows and actors introduced by globalization processes fuse and combine with extant local entities to produce new hybrid formations. In this way, places in the emergent global countryside retain their local distinctiveness, but they are also different to *how they were before.*”

Woods (2007) in *Progress in Human Geography*



*“Life has changed a lot here in Conche. A lot of families have left with their children. There was a feeling that Conche was dying; Everybody was saying, ‘Conche is dying, Conche is dying’. I hate it when somebody says that. I say, ‘No, Conche is changing, it’s not dying.’ It’s changing.”*

Newfoundland outport resident,  
quoted by Cochrane (2008)