

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

MARIAN BINKLEY, *Set Adrift: Fishing Families*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 2002, xiv + 204 p., Index, \$65.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

Set Adrift represents a valuable contribution to the growing body of literature that documents the roles played by women, fishermen's wives in particular, in the Canadian East Coast fishing industry. Binkley makes generous and effective use of interview materials throughout the book, providing readers with a detailed understanding and intuitive "feel" for the social dynamics of Nova Scotian fishing families and the communities in which they are situated. Of particular value is her finely nuanced portrayal of the household strategies fishing families employ to maintain their livelihoods in difficult times, and the emotional, as well as the economic, stresses and strains that result from these varied strategies. Binkley presents an impressive array of descriptive statistics in her book, compiled from surveys conducted in 1993 and 1994 with 300 women, in Halifax and Lunenburg counties, and from later, more in-depth, follow-up interviews with 50 of those women. She divided equally her sample between households engaged in "deep-sea" and "coastal" (small boat) fishing.

Despite these notable strengths, however, the book will disappoint many readers, particularly those interested in gaining a better understanding of the changes brought about by the collapse, in the early 1990s, of the East Coast ground fishery. The issues of change and decline are emphasized in the book's title, introduction and conclusion but, as Binkley acknowledges, they did not inform the original design of the research project on which this publication is based. Those she interviewed, in fact, were from an area where groundfisheries were substantially curtailed but exempt from the moratoria. Binkley's attempt to address the issue of change would have been much more successful if she had included a detailed comparison of her 1992 economic data to earlier data and thereby provided the reader with tangible evidence of the magnitude of change that had occurred. She, however, did not do this and the interview data she relies on throughout the book rarely addresses the question directly.

Also disappointing is Binkley's comparison of deep-sea and coastal-fishing households—disappointing because, while she designed her research to facilitate this comparison, her analysis asks relatively routine and undemanding questions of her data. She also tends downplay many of the important differences between deep-sea and coastal-fishing households that are evident in her own data - the much higher income levels of deep-sea fishing families than coastal families, for instance, the far greater

inequalities of income that exist within the deep-sea sector, and the more "dysfunctional" nature of husband/wife relationships in the industrial fishing sector. This downplaying of differences appears to be the outcome of her preference for emphasizing what is common to both contexts—the subordination of women in an enterprise that depends so fundamentally on their participation, a dependence that has only deepened since the 1990s with the collapse of the groundfisheries.

This downplaying of differences also weakens Binkley's discussion of the social ideals that surround the coastal-family fishing enterprise. She represents those social ideals as male-driven, arguing that fishermen's wives support their husbands' "dream" without really sharing in it. While this is no doubt true for many women, there is a large volume of literature, much of it cited by Binkley in this volume, that documents the deep commitment of women to the fishing culture of their home communities, in Atlantic Canada, Norway and elsewhere. But what is their "dream"? Unfortunately, Binkley sheds far less light on this issue than she might have, given the extensive body of interview data that she gathered.

Despite these weaknesses *Set Adrift* manages to be thought-provoking, both for what it says and leaves unsaid. Are the positions of women within small boat and deep-sea family fishing enterprises, and the general social characteristics of those two enterprises, really as similar as she argues? Do the wives of small boat fishermen really lack, to the extent Binkley argues they do, a personal commitment to fishing as a way of life? Binkley may not provide definitive or convincing answers to these questions, but they are important questions to ask and help provide a foundation for further comparative research. While it does not break new theoretic ground, the book nevertheless provides much needed and stimulating case study materials regarding women's roles and contributions within household fishing families and communities.

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