

WOMEN ,FOLKLORE AND COMMUNICATION:
INFORMAL SOCIAL GATHERINGS IN A
FRANCO-NEWFOUNDLAND CONTEXT

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INFORMAL SOCIAL GATHERINGS IN A
FRANCO-NEWFOUNDLAND CONTEXT

BY

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ABSTRACT

Women, Folklore and Communication: Informal Social Gatherings in a Franco-Newfoundland Context.

As elsewhere in the world, Franco-Newfoundland women feel a need to socialize with their peers. They do this whenever the opportunity arises, although their role as wives, mothers or housekeepers is so demanding that they must actively create such social occasions.

This doctoral dissertation focuses on the dynamics of verbal interaction which takes place during such informal women's gatherings. Verbal interaction in these contexts is often expressed in specific folklore genres and an examination of these genres in characteristic ethnographic contexts permits the delineation of patterns of women's communication and enables us to make an assessment of their significance. The data allowing for such an examination were collected during three summers spent in the community of Cape St. George, Port-au-Port Peninsula, Newfoundland. Tape-recorded interviews made as a participant observer were used to obtain biographical data from selected informants, and to record interaction in small groups of women, men, and mixed groups. Fieldnotes supplement the tape-recorded data, documenting the sociocultural context, ranging from concrete physical surroundings to abstract kinship patterns, in order to convey the full social ambience.

This study adopts the principles of ethnoscience, essentially an emic approach seeking to determine the folk's own definition of experience, as a method of classification and data organization utilizing folk taxonomy. The data is analysed and discussed following the theory of "ethnography of communication," a method of analysis facilitating the examination of the organization and meaning of acts of communication in sociocultural contexts. The gatherings are considered as communicative events, whose participants are members of the same speech community. Folklore genres occurring in these events are examined in terms of the dynamics that govern and result from their expression. Because such gatherings recur with high frequency and exist in different but recognizable variants (according to time, setting, pretexts and participants), whether they are planned (usually through informal oral means of communication such as the telephone) or whether they are unplanned, these gatherings, in terms of their form and content, are seen as desirable customary activities by the participants.

Scholarly attention has yet to be focused on women's informal gatherings as an aspect of customary tradition. Thus a particular focus on this aspect as a traditional though barely recognized context for ethnographic communication not only furthers but helps validate the study of women as members of several social subgroups of which gender is in each case a constant amongst varying defining factors such as age and marital status, geographic location, kinship, occupation, education and

economic status, to name the most obvious. The members of these subgroups share a multidimensional sense of identity, while retaining their distinctive personality. It also demonstrates that in the context of exclusively women's gatherings, participants use specific expressive behaviours which are intrinsic to these situations.

By defining and analysing the dynamics of these gatherings, it should be possible to provide answers to a series of problems deriving from interest in gender-specific studies in folklore: 1) What is the nature of women's discourse and its expression in folkloric terms? 2) How does it function in a specific context? 3) What consequences does gender-specific analysis have on the theoretical interpretation of ethnocultural data? While recent publications have shown a growing interest in the study of women and folklore, this domain still lacks theoretical perspective, especially regarding the ways in which gender affects performance.

This dissertation attempts to fill a gap that will allow the social sciences in general and folklore in particular, to broaden their present perspectives in the specific area of women, folklore and communication. Moreover, although a few researchers have devoted substantial work to some aspects of Franco-Newfoundland culture, none has yet undertaken any research with a specific emphasis on women's traditions, perceptions and expressive behaviour in this culture.

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CONTENTS

	page
ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
INTRODUCTION:	t
Chapter 1 THE SOCIOCULTURAL BACKGROUND OF FRENCH-NEWFOUNDLANDERS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CASE OF WOMEN WITHIN AN ETHNIC MINORITY	21
Historical Sketch of Settlement Patterns on the Port-au-Port Peninsula	23
Patterns of Settlement	24
Illegal Settlement	28
Legal Settlement	29
Bilingualism and Cultural Identity	31
Aspects of the Two Languages	31
Historical Dimension	35
Women and Bilingualism	38
Concluding Remarks	52
Chapter 2 WOMEN, FOLKLORE AND COMMUNICATION: A SELECTIVE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	53
Women and Folklore	54
Folklore and the Ethnography of Communication	70
Theoretical Statement	74
Chapter 3 DOING FIELDWORK WITH WOMEN IN A MINORITY CULTURE: THE CAPE ST. GEORGE EXPERIENCE	88
Ethics	89
Initial Interest: Early Fieldwork	95
First Contact with the Community	96
Second Outing and First Tape-Recorded Interview	100
The Mediator	104
Concluding Remarks on Early Fieldwork in the Community	110
Doing Extensive Fieldwork in Cape St. George	113

The Hosting Family Household	115
Awareness of Women's Informal Social Gatherings as a Customary Activity	118
Methods of Collecting	122
Stress and Politics: Problems Affecting Fieldwork	126
Final Fieldtrip: Gathering Circumstantial Data	133
Concluding Remarks	136
Chapter 4 COMPOSITION OF THE VARIOUS GROUPS AND THEIR MODE OF GATHERING	144
Elderly Women and Widows	147
The Cape St. George Group	152
Transportation	157
The Red Brook Group	159
Married Women	171
Time and Group Organisation	171
The Group Members	174
The Gatherings	178
Chapter 5 WOMEN'S INFORMAL SOCIAL GATHERINGS: CONTEXT AND EVENTS	184
"Sprees" As Customary Events	185
The Bingo Bus	187
The Bingo Game	191
Coming Back From Bingo	195
The Gathering	197
Married Women's Gatherings	209
"After The Post-Office" Gatherings	210
Work Related Gatherings	215
Concluding Remarks	221
Chapter 6 EXAMPLES OF FOLKLORE GENRES EMERGING FROM INTERACTIVE SITUATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF WOMEN'S INFORMAL SOCIAL GATHERINGS	222
Interaction and Cooperative Narrative	
Construction	226
Discussion	239
Context	248
Matrimonial Talk	251
Church Narratives	255
Name Calling	263
Kernel Narratives	265

Discussion	272
Concluding Remarks	277
Chapter 7 EXAMPLES OF FOLKLORE GENRES	
EMERGING FROM ELDERLY WOMEN'S INFORMAL	
SOCIAL GATHERINGS	279
Coaxing	280
Frights	287
Discussion	295
Midwives and Birth Stories	299
Discussion	303
Jigs	309
Songs	315
Older Women: Gossip and Rumour	324
Concluding Remarks	330
CONCLUSION	331
BIBLIOGRAPHY	338

INTRODUCTION

Women in Cape St. George feel a need to socialize with other women. This they do whenever the opportunity arises. In fact, their roles as wives, mothers, and householders are so demanding that they must create opportunities to meet with other women. The informal gatherings which result from such efforts constitute an important context for the transmission of folklore, mostly narratives, dealing with women's experience; further, the gatherings have not apparently been recognized by scholars as an important and legitimate context for the study of women's folklore and communication.¹

This dissertation will examine the dynamics of verbal interaction which takes place during informal women's gatherings, with special focus on the various examples of folklore genres that are of special interest to women and which emerge in this context. By defining and analysing the dynamics of these gatherings in terms of their folkloric dimensions, this study aims at providing a possible answer to a series of problems raised by the interest of gender-specific studies in folklore:

¹See: Eleanor Wachs, *Crime-Victim Stories: New York City Urban Folklore* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988) 1-14.

1) What is the nature of women's discourse and its normative expression in folkloric terms?

2) How does it function in specific contexts?

3) What are the consequences of gender-specific analysis on the theoretical interpretation of ethnocultural data?

The intention here is therefore to look not at specific female performers of specific genres, but rather to study groups of ordinary female members drawn from a larger community interacting in what they regard as everyday life situations. The emphasis is thus placed on how the members of a folk group organise, understand and experience their lives as women in a larger community. In this way, the study of informal social gatherings of groups of women enables the folklorist to adopt a situational perspective. One may then look more specifically at the folkloric data provided by the social gatherings as a customary practice on the one hand, and on the other by the content of the folklore genres expressed within the frame of reference of these gatherings. The analysis of these data in relation to performers should be regarded then as a basis from which other situations involving women performers can be observed and from which gender-specific theory can be derived. In other words, the study of exclusively female informal social gatherings, because it enables the observer to study the interactive expression of a set of values common

to women, sets the premises necessary to understanding women's performance of folklore material in situations that take them beyond the realm of domestic everyday life activities.

This dissertation also wishes to reinforce the validity and the necessity of studying women as members of social subgroups capable of sharing a sense of identity. It is shown that in the context of exclusively women's gatherings, participants use specific types of expressive behaviour which, without being restricted to females, recur in these situations. Ultimately then, and with regard to women in folk groups, it can be said that the diversity of women's groups with shared identity factors in various cultures may be seen as the basis for defining a more universal sense of identity for women cross-culturally.² Just as fishermen can identify with fishermen as members of an occupational group all over the world, or storytellers with storytellers as members of a performance group, women can identify with women as members of a gender group. In the case of fishermen, it is the shared experience of earning a living from the sea which is the common denominator that prompts a sense of identity. In the case of women, apart from shared factors of a biological nature (i.e., the ways women deal with menstruation, pregnancy or menopause in their

²For further discussion on the notion of "folk group" and its relation to the concept of "identity" see: Alan Dundes, "Who are the Folk?" *Interpreting Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1980): 1-19. and Richard Bauman, "Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore," *Towards New Perspectives in Folklore*, eds. A. Paredes and R. Bauman (Austin: U of Texas P, 1972): 31-41.

respective cultures) there are also social and economic realities by which, though they may be diverse, women are confronted on a day-to-day basis. With regard to these latter factors, it has been argued that women assert their identity or womanhood in reaction to men. As Evelyne Sullerot notes:

It is only by reference to man's position in each society, country, social class, environment, age group or occupation, that one can speak of the position of women.³

Women's culture can be partly defined by their experience of male domination. However, the fact that women feel a need to identify with each other in a group structure is not exclusively limited by their power-determined relationships with men. Women tend to develop their own values and cultural concepts which are women-oriented and, to a certain extent, exclusive of men.

Chapter One, which examines the socio-cultural background of French Newfoundlanders with reference to the case of women within this ethnic minority, is based largely on data stored in the *Centre d'Etudes Franco-Terreneuviennes* at Memorial University of Newfoundland. The chapter shows that the residents of Cape St. George, the community which serves as the focus of this study, are for the most part of French descent, except for outsiders who settled there for current occupational reasons such as teaching, whose Acadian and Breton ancestors began

³Evelyne Sullerot, *Women, Society and Change* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974) 7.

settlement on the west coast of Newfoundland from the end of the eighteenth century. Because of the relatively isolated geographic position of Cape St. George, at the south western extremity of the Port-au-Port Peninsula, distant from English settlements, its residents have conserved unique cultural traits. Their songs, for instance, originate for the most part in Brittany and other areas of France.⁴ Despite American influence, through the air force base in Stephenville from 1940 to 1966, or Canadian and Newfoundland English influence, through media and other aspects of the social system such as church and schools, these cultural traits have remained distinct from those shared by other anglophone Newfoundlanders. French Newfoundlanders, who constitute less than one per cent of the total population of the island, are therefore a cultural minority.

A sense of belonging to a minority culture is shared both by male and female members of the community. Fieldwork data are available to support this statement. What is less obvious, however, and needs more investigation, is the degree to which men's and women's senses of cultural identity are similar or dissimilar. Further questions, regarding for example the similarity or difference between men's and women's attitudes vis-à-vis the French language, need to be raised. Referring to this

⁴See Gerald Thomas, *Songs Sung by French Newfoundlanders: A Catalogue of the Holdings of the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive* (St. John's: Memorial U of Newfourⁿland, 1978.)

particular culture, there is a need to know if there exist different identities reflected in the expression of certain values which could be gender-bound and identifiable in traditional behaviour. Here again fieldwork is used to illustrate these differences. But in order to place the argument in its social context, it is necessary to note the factors which contribute to gender-bound traditional behaviour. Can one talk, as Bauman does, of "differential identity," as the data are culturally determined, or can one talk about two different cultures, without having to classify one as a subculture? Can one rather consider it a parallel or symbiotic culture?

Chapter Two selectively reviews material pertaining to women and folklore as well as to ethnographic analysis. Recent publications are a sign of a growing interest in the study of women as bearers of tradition, yet there is still a lack of theoretical foundations in this domain.⁵ A number of folklorists, however, have posed interesting questions with regard to women's aesthetics and women as individual performers.⁶ A review of the literature will examine the status of folklore scholarship related to women with a view to assessing the importance of the present contribution to existing material.⁷

⁵See Rosan A. Jordan and Susan Kalcik eds., *Women's Folklore, Women's Culture*, (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1985).

⁶See for instance: Debora Kodish, "Fair Young Ladies and Bonny Irish Boys," *Journal of American Folklore* 96 (1983): 131-50.

⁷See for example Marta Weigle, "Women and Folklore: A Review," *Signs* 2 (1977): 911-13.

As was pointed out by Jordan and De Caro, the ways gender affects performance context are complex and very incompletely understood.⁸ This part of the review of the literature reiterates questions raised earlier in the discussion of material relevant to the field of women and folklore, and points out that there are links to be made with studies of speech communities, communicative events, and the growing literature in women's folklore. Attempts have already been made to connect the two areas but these attempts are restricted in their presentation of folklore genres.⁹ Bauman's article on the La Have Island general store has a wider generic perspective and is, although not intentionally, gender-restrictive.¹⁰

Chapter Three gives the necessary detailed description of the circumstances that led to my choice of this particular topic and were operative when I was conducting fieldwork on this particular project. When I started fieldwork in Cape St. George, my intention was to look for *storytellers* in order to make a gender-related analysis of their performances. However, I soon became aware of women's *informal gatherings* because they were happening before my eyes every day, and

⁸Rosan A. Jordan and Francis De Caro, "Women and the Study of Folklore," *Signs* 11 (1986): 500-18.

⁹See for instance: Anna Caraveli-Chaves, "Bridge Between Worlds: The Greek Women's Lament as Communicative Event," *Journal of American Folklore* 93 (1980): 129-57.

¹⁰Richard Bauman, "The La Have Island General Store: Sociability and Verbal Art in a Nova Scotia Community," *Journal of American Folklore* 85 (1972): 330-43.

frequently several times a day. It must be stressed here that this does not imply that these gatherings were unplanned. Women who did not necessarily belong to the same age group expressed the need to get together and "talk," that is, for instance, to exchange information, to gossip, or to tell jokes.

The primary reason, as expressed by many women in Cape St. George, for getting together is "to get away from the men and the kids," that is, to get away from their expected traditional role as mothers, wives, or housekeepers, and step into another sphere and experiment with a different sense of security and power. However, for women to get together, they have to make free time or find a work-related reason which will allow them to spend that time together. It must be noted that men also get together, but they have time allotted for such activity, as their role as breadwinners is clearly defined. Whenever they have gainful employment, their working hours are clearly distinct from their leisure time which in fact they can enjoy whenever their work is completed. When they do not have employment, they nevertheless perform tasks outside the house; it is darkness then or the weather that regulates their day. Thus they do not have to find reasons to spend leisure time together, as they are expected to have leisure activity. Role problems raised by my position as a participant observer are discussed here.

Chapter Four presents the different groups whose informal social gatherings are the subject of this study. The notion of group gatherings mentioned here refers to any group of at least two people where there is the possibility of face-to-face interaction.¹¹ Communicative events can take place between two or more women. Two major group categories, married women and widows, are however, taken into specific consideration.

Married women in Cape St. George have an important responsibility to assume as housekeepers, mothers, and wives. They do not enjoy regular leisure time as such, even if some of them, though in fact in my experience very few, do watch the soap operas in the afternoon; their hands are always busy knitting, putting things away, or even making bread or cleaning fish. Married women or mothers are never idle. Yet they make time to socialize without totally giving up their ordained role. That is, they combine working time with leisure time and socialize with other women.

Although they have different individual personalities and backgrounds as they did not necessarily grow up together, they have a common understanding of the concept of time, which they use to organise their lives and more specifically their informal social gatherings. During

¹¹See Gerald M. Phillips, *Communication and the Small Group* (New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1966).

these communicative events, interaction becomes the primary concern, while work functions as a frame of reference. That is, very little of the conversation actually relates to the chores they get together to perform. Rather, they discuss more general subjects pertaining to their lives as women, or other community matters. It is within such contexts as work-related gatherings that the act of communication takes place. Married women, not only because of their socio-biological identity, but also because of their shared concept of time and work, form a social group whose shared identity factor is partly expressed through the traditional characteristics of their gatherings, as well as the content of these gatherings.

The second group is composed of widows, who form the most flexible group. They are not bound by the same demands as married women, but have been in the past and can therefore identify with and relate to married women. Thus their mode of gathering, their communication and performance skills are twofold. It will be seen later how this group's gatherings contain the widest variety of folklore genres. Widows can socialize with married women and also socialize among themselves, usually after bingo games. The special function of the road, the bingo bus and bingo games will be elaborated on here.

Besides these two groups, I was also able to observe women's communication and transmission of folklore at another level, that is

between mother and daughter. Although this area is not my primary concern it was nevertheless present during my fieldwork and therefore is mentioned briefly in this study. The family I stayed with during three consecutive summers consisted of a husband (47), a wife (44), two sons (23 and 4), a daughter (16). Two other sons aged, 21 and 20, were temporarily settled outside the community as they had summer employment elsewhere.¹²

Interaction between daughter and parents was primarily restricted to mother and daughter. The two women in the family formed a relationship which sometimes conflicted with the two other relationships (husband/wife and sister/brother). It will be seen here how the mother/daughter interaction functioned not only as an educational one but also as a medium for the daughter to learn the rules governing women's communication.

Chapter Five gives a detailed description of the specific context surrounding and inherent to the various kinds of informal social gatherings at study here. These gatherings are often the result of a certain degree of preparation which can at times be a lengthy process. Married women

¹²As I note elsewhere, my fieldwork was almost uniquely carried out in the summer months. I am of course aware that there are patterns of the organisation of time on a seasonal basis; but as Margaret Mills suggested to me, summer employment of family members seems likely to affect women's work patterns even if the women mostly stay at home.

have two main forms of gatherings each of which involve a different schedule organisation. Widows' gatherings often happen after bingo games. Attention here will be paid to the specifics of this time organisation as well as to the process of the bingo evenings which precede widows' gatherings.

Chapters Six and Seven examine how various folklore genres function as communicative devices. Questions will be raised in order to determine which genres are used, by whom, and to what purpose. The question of a dialectic of genres within communicative events will be discussed. I mean by dialectic of genres the degree to which one genre is used to respond to another genre, or a situation of dialectical dynamics which affects genres and their content in that one genre may be used to respond specifically to the information carried by another genre. The question of the kind of information carried by specific genres; the meaning of genre-specific information and the rules governing generic interaction will also be addressed.¹³ The participants during these informal social gatherings are considered as addressor/addressee in the case of jocular genres such as teasing or "picking," which implies two participants directly involved, thus allowing for this dialogic situation. But these jocular genres, like others which require less involved interaction, such as gossip, news or

¹³See Herminia O. Menez, "Filipino-American Erotica and the Ethnography of a Folklore Event," *Folklore, Performance and Communication*, eds. Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth S. Goldstein (The Hague: Mouton, 1975) 131-41.

personal experience narratives, can be also considered in terms of their performance value. To paraphrase Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth S. Goldstein, it can be said that in this case the role of speaker-addressor and listeners-addressees are transformed into those of performer and audience.¹⁴ In these kinds of situations, the performer is one person but the audience consists of several listeners, even if the message, which is the content as well as the form in which it is expressed, is directed (for convenience) toward one participant.¹⁵ The variety of genres used by the various groups will be examined here. As pointed out in chapter three, widows tend to demonstrate a wider variety of genres.

These chapters also examine more closely the content of the interaction in terms of what topics are discussed by which groups. Chapter Six concentrates upon narrative genres which are common to both groups' gatherings and which are often the result of cooperative construction. Chapter Seven deals specifically, although in a similar analytical manner, with those genres which emerge during elderly women's gatherings. A random list of topics not necessarily in order of importance would include: men, housework, women's condition, money, sexuality, courtship, pregnancy, children, birth control, health, politics, courage and exploits.

¹⁴See Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth S. Goldstein, eds., *Folklore, Performance and Communication* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975).

¹⁵See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964) 7-21.

extraordinary happenings, kinship patterns, local history, alcohol and drugs, strangers, television. It is also to be noted that not all topics discussed by the women concern women directly, but they are discussed from the point of view of women. Neither are all topics discussed by all groups. However, certain topics such as men, courtship, or alcohol and drugs are common to the three groups. We shall see how the different groups express different points of views, and how topics, like the genres used to express them, do seem to unfold into certain patterns during the gatherings. The relationship between the form and content of interaction is examined here in order to show how several genres can be used to express what seems to be the same information or message. The chapter also discusses how the same message can take on different meanings when expressed through different genres. In other words, a message can be interpreted differently depending on a wide range of variable factors such as the tone, intonation and intent of the speaker on the one hand and the interpretive competence of the listeners on the other.

Concluding remarks aim to demonstrate that women show by their communicative interaction that they hold certain values which are not always expressed affirmatively. More often than not examples take on one perspective but are meant to express opposite values. For instance some widows take pleasure at telling "frights" or frightening stories, in the first person, to show that they are in fact very courageous, that they have the courage to face a "fright," even if they confess to running away from it. Running away in fact does not express cowardice but wisdom.

Health related values are more complex. They are related to other values such as courage or luck, and are expressed in various ways. But women's folk-diagnoses are often much more elaborate than those of doctors who, according to the women and depending on the situation, should be listened to or ignored.

Women's power, responsibility and control over men, children, their household, and by extension community politics, are at the core of their conversations.¹⁶ These topics are often intertwined but expressed through most genres and by members of the different groups. Values stemming from these gatherings are one of the determining factors which establish women as a folk group.

Here the concept of folk group as presented by various scholars is discussed with reference to the results of the earlier analysis of the social informal gatherings. It will be argued that diversity is not necessarily oppositional to the sharing of a sense of identity and that ultimately it will provide a response to the question raised above, regarding the validity and the necessity of studying women as a folk group.¹⁷

¹⁶See Marilyn Porter, "The Tangly Bunch: Outport Women on the Avalon Peninsula," *Newfoundland Studies* 1 (1985): 79-93.

¹⁷See Alan Dundes, "Who are the Folk?," *Interpreting Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes, (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1980) 1-19.

Issues raised above concerning the consequences of gender-specific studies and the theoretical interpretation of ethnocultural-cultural data are addressed in order to point out that women's folklore and consequently women's culture are not dependent upon but exist parallel to men's folklore and culture, when the two are not blended together, and that women should not be seen as a subgroup, or their culture as a subculture.

Three summers were spent collecting data. Fieldnotes were used to document the socio-cultural context, that is the circumstances of the gatherings, as well as the "atmosphere" of the community, and kinship patterns. Tape-recorded interviews were used in order to obtain biographical data from selected informants, and to record conversational interaction in small groups of women, men, and mixed groups of participants. The point of view of the fieldworker was that of participant observer. The data was collected in the community of Cape St. George. Because of the sensitivity of the data collected, especially with reference to sexuality, and in agreement with several women interviewed, the actual names of the informants do not appear in this thesis. The choice of the pseudonyms is arbitrary. This I hope will preserve the confidentiality with which they entrusted me and more importantly their pride and self-respect. As is explained in chapter four, one particular first name is perceived by several women informants to connote respect. Some of the women insist on being called by that name. This name here will be "Pearl."

Note on the Transcriptions

Although various complex systems of transcription of tape-recorded or primary data have been used in order to reconstruct the phonology, morphology and syntax of the dialect on the Port-au-Port Peninsula, the nature of the material collected for this thesis does not call for such elaborate systems.¹⁸ In *Les Deux Traditions: Le Conte Populaire chez les Franco-Terreneuviens*, Gerald Thomas argues for a system of transcription that enables him to convey aspects of speech relevant to the performance study of the verbal art of storytellers.¹⁹ Many different systems of transcription are available to the folklorist.²⁰ The choice of one transcription protocol over another really depends on the aims defined in the scholar's project. When dealing with the rendition of tape-recorded information, one may decide to standardize everything and therefore deemphasize the importance of the original text, or on the contrary adopt

¹⁸In his Ph.D. Dissertation entitled "Stories, Storytellers and Storytelling in Newfoundland's French Tradition: A Study of the Narrative Art of Four French Newfoundlanders" (Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1977,) Gerald Thomas presents a system of transcription that he developed with the contribution of Geraldine Barter, a native of Mainland, Port-au-Port Peninsula. The system which, unfortunately, renders the text initially difficult to read is, however, suitable to the approach that Thomas undertakes in his dissertation.

¹⁹Gerald Thomas, *Les Deux Traditions: Le Conte Populaire chez les Franco-Terreneuviens* (Montreal: Bellamin, 1983) 187-93.

²⁰A comparative discussion of such systems is presented by Vivian Labrie in her *Précis de Transcription de Documents d'Archives Orales* (Québec: Institut Québécois de Recherche sur la Culture, 1982).

a cryptic system of transcription which renders the text accessible only to the erudite. Dennis Preston and Elizabeth Fine entered a controversial debate regarding the issue of transcription of folkloric data.²¹ Preston's argument tends towards standardization whereas Fine advocates a system which would reflect regional dialect. Without totally agreeing with either of the two scholars, one may nevertheless draw from both arguments, and thus place the following system in scholarly perspective.

Fine's argument asserts that:

Whether or not casual speech usages indicate a regional dialect, they indicate the conscious or unconscious choices of a performer, which can convey important information about folklore and its social use.²²

The system which I developed and use in this present study merely aims at reproducing the informants' accounts in their own words. Orthographic standardization is maintained and thus the readability of the text is preserved. Preston also raises a valid point in as far as the scope of the present study is concerned, in stating that:

Morphological accuracy is the appropriate level and [that] phonetic precision should be sought only when that level is pertinent to the lore or the clarity.²³

²¹See Dennis Preston, "Riting Fowlklower Daun 'rong': Folklorists' Failures in Phonology," *Journal of American Folklore* 95 (1982): 304-26, and Elizabeth Fine, "In Defense of Literary Dialect: A Response to Dennis Preston," *Journal of American Folklore* 96 (1983): 323-26.

²²Fine 327

²³Preston 323

The informants in this study use "macaronic" speech extensively in that they easily switch from French to English and vice versa.²⁴ They use this speech as it is contextually meaningful. Excerpts used in the study itself however, will be accompanied with a summarized English translation when necessary so as to facilitate the task of the nonbilingual reader.

In order to respect nonphonetic aspects of dialect, nonstandard morphology and syntax are transcribed as they are used by the informants. Regular punctuation is used to indicate pauses equivalent to those normally made when reading a text orally. Longer pauses as well as circumstantial comments such as external interferences affecting the flow of speech are indicated between brackets. Words or expressions emphasized by the speakers are printed in **bold** characters. Sections quoted from the transcriptions appear indented and single-spaced. In these ways the system allows the reader to read easily the written version of the tape-recorded data without losing a sense of the uniqueness of the dialect.

The data are analysed and discussed according to the approach of the ethnography of communication. The gatherings are considered as communicative events, whose participants are considered as members of

²⁴For a definition and an elaboration of the use of macaronic speech see Thomas. *Les Deux Traditions* 111-18.

the same speech community. Folklore genres used within the frame of reference of the communicative events are examined in relation to these events.

Chapter 1

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF FRENCH NEWFOUNDLANDERS WITH REFERENCE TO THE CASE OF WOMEN WITHIN AN ETHNIC MINORITY

Documentation for this chapter comes from two sources: published and unpublished material stored in the CEFT (Centre d'Etudes Franco-Terreneuviennes) archive at Memorial University of Newfoundland; and primary data used from interviews conducted by myself with residents from the Cape St. George area. The patterns of settlement that later established French Newfoundlanders and their growing awareness as an ethnic minority will be examined. Moreover, special attention will be paid to the situation of women within this linguistic minority.

The first part of this chapter will show that the inhabitants of Cape St. George and the neighbouring communities of Degras and Red Brook are for the most part of French descent (exception is made of outsiders who later settled there for various contemporary occupational reasons such as teaching). French Newfoundlanders' earliest Acadian and Breton ancestors began to settle on the West coast of Newfoundland at the end of the eighteenth century, although the greatest immigration took place

during the nineteenth century.²⁵ We will see that because of the isolated geographic position of the community of Cape St. George, on the Port-au-Port Peninsula, its residents have maintained unique cultural traits. Despite American influences (chiefly due to the military base established in Stephenville in 1940, which provided the local population with many non-military employment opportunities) and the Newfoundland English/Irish and later Canadian influence exercised by the media and various institutions of the Newfoundland social system, such as Newfoundland educational institutions and the Anglo-Irish Catholic Church, this community's cultural traits have remained distinct from those shared by other Newfoundlanders.²⁶ French Newfoundlanders, who constitute less than one percent of the total population of the island, are therefore a cultural minority.

Furthermore, a sense of belonging to a minority is shared both by male and female members of the community. Fieldwork previously conducted by Gerald Thomas supports this statement; however, in this particular study consideration will be paid more specifically to gender differentiation so as to evaluate the degree and the nature of involvement

²⁵See: Gerald Thomas, *Les Deux Traditions: Le Conte Populaire chez les Franco-Terreneuviens* (Montreal: Bellarmin, 1983) 11.

²⁶This is not to say that the French are the only distinct community in Newfoundland; other such distinct communities include for instance the Scots of the Codroy Valley, the Irish of the Southern Shore, or the Micmacs of Conne River, but it is the French who have most successfully maintained their native tongue.

of male and female expression of cultural identity. Reference to the different attitudes and position of men and women vis à vis the French language will help define and understand women's predominant choice of English as the preferred language in their communicative exchanges. Fieldwork data will be used to illustrate the mechanisms by which different expressions of identity are gender-bound as they are activated by traditional behaviour.²⁷ Thus in order to place this argument in its social and cultural context, the factors which contribute to this gender-bound linguistic behaviour will be outlined.

Historical Sketch Of Settlement Patterns On The Port-Au-Port Peninsula²⁸

John Cabot discovered Newfoundland in 1497.²⁹ Soon after, Breton and Norman fishermen attracted by the potential fishing grounds began to

²⁷See: Albert Dauzat, *Les Patois* (Paris: Delagrave, 1927) 30 where he points to a number of practical reasons (habit, easy access, status) explaining why men tend to be linguistically conservative whereas women tend to be more oriented to a perceived higher status variety of the language. This assertion is however to be understood in context. It is possible that in specific communities the reverse might also be true. See Jennifer Coates, *Women Men and Language: A Sociolinguistic Account of Sex Differences in Language* (New York: Longman, 1986)

²⁸I am indebted here to Gerald Thomas' earlier research on the subject, summarized in his doctoral dissertation entitled "Stories, Storytelling and Storytellers in Newfoundland's French Tradition, A Study of the Narrative Art of Four French-Newfoundlanders," Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1977.

²⁹We know of course that archeological digs near L'Anse-aux-Meadows on the Great Northern Peninsula have indicated the presence of Vikings as early as the tenth century. Nevertheless our interest here will be restricted to the continuum established by the more recent European discovery.

organise fishing expeditions to the Grand Banks. Although the first French ship recorded in Newfoundland waters was in 1504, real trade only started to flourish in 1529 when Norman merchants established a fishing commerce with England for cod caught on the Newfoundland banks.³⁰ The Newfoundland banks became more and more attractive to French fishermen and in 1542 sixty vessels left Rouen (Normandy) for the Grand Banks. However, it was the Bretons who were among the first to exploit this new discovery. St. Malo, Jacques Cartier's birthplace, was at the time the main port of departure for many fishing expeditions to Newfoundland.³¹

Patterns Of Settlement

The exact date of the arrival of the first Acadians in Newfoundland is not known, although there is some evidence that two families were settled in the St. George's area in 1770, fifteen years after the *Grand Dérangement* when the Acadians were deported from the present Nova Scotia by the English.³² Charles De La Morandière reported the presence of eighteen families in the area in 1821, two of which had apparently been there since

³⁰See: Samuel Eliot Morison, *The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages* (New York: Oxford UP, 1971) 270-73. Shannon Ryan, *Fish out of Water: The Newfoundland Salt Fish Trade 1814-1914* (St. John's: Breakwater, 1986) 34.

³¹Jacques Cartier named the modern community of Cape St. George, Cap de Latte after Fort Lalatte, an ancient castle in the St Malo area; see Morison, *The European Discovery of America, The Northern Voyages* 359.

³²Gerald Thomas holds this information from an oral interview with Father White, a former parish priest at Stephenville Crossing.

1780.³³ According to De La Morandière, who quoted a letter from a French officer to the governor of St. Pierre, one thousand two hundred Acadians were living around St George's Bay in 1830.

A la Baie St George (un peu plus au Nord) écrivait-il, la population est d'environ 2000 âmes qui peuvent se diviser en 4 parties, à savoir 400 anglais, 1200 acadiens, français et sauvages: 400.³⁴

Thomas W. White noted a stream of immigrants between 1825 and 1860.³⁵ Common family names in St. George's Bay were Aucoin, Blanchard, Benoit, Bourgeois, Cormier, Doucette, Jesso, Lejeune, Alexandre and Leblanc. All settled in Newfoundland between 1845 and 1850, followed later by other families such as the Longuépées, Chevaries. Chiassons, Poiriers, Deveaux, Muisés and Madores.³⁶

The second major component of the French population who settled on the West coast of Newfoundland consists of Metropolitan French.³⁷ A

³³Charles De La Morandière, *Histoire de la Pêche française de la Morue dans L'Amérique septentrionale*, 3 vols. (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1962-66) 3: 1175.

³⁴De La Morandière 3: 1179.

³⁵Thomas W White, "Les Acadiens de Terre-Neuve," *L'Évangéline* 26 February 1948; 28 February 1948; 4 March 1948; 11 March 1948; 18 March 1948; 25 March 1948; 8 April 1948; 15 April 1948; 6 May 1948.

³⁶See: Gerald Thomas, "Some Acadian Family Names in Western Newfoundland," *Onomastica Canadiana* 62.4 (1982): 23-34 and "French Family Names on the Port-au-Port Peninsula, Newfoundland," *Onomastica Canadiana* 68.1 (1986): 21-33; Thomas also consulted: Geneviève Massignon, *Les Parlers français d'Acadie*, 2 vols. (Paris: Klincksieck, 1962) and E.R. Seary, *Family Names of the Island of Newfoundland*, (St John's: Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1977).

³⁷By "Metropolitan" I mean from continental France; it is the commonly used term in French to distinguish between overseas French possessions and France itself.

number of people now living on the Port-au-Port Peninsula have ancestors who were fishermen or shoreworkers who came directly from St. Pierre, but whose origins were in fact in Brittany and Normandy. The ports of departure were Granville in Normandy, St. Brieuc and St. Malo in Brittany.³⁸

Agriculture was improving in Normandy in the nineteenth century and the Normans did not have much to gain by going away to Newfoundland. But the situation was different in Brittany and young Bretons at the time had economic reasons for leaving their country. However, the poor economic situation was not the only reason why young men went away to Newfoundland. There were apparently other psychological factors which had more to do with a question of pride. As a matter of fact the young man who came back from Newfoundland had a certain prestige which might stand him in a good stead socially. But not all of those who left came back. Some preferred to stay behind rather than return to the unattractive situation which they had originally left. Also they had the obligation of naval service after being on the French Shore which they were not necessarily too enthusiastic about. In fact many of the young people who left Brittany had few, if any qualifications as fishermen coming frequently

³⁸This information comes from Gerald Thomas's dissertation. Conversations with several people from Fécamp in Normandy in 1986 and 1988 led me to believe that Fécamp would also have been a port of departure, as it is still one of the harbours contemporary Normans refer to when conversing about the Newfoundland fishery.

from the St. Malo hinterland where they had been farm labourers. Thus a number of them registered as shoreworkers.³⁹ Breton family names included Cornic or Cornac or Lecornick (now spelt Cornect), Carrautret (Cowtret, Karotret), Lagatdu, Kerfont, Tallec (now spelt Tallack), Robin (often spelt Robia or Rubia today). Other names such as Chrétien, Lecoure, Lecointre, Leroy, Louvelle (or Nouvelle), Lemoine and Lainey are still common family names in Normandy nowadays.⁴⁰ These names are still common in Cape St. George to the present. Spelling changes in family names are partly due to the influence of contact with English-speaking settlers and priests but also to reasons associated with illegal settlement which will be shortly accounted for.

From Cartier's time until the treaty of Utrecht which concluded the war of Spanish succession in 1713, France controlled the coastline of most of Newfoundland. Following the treaty, France lost everything in Newfoundland except for its fishing and drying rights on what was termed

³⁹See Thomas, *Les Deux Traditions* 32-33, who quotes Paul Sébillot, according to whom two thousand fishermen-farmers came to the annual "Fête des Terre-Neuvas" in St. Malo, from the nearby villages of Cancale, St. Coulomb, Chateaufort, Pleudihen, Plouguenec, and even the town of Dol de Bretagne. They were to enroll to go to St. Pierre, and from there to the shore fisheries; see: Paul Sébillot, *La Folklore des Pêcheurs* (1901; Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, coll. Littératures Populaires de toutes les Nations, XLIII, 1968) 299-301.

⁴⁰See: Thomas, *Les Deux Traditions* 33-34 quoting: Albert Dauzat, *Dictionnaire des Noms de Famille et Prénoms de France* (Paris: Larousse, 1951), and Seary.

the French Shore.⁴¹ After the Anglo-French agreement of 1783, St. Pierre-based companies were allocated the harbours of Codroy, Red Island, St George's Bay and Port-au-Port. Part of the manpower was constituted by seasonal Breton and Norman fishermen. In 1870, a visiting French Captain noted the presence on Red Island (off the Port-au-Port Peninsula) of a doctor, a surgeon and one hundred and twenty men. In 1871 another French Captain counted one hundred and thirty-two men on the Island.⁴²

Illegal Settlement

Many of the French settlers on the Port-au-Port Peninsula were deserters who "jumped ship" as is commonly said in Cape St. George, although they often denied their origins.⁴³ One of the main reasons for desertion seems to have been linked to the economic advantages resulting from such action. That is, many Breton fishermen-farmers saw a way to escape the hard conditions which prevailed at home. The opportunity given to them by ship owners was then largely accepted. Others deserted the ships to avoid military conscription:

They had run away. A crowd of Frenchmen. They had run away from

⁴¹From 1713 until 1783, the French Shore extended from Cape Bonavista in the East, around the North of the island to Point Riche on the Western shore. From 1783 until 1904 the French Shore had new boundaries which covered the area from Cape St. John around the Northern Peninsula, to Cape Ray in the South West; this area was also known as the Little North. See: Frank Cramm and Garfield Fizzard, *The Atlantic Edge* (St. John's: Breakwater, 1986) 66.

⁴²De La Morandière 3: 1351.

⁴³See Newfoundland census figures for the years 1857, 1874, 1884, 1891, 1911.

France to come here. They didn't want to go to war.⁴⁴

Legal Settlement

As a result of agreements signed between England and France in 1884-1885, whole families were then allowed to winter at the French fishing stations to take care of the installations.⁴⁵ French families, mostly from St Pierre, then had the opportunity to stay all year long on the Port-au-Port Peninsula. They finally became permanent settlers. Eventually, English-speaking settlers coming mostly from the east part of the island, also established themselves on the Port-au-Port Peninsula. Inter-marriage between members of the two linguistic communities began to occur, thus contributing to the erosion of the French language in the area. However, although other economic and social factors encouraged the linguistic assimilation to the anglophone majority populating Newfoundland, the French on the Port-au-Port Peninsula have retained and indeed revived their ethnic and linguistic identity.⁴⁶

Due to the geographic isolation of French Newfoundlanders resulting from the irregular patterns of settlement described above, the use of

⁴⁴Tape Recorded Interview, MUNFLA 86-012, C8330. Cape St. George, 31st July, 1985. This quote which contains historically inaccurate information, nevertheless reflects people's selective interpretation of historical facts.

⁴⁵De La Morandière 3: 1201-04.

⁴⁶Gerald Thomas elaborates on this point in *Les Deux Traditions* 46-48.

French on the Port-au-Port Peninsula has been maintained despite precarious conditions which are largely consequences of an anglophone system of socio-economic structures.⁴⁷ With regard to the contemporary linguistic situation in Cape St George, until recently, English socio-economic domination had led the community into a position of effective bilingualism. By this I mean that although a majority of the population knows and occasionally uses their French native tongue, interaction in mixed situations predominantly occurs in English.⁴⁸

Considering the topic of this dissertation and with specific reference to women it is to be noticed that with a few exceptions, the majority of them express a preference for the use of English as a primary vehicle for verbal communication and conversational exchange.⁴⁹ This particular issue of language choice and gender will be further examined as will the more general issue of language and ethnic identity in the community of Cape St. George.

⁴⁷I will from now on employ the term "English" to refer to the language and not specifically to the origin of the people who speak it.

⁴⁸"Mixed" (mixte), a term employed by Gerald Thomas in *Les Deux Traditions*, refers here to situations where not all of the participants present have a command of the French language, as well as situations where the group is composed of male and female participants.

⁴⁹See Dauzat, *Patois* 31. Fieldwork observation shows that women who opt for French are usually either elderly, or enjoy a higher socio-economic status than their peers or are ethnically and politically aware of the implications of their choice, or fall into a category which corresponds to a combination of any two or three of these criteria.

Bilingualism And Cultural Identity

Aspects of the Two Languages

Before presenting the debate raised by the situation of bilingualism and its relation to gender in the broader context of the expression of ethnicity and identity, a brief evaluation of the simultaneous interaction of the two languages will be made.⁵⁰ The contemporary form of the French language as spoken in Cape St George is the result of an amalgamation of different types of French.⁵¹ Due to the various origins of the first settlers (Acadia, Brittany, St. Pierre & Miquelon), it is reasonable to assume that

⁵⁰Gerald Thomas has examined this issue at some length in various publications: see especially: "The French Spoken on the Port-au-Port Peninsula of Newfoundland," *Languages in Newfoundland and Labrador*, ed. Harold Paddock (St John's: Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1982) 42-61, which was originally a chapter of his Ph.D. dissertation. Thomas gives a comprehensive analysis of the use of French in the area and briefly discusses the particular issue of bilingualism.

⁵¹It is not my intention here to present a linguistic synthesis as a variety of studies, brief articles and chapters in M.A. and Ph.D. theses have been made on Newfoundland French. See: John T. Stoker, "Spoken French in Newfoundland," *Culture* 5 (1964): 349-59; Ruth King "Newfoundland's Acadian French Dialect," *Modern Languages Council Newsletter* 2:2; "Hypercorrection in Newfoundland French," *Papers from the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association* (Fredericton: U of New Brunswick, 1961) 117-25; "L Deletion in Newfoundland French," *Regional Language Studies Newfoundland* 10 (1982): 2-11; "Variation and Change in Newfoundland French: A Socio-Linguistic Study of Clitic Pronouns," Ph.D. diss., Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1983; and "Le Parler français de L'Anse-à-Canards/Maisons d'Hiver (Baie St. George, Terre-Neuve): Etude phonologique et morphologique suivie d'un Lexique," M.A. thesis, Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1978; H. Kelvin Darby, "A Survey of the Lexicon of Fishing, Farming and Carpentry in the French Community of Cape St. George, Port-au-Port Peninsula, Newfoundland," M.A. thesis, Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1977. Most importantly, a native speaker's viewpoint is provided by Geraldine Barter, "A Linguistic Description of the French Spoken on the Port-au-Port Peninsula of Western Newfoundland," M.A. thesis, Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1986.

their dialects possibly influenced each other as the people intermingled to finally become French Newfoundlanders. Thus, today, although there are acknowledged differences between for example the dialect spoken in Mainland and that of Cape St. George, generally speaking the variety of French spoken on the Port-au-Port is not directly identifiable with any other already existing specific dialect. Rather, the form of the language that developed in this particular area is unique, considering its combined phonetic, morphological, syntactical and lexical levels.

Moreover, the evolution of the French dialect on the Port-au-Port Peninsula is constantly in process as new influences from Quebec and metropolitan France maintain this process of evolution through the broadcast media (accessibility to Radio-Canada on radio and television) and the school system (school manuals and instructors from Quebec and France in the immersion programme). The uniqueness of the dialect and its constant evolution are further reinforced by the fact that it exists and is used in a purely oral form at the moment. Written forms of the dialect are not used as common everyday or educational means of communication. Their existence has been limited to academic and scientific use in the form of transcriptions of tape-recorded data.⁵² Thus there is at the moment no

⁵²These transcriptions are based on a flexible system devised by Gerald Thomas and Geraldine Barter to transcribe data of a folklore nature (essentially folktales) initially in order to present a performance-oriented study of the material. See Gerald Thomas *Les Deux Traditions*, for further details.

standard written or literary form of the dialect available or in use. However, Geraldine Barter is currently working on a dictionary of the French dialect on the Port-au-Port Peninsula. Upon publication, this tool will then be the nearest to standardization of a written form of the dialect for its users and other interested parties, as it will provide a readily available reference to the language as a whole, rather than in a specific contextual framework.⁵³

French is not the sole language of the residents on the Port-au-Port Peninsula. As a matter of fact it has become secondary to the English language which everyone is now able to use and uses to a greater or lesser extent according to context and ability. That is, while it is possible that a number of people express a preference for French in everyday life situations, all are able to communicate in English. The reverse however, is not true. A good number of people and especially women are not able to hold a conversation in French. This issue will be further elaborated on once a description of the English language in Cape St. George has been completed.

The reader may be reminded at this point that the description given

⁵³Patrice Brasseur, a linguist at the CNRS (Centre National de la recherche Scientifique) in Nantes, France, is currently working on an "Atlas linguistique des Côtes de L'Atlantique," in which he intends to refer to the French spoken on the Port-au-Port Peninsula.

here has no linguistic pretensions.⁵⁴ Rather the attempt is to contribute to the frame of reference in which the informal social gatherings under study took place. It is necessary to point out that when referring to the English language and its use in the community, the reference is to a variety of Newfoundland English and not to standard English.⁵⁵

While Newfoundland English itself exists in many different forms which are in part identifiable by region, the residents of the Port-au-Port Peninsula are exposed to and use a form of Newfoundland English that is nevertheless consistent. Because of its consistency within the region, this particular variety of English is therefore comprehensible to its users and can be employed as a meaningful and referential tool of communication.⁵⁶

⁵⁴For a linguistic perspective on the issue see: Ruth King and Harold Paddock, "Etude de certains Traits communs au Français et à L'Anglais terreneuviens," *Si Que* 5 (1982): 99-116. To my knowledge there is no published material specifically and exclusively relevant to the form of English spoken on the Port-au-Port Peninsula.

⁵⁵For more information on Newfoundland English see G.M. Story "The Dialects of Newfoundland English," *Languages in Newfoundland and Labrador*, ed. Harold J. Paddock (St John's: Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1982) 62-70, and Harold Paddock "Newfoundland Dialects of English," *Languages in Newfoundland and Labrador*, ed. Harold J. Paddock (St John's: Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1982) 71-89, and *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*, 2nd ed. (St John's: Breakwater, 1990)

⁵⁶The term "consistency" is to be tempered in that a close look at the morphological, syntactical, phonological and lexical levels would most certainly indicate internal variations in the dialect itself; however, it is still reasonable to argue that a sufficient level of consistency in the dialect is present and allows linguistic competence and performance among its users.

Although analysis of the specific characteristics of each of the two languages spoken on the Port-au-Port Peninsula would be too lengthy and complex a process, one can qualify their individual uniqueness by the influence that each of the two languages has had on the other. Such influence is characterized by the presence of anglicisms in the French language and gallicisms in the English language.⁵⁷ This interaction between the two languages is the result of a specific type of bilingualism which can be historically and culturally defined.

Historical Dimension

In the case of Cape St. George, where the two languages are in constant interaction, the bilingual situation is not to be understood as the result of the co-existence of two different cultures but rather as one culture wherein a unique mode of expression has emerged from an initial process of cultural assimilation simultaneously combined with cultural resistance which later, because of its political expression, prevented total integration. As previously outlined in the historical sketch, the first residents of the community were French-speaking settlers. The major factor influencing the English language of the original French population of the area has been the Roman Catholic church, beginning as early as the turn of the

⁵⁷More information on this particular aspect is provided in Ruth King's "A Preliminary Study of Anglicisms in Newfoundland French," *Papers from the Third Annual Meeting of the Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association* (Church Point: Université Ste-Anne, 1980) 58-63; and in Gerald Thomas' *Les Deux Traditions* where he discusses aspects of macaronic speech.

century.⁵⁸ Although its presence was sporadic at the time, the church undertook to dispense liturgic and educational knowledge in Latin and English respectively, the latter of which at the time was alien to the French population on the Port-au-Port Peninsula.

The major process of assimilation however, did not start until 1940 when an American air force base was constructed in Stephenville.⁵⁹ The base provided the local people with many non-military employment opportunities and many men and women from the peninsula saw there a chance to alleviate the harsh economic situation in which they had found themselves in the years during and after the Depression. This newly gained economic wealth, however, had a cultural cost. Traditional activities and occupations were partly abandoned and for the next twenty years, attraction to the new and different cultural environment readily available in Stephenville (e.g. American country music was then already in vogue and transmitted through battery powered radio to French Newfoundlanders) pushed French speakers to learn and value the English language as an essential means to achieve economic prosperity. The

⁵⁸Gerald Thomas mentions the presence of a Quebec missionary, Père Bélanger, who worked on the West coast of Newfoundland from 1850 until 1868; see Thomas, *Les Deux Traditions* 45.

⁵⁹Earlier, in 1935-36, a relatively large group of English and Irish fishermen and their families were transplanted from the Fortune Bay area on the south east coast of Newfoundland, to the community now known by the name of Lourdes; see Thomas, *Les Deux Traditions* 46. This important English settlement on the Port-au-Port Peninsula laid the foundations for further conflict between French and English speakers in the area.

same reasons led some adults to neglect their French culture and language in their children's education. As a result, many of the children born in the period 1940-1965 were discouraged from using, if not denied access to their parents' first language.⁶⁰

Other factors also contributed to the devaluation of French culture and language. The term devaluation is not lightly used as it corresponds to a feeling of shame and inferiority that was emerging among some French Newfoundlanders as their contacts with the English world increased. Many of the men and more of the women who are in their forties and fifties in the 1990s recognize and attribute these feelings to the doings of the Church which then ran and still runs the School Boards. Many tell of incidents in which they were physically punished by the Brothers and the nuns for speaking French at school.⁶¹ Although other influences such as the introduction of radio in the 1930s and later of television in the 1960s also contributed to the growing impact of English and its cultural values upon the community, the Church campaign for assimilation probably had a greater impact on women and their choice of language as a vehicle of communication than any other institution.

⁶⁰A similar phenomenon occurred in Brittany at approximately the same time. As a result the whole generation to which I belong was discouraged from using if not denied access to the Breton language. The consequences of this can be easily paralleled to what happened on the Port-au-Port Peninsula. In Cape St. George however, approximately half the population, geographically situated toward the end of the community, consciously maintained their French.

⁶¹Fieldnotes Cape St. George, Mainland and Black Duck Brook, 1985, 1986, 1987.

Women and Bilingualism

The mechanism by which the influence of the Church on women's language choices was slowly but surely impressed on their lives is in fact quite simple and affected a wider generation range than that at which it was initially directed. Pupils, boys and girls, who went to school in the forties, fifties and early sixties were, although not always willingly, subjected to a heavy process of anglicization inflicted upon them by their teachers. Education was entirely in English and pupils were strictly forbidden to communicate in French even during recess. Because they were told by their educators that French was not to be used and was a shameful language associated with backwardness, the children grew up confused about their own identity even when going home in the evening.

The education given by their parents was then severely in conflict with that which they received at school.⁶² This parental education was informal and may be cautiously termed "traditional." The pupils eventually acquired an acceptable command of the English language and started to use it at home, much to the dismay of their parents and more specifically their mothers with whom they were mostly in contact.⁶³ Put under such

⁶²Fieldnotes from conversations with Joan Murphy, Catherine Ryan and others, Cape St. George, 1985, 1986, 1987.

⁶³According to Gerald Thomas, in the early '70s some children were still entering Kindergarten at the Cape unable to speak English.

pressure, mothers then started to use English with their children as it seemed the only way in which they could communicate. Fathers who spent much less time with their children and had practically no contact with their children's educators, continued to use French among their peers, in the workplace for those involved with the inshore fishery, or at informal social gatherings with other men. According to some women, fathers started to spend as much time as possible away from the house where the communication situation would sometime become strenuous.⁶⁴ Their sons would occasionally seek refuge in all-male environments where French was being practiced all the time.⁶⁵ Daughters on the other hand did not have this opportunity and although some occasionally sought refuge with their grandparents, they were soon called back by their mothers who had been contacted on the issue by the nuns.⁶⁶

Although it is difficult to provide precise dates, the fact remains that anglicization became more and more prominent. Female communication began and continued mostly in the English language. Mothers who spent a lot of their time with their children communicated exclusively in English with the younger ones on the assumption that they would not encounter

⁶⁴Fieldnotes, Cape St. George, 1986.

⁶⁵Conversation with Bernard Murphy, Cape St. George 1986. The implication that might be read into this statement is that boys may have resented the anglophone agenda of the school and the Church more than girls. It is however a question that might be better explored by a sociolinguist.

⁶⁶Conversation with Joan Murphy and Catherine Ryan, Cape St. George, 1986.

the same problems as their elders by the time they reached school age. Thus Sarah, Catherine Ryan's youngest daughter who is now in her early thirties, does not speak and understands very little French. By the same token women who are a little older than Sarah and constitute the groups of married women who are under study here, function almost entirely in English. Their mothers, who are now accustomed to the English language, express a preference for it as it has been the main vehicle of verbal communication for the past forty or fifty years of raising children and communicating with the outside world or teachers, clergy, health and social services employees, as well as clerks in shopping centres in the nearest town of Stephenville, where they go once in a while to do the family shopping.

Although not in a strictly exclusive manner, some families have continued to function in French first by what as a folklorist I would be tempted to call tradition, or, as some residents said, because they refused to give it up, and now, by political choice. The transition from one to the other will be examined later. It seems from my observations that the growing evolution from a situation in which a unilingual group of settlers became gradually assimilated into a culture in which the functioning language was radically different from their own has been a major part of a phenomenon of acculturation. This phenomenon is partly visible and comprehensible in terms of the gender-bound use of one language as

opposed to another.⁶⁷ As is suggested above this gender boundary is not strictly biological but rather originates in the traditional/occupational divide and its assignment to each gender group.⁶⁸

As Fishman argues in his essay "The Relationship Between Micro- and Macro-Sociolinguistics in the Study of Who Speaks What Language to Whom and When," language choice in a multilingual society is determined by such parameters as "Domain," "Interlocutor," "Place" and "Topic".⁶⁹ Although Fishman's hypothesis is not to be interpreted or applied in a strict and exclusive manner, it certainly matches the situation of language choice among the women who belong to the various groups at study here. During their social gatherings and for the reasons elaborated upon above, the choice of English as a primary vehicle of oral communication operates in what Fishman would connote as a predominantly "friendship" domain although it may be tempered or interfered with by the "family" domain with restricted female kinship factors. In the same manner the interlocutors can

⁶⁷The term acculturation is used with the same meaning as in A Richard Diebold Jr.'s article "Incipient Bilingualism," *Language, Culture and Society*, ed. Dell Hymes (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 493-508; to refer to the learning process of a language and its implication in a situation of inter-cultural contact.

⁶⁸Diebold observes a similar phenomenon in a study that he conducted among an Indian/Spanish community in Mexico, where according to his results, men had a greater proportion of bilingual persons because of their occupations, which brought them in contact with Spanish speakers; see Diebold 500.

⁶⁹J.A. Fishman, "The Relationship Between Micro- and Macro-Sociolinguistics in the Study of Who Speaks What Language to Whom and When," *Sociolinguistics*, ed. J.B. Pride and Janet Holmes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 15-32.

be spoken of as "friends" although again in some cases the category "parent" may be restrictively applicable. The "place" in all cases of informal social gatherings is the home of one of the participants or interlocutors present. The "topic" corresponds to the variety of the conversational folklore genres described in further chapters.

It is obvious from this situational description that the parameters in place are not exclusively restrictive and the variety of topics submitted for analysis do occasionally offer the possibility of eventual code-switching from one language to another.⁷⁰ But the object of this study is not to present a strict and exclusive socio-linguistic approach to the topic; thus since the focus is on topic and genre, code-switching analysis will be primarily restricted to that information. Simple mention therefore of occasional code-switching related to topic context should be necessary and sufficient, in that it does not interfere significantly enough to necessitate analysis beyond the scope of the folkloristic approach to the material. As can be seen in the transcription excerpts, code-switching does occur quite frequently during some of the elderly women's gatherings. It is a natural thing to do for those who do it. Yet it is certainly tied in with the dynamics of the argument presented here. Mrs Rose Murphy's use of language on the other hand seems to be the result of a conscious decision

⁷⁰In *Les Deux Traditions*, 111-18. Gerald Thomas refers to macaronic speech in his performance study of storytelling sessions involving two bilingual participants.

to opt for English rather than French. Mrs Murphy was raised in French and later on decided to use English more often for reasons that are not alien to those proposed in this argument. Thus Mrs Murphy tends to avoid code-switching, yet when she does it seems clear that it comes out of a need to emphasize certain points.

Also as mentioned above, the particular choice of language made by the groups of women under study here is not necessarily that of all women in the community. However, it is consistent and constant in these particular groups of women. It is not to be denied that other women in the community opted for French as their primary vehicle of communication. Circumstances such as those described in the following fieldwork account oriented my study to the previously mentioned selected groups of women. Those circumstances were mainly linked with my base in the community and the network of acquaintances which developed from this particular base. However, I did occasionally come into contact with predominantly and sometimes exclusively French-speaking groups of women but again circumstances were such that I did not get or did not opt for an opportunity of studying these groups.

General community observation, however, led me to formulate the hypothesis according to which language choice in the community at large is in some cases dependent on such factors as geographical position or socio-economic status in the community. From a very rough map, not

included here but outlining the distribution of houses and their main occupants in the community, which I designed with the help of Jane and John Ryan and Alice Walsh among others, it appeared that the community is organised in family clusters corresponding, I assume, to land distribution and inheritance patterns. It has been noted before that certain clusters, with a higher concentration of them towards the west end of the community, used French as the primary language.⁷¹

Conversations with Geraldine Barter and other interested scholars, as well as with people from the area itself, often led to the suggestion that the generally more frequent use of the French language among families living in the west end of Cape St. George is due to a greater isolation from the rest of the community and the entire peninsula, which in other areas maintains extensive contacts with the anglophone population.⁷² Ms Barter tempered her remark however, by saying that while this is generally true and valid, elderly people are nevertheless the ones most attached to the use of their maternal language.

⁷¹This hypothesis is supported by many residents of Cape St. George and other communities on the Port-au-Port Peninsula as well as by researchers such as André Magord and Geraldine Barter who have done extensive fieldwork in the area.

⁷²In a conversation at the time of redaction, Gerald Thomas informed me that from his own observation he had noticed that for the same reasons of isolation, the same phenomenon applied to the peninsula as a whole. That is, the west and north west coast of the area, from the tip of Cape St. George, through Mainland to Black Duck Brook on the North side, where the population was more inclined to have maintained day-to-day use of French, than in and along the road leading from Cape St. George to the east and through Degras to Red Brook and Sheaves Cove, where English is predominant.

As for the second factor affecting language choice in the community, the situation is fairly complex. It is probably safer to suggest that the socio-economic position and status of the family is one that still primarily affects the individual who may or may not belong to a relatively "privileged" family.⁷³ Thus such individuals have made definite choices vis-à-vis their language. They are aware of its value as a vehicle for realizing a distinct identity and for validating the status of the community as an ethnic minority in the eyes of the political superstructure. The latter may or may not in its turn act in a favourable manner, so as to recognize and materially and financially acknowledge the existence and the right of the community to a status, and provide its members with adequate means for achieving this status.

However, in order to be able to make this conscious language choice with its underlying consequences at the political level, that is with reference to the revival movement which has affected French Newfoundlanders and other ethnic minorities since the sixties and early seventies, people who became involved in the issue recognized the desirability of a certain amount of educational attainment. This they acquired at the secondary or at the university level. Yet at the time and

⁷³In a recent conversation at the time of redaction, Helen Parker, a native from Cape St. George who is currently working in St John's, said that she did not think that family status was linked with language choice; she however, did agree with the family tradition factor.

even nowadays in Cape St. George, the number of students who attend university is minimal.⁷⁴ Such education is costly and therefore not accessible to everybody. As for the social aspect of the issue, and again with reference to the initial stages of the development of political and ethnic awareness in the community, the first insiders to become involved in developing ethnic awareness were teachers and their families who also happened to live towards the West end of the community where, as I have explained above, the use of the French language was more preponderant than in other parts of the community. In an interview, Patrick Hunter who was the mayor of the community at the time of my fieldwork, described the very beginning of this rise of consciousness when a meeting had been organised with the presence of Chancellor Alain Frecker of Memorial University of Newfoundland and people from Cape St. George in Stephenville in the early seventies. Dr Frecker was well known in Cape St. George as he himself was a francophone Newfoundlander, having been born in St. Pierre:

Puis le docteur nous parlait de ce qui se passait, c'est qu'il mentionne juste en passant, "Vous êtes pas organisés, comment ça se fait que vous êtes pas organisés, vous êtes francophones, vous êtes une minorité! Sous le coup du moment je pense y a pas eu trop de réaction. On n'était pas conscients qu'on était francophones, on était conscients qu'on était différent des autres mais c'était quelque chose qu'on avait pris pour acquis parce qu'on a toujours vécu en français alors pour nous c'était pas différent et après la rencontre on avait laissé tomber de même, mais là juste en passant y a une couple de personnes qui l'ont mentionné puis eux ont décidé "Bien c'est vrai oui

⁷⁴At the time of my fieldwork, less than five people were attending university. This figure represents less than one percent of the combined population of Cape St. George, Degras and Red Brook.

on est francophone et on est une minorité . puis je pense si on veut pas perdre ce qu'on a il faut commencer à s'organiser." Alors ça a commencé avec ça là , puis peu à peu une couple de personnes se sont rencontrés dans les maisons des personnes comme Sylvia Parker, qu'a fait une grande grande part là dedans, Noel Cook c'était un autre, Robin Donovan, ma soeur Ruth était une autre et ça a commencé je pense avec huit ou neuf personnes dans une maison.⁷⁵

The group of people who were at the origin of the revival movement which led to the organisation of the Association Les Terreneuviens Français was essentially composed of teachers who were not necessarily representative of the population of the community in terms of educational privileges. Yet because of their position, they enjoyed a status of authority and respect which eventually enabled them to gain credibility in the community and later to exercise an influence on younger generations. It is interesting to note that although Sylvia Parker is not representative of her women peers, mainly because she is a teacher and therefore works outside the home, that it is she, a woman, who has encouraged, and undoubtedly with the help of others, maintained the cohesion in the association which was necessary for the accomplishments it has achieved up to today.

⁷⁵Patrick Hunter, personal interview, Cape St. George, 12 June 1987. Gerald Thomas rectified some of these facts in one of our conversations. As a University representative, Thomas attended a meeting with Dr. Frecker, Father Ron Kelly and a representative of the School Board in 1973 or 74. The purpose of that meeting was to create an immersion school at the Cape. Thomas also pointed out that the organisation of *Les Terreneuviens Français* happened because Sylvia Parker's mother-in-law Moira's home was a focus for all outsiders including Bill Frost who was at the time working with the Secretary of State and began promoting the organisation. This minor controversy in the reporting and interpretation of facts is one of the inevitable consequences of poor formal record keeping in a community where oral tradition had for so long been predominant.

Sylvia Parker, who is now in her fifties, was indeed the driving force of the movement. Although it is difficult to say whether or not she influenced her peers, in that not many of the women whom I interviewed in group situations used French as a primary language, most of their children who are now in their teens and early twenties and sometimes even older, had much contact with Mrs. Parker and her team. As a result they have regained an interest in their linguistic identity to the point that they are determined to speak French with their children, who in turn, it is hoped, will continue the process of reactivation of ethnic identity started by people like Sylvia, in the early seventies. Her specific influence on the women in the community, however, is not to be denied. In the early seventies Sylvia was also one of the founders of the local branch of the Women's Institute.

While this organisation did not and still does not have the same mandate as the Association Les Terrenewiens Français, i.e., to promote aspects of the French culture in the community, the Women's Institute was never totally estranged from the issue. The membership of the two groups entirely overlaps; that is, all members of the Women's Institute are or were at some point members of Les Terrenewiens Français.⁷⁶ Although activities undertaken by the Women's Institute have not been predominantly in French, both languages have been used as vehicles of communication. The organisation has nevertheless been involved in and

⁷⁶Fieldnotes, Cape St. George, June 1987.

contributed to ethnically relevant activities and has thereby played a role in the community's striving to assert its identity. In an interview with Miriam Winsor, president of the Women's Institute in June 1987, I was informed that aside from other activities which involved active material support to the locally organised French folk festival "*Une Longue Veillée*" by the Les Terreneuviens Français, the Institute had also participated in a cultural exchange with a French-speaking village in Senegal. According to Miriam Winsor the cultural exchange took place when Sylvia Parker was president of the organisation.⁷⁷

M.W.: Yeah she's been in there for many years, she is the one that founded it I guess.

B.M.: I don't know.

M.W.: Oh I guess so, since Sylvia, since I've been going to the Women's Institute, Sylvia was there you know because when I went to the first meetings it was at the Bill of the Cape up there in an old school... and she had start up then, then we got a bunch of people from Senegal, I think nine, yeah, nine coloured people from Senegal, that's when I started with them, that's when I got involved in the Women's Institute in 1974.⁷⁸

⁷⁷In a conversation with Helen Parker, on November 26, 1990, I was informed that a group of Senegalese was visiting Newfoundland and went to Cape St. George possibly because of the French affiliation of the community, but the exchange was not exclusively French in nature.

⁷⁸Tape-recorded interview, Cape St. George, 17 June 1987.

In an article entitled "The Tangly Bunch': Outport Women of the Avalon Peninsula," sociologist Marilyn Porter describes and analyses a meeting of a Women's Institute that could well have taken place in Cape St. George.⁷⁹ The similarities between the meeting described by Porter and a meeting I attended in Cape St. George are striking, especially as the voting procedure was taking place in a very similar way if interaction beyond the observation of strict procedural rules is to be taken into consideration. Beyond this however, the fact remains, as suggested in Porter's article, that partly due to exogamy or the fact that women tend to marry outside their community, their informal communication network is more extended than that of men:

A man would marry a girl from a neighbouring outport. He then built a house close to his parents' and by extension to his brothers. Fishing crews were still composed predominantly of close male relations. Men therefore lived among their kin, kept their boats at the community anchorage, fished with their brothers and other close male relatives, and sold the fish to the local fish plant. The women, separated from their own families of birth, kept in close contact with their mothers and sisters by means of both the phone and frequent visits. With roots in two communities and with sisters in others, women start with an inherently "wider world" than men.⁸⁰

Marilyn Porter uses these observations to support the argument for women's involvement in voluntary associations regrouping women from several communities, and thereby argues that their sphere of action is wider than that of men who themselves do not have or create the

⁷⁹Marilyn Porter "The Tangly Bunch': Outport Women of the Avalon Peninsula," *Newfoundland Studies* 1:1 (1985): 79-93.

⁸⁰Porter 84-85.

opportunities for participating regularly in similar social settings. While this is also valid for the Cape St. George area, where the local branch of the Women's Institute does regroup women from several communities into a formal organisation, the argument can be extended further and be used to better understand women's choice of language in informal social gatherings. More than men who tend to gather locally with members of their fishing crews and families, women do not hesitate to use transport to visit friends and family members away from their own household. Such visiting patterns are examined in more detail in a subsequent chapter. Moreover, and as is suggested by Porter, partly because of exogamy women's informal communication networks are more extended than those of men. It is not surprising then that having a wider circle of friends and acquaintances, women are more likely to use a language which is more appropriate to travelling and interacting with people outside their immediate community.⁸¹

As noted by Helen Parker in a conversation, women in Cape St. George have traditionally been responsible for conducting business and other matters with outsiders. They therefore traditionally used English more than the men whose occupations, fishing and lumbering, operate

⁸¹As it is discussed later, this is the case of at least one group of friends under study here. Debbie was an outsider from Stephenville and neither spoke nor understood French; for this reason her women friends would only use English to communicate in her presence. Since fieldwork was conducted, Debbie and her husband have separated, which resulted in her returning to her home community.

with French vocabulary and expressions, thus prompting them to use this familiar language beyond the immediate boundaries of their occupational realm.⁸²

Concluding Remarks

To conclude and thus reiterate the account of circumstances which supports the choice of the language in which the material for this study was collected, one must bear in mind the historical circumstances which led the residents of Cape St. George to a situation of bilingualism. Women's position in this situation has been such that their predominant use of English as a vehicle of verbal communication has mainly been consequential to their traditional role as mediators as well as by patterns of exogamy that possibly even emphasized their traditional roles.

⁸²Phone conversation with Helen Parker, 26 Nov., 1990.

Chapter 2

WOMEN, FOLKLORE AND COMMUNICATION: A SELECTIVE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter will selectively cover the area of "women and folklore" in that it will focus primarily on the literature dealing with women's use and performance of various forms of narrative in interactional social situations; such focus consequently requires that additional material relevant to the concept of "folk group" and its further implications to gender issues be initially taken into consideration.

In the same manner, this review of the literature will also bring attention to publications relevant to "the ethnography of communication" as a theoretical approach applied to folklore studies and more specifically to women as a folk group. A theoretical framework corroboratively emerging from the analysis of the material and in accordance with the topic of this dissertation will be developed from the following examination of these two complementary areas of interest.

Stating the primary differences between anthropology and folklore in the scope of their academic evaluation of women's culture, we shall see how the two disciplines converge in agreeing that women's culture exists

in a different sphere from that of men. The folklorist's perception, which is the one with which I deal in this study, concentrates on material that is generically determined. When analysed contextually, the form and content of these folklore genres are expressive of the values held by their performers. It will be shown also how ethnography of communication as a theory reveals itself to be an appropriate approach with which to comprehend situations of interaction.

Combining these two perspectives with the particular case of women's informal gatherings, it will be shown how the genres performed cannot be dissociated from their situational context. The context itself is characteristic of women's manipulation of the folklore process in terms of transmission of knowledge.

Women And Folklore

A number of review articles on this topic are now available to the interested scholar. The very fact that these review articles have been written and published demonstrates not only a growth of folklore scholarship dealing with women's issues in the broad sense of the term, but also an interest in organizing the material into a theoretical framework specifically relevant to its nature. In her 1975 introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of American Folklore*, Claire Farrer accounts for the

lack of exposure which has affected scholarship written by and about women. She appropriately attributes the rise of consciousness in that area to the feminist movement:

The consciousness of men as well as of women was raised by feminist literature, and this led to the current revival of interest in women's rights in all areas of life. The literature and polemics have focused attention on our images of women, and academic disciplines have not been immune to the feminist impact.⁸³

This is not to say however, that feminist theory made an immediate and accepted impact on folklore scholarship. One had to wait another twelve years to see the publication of an entire issue of the *Journal of American Folklore* devoted specifically to and entitled Folklore and Feminism.⁸⁴

In an article entitled "Women and the Study of Folklore," Rosan Jordan and Francis De Caro reiterate Farrer's assertion, tempering it, however, by mentioning that

The purpose of this essay is not to dwell upon past sexocentrism or neglect but to review the more positive side of the picture.⁸⁵

The authors do not, however, deny that a preliminary step, which allowed scholars to identify the nature and the expression of such sexocentrism was not necessary; indeed, it was important as an evaluative process which permitted the understanding of the existing scholarship and helped

⁸³The entire issue of this edition of the *Journal of American Folklore* has been printed as a separate publication: Claire Farrer, ed. *Women And Folklore* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1975).

⁸⁴*Journal of American Folklore* 100 (1987).

⁸⁵Rosan Jordan and Francis A. De Caro, "Women and the Study of Folklore," *Signs* 11 (1986): 501.

define the potential for further development. Along the same lines, and through the same path blazed by the feminist movement, anthropologists, ahead of their folklore colleagues in the mid-seventies, became aware of a dearth of interest accorded to gender-related theoretical scholarship in their own discipline. A collection of essays entitled *Woman, Culture and Society* is one result of such awareness.⁸⁶

When the issue of the lack of folklore scholarship relating to women and the delay in its production came to the fore, folklorists first identified this lacuna mainly as a lack of interest in women's expressive behaviour, although as Farrer mentioned:

the majority of folklore studies and folklorists have viewed women's expressiveness and creativity in restricted, a priori categories, a consistent thread of investigative scholarship has suggested that the predetermined genres and generally accepted images of women are not the only ones valid for describing women or their folklore.⁸⁷

Subsequently and given the importance that performance-oriented scholarship was enjoying at the time, contributions to the study of women and folklore followed the same lines to present women's expressive behaviour. Performance studies in folklore consider the material from a "dramaturgic" perspective in that speaker(s) and listener(s) are regarded as performer and audience; the context in which interaction between the

⁸⁶Michelle Zimballist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds. *Woman, Culture and Society* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1974).

⁸⁷Farrer, *Women* x.

two components takes place constitutes the traditional event.⁸⁸

Anthropologists differed from their folklorist colleagues to a certain extent in that they were mainly concerned with the examination and understanding of women's roles and status within different societies and cultures; their approach and interest were more comparative than performance-oriented.⁸⁹ In their introduction to *Woman, Culture and Society*, Rosaldo and Lamphere state that the papers included in the volume

Present a challenge to future thinking in anthropology by focusing on women's roles and actions... (emphasis mine)⁹⁰

Because the focus of each disciplines differs, folklorists and anthropologists each addressed a different set of questions related to the goals of their respective academic fields. Farrer gives a few examples of the kind of questions raised by folklore scholars in the mid-seventies:

What happens folkloristically in [such] women-oriented groups?.... How do women's experiences as children shape their expressive options as

⁸⁸Important contributions to the performance approach in folklore include the works of Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth S. Goldstein, eds. *Folklore, Performance and Communication* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975); Roger Abrahams, "A Performance Approach to Gossip," *Man* 5 (1970): 290-301; Richard Bauman, "The La Have Island General Store: Sociability and Verbal Art in a Nova Scotia Community," *Journal of American Folklore* 85 (1972): 330-43.

⁸⁹See for example Rita E. Montgomery, "A Cross-Cultural Study of Menstruation, Menstrual Taboos and Related Social Variables," *Ethos* 2 (1974): 137-70; Sue-Ellen Jacobs, *Women in Perspective: A Guide for Cross-Cultural Studies* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1974).

⁹⁰Rosaldo and Lamphere 13.

adults? What are the cultural variables influencing the range of expressive and creative activities available to women? How are a culture's perception of women and expectations of them expressed folkloristically... More succinctly, just what are the parameters of women's folklore and on which image are they predicated?⁹¹

This particular set of questions implies a generic identification and analysis of women's folklore. Expressive and creative behaviour has to be categorized within the cultural context, the mechanisms of which have to be defined and understood beforehand.

Based on the observation that "An asymmetry in the cultural evaluations of male and female, in the importance assigned to women and men, appears to be universal," anthropologists have approached women's issues and defined their areas of investigation using a perspective different from but complementary to that of folklore scholars.⁹² The questions raised revolve around an attempt to understand women's values by investigating the notions of status, role, and thence power, within the sociocultural context. Rosaldo argues for two main steps in the establishment of a series of problems, as she distinguishes between two kinds of power available to women. According to Rosaldo it is women who as mothers ultimately hold reproductive powers and, as wives in traditional communities such as the one studied here, manage the household and retain responsibility for the children's welfare:

⁹¹Farrer, *Women* xiv.

⁹²Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, "Woman Culture and Society: A Theoretical Overview," *Woman Culture and Society*, eds. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1974) 19.

We begin by asking what makes the fact of male authority. Why is sexual asymmetry a universal fact of human societies? What is its importance and how is it related to other aspects of men's and women's lives? Once these complex relations are understood, we can ask now how and in what situations male systems of authority are reduced or mitigated in importance, what sources of power are available to women and what sorts of arrangements give what sorts of values to women's lives.⁹³

Although the intentions of the two disciplines appear to be different in scope, one being genre-oriented and the other being status-oriented, there is a point of convergence shared by both academic fields. Folklorists and anthropologists are of the opinion that men and women's activities operate in two different spheres.⁹⁴ Folklorists have used the terms "public" and "private" in relation to aspects of traditional expressive behaviour and creativity, therefore underlining the notions of performer and audience. Farrer puts it this way: "Men's activities usually take place in public arenas, women's in more private ones."⁹⁵ Anthropologists suggest a similar kind of distinction by referring to "public" and "domestic" areas of activity:

An opposition between "domestic" and "public" provides the basis of a structural framework necessary to identify and explore the place of male and female in psychological, cultural and human aspects of

⁹³Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, *Theoretical* 22.

⁹⁴My understanding of this is that although there exist contexts which are uniquely male or female e.g. hunting camps or spinning bees, there are also many overlapping which are socially mixed and to which the term public and private might apply. Folklorists Gerald Thomas and Edward Ives use this terminology in the expressive behavioural sense.

⁹⁵Farrer, *Women* xi.

human life.⁹⁶

This awareness of two opposed arenas of activity, be they expressive or more largely behavioural and role-oriented, intensified the reflection geared towards the importance of the actual reporting and documenting of the material. In both disciplines, essays such as "Women Anthropologists Look at Women," by Alice Schlegel, or "Woman to Woman: Fieldwork and the Private Sphere," by Margaret Yocom, illustrate Jordan and Kalčík's point:

The gender of the folklore fieldworker influences what he or she looks for; it affects his or her relationship with informants, and what he or she is ready to see and hear and understand as important.⁹⁷

Folklore scholarship written by women, in the decade following Farrer's collection of essays, largely drew upon this afore-mentioned distinction. The distinction is in fact the recurrent theme in the next significant collection entitled *Women's Folklore, Women's Culture* edited by Jordan and Kalčík.⁹⁸ Part one of the collection is entitled "Women in Private / Women with Women," part two "Women in Public" and part three "Two Worlds / One World".

⁹⁶Rosaldo, *Theoretical* 23.

⁹⁷See Alice Schlegel, "Women Anthropologists Look at Women," *Reviews in Anthropology* 1 (1974): 553-60; Margaret R. Yocom, "Woman to Woman: Fieldwork and the Private Sphere," *Women's Folklore, Women's Culture*, eds. Rosan Jordan and Susan Kalčík, (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1985) 45-53; Rosan Jordan and Susan Kalčík, eds. *Women's Folklore, Southern Folklore: Folklore Fieldwork: Sex, Sexuality and Gender* 47 (1990).

⁹⁸Jordan and Kalčík 5.

It is not totally unlikely that the combination of the factors presented above, that is, the distinction of spheres and the need for women fieldworkers, may have been responsible for the reaffirmation of a need to reformulate certain aspects of folklore theory in order to suit this growing interest in, and scholarship dedicated to, women's issues.⁹⁹ In fact Jan Harold Brunvand, in the third edition of what must be one of the most popular folklore textbooks in existence, took the hint and added "gender-differentiated groups" to his previous categorization of folk groups.¹⁰⁰ Such an inclusion cannot be said to have any new theoretical impact in the development of the discipline, but it certainly fills a gap by attracting the reader's attention to new developments in scholarship. Assuming then that gender is a legitimate factor in the constitution of certain folk groups and following the assertion according to which men and women operate in different spheres, one can attempt to bridge the gap between folklore and anthropology and agree with Jordan and De Caro in saying that:

Women's folklore is so expressive of women's attitudes, values, anxieties, and worldview that it can be of considerable importance in interpreting society and women's roles within it.¹⁰¹

However, one can also argue that the proper understanding and determination of women's roles in society can be an asset for, if not a key

⁹⁹See: special issue of *Southern Folklore* 47 (1990), entitled "Folklore Fieldwork: Sex, Sexuality and Gender.

¹⁰⁰Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction* 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986) 43.

¹⁰¹Rosan Jordan and Francis De Caro, *Women and the Study of Folklore* 512.

to, the delineation of the dynamics that govern the folkloric dimension of women's expressive behaviour. A compromise would be to consider Rachelle H. Saltzman's point of view and explore "specifically the relationships between women's choices of expression and their sense of belonging to a larger culture."¹⁰²

Saltzman's key informant, Rose Kerrigan, is an early Scottish communist. She is obviously class-conscious and considers herself a feminist. Her use of folklore as embedded in her verbal expressive behaviour, while at work with the collector, is consciously governed by her own perception of her position in the sociopolitical context. In the case of Saltzman and Kerrigan, both protagonists share common ground, as the folklorist is concerned with writing about folklore from a woman's perspective and the informant is concerned with using it from a woman's perspective. Because of the pre-existing common ground, the outcome of the collecting session might also suffer from predictability expressed in the informant's performance. The informant may deliberately or unconsciously attempt to fulfill the fieldworker's expectations. It is difficult to tell to what extent this process is operating, however, and more importantly, the rapport established between Saltzman and Kerrigan is such that Saltzman does give room to Kerrigan to feel free to offer her own interpretation of her material:

¹⁰²Rachelle H. Saltzman, "Folklore Feminism and the Folk: Whose Lore Is It?" *Journal of American Folklore* 100 (1987): 548.

If we truly listen to our informants and hear what they say, we may well come to appreciate and learn from their theories about the ways in which women (and men) use and interpret their own folklore.¹⁰³

Such a statement is directly relevant to the realm of ethics and the social sciences. Although made with reference to the study of one individual, it tackles the issue of ethnography at its core. How much is the description of culture representative of its own carriers' worldview? In an article entitled "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?" Judy Stacey argues that while "feminist researchers... seek... an egalitarian research process characterized by authenticity, reciprocity and intersubjectivity between the researcher and her subjects," such a process may also "mask a deeper, more dangerous form of exploitation."¹⁰⁴ She discusses the ethical dimensions which characterize ethnographic fieldwork, emphasizing that the potential for betraying informants in order to endorse feminist theory may also be a deterrent to basic humanistic principles such as the respect we owe the people we study.

Debora Kodish elaborates on one aspect of the whole issue of women as informants and their "rapport" with visiting folklorists. She discusses more specifically "first encounters," and argues for the

¹⁰³Saltzman 559.

¹⁰⁴Judith Stacey, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?" *Women's Studies International Forum* 11 (1988): 22.

prevalence of a sexual dimension attached to initial encounters between male folklorists and their female informants, in which folklorists have considered themselves as "saviours" of the folk.¹⁰⁵ As extreme as this position might appear, it bears an interesting impact on the premises of a feminist approach to ethnographic fieldwork. It should be noted at this point that here and throughout this argument, I understand "feminism" as the nature and the expression of female gender-consciousness, unless I specify otherwise. Feminist fieldwork, therefore, is denuded of any sexual dimension of the kind described by Kodish in her article "Absent Gender, Silent Encounter," where she argues that accounts presented by male fieldworkers are undermined by marks of unacknowledged sexuality where apparently-powerful males woo and win their seemingly passive female informants into speech.¹⁰⁶ In a sense, it attempts to advocate an egalitarian research process. However, as Kodish also suggests, the researcher is an intruder:

Like any household task, a folklorist is described as an everyday interruption. Folklorists are not powerful heroes here, but additional chores to be quietly and well managed."¹⁰⁷

Here one particular interpretation reflecting a feminist position relating to fieldwork is that of Kodish who perceives in certain male

¹⁰⁵Deborah Kodish, "Absent Gender, Silent Encounter," *Journal of American Folklore* 100 (1988): 575.

¹⁰⁶Kodish, *Absent* 575.

¹⁰⁷Kodish, *Absent* 576.

folklorists' behaviour a sexual metaphor representing an issue against which feminists have been struggling. Kodish argues that male fieldwork behaviour may contribute to a redistribution of power or the ability to persuade one's informants in ways which may both enhance male power and misinterpret or ignore female power. In my experience and that of my mentors, power is perhaps a less appropriate term than a phrase such as the ability to persuade which varies according to the individual fieldworker, male or female, as well as the specific fieldwork context.

From the above discussion, one distinguishes two major dimensions emerging from the existing literature on women and folklore. It appears that there is a strong reflexive relationship between subject matter and methodology. The article by Kodish illustrates this point. While the argument developed by Kodish essentially refers to women as informants, its ethical and theoretical implications are valid for the discipline as a whole.

Proceeding from the material presented above, the elaboration of the difference between public and private domains and their gender-affiliation brought the emphasis onto the performers, or rather onto the participants in traditional events. In the case of small group gatherings, whether gender-exclusive or not, the combination of the participants in any particular group situation is a prime factor in the definition and the subsequent analysis of the communicative event. Pre-existing kinship

relations or affinities between individual members of any given group dictate to a certain extent the mode of interaction likely to occur once the social-situational context is created. Folklore items and genres embedded in conversations are aesthetic expressions of values held by these participants. Referring specifically then to women, Sheila K. Webster asserts that:

It is in respect to other women and not vis à vis men, that women evaluate themselves and other women.¹⁰⁸

There is no shortage of data to support this statement. The present study of informal women's gatherings will not only show the reality behind Webster's statement, but will also demonstrate the ways in which folklore is used by a group of women, to express the nature of their system of values and establish a sense of identity.

It has been suggested by several scholars that to achieve these goals, women use specific genres. Personal narrative is probably one of the most commonly used by women cross-culturally. Benedicte Grima gives an example of one possible use of this personal genre. In an article entitled "Suffering as Esthetics and Ethic Among Pashtun Women," she suggests that:

The tragic aesthetic and the credit attributed to suffering are used by the narrator in transforming another's ailment into an autobiographical account of her own reactions. By changing the role from observer to participant, a woman uses the narrative to promote herself as acting

¹⁰⁸Sheila K. Webster, "Women and Folklore: Performers, Characters and Scholars," editorial, *Women's Studies International Forum* 9 (1986): 220.

out socially approved actions.¹⁰⁹

The primary function of the personal narrative here, namely changing the role from observer to participant, is not specifically restricted to Pashtun society, and demonstrates women's perception of themselves as active participants in community events. Personal narratives used in this particular way also contribute to the reinforcement of the narrators' sense of power among their peers. That is, power in this instance is related to role-taking in this particular narrative context. Grima describes this process as one of using specific channels to express particular concerns.

Similarly, referring now to another narrative genre, Carol Mitchell suggests that:

Men and women have different attitudes toward joke-telling, favor different kinds of jokes, respond to different audiences and situations for joke-telling, learn to become joke-tellers in different ways.¹¹⁰

Here again, the underlying thought is that there exist realms of expressive behaviour which carry values specifically relevant to women through an alternative use of folklore genres.

Still in the area of folk narrative, another example of such an alternative use of folklore by women is hinted at by Gerald Thomas in *Les*

¹⁰⁹Benedicte Grima, "Suffering as Esthetic and Ethic Among Pashtun Women," *Women's Studies International Forum* 9 (1986): 237.

¹¹⁰Carol Mitchell, "The Sexual Perspective in the Appreciation and Interpretation of Jokes," *Western Folklore* 36 (1977): 303-30.

Deux Traditions, a study of storytelling among French Newfoundlanders.¹¹¹ Without making the case for gender analysis, Thomas points to the existence of two storytelling traditions; a "public" and a "private" tradition. The latter, using the same basic genre, the folktale, at different structural and functional levels of performance than the former, is more favoured by women. "Private storytelling" sessions, according to Thomas, would occur, *inter alia*, at older women's gatherings.¹¹²

Margaret Yocom elaborates on this particular topic in an article in which she deals with the differences in style between a female and a male storyteller in her own family. She contrasts the public sphere and the competitive nature of the male storytelling style with the private sphere in which female storytelling thrives, noting that a fieldworker looking only for the public dramatic performance would miss the more intimate narrative tradition of the women.¹¹³ Similarly, when presenting the case of two women storytellers in *Les Deux Traditions*, Gerald Thomas points to the cooperative element where the two storytellers help each other out with the linguistic delivery or even the chronological unfolding of a particular story.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹Gerald Thomas, *Les Deux Traditions; Le Conte Populaire chez les Franco-Terreneuviens* (Montreal: Bellarmin, 1983).

¹¹²Thomas, *Les Deux Traditions* 55.

¹¹³Yocom 45-53

¹¹⁴Thomas, *Les Deux Traditions* 100.

One cannot help noticing that when women have been acknowledged as bearers of folklore and more specifically so in the area of folk narrative, their contributions have been rated lower, compared with those of men. Recent scholarship, however, has pointed out such bias.¹¹⁵ By elucidating the interactional dynamics of conversations at informal women's gatherings the present study intends to demonstrate that groups of women in Cape St. George, Newfoundland control their own traditional dimensions by initiating communicative events during which recognizable forms of folklore, characterized by functional and aesthetic expressive behaviour, take place. This study will therefore be a contribution to the existing scholarship on women and folklore, and also to that of the ethnography of speaking, as it will use its methodological premise.

Having examined the theoretical issues pertaining to the area of women and folklore and relevant to generic performance in the "private" sphere, we shall now concentrate on the premise of ethnography of communication and its implications for the study of women's informal social gatherings.

¹¹⁵See: Rosan Jordan and Susan Kalčik; Farrer, *Women*; Marta Weigle, "Women and Folklore: A Review," *Signs* 2 (1977): 911-13. Gerald Thomas suggested in a conversation that female informants themselves rated male narrators higher than most, though by no means all, women narrators in the Cape.

Folklore and the Ethnography of Communication

Ethnography is the description of culture. Such description however, has not necessarily always carried a strict scientific connotation and one often hears about the ethnographic value of a literary piece of work with reference to the cultural information incorporated in such and such a play, novel or short story. For social scientists however, the task of doing ethnography goes beyond mere description or report. Ethnography also involves the analysis and interpretation of aspects of a given culture in a holistic fashion, that is, with reference to the culture as a whole. It is not a theory in itself. Rather, it is a methodological complex which, in the case of folklore, has theoretical implications relevant to structuralism and functionalism. In recent years there have arisen the "New Ethnography", the novelty of which is in its stressing that all cultural descriptions are in fact interpretations, some implicit, some explicit. This is why fictional and "non professional" and personal report documents may count as forms of ethnography insofar as they attempt to portray cultural activities.¹¹⁶

In their introduction to *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*, Bauman and Sherzer understand ethnography of speaking as "The means

¹¹⁶See: James Clifford and George Marcus eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography: A School of American Research Seminar* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986) and James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988).

of elucidating the patterns and functions of speaking in societies."¹¹⁷ In other words, results obtained from an ethnographical approach can be interpreted to suit, modify or expand on previously made observations. The meticulous description of culture provides the student with a basis upon which theories may be built or conclusions drawn. Such conclusions however, need not be confined by the boundaries assigned to structuralism and functionalism. Beyond this, the theoretical field can be opened to include the formulation of descriptive theories of culture; namely, interpretative and analytical statements based on descriptive data. Vladimir Propp, for instance made no attempt to relate his extraordinary morphology to Russian or Indo-European culture as a whole.¹¹⁸

The phrase "ethnography of speaking" was first introduced by Dell Hymes in 1962, to name a field of inquiry which would both incorporate and supersede existing scholarly theories in the area of language and culture.¹¹⁹ The description and analysis of the cultural dynamics and implications of the act of speaking, a cultural act in itself, were later

¹¹⁷Richard Bauman and Joel Sherzer eds., *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1974) 3.

¹¹⁸See Vladimir Propp, *The Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1968) xiii.

¹¹⁹Dell Hymes, "The Ethnography of Speaking," *Anthropology of Human Behaviour*, eds. T. Gladwin and W.C. Sturtevant (Washington: Anthropological Society of Washington, 1962) 13-53.

referred to by Dell Hymes as the "ethnography of communication," based on the premise that linguistic behaviour cannot be dissociated from its primary purpose, which is communication. Communication then provides the frame of reference in which the act of speaking is to be studied.¹²⁰ The act of speaking, also referred to as "verbal behaviour," is studied by sociolinguists from functionalist and contextualist perspectives, that is, in terms of the dynamics established by the relations between the setting, the participants and the topic.¹²¹

In the introduction to *Folklore, Performance and Communication*, Ben-Amos and Goldstein determine the foundations of an interdisciplinary bridge by stating that:

The contextual approach in folklore narrows the perspective of sociolinguistics somewhat, focusing not on the entire network of culturally defined communicative events, but upon those situations in which the relationship of performance obtains between speakers and listeners. It concentrate on those utterances which transform the role of speaker and listener to those of performer and audience.¹²²

In the case of informal gatherings, conversations incorporate those utterances, otherwise known by folklorists as "genres" or "conversational genres." Yet, for any communicative event to bear significance among its

¹²⁰See: Dell Hymes, *Language in Culture and Society: A Reader in Linguistics and Anthropology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964).

¹²¹Susan Ervin-Tripp, "An Analysis of the Interaction of Language," (*American Anthropologist* 66.2 (1964): 86-102.

¹²²Ben-Amos and Goldstein 4.

participants, that is, to be loaded with meaningful verbal interaction, speakers and listeners must belong to the same speech community.

Gumperz defines speech community as:

Any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language usage.¹²³

From such a definition, one can establish yet another parallel between folklore and sociolinguistics. Both disciplines are concerned with the study of groups. While Gumperz and sociolinguists use such terminology as "human aggregate" and "speech community," folklorists work with the concept of "folk group." According to Barre Toelken:

A folk group can be described as any group of people who share informal communal contacts that become the basis for expressive, culture-based communication.¹²⁴

Gumperz and Toelken's statements reveal a certain degree of similarity. Both assume the existence of a form of interaction between the members of the group. The folkloristic conception of group, however, is more restrictive in that it generally takes the reality of speech community for granted and therefore assumes the validity of Gumperz's assertion.¹²⁵

¹²³John Gumperz, "The Speech Community," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, (New York: Macmillan, 1968) 381.

¹²⁴Barre Toelken, *The Dynamics of Folklore* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979) 51.

¹²⁵Some exceptions are to be made with regard to this generalization. See Richard Bauman's essay "Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore," *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore*, eds. R. Bauman and A. Paredes (Austin: Texas UP, 1972) 215-42.

Theoretical Statement

Considering the groups studied in this dissertation, it is a prime condition that in order to achieve expressive communication, the participants must belong to the same speech community. Yet Bauman and Sherzer argue for a heterogeneity factor affecting the composition of a speech community by stating that:

Such a community is an organization of diversity, insofar as [this] knowledge and ability (i.e., access to and command of resources for speaking) are differentially distributed among its members; the production and interpretation of speech are thus variable and complementary rather than homogeneous and constant throughout the community.¹²⁶

Although a similar trait could be attributed to the concept of folk group, the tendency among folklorists has been to emphasize aspects of homogeneous quality inherent to the composition as well as to the dynamics governing the formation and existence of such groups. As Alan Dundes pointed out:

A member of the group may not know all the other members but he will probably know the common core of traditions which help the group have a sense of identity.¹²⁷

However, it can be assumed that despite minor differences in terminology and scope, both folklore and sociolinguistics can be said to have enough common ground, in their general approach to the study of human

¹²⁶Bauman and Sherzer 6.

¹²⁷Alan Dundes, "Who Are The Folk?" *Interpreting Folklore*, ed. A. Dundes (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1980) 7.

expressive behaviour, to benefit from a method such as is offered by ethnography of communication theory, in order to formulate descriptive theories about language and culture.¹²⁸

Using ethnography of communication theory to understand the dynamics of a folklore event implies undertaking a performance approach to the material, that is, studying the behavioural aspects of the participants and more specifically, considering verbal expressive behaviour. As Dell Hymes points out:

Folklore makes a distinctive contribution to the study of communicative events by focusing attention on the stylized content and conduct within them. Here folklore enhances its concern with the aesthetic and evaluative dimensions of life.¹²⁹

The delineation of communicative events can be somewhat problematic. Hymes, in his initial publication on the ethnography of speaking, refers to speech events as comprising several components: sender, receiver, message form, channel, code, and topic and to setting, participants, end acts, keys, instrumentalities, norms and genres.¹³⁰ As noted by Saville-Troike:

A communicative event is a bounded entity of some kind, recognizing

¹²⁸For further discussion on the relations between folklore and sociolinguistics see Dell Hymes, "The Contribution of Folklore to Sociolinguistics," *Journal of American Folklore* 84 (1971): 42-50.

¹²⁹Dell Hymes, "Breakthrough Into Performance," *Folklore, Performance and Communication*, eds. Ben-Amos and Goldstein, (The Hague: Mouton, 1975) 11.

¹³⁰See Dell Hymes, *Ethnography of Speaking* 23.

what the boundaries are is essential for their identification.¹³¹

Saville-Troike then illustrates her statement with the example of a phone conversation as a communicative event bounded by the ringing of the phone and the hanging up of the receiver. This statement however, suffers from oversimplification, as communicative events as understood by Saville-Troike can be inherently inclusive. That is, a phone conversation can include a personal experience narrative which itself can include a joke including a proverb. Hymes deals with this phenomenon, and distinguishes between "speech acts," "speech events" and "speech situations" the three of which operate through the same relation of inclusion. Informal women's gatherings in Cape St. George can be considered as spatially and temporally bounded communicative events. These boundaries will be discussed together with the presentation and analysis of the material proper.

As suggested by Ben-Amos and Goldstein, there is a mutual relationship between folklore and the cultural context in which folklore focuses on the performance of defined and recognizable genres.¹³² In an article entitled "Breakthrough Into Performance," Dell Hymes argues that performance as folkloric behaviour (of a folklore genre) is characterized by

¹³¹Muriel Saville-Troike, *The Ethnography of Communication* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982) 134-35.

¹³²Ben-Amos and Goldstein 5.

three dimensions, i.e., the reportable, the interpretable, and the repeatable.¹³³ In an oral conversation, Diane Goldstein also suggested "the performable" as an additional dimension.¹³⁴ This last dimension refers more specifically to the ability or the skill of the individual at entertaining or at establishing a rapport between the performer and the audience.¹³⁵ Such a dimension is by its nature aesthetically loaded, in that it is appraisable by the members of the community. As Dell Hymes points out:

There is performance when one or more persons assume responsibility for presentation.¹³⁶

The performer is then responsible for meeting his or her audience's expectations with regards to the standards of the act. For instance, the responsibility of a comedian when giving a performance is to make his audience laugh. Elements relevant to the "quality" of the performance, in such a case, can be evaluated in term of the reactions of the audience during the event.¹³⁷

¹³³Hymes, *Breakthrough*.

¹³⁴Oral communication with Diane Goldstein, St John's, April 1989.

¹³⁵See: William R. Bascom, "Four Functions of Folklore," *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965) 279-98 for a discussion on the entertainment function of folklore.

¹³⁶Hymes, *Breakthrough* 18.

¹³⁷This particular aspect of performance is discussed by Dell Hymes in his article "Folklore's Nature and the Sun's Myth," *Journal of American Folklore* 88 (1975): 345-69.

The concept of the responsibility of the performer to his or her audience ought to be considered together with another pair of referential concepts: formality and informality. As mentioned above, the context of performance is, among other things, one in which participants assume role-taking, namely those of performer and audience, whose role is characterized by the emission of signals verbally expressed by short but interpretable reactions, as opposed to speaker and listener. Attention has also been drawn above to the distinction between public and private traditions. Depending on the perspective, we have seen that on the one hand, successful attempts have been made by gender-interested scholars to establish a link between the idea of private sphere and women as bearers and transmitters of traditional knowledge. On the other hand this distinction has also been correlated to genre, in that it has been argued that the public sphere was often the context for more elaborated forms of folklore.¹³⁸

It can be asserted that within our cultural boundaries the public domain is more restrictive with respect to generic selection. Genres which are performed in the public sphere, be it traditional or media-related, can be and often are transposed to the private scene, as in the case of

¹³⁸Gerald Thomas emphasizes this point in *Les Deux Traditions* where he argues for different degrees of elaboration in the telling of Märchen according to public or private performance contexts. He also examines *in extenso* the aesthetic dimension raised by Hymes, attempting to define the criteria of aesthetic excellence in both public and private narrative traditions.

Märchen or ballads. The differences between versions can then be partially attributed to the nature of the performance context. However, the reverse is unlikely, unless their performance was highly affected by a formality factor which would render it theatrical. For example, the exchange of gossip which may have significance for participants at an informal gathering is unlikely to occur in a public setting.¹³⁹ Conversational genres, such as those which form the major corpus of this study, are not likely to be transposed to the public level for the simple reason that their existence is emically linked to the conversational context. It should be clear at this point that the intention of this argument is by no means to bring in a relation of causality between genre and gender with reference to public or private domains. What is interesting to note however, is that a relationship can be established between performance and the concepts of "public" and "private." Such a relationship can be understood in terms of "formality" and "informality" where public performance calls for a higher degree of formality. In this case the roles of performers and audience are easily distinguishable and the weight of responsibility is heavier on the performer.

In her essay "Formality and Informality in Communicative Events," Judith Irvine distinguishes between four aspects of formality which affect

¹³⁹For more information on the concept of formality see Judith Irvine, "Formality and Informality in Communicative Events," *American Anthropologist* 81 (1979): 773-90.

the nature of communicative events at the code (speech) level as well as at the situational level.¹⁴⁰ The first two are code-related, marked by an increase in the structure of the code on the one hand and an occurrence of consistency at the code level on the other. Irvine bases her argument on Erving Goffmann's concept of "frames" as situations which become organised through social moves. Thus for Goffmann, the level of informality in conversational exchange corresponds to the freedom of frame space in which interlocutors ordinarily move.¹⁴¹ Taking social gatherings as supportive examples, Irvine argues that in the first case code is enhanced by the addition of extra rules or conventions.¹⁴² Using the expression "code consistency" to describe the characteristics of the second aspect of formality, she suggests, as an example, a lesser occurrence of code-switching.¹⁴³

Formality at the situational level according to Irvine, is signalled in two different yet potentially interdependent manners. On the one hand, referring to the attitude of the participants, she notices a switch from personal to positional identities. For example in a situation where two

¹⁴⁰Irvine 776.

¹⁴¹Randall Collins, "Theoretical Continuities in Goffmann's Work," *Erving Goffman: Exploring the Interaction Order*, eds. Paul Drew and Anthony Wooton (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988) 54-55.

¹⁴²Irvine 776.

¹⁴³Irvine 777. Gerald Thomas made similar remarks in *Les Deux Traditions*, 1983.

friends are chatting and are then suddenly interrupted by the entrance of an official person who comes to address one of them, the person who was initially talking to her friend as a friend may have to answer this official person in her capacity as an official. This switch is occasionally combined or provoked by a second situational aspect termed "emergence of a situational focus" where a performer becomes clearly if not physically detached from the simultaneously created audience, thus bringing focus onto him or her:

An American cocktail party for example is usually decentralized, with many small groups whose conversations are not meant to concern the gathering as a whole; but a lecture is centralized even if members of the audience mutter outside to each other during the lecturer's performance. The emergence of a central focus of attention for a social gathering parallels the process . . . of focusing for aspects of code. Participation in the central, focal activity is regulated in special ways. For instance it may be that only certain persons have the right to speak or act in the main sequence, with others restricted to the side sequences.¹⁴⁴

Bearing Irvine's developments on aspects of formality in mind, a link can be established between the concepts of "formal" and "public" as applied to performance.¹⁴⁵ Although the four aspects delineated by Irvine need not concurrently affect a communicative event, they function essentially as determinators of formality.

The question then remains as how to define "informal" when referring to gatherings of the women's groups which constitute the subject of this

¹⁴⁴Irvine 779.

¹⁴⁵See: Erving Goffmann, *Behavior in Public Places* (New York: Free Press, 1963) 164.

dissertation. Specifically, how does the concept of "informality" relate to that of performance in these particular situations? Finally, two of the key questions are: What characterizes performance during informal women's gatherings in Cape St. George? and what makes these gatherings of interest to the ethnographer?

From the discussion above, it can be noted that the act of performance is, from a folklore perspective, to a certain extent genre-determined. As Roger Abrahams points out:

...genres are useful not only because they help us focus on the relationship between performer and audience but also because genres give names to traditional attitudes and traditional strategies which may be utilized by the performer in his attempt to communicate with and affect the audience.¹⁴⁶

Moreover, performance when considered as a role-taking form of behaviour in which interlocutors become performers and audience, implies the assumption of responsibility by the performer towards the audience. In the case of informal women's gatherings in Cape St. George, a relationship of interdependence can be observed between the concepts of responsibility and informality as they relate to the genre interaction, or dynamics, which determine the element of performance in these communicative events. That is, switches from one genre to another determine the variation of the performance level.

¹⁴⁶Roger Abrahams, "The Complex Relations of Simple Forms," *Genres* 2 (1969): 104.

Roger Abrahams discusses the issue using a diagram in which the parameters measure the relationship between genres and involvement of the participants.¹⁴⁷ With respect to conversational genres and in the context of some of the women's informal gatherings under study here, such a relationship results in the engendering of an egalitarian climate balanced with competitiveness among the participants. The participants regard the "success" of the gatherings in terms of their ability to achieve such a climate.

The context of these gatherings is one in which participants are in turn performers and audience. Informality here can be measured in terms of a lack of a permanent "central situational focus" as defined by Irvine, or more precisely in terms of a transposition of the "central situational focus" from the performer to the topic of the performance. This transposition is made possible by virtue of the generic mode of expression. The exchange of information, which accounts for the main part of verbal expression during the gatherings, calls for genres that suit this particular purpose in that each participant in the group has, or can create, an opportunity to contribute additional information to the conversation. The detailed analysis of these communicative events will show a preponderance of genres such as personal experience narratives, kernel narratives, jokes and so on, that are conversational in that they occur within that particular framework.

¹⁴⁷Abrahams, *Complex*.

Hence, for example, personal experience narratives, which Abrahams would qualify as fictive, will be treated here as conversational because the participants use them in this particular context.

As the roles of performer and audience are equally distributed by and among the participants, there is also a sense of shared responsibility. To use Carole Edelsky's term, "the floor" is there for every participant to use.¹⁴⁸ Although Edelsky's inquiry concerns a group of male and female participants, her insight into the conversational dynamics with regard to turn-taking and its relationship to gender certainly prompts inquiry about exclusively female groups and their management of folkloric performance.

Very little has been written about women's communication patterns and group interaction from a folkloristic perspective, especially with reference to the concepts of use of multiple genres and informality in a performance context. Susan Kalčik's article on personal narratives in women's rap groups is one example of an attempt at understanding the dynamics of interaction within small groups of women from this perspective. However, as the author cautiously states:

No definitive statement about women's storytelling, interaction, or use of language is attempted except in terms of the rap-group situation and narratives analysed here, but important questions and considerations are raised that can be applied to further research in these three

¹⁴⁸Carol Edelsky, "Who's Got The Floor?" *Language and Society* 10 (1981): 382-421.

areas.¹⁴⁹

Kalčík's essay, however, does consider the notions of equality and competition mentioned above, although she uses the term "support" to refer to equality.¹⁵⁰ She accurately perceives the combination of these two elements as strategies which disclose the collaborative aspect affecting interaction in two different yet complementary ways. Generically, collaboration contributes to the collective elaboration as well as the structuring of the narratives which she calls *kernel* stories. In other words, both the content and its mediators' verbal behaviour are subjected to the collaborative process. Without strictly defining the genre, the author suggests that:

Most often a kernel story is a brief reference to the subject, the central action of an important piece of dialogue from a longer story. In this form one might say it is a kind of a potential story, especially if the details are not known to the audience.¹⁵¹

The occurrence of such interactional dynamics at the content level is also noticeable among the groups of women in Cape St. George and in fact can be comprehended as the generic realization of the afore-mentioned concept of shared responsibility at the performance level. Thus, after having taken these various notions into consideration, it is possible to say that the nature of interdependence between genre, performance and

¹⁴⁹Susan Kalčík, "...Like Ann's Gynecologist or the Time I Was Almost Raped": Personal Narratives in Women's Rap Groups," *Journal of American Folklore* 88 (1975): 3.

¹⁵⁰Kalčík 5.

¹⁵¹Kalčík 7.

situation, in the case of the Cape St. George women's groups, is one in which the events become defined by their generic content.

Pauline Greenhill's work on women as performers of narratives when describing and commenting on the contents of their family photograph albums, is to an extent comparable to the present study. She analyses the narratives in terms of their performative and communicative values. By defining them as monologues, she compares these narratives to the more masculine genre of recitation. Although the restrictions defining the boundaries of those communicative events are different from the ones of direct relevance to this study, it is interesting here to note Greenhill's consideration of these narratives as communicative events expressive of female verbal creativity within a female informal interactional context.¹⁵²

Finally, one should note that studies relevant to women and communication written from a folkloristic perspective and referring to informal interactional context are still scarce despite the number of publications dealing with the issues of gender and speech.¹⁵³ Reference

¹⁵²Pauline Greenhill, "The Family Album: A Newfoundland Women's Recitation," *Canadian Folklore canadien* 6 (1984): 39-61.

¹⁵³See for example: Elinor Keenan, "Norm-Makers, Norm-Breakers: Uses of Speech by Men and Women in a Malgasy Community," *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*, eds. R. Bauman and J. Sherzer (New York: Cambridge UP, 1974); Philip M. Smith, "Sex Markers in Speech," *Social Markers in Speech*, eds. Klaus Sherer and Howard Giles, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979) 109-46; Debora Kodish, "Fair Young Ladies and Bonny Irish Boys: Patterns in Vernacular Poetics," *Journal of American Folklore* 96 (1983): 131-50.

to such activities as women's informal gatherings are nevertheless present in Newfoundland ethnographies, although no specific attention has been paid to the performance of folklore in this interactional context.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴See for example James C. Faris, "The Dynamics of Verbal Exchange: A Newfoundland Example," *Anthropologia* 8 (1966): 235-48; John Szwed, *Private Cultures and Public Imagery: Interpersonal Relations in a Newfoundland Peasant Society* (St. John's: Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1966); Wilfred W. Wareham, "Towards an Ethnography of 'Times': Newfoundland Party Traditions Past and Present," Ph.D. diss., U of Pennsylvania, 1982; Dona Lee Davis, *Blood and Nerves* (St. John's: Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1983).

Chapter 3

DOING FIELDWORK WITH WOMEN IN A MINORITY CULTURE: THE CAPE ST. GEORGE EXPERIENCE

This chapter is based on ethnographic data collected during three consecutive summers in the community of Cape St. George, Newfoundland. Fieldwork was carried out using participant observation as a method of investigation, in order to comprehend and collect forms of folkloric behaviour expressed through conversation by three groups of women in the community. Particular attention was paid to processes of transmission of traditional knowledge as well as to the dynamics which govern the reception of such knowledge. The chapter, which is preceded by a preliminary account of previous fieldwork conducted in the same community, will document the conditions that led to an awareness of the social and situational contexts surrounding such folkloric events as informal women's gatherings.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ collected data in Cape St. George during the winter of 1983 for my *Maitrise*: "English-French Bilingualism on the Port-au-Port Peninsula, Newfoundland, with Special Reference to the Role of Folktales Narration," Université de Haute-Normandie, 1983.

Ethics

Ethical concerns throughout the chapter are approached with reference to the quality of the rapport established and maintained between the ethnographer and members of the community. These concerns are balanced with academic ones pertinent to the relevance of the ethnographic data as a foundation for theoretical statements. Thus certain situations which might be potentially detrimental to the reputation of individuals in the community or to their image vis-à-vis the unconcerned outsider have not been described in detail. The following introductory ethical remarks illustrate the internal dialogue with which I was constantly faced during my stays in Cape St. George. Thus thoughts often revolved around an attempt to reconcile scholarly accuracy and fairness to the informants.

A number of guides have been written, stating the premises of fieldwork and giving directions to the fieldworker.¹⁵⁶ These guides are indeed helpful to the unskilled collector of folklore. They provide insights

¹⁵⁶See: Kenneth S. Goldstein, *A Guide for Fieldworkers in Folklore* (Hatboro: Folklore Associates, 1964); Peggy Golde, ed., *Women in the Field: Anthropological Experiences* (Chicago: Aldine, 1970); James Spradley and David W. McCurdy, *The Cultural Experience: Ethnography in a Complex Society* (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1972); Edward D. Ives, *The Tape-Recorded Interview* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1974); Sue-Ellen Jacobs, *Women in Perspective: A Guide for Cross Cultural Studies* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1974); Bruce Jackson, *Fieldwork* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1979); James P. Spradley, *Participant Observation* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1980) and Tony Whitehead and Mary Ellen Conaway, *Self, Sex and Gender in Cross Cultural Fieldwork* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1986).

which, although reflecting one or several individuals' perspectives, might be used as precedents that hint at clues to mistakes of a practical nature, such as the proper checking of a tape-recorder, or the organisation of fieldnotes; but these and indeed other fieldworkers' reports, whether written by folklorists or not, can also provide food for thought in terms of their ethical dimensions, since experience in the field is governed not just by such questions as time and place but more importantly by the collector's rapport with his or her informants.

This fieldwork account is framed by a discussion of methodological and ethical issues specifically relevant to my fieldwork experience with the people of Cape St. George. I hope however, when discussing ethical dimensions, to transcend the boundaries of my own experience. Although extrapolation is always risky, it is my conviction that the task of the social scientist goes beyond that of mere reporting. It is our duty to remember and remind our readers that we are dealing with extremely variable data from a potentially tangential perspective, and this is the case, no matter how scientific, logical and rational we may claim to be. In other words, ethnography, or the description of culture, as conscientious and accurate as it may be made, is bound to be coloured by the writer's frame of mind and overall perspective. Thus ethics involves not only the rapport in the field but also the philosophy that governs the choices and selections of

representation made in the subsequent report.¹⁵⁷

The ultimate problem is that whatever we might observe and account for, there remains one given perspective, which is our own. I am not saying that for this reason we should refrain from writing or for that matter observing culture, because we do get an insight into people's ways of living, understanding and interpreting their own lives. But we should always be aware that these ways are constantly subject to change. Therefore our descriptions and their interpretations, like photographs, are fixed documents of cultures in motion; yet we cannot expect culture or any of its eventual representations to pose for us, neither should we pretend that it has done.

As social scientists, and specifically as folklorists, we are trained and encouraged to observe and analyse cultural traits, that is, to give interpretations of signals and verbal statements as expressions of cultural values. In ethnoscience the purpose is to lay bare the semantic element, or the meaning of signals and statements, and to uncover the kinds of taxonomies in which various linguistic and, by extension, various cultural

¹⁵⁷See: James Clifford, "Ethnographic Authority," *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography Literature and Art*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988) 21-54.

systems operate.¹⁵⁸ Yet, while ethnoscience provides us with ways of identifying these traits and of classifying them, using folk taxonomic systems based on the results of interviews and specially designed questionnaires, it remains the task of the fieldworker to apply the method correctly: to design questionnaires (mass-oriented or individually tailored) and adapt interviewing techniques (directive, semi-directive, or non-directive) to the group studied. Considering the non-taxonomic aspects of learned appropriateness - unnamed aspects of culture, and also limits of appropriateness, ethnographic understanding has moved somewhat from ethnoscience, though the latter has certainly played an important role in defining current trends. However, such a method has its limits. Because of its rigidity, in the case of mass-oriented questionnaires or directive interviewing techniques which may not be necessarily tailored to suit specific individual informants, it can easily lead to out-of-context interpretation. A certain signal or expression may be used in a given situation with a specific referent. However, should the situation change, in terms, for instance, of the combination of the participants at a traditional event, the same expression may have a completely different meaning, or another expression may be used with the same meaning, or again, two or more simultaneous meanings may be carried by the one expression, in which case the intention of the speaker is to establish two levels of

¹⁵⁸See W.C. Sturtevant, "Studies in Ethnoscience," *American Anthropologist* 66 (1964): 99-131.

conversation and engage in what is commonly known as double-talk.¹⁵⁹

The following event illustrates this point: One Saturday morning, the Murphys, whom I stayed with, and others who had been drinking and partying the night before, were reminiscing while complaining about the effects of drink and ways to remedy our hangovers. The conversation was then loaded (sic) with drinking terminology and swear words. Suddenly, two visitors came in. They were cousins of the Murphys and I had never met them before. I could not help but notice the change in the tone and wording of the conversation. Yet I could not point to the exact nature and the reason for this change until the visitors had left. Once they left, Sean and Joan explained to me that their cousins had become Pentecostals and as a result did no longer approve of drinking let alone swearing. Thus the conversation during their presence was denuded of specific referents to drink and of swear words. In this manner "hangover" became "headache", "drunk" became "sick" etc. Sean and Joan also admitted they were secretly anxious that I would notice and not inadvertently swear. But as it was, I was so taken by the change that I had, like the rest of the

¹⁵⁹Studies in sociolinguistics, ethnosemantics and discourse analysis discuss this particular set of issues in relation to its cultural context. For further reference see: Penelope Brown, "Women and Politeness: A New Perspective on Language and Society," *Reviews in Anthropology* 3 (1976): 240-47; Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, "Social Structure, Groups and Interaction," *Social Markers of Speech*, eds. Klaus Sherer and Howard Giles (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979) 291-341; Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1967); James Fernandez, "The Mission of Metaphor in Expressive Culture," *Current Anthropology* 15 (1974): 119-45; and Philip M. Smith, "Sex Markers of Speech," *Social Markers in Speech*, eds. Klaus Sherer and Howard Giles, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979) 109-46.

company, become quieter and cautious. They also explained why they were using the words "saved" and "safe" so often as an inside joke on their cousins' change of religion.¹⁶⁰

This kind of situation occurred frequently during my stay in Cape St. George, and was not without posing a number of problems and dilemmas. In everyday life, one is able to tune out conversation one is not interested in, and one often does, because when sitting down with a group of people one simply cannot follow two or three conversations at once. Even on a one-to-one basis, we unconsciously select information, thereby interpreting and restructuring what is transmitted to us, in order to satisfy our individual system of cognition.

However, when one is doing fieldwork with a view to writing an ethnography, or any report dealing with the dynamics of the cultural life of a group of people, the need is for participant observation. This can be defined as a way of learning by doing or being (Spradley 1980), or, as Kenneth Goldstein stated in his *Guide For Fieldworkers In Folklore*:

The term participant observer... [designates] a fieldworker who participates in a folklore context or event which is studied by him. It should not be confused with a general participation in the activities of the community, except in so far as certain of those activities are folklore events. If the anthropologist's problem concerns the activities of a community, then every time he participates in any of its activities he does so as participant observer. The folklorist's problem concerns only the folklore activities of a community, and he is a participant

¹⁶⁰Fieldnotes, Cape St. George, 1986.

observer only when he participates in folklore activities.¹⁶¹

The study of informal women's gatherings in Cape St. George, involved a great deal of participant observation. This was the only reasonable way of getting an understanding, even if it did not exhaust the possibilities of analysing all aspects of this particular mode of expressive behaviour.

Initial Interest: Early Fieldwork

I was first informed of the existence of the French community on the Port-au-Port Peninsula by Gerald Thomas in 1982. Thomas had been an active researcher in the area since 1970, collecting folklore, and was able to give me substantial information on the origins, the dialect, and the present situation of the French on the Port-au-Port Peninsula. I was impressed by our conversations and was happily surprised to learn of the existence of such a community in Newfoundland. I needed to satisfy my own curiosity. Coming from a family with a strong occupational tradition of fishing and farming, I had heard before my departure from France that a number of Breton fishermen had indeed previously fished there and I was anxious to find out if any traces of their presence remained on the island. My conversations with Gerald Thomas further piqued my curiosity.

¹⁶¹Kenneth S. Goldstein 79. Goldstein's boundary for "folklore activities" becomes problematic in terms of definition and more specifically, his approach underplays the insights to be gained about generic relationships deriving from long term in-depth fieldwork.

As much as I wanted to go there, I still did not know how to go about it. I could not picture myself going on my own and just walking into somebody's house. In November 1982, I took a position as a French assistant at Sir Wilfred Grenfell College in Corner Brook where I gave French conversation classes; I had come to Newfoundland on a cultural exchange program involving *l'Université de Haute-Normandie* and Memorial University. One day, one of my new acquaintances Lise Bergeron, whom I had told about the French community, informed me that she was going to Cape St. George the next day to visit the French immersion school. She suggested that I take advantage of a vacant seat in the car to go along. Here was my chance. I was very excited but also felt somewhat uneasy. I called Gerald Thomas and asked him for advice. He told me that I should go and see Mrs. Rose Murphy and tell her that I knew him; he assured me everything would be fine. I must admit that after this phone call, my feelings oscillated between anticipated panic, as I knew intuitively this was going to be the start of an important part of my life, and a vague feeling of reassurance, given that I had the blessing of the leading scholar in this particular field.

First Contact With The Community

We left Corner Brook the next day. After an hour's drive, we crossed the now familiar but still impressive isthmus that separates the peninsula from the mainland. The potholes in the road seemed to warn us continually that

we were getting further and further away from urban conveniences. The road alongside the deep cliffs and the generally barren landscape seemed endless; but as we got nearer to settled areas one could almost sense the curious eyes behind the curtained windows of the small wooden houses that had now replaced the cliffs alongside the road. I felt comforted by the magnificent presence of the sea on the other side; that at least I was used to. It was raining when we arrived in Cape St. George. I asked to be dropped off at the *Centre des Terreneuviens Français* where I met Patrick Hunter, the coordinator of the local French Association. I asked him the way to the store where I could buy a case of beer before heading towards Mrs. Murphy's house; I did not want to arrive empty-handed.

When I asked for Rose's house, it so happened that I was speaking to her son at the store and he offered to drive me there. Bernard Murphy is a forty year old bachelor who lives with and "takes care" of his mother; that is, he is responsible for the bills and the physical upkeep of the house. He does not, however, take part in the performance of household chores. On our way I told him who I was and that Gerald Thomas had told me about Mrs. Murphy. He sounded enthusiastic about the fact that I came from France and told me that his ancestors came from there too.

When we arrived at his mother's home he introduced me as "a girl from France"; this was to be my "name" for a long time. In fact it endured until 1985 by which time people had effectively accepted me, as I will later

describe, and started to call me by my real name. So I greeted Rose and her daughter Jean, who was visiting from Toronto. When I offered my hostess a drink, she told me she had given up drinking three years before. So much for bringing in beer! I suddenly felt embarrassed, but Jean eased the situation by accepting one and we started to talk about France.

I was amazed by the number of questions I was asked, but realised that I was after all a stranger to these people and that naturally enough they were checking me out without making me feel uncomfortable. In accordance with the unwritten rules that govern social hospitable behaviour towards strangers and newcomers, not only in Newfoundland but in most rural areas where the visit of an unknown individual is often turned into a special event, my hosts were quite subtle about the whole "interrogation" and I felt really good when I eventually found some dinner in front of me, even if to them it was simply the mark of sociability.¹⁶² At the risk of sounding ethnocentric, I must admit that it certainly made me think of my own family tradition as a familiar sign of hospitality. However, Rose waited until the end of the soap opera on television to really start talking to me, or anyone else, although she had made comments about

¹⁶²In her M.A thesis entitled "Aspects of Contemporary Courtship in a Rural Newfoundland Community," Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1987, Kathryn Kimiecik remembers having had a similar experience when she recounts her first trip to Welch's Cove.

"the story."¹⁶³ It was only later that I realised the importance of the soap operas in women's communication was not to be neglected. In an article entitled "Other Worlds: The Folktale and Soap Opera in Newfoundland's French Tradition," Gerald Thomas pointed out that "There is enough similarity between the real life of French Newfoundlanders (and others) and the soap opera plots to suggest a high degree of personal identification."¹⁶⁴

I spent that afternoon chatting with Rose and Jean and eventually was invited to go to a dance, two weeks later, at the Piccadilly Lounge, a club located in the community of Piccadilly, approximately a thirty-minute drive from Cape St. George.

¹⁶³Most Newfoundlanders call the soap operas "the story" or "my story."

¹⁶⁴Gerald Thomas, "Other Worlds: The Folktale and Soap Opera in Newfoundland's French Tradition," *Folklore Studies in Honour of Herbert Halpert*, eds. Kenneth S. Goldstein and Neil V. Rosenberg (St John's: Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1980) 347.

Second Outing And First Tape-Recorded Interview

I next went to Cape St. George on the 4th of December 1982. It was a Saturday and I was going to stay the weekend. This time I had brought a tape-recorder with me. I was really a newcomer to the discipline of folklore and to the process of fieldwork but I had had further conversations with Gerald Thomas, and had decided that I was going to try to collect some folktales from Rose. I was very enthusiastic about the novelty of the experience, and would have jumped at any opportunity to test my non-existent skills. I told Gerald about my intention of collecting folktales and he encouraged me to do so, but to wait for the right moment to start taping. It was a question of intuition as well as an ethical one. That is, I did not want to impose my work or schedule on my potential informant. Also, I did not want to appear either polite or impolite. I felt that in this particular instance mere politeness, whether positively or negatively expressed, would have impinged, by its superficial nature, on the quality of sensitivity necessary to establish any meaningful relationship or rapport between the members of this family and myself.

In Cape St. George storytelling, specifically folktale narration as a formal expression of verbal art, is highly regarded in terms of traditional aesthetics in that it carries more weight than conversation or talk.¹⁶⁵ One

¹⁶⁵For more information on this particular issue see Roger Abrahams, "The Complex Relations of Simple Forms," *Genres* 2 (1969): 104-28)

person is attributed the role of entertainer and by virtue of performance, changes a conversational communicative event into a more theatrical one in which speaker and listener become performer and audience.¹⁶⁶ With reference to this particular issue, William Hugh Jansen wrote a groundbreaking article as early as 1957, in which he addressed the questions of meaning and degree of performance:

... When one speaks of verbal folklore, one must employ the term *performance* in something like its theatrical or dramatic definition. The very existence of a piece of verbal folklore, however insignificant, implies an auditor, frequently a group of auditors, and of course, some person or occasionally persons to "do" that piece of folklore for that audience. This truism applies to language itself, for in its existence also, a speaker and a hearer are implicit. But in folklore, the element that I can find no term for except *performance* does not exist until the "doer" the speaker or the reciter of the bit of folklore, steps outside himself as an individual and assumes a pose toward his audience, however small, that differs from his everyday, every-hour-in-the-day relationship to that same audience.¹⁶⁷

The following quote should also be read as an example of reconciliation between humanist and social sciences approach to folklore, the two modes of description should by no means be exclusive of each other. Thus it is a demanding responsibility for a stranger to decide when to initiate such a performance situation. I believe, in fact, that under normal circumstances it is not for the stranger to make such a request. The thought of having done it myself in the early stages of my fieldwork was

¹⁶⁶See: Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth S. Goldstein, eds., *Folklore, Performance and Communication* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975).

¹⁶⁷William Hugh Jansen, "Classifying Performance in the Study of Verbal Folklore," *Studies in Folklore in Honor of Distinguished Service Professor Stith Thompson*, ed. W.E. Richmond (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1957) 112-13.

then immediately brought home together with a feeling of genuine embarrassment.

I arrived at "The Cape" around noon. The Murphys were waiting for me and welcomed me most heartily. As I was soaking wet (I had hitchhiked my way in), Rose immediately gave me dry clothes. Then she asked me if I was hungry, and although I was actually starving I said "No" to see what her reaction would be (in my own tradition, one is expected to refuse twice before accepting the food). So she asked me again in a more insistent manner and when I said "not really," she came and put the food on the table and "ordered" me to eat. "*Mange!*" she said. When I had finished she gave me a second serving, at the same time asking me if I wanted more. I was not really expected to answer. Throughout the meal I noticed that butter was always on the table as it would be in Brittany. I was interested to find out if there were any similarities between the two cultures.

Soon after, Rose's son Bernard came home from work and everybody, including me, had dinner together: in other words I acted as a perfect glutton and ate twice in the space of twenty minutes. I found out later that "lunch" is not usually a meal shared by the whole family but rather a collation that may be eaten individually; eating then takes on the practical function of feeding oneself as opposed to being an excuse for socializing. However, as there were two guests (Jean and myself) in the

house at this time, an exception was made. Moreover, Jean does not visit her home community very often, so every effort seemed to be made to let her socialize with as many people as possible. This rule usually applies for any member of a family visiting from away and functions as an acceptable cause triggering social gatherings.

At 1.30 p.m., Rose turned on the TV and I watched it together with Rose and Jean. Later in the afternoon, Rose agreed to tell me a couple of stories. I realised later that as it was Saturday there were no soap operas scheduled. Like many older women in the community, Rose watches the "soaps" every afternoon, so I was lucky indeed to have chosen a day when she would be able to tell me some stories.¹⁶⁸

However, when I returned to Corner Brook, I realised that I had not brought a microphone and had used the condenser microphone on the machine. The material turned out to be almost inaudible. I blamed my mistake on the absent-minded folklore professor at the college who should have told me to bring one along. But after all I had only asked for a tape-recorder.

¹⁶⁸Gerald Thomas relates a collecting experience with Mrs. Murphy, when she began speeding up a story in order to finish in time to watch "the story." *Les Deux Traditions* 64.

When I eventually went to St John's for Christmas, I informed Gerald Thomas about my "fieldtrips" and mentioned that I would be able to visit Cape St. George more often during the next semester because Bob Murphy, Rose's twenty-year old grandson, was going to be one of my students.

The Mediator

When Bob arrived in Corner Brook in January 1983, he knew "all about [me] and [my] visits to his grandmother's." He was fluent in French and seemed happy to meet somebody who was interested in his culture. So he offered to take me along each time he intended to go home, particularly during the mid-term break. My next trip to Cape St. George was in Bob's company, in early February 1983.

We hitchhiked from Corner Brook on the 4th of February, leaving at approximately 1.30 p.m. and arriving in Cape St. George at around five o'clock. Bob's grandmother, Rose, had made supper and welcomed us warmly. Somehow, being with Bob was an indicator that I was slowly becoming accepted by the family. My status at that point was slowly evolving from that of outsider to "teacher-friend" of Bob's. It must be noted that Bob himself enjoyed a higher educational status than his siblings, relatives and friends in the community. I am not sure whether his status as such was envied, but Bob seemed to be the object of a mixture of "fear"

and respect. His educational status conferred on him a certain amount of respect from his peers, especially regarding his knowledge of formal English, and of the administrative system (Social Services and the Unemployment Insurance Commission) on which almost everybody's economic well-being depended. "He/she goes to University" was a phrase I heard quite often, meaning that such a person was an authority on certain matters and could be helpful. Bob was well aware of this, as well as of the "mystery" that surrounded the university world. Thus to a certain extent he considered me his "backup," a role which I was not always quite prepared to play.¹⁶⁹

He introduced me to his parents and thus I extended my circle of acquaintance within the Murphy family, beyond the grandmother's household which consisted of Rose, Bernard and Jean.

After supper my inquisitive mind was alarmed by mention of a custom of which I had never heard. Rose was going to Bob's mother's baby shower. She explained what it was about, and although I could not attend, I was fascinated as any enthusiastic and naive newcomer to the field of folklore would have been. There was indeed customary practice of a traditional nature going on in the community. This reinforced my intention to spend more time in Cape St. George and study its folklore.

¹⁶⁹Again Kathryn Kimiecik describes similar experiences. She had a friend in St. John's who also belonged to the community she studied (Kimiecik, 1987).

That evening, Bob and I went for a beer at the *Salon du Cap*. There was to have been a women's darts contest but it had been cancelled on account of the shower. That made me even more curious, the more so because it all seemed so natural to Bob. Considered from a retrospective standpoint, the cancellation of one event to the benefit of another raises two points concerning the existence and importance of exclusively women's gatherings, whether of an informal or formal nature. On the one hand, it seemed possible that women in Cape St. George might attach degrees of importance to different kinds of women's gatherings. Such degrees of importance might be measured in terms of the traditional status of the event; thus a baby shower would enjoy higher status because of its relationship to birth as an elemental rite of passage respected by the community as a whole. However, given the fact that a baby shower is attended exclusively by women and in some cases happens approximately one month before delivery, the cancelling of one exclusively female social gathering for the benefit of another might indicate yet another value shared by women as a group that is, support for the expectant mother from her peers. On the other hand, this cancellation might be interpreted as indicative of men's lack of awareness of women's traditions in a general sense but specifically of exclusively female gatherings. As for our evening at the bar, Bob was never known to go to women's darts on his own, and although he did not know about the cancellation of the dart game, showing me around was a way for him to satisfy his curiosity about an exclusive women's gathering. As it turned out, the bartender informed us about the cancellation and we left.

Although this particular outing did not prove as successful as it might have been, I realised how useful it could be to be in the company of an insider who has had outside experience as well.¹⁷⁰ Bob turned out to be very helpful about various aspects of everyday life which I had noticed and written down without, however, understanding their full significance. When I used to quiz him later in Corner Brook he never seemed to get tired of my questions, as it was for him an extra opportunity to speak French.

As the contest had been cancelled, there was, according to Bob, no good reason for us to stay there, otherwise "people will think that we are seeing each other" and "it's not good for your work, they'll be jealous." This remark is indicative of individual and group attitudes in Cape St. George. Its introductory "formula": "people will think," often occurs in one-to-one conversational situations to demarcate the individual from the community and to create a sense of complicity between the interlocutors.¹⁷¹ It also indicates people's awareness of gossip as a potentially negative recreational activity. It is not what people "think" that really matters, but what people are likely to "broadcast" around the community. This kind of remark also shows the importance granted to

¹⁷⁰The insider/outsider issue during fieldwork was discussed at some length with Gerald Thomas who did a lot of fieldwork with Mainland native Geraldine Barter. It was also discussed later during a seminar with Dr. Neil Rosenberg at Memorial University. The problem is also dealt with by authors of fieldwork-related material (e.g. Goldstein, 1964; Spradley, 1972; Jackson, 1979).

¹⁷¹Kimiecik deals with the particular issue of courtship and has investigated in detail the meaning and consequences of this rhetoric.

public places and social gatherings, in that they are considered as arenas for the display of activity that may or may not lead to gossip. In other words, people, being aware of these qualities granted to the public domain, can use them to their own advantage. We will see later how this can be achieved.

Bob, then, used this remark as a reason to leave the *Salon du Cap* and we went on to Moira Parker's house, across the road from Bob's. He introduced me to Moira and her son Colin who was home at the time. Apparently the Parkers had already heard about me, and Colin, who was then a bachelor in his late forties, started to fill me in on Cape St. George history. The Parkers, who spoke French most of the time, turned out to be very informative. Moira, who was in her late sixties, was fascinated by strangers and seemed very happy to share her memories of earlier visitors. As it happened I knew some of the names she mentioned and was fairly well acquainted with a few of these visitors. The conversation could as well have been about the weather, as far as content was concerned, since it served the same function -- to break the ice and to begin getting acquainted. However, as soon as I mentioned that I knew some of Moira's earlier visitors, I sensed I was entering the "check-out game" that is they were trying to ascertain my position with regard to people we all knew. I realised that my hosts were very attentive to what I had to say about common acquaintances. My reactions on this particular occasion were to determine, as far as was possible, my future relationship with the Parkers.

According to family tradition, the Parkers live in the oldest house in Cape St. George. It is a two storey house (most houses there are bungalows). Apparently a lot of visitors stop there, as I noticed when Moira had me sign her guest book before I left. She seemed to be proud of having encountered people from faraway places. I noticed that in her conversations she never had anything negative to say about outsiders, or at least she never had in front of me. This, however, did not necessarily apply to local residents or outsiders who had been adopted by the community and consequently were subject to similar rules of behaviour as its members, but nevertheless had transcended their assigned position.

After three hours of conversation, we eventually went back to Bob's mother's house. She was seven months pregnant and had just returned from her baby shower with a big box full of presents. She was proud to report that there were five more boxes to come. When we went back to Rose's, the men had just finished playing cards. It seems to be common practice that whenever women have an "official" reason to get together, their husbands use the opportunity to organize "parallel" gatherings, usually in the form of card games. The opposite however, is not necessarily true.

The next day I played cribbage ("crib") with Rose until "story time" on television, and eventually she agreed to tell me more stories. Later, her sister Rhonda came in and joined in the tale-telling. I realised as soon as

Rhonda walked in that I had become a stranger again; Rose was now telling the story to Rhonda rather than to me. When my friend Lise Bergeron, who had just come for the day, walked in, Rose stopped telling her stories. She saw Lise as an intruder and she did not know her well enough to feel at ease with her present.

In the evening, Lise and I went to the *Centre des Terreneuviens Français* (called the French centre by most people in the community) with Bob. There was a Candlemas party. Everybody stared at us wondering who Lise was; apparently, from the seemingly suspicious comments I overheard, they were wondering who "was the woman with the girl from France." The band was mainly playing country music, and during the breaks, an accordion player played traditional tunes. I had the impression that these were two sides of the same culture, as the same enthusiasm was engendered by both kinds of music.

Concluding Remarks On Early Fieldwork In The Community

To recapitulate, then, my 1983 fieldwork experience had been valuable for two reasons, in addition to the data I collected. My first lesson was that it is indeed very helpful to be introduced to potential informants by a mediator. A second element which indeed worked to my advantage, was my country of origin. Even if the similarities between my French background and that of my informants were slight, it helped to break the

ice many a time. As a matter of fact, I realised that local history was an important part of conversation in Cape St. George, although men more often than women were, if not concerned about their origins, at least curious about the "old country." They saw me and on occasion accepted me as the authority whenever conversations or arguments revolved around France. However, it was sometimes difficult for me to assume this position because their conversation related to events which had occurred long before my time and of which I had little knowledge. Moreover, my historical knowledge of their settlement at this point was formal and had been acquired through written accounts, mostly pointed out to me by Gerald Thomas and later on by members of my own family who developed an interest in my field of study.¹⁷² Theirs was informal and had been conveyed through oral sources. Therefore, not only did I feel spatially dislocated but also temporally out of place, despite the fact that I had done preliminary readings about the history of the area and its people.

Nevertheless I did not mind and even enjoyed sharing my experience as I saw this as a way of repaying them for the information they were giving me. They were never reluctant to share their experience of life, or if they were, I was not aware of it at the time.

¹⁷²My family's interest in a way complemented that of my informants from Cape St. George, the former being interested in where some of their ancestors might have gone, the latter in where they might have come from.

During this early fieldwork, I was mainly interested in collecting folktales. In this respect, Mrs. Murphy was my main informant. Before recording sessions I explained to Rose that I saw the tape recorder as a tool that would help me remember the stories she told me. However, the fact could not be hidden from either of us that the tape-recorder was also an extra pair of ears which would not only pick up every word in her storytelling and our preliminary conversations, but would also keep a record of this information forever. It is interesting to note that it was Rose who insistently warned me against the misuses of the machine, the most important one for her being that under no circumstances should the tapes be played before any local audience for, as she said, "that would only lead to trouble and I'd kill you if you did." Although I had never dreamed of transgressing ethical rules, such as divulging material collected from one informant to anybody else in the community without having first obtained permission to do so, I had to promise repeatedly to several people whom I interviewed that I had no intention of doing such a thing.

This request was made of me several times and in an even more insistent manner when I went back to do more substantial work, a couple of years later. I was told that trouble had been made in the past by, as it seems to me, over-enthusiastic students who played some of their recordings to others. As a result, as I found out for myself later, some people had lost trust and literally refused to cooperate with "her and her tape-recorder." It is possible that this kind of attitude prevented me from

recording a few individuals' points of views, specifically regarding political matters in the community; however, I cannot assume that I would have been trusted by these individuals, had previous ethical mistakes of the nature of those described above not been made.

Doing Extensive Fieldwork In Cape St. George

When I went back to Cape St. George in 1985 and 1986, I had by then increased my knowledge of folklore and become familiar with the "ethnography of communication" as an approach to folklore. Ethnography of communication belongs to the broader perspective of ethnoscience which is derived from functionalism and contextualism. Ben-Amos and Goldstein describe ethnography of communication as an approach which:

Requires the formulation of analytical concepts and terms to handle the data; on close scrutiny it appears that there is even a more fundamental need, namely the basic observation of speech behavior itself.¹⁷³

Herminia Meñez uses the expression "ethnography of speaking folklore" and describes it as follows:

The "ethnography of speaking folklore" grows out of the concern among some folklorists today for discovering the "rules" governing what forms or genres of folklore may be performed at a given time and place, by whom, with whom and for whom, and how and why such performance take place.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³Ben-Amos and Goldstein 4.

¹⁷⁴Herminia Meñez, "Filipino-American Erotica and the Ethnography of a Folklore Event," *Folklore Performance and Communication*, eds. D. Ben-Amos and Kenneth S. Goldstein (The Hague: Mouton, 1975) 131.

I became increasingly interested in understanding how specific events, such as informal women's gatherings, function within the community, by determining their meaning and importance to the participants involved.¹⁷⁵

When I started fieldwork, however, my intention was to look for storytellers in order to make a gender-related analysis of their performance. My settling-in was not extremely difficult, given the fact that I had already become acquainted with the Murphys a few years earlier.

In 1985, Bob Murphy was a student in St John's and we saw each other on occasion. When the time came for me to go back to Cape St. George for a fieldtrip I informed him about it, and after having consulted his mother, he offered me accommodation in her house. When I arrived that summer, Joan Murphy had a small room waiting for me. I was lucky in that I did not have to make tremendous efforts to get accepted. I was not exactly a total stranger, but I was not exactly just a visitor anymore. I was going to stay six weeks, and to a certain extent I would be included in family life, and also disturb the routine. My position was not that of a boarder (although I gave Joan money for room and board), but rather that of a friend of the eldest son of the family, who had come to do some work for the University.

¹⁷⁵In the "Introduction Toward Ethnographies of Communication," *American Anthropologist* 66 (1964) 3, Dell Hymes uses "Ethnography of Communication" to describe an interdisciplinary approach which investigates the use of language in situation contexts so as to discern patterns proper to speech activity. According to Hymes, the approach must investigate the communicative habits in the context of the community.

The Hosting Family Household

The household at that time consisted of Sean, his wife Joan, both in their early forties, and three of their children, Bob, Lori and Christy, respectively aged twenty-one, fourteen, and two; Dolores McCarthy, a friend of Bob's, in her mid-twenties, though not officially staying in the house, spent most of her time there, helping Joan in exchange for food and occasional overnight accommodation. Within a week and a half of my stay at the Murphy's home, Dolores had practically moved in.

The house itself was not overly big considering the number of people it had to accommodate. It had a fair-sized kitchen around which three bedrooms and a bathroom were built. The kitchen opened onto a carpeted living room thirty-five metres square which was basically Christy's playground. The kitchen was the room which received most use, as it was not only the eating area but also the gathering centre. A hallway led to the outside door.

Sean, his wife and their youngest offspring shared the largest bedroom, Bob and Lori had each a bunk bed in the middle size one, and I had the smallest room to myself. Dolores would usually sleep on the couch unless Sean had decided to, in which case Lori would sleep with

her mother and the child, and Dolores would have one of the bunk beds. If Bob slept on the couch, then Dolores and Lori would share the middle size room. Joan would occasionally sleep on the couch when Dolores was not in. I never had a turn on the couch, and neither had Lori, probably because she was too young. The one who sleeps on the couch is usually the one who wants to be the last one to retire and one of the first ones to get up in the morning, therefore a younger member of the family is not really allowed to do so. The couch is considered male-territory when used during the day, the rocking chair being the female equivalent. However, at night the couch becomes adult-territory in that children are not allowed to stay up once their mother is asleep.

Sleeping arrangements were, at this point, the most obvious indicator of the "large" number of people sharing a relatively small space and may have been a contributing factor to an incidental outbreak of tension of subsequently minor importance to everyone. At that time Bob was working for the community centre. He was responsible for the organisation of the forthcoming folk festival *Une Longue Veillée* and as a result was extremely busy. His father was unemployed and waiting to get work with a local community project for ten weeks; the unemployment rate in Cape St. George is so high that adults do not have much opportunity to work for wages. Bob supported the family, even if he was not the "family head." Thus as he was working, and had financial responsibility, he took it upon himself to make decisions regarding the routines of his parents, siblings

and friends. He tended to take on responsibilities that were not ultimately his.

His behaviour and his expectations of me came close to jeopardizing my relationship with him and the rest of the family. As I mentioned earlier, Bob expected me to back him up so that he could maintain the respect that his status conferred on him. But I realised that this often meant taking sides in what were to me trivial conflict situations and I decided to remain silent. This, however, led to a situation over which I had no control. Since Bob could not get my support, he finally lost his temper and "threatened" to kick me out, as "I was not part of the family anyway." Luckily for me, his mother finally interfered and he went "for a walk."

The incident resulted in unnecessary tension between the three of us. Bob was upset with his mother and more or less blamed it on me. The small size of the house became all the more confining since I was the only one who had my own room to which I could retire; though the expression "the walls have ears" had a real meaning as the rooms were not soundproof and no one could talk of privacy. The tension remained until my return from the Corner Brook Folk Festival a short while later. I had spent a few days away, and now as far as I knew, everything was fine; nobody's pride had been irrevocably hurt.

As I said above, my prime interest at the time was to continue studying storytellers and storytelling, and I undertook some interviews to that end. Finding informants was not excessively difficult. The difficulties arose, however, when I started to transcribe some of the material for another assignment I was working on. I realised that I was not able to understand the entire content of my recordings. My language abilities may not have been fully adequate at the time and my difficulties with the transcribing were due mostly to the fact that some of my informants' enunciation was hampered by their not wearing their dentures as well as by the effects of aging on their vocal chords. I was confused by all this because although the material was there, I was unable to deal with it.

I decided to stop interviewing for a couple of days and think about the consequences of undertaking a project which might not be supported by accurate documentation. From then on, I became aware of and interested in the potential study of informal women's gatherings as a customary practice.

Awareness of Women's Informal Social Gatherings as a Customary Activity

Joan Murphy's house is next to the post office. A couple of Joan's friends usually drop in for a visit on their way back from the post office. It is time then for a cup of tea and a cigarette along with the customary exchange of

news. I did not become aware of this practice until I started to stay at home in the mornings; then it became clear that custom was being observed. Joan would expect her friends to drop by at that time of the day to take a break for approximately an hour.

Joan would become busy looking out the window and start chatting with me about her friends who would "certainly be here in a few minutes." Jane and Alice would come by, sometimes together, sometimes not. Jane and Alice are neighbours and live a few houses east on the road from Joan's. Other "regulars" were Ann and Brenda, who live in the same neighbourhood or cluster of houses as Jane and Alice. These five women are of approximately the same age, Jane and Alice being slightly younger than the others (in their early or mid-thirties) Ann, Brenda and Joan in their early forties. However, there are other characteristics that bind the group together, characteristics which will be more closely examined in the next chapter. Our point here is that all these women knew each other and spent a fair amount of time, at least ten hours a week, in each other's company or talking over the phone.

It is because I was there during these morning gatherings that I was introduced to this particular group of friends. Little by little my presence was accepted as normal and my opinion was sought on various topics arising from the conversation. My role, which I would in academic terms define as participant observer, a position I had made clear to them, was

being established and accepted as such by the group. Thanks to these morning social gatherings, my relationship with Joan became friendlier and she started to take me into her confidence. Our conversations turned out to be a great help in trying to define the parameters of my project. Joan was interested in talking about what she would refer to as "talk" and what I would call "group dynamics," hers being the most precise term in this case. Our different use of language almost never posed a problem, and if I was caught using jargon from time to time she would be the one to reformulate my sentences in ordinary speech.

When I made the decision to change my initial project to the study of informal women's gatherings, I spread the word around. This was particularly easy to do since people, when they met me, were always asking me "So how's your work going?" Then, instead of my usual reply "Pretty good, thank you," I would let them know that I had thought over my primary topic and changed it to the present one. The response when expressed, was generally positive and interested. On the one hand, men would agree with the idea because in their words "Women always find ways to get together and talk, they know everything about everybody."¹⁷⁶ On the other hand, women were also positive about it, probably because somebody was finally ready to pay attention to their existence as a group.

¹⁷⁶Fieldnotes; Cape St. George, July 1985.

One of the "ways" that the group of friends described above would find to get together was work. A group of women would get together to work on a project, such as the making of curtains.

It was within this context that the informal gatherings would take place. Interaction would revolve around work. During these gatherings conversation would be about children, but also about the quality of life as seen through material culture-related values, as expressed for instance by choice of clothing they would exchange. Because, as the participants noticed, these gatherings resemble "old time carding sprees," one finds a lot of narratives being told, especially in the form of anecdotes, or personal reminiscences of the past. With reference to "Old Time Carding Sprees" or "Spinning Bees" as a former mode of gathering, Elizabeth Sellars made the following comment:

Women would often get together . . . These would be parties, "frolics" or "bees," when one woman of the community would invite others to visit her and all would work together. The work performed would be done for the hostess, who was obliged to supply the wool used, since it was only their time and work that the women donated. Sometimes the women of the community would get together to work for a less fortunate family, and in this case each would supply a certain amount of wool as well. The hostess would also supply refreshments which would be eaten around midnight, usually after more than five hours' work. During the "frolic" women would talk, joke, tell stories and discuss community and family interests. No men would attend these parties and often "the men didn't have to hear what was said." Women would have this type of parties for carding, in which case the party would be called *une carderie*, they would have spinning parties called

[une filerie] and knitting parties called [une brocherie].¹⁷⁷

Methods Of Collecting

I was lucky to find a "helper." One younger woman, Barbara, who used to visit Joan occasionally, as she was one of Joan's husband's cousins, showed interest in my work and would often arrange meetings for me. She understood that I was interested in participating in women's gatherings but did not quite grasp the concept of informality as such. Her way of organising gatherings was very straightforward. She would phone her mother or her mother's friends, who lived a couple of miles away, choose a date which would be convenient for everybody, and then ask me to be ready for the eight o' clock bus to go and spend the whole day in their company, until ten o' clock at night. I would usually record only a couple of hours of conversation, in French or English depending on the composition of each group. I was also able to observe their activities

¹⁷⁷See Elizabeth C. Sellars, "Aspects of the Traditional Life of French Newfoundlanders of Black Duck Brook (L'Anse-à-Canards, Port-au-Port, Newfoundland) With Special Emphasis on the Role of Women," M.A. Thesis, Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1978, 122. The informants of Margaret Bennett, another folklorist who studied folklife in the Codroy valley recall having spinning bees during summer days: "Mrs. MacArthur laughed as she recalled the enjoyment they used to get from going to a neighbour's spinning bee; not only was a tremendous amount of work accomplished, but they also experienced the great pleasure of getting together for a day's conversation, laughter, and singing -- a rare luxury in a woman's life in those early days." See: Margaret Bennett, *The Last Stronghold: Scottish Gaelic Traditions in Newfoundland* (St John's: Breakwater, 1989) 152. Hilda Murray on the other hand, did not recall any such events on the North-East Coast of Newfoundland; see: Hilda Murray, *More than 50%* (St John's: Breakwater, 1979) 65-74.

during the day, and complement the recorded data with notes I would write down at night or the next morning.

The difference between these gatherings and the ones at Joan's house lies in the degree of spontaneity. At Barbara's mother's, the participants were expecting to be tape-recorded and would think about topics related to women's lore and experience beforehand. Initially, interviews were thus semi-directed. After a little while, the atmosphere would grow more relaxed and what was originally a semi-directed interview would turn into a non-directed one. These interview techniques enabled the collection of women's folklore by allowing conversation to be the transmission process through which personal experience narratives would be shared. Non-directed or open-ended interviews would sometimes evolve to the point where the situation become one in which conversation would flow uninterrupted by ethnographic or other questions from the fieldworker. It is in those situations that folklore pertaining to or emanating from the exchange of news and gossip would be tape-recorded. However, my opinion regarding local gossip was less sought by this group of participants than the former.

I also arranged to interview participants in each group individually, about their life history and their personal perception of topics which had been previously discussed in group situations. Topics would include women-related subjects such as courtship, birth-control, child-raising and the like.

Many women's gatherings happened on Bingo nights. The participants in these gatherings were mostly widows. It is by chance that I became aware of such gatherings. One day I had made arrangements with Rose Murphy for an interview but she changed her mind and simply told me that she would not be able to make it because she was not coming back home that night. She was going to go back to her sister's home for a "spree" after bingo. Rose, her sister and two other elderly women would meet at bingo games, which took place three times a week. When the games were over they would all get on the same bus and get off at one or the other's place. Such gatherings, which implied staying overnight for most or sometimes all participants, were planned beforehand. The reason why they happened on bingo nights is of a practical nature. Participants could use the bingo bus as a mode of transportation and the next morning they would take the regular bus to get back home.

These "after bingo sprees" can be considered as leisure activities in that they did not happen on what I would call and refer to here as "stolen time." By "stolen time" I imply the amount of time that women take from that which is normally used for other obligations (e.g. housework and time devoted to living-in members of the family). Such free time, in the case of married women and often to a lesser extent their widowed mothers, is usually carefully saved and planned. Joan for instance would often make comments about having to finish such and such a chore quickly so that

she could go and visit her friends. Likewise, similar comments were often made during phone conversations. The participants involved were widows without dependent children and therefore duly entitled to such leisure activities. Compared to married women, they did not have heavy responsibilities and tasks to discharge. As we will see in the next chapter, the content of these events is, in a way, more readily decipherable than the content of other women's gatherings: the internal pattern or structure and the genres are more easily identified.

As I was intrigued by these meetings and saw in them yet another aspect of women's life in the community, I asked Rose if I could join her and her friends at some of these sprints. She checked with them and eventually gave me a positive answer.

This enhanced my awareness of the fact that I had finally been given a role by this part of the community. The group had rationalized my presence as a fieldworker in the sense that they had found what they considered a satisfactory reason to accept my presence although it was never clearly stated to me as such. Considering the nature of my research topic, I needed contact with and acceptance by a group of people, especially as I had been previously mistaken by some residents for a welfare officer or some other kind of unwanted government intruder. To go to these gatherings I would go with Rose on the bingo bus, where an average of some eighty-five percent of the fifty or so passengers were

women, attending the bingo game; and then I would go along with the group of participants afterwards to the "spree," as they called it.

During these "after bingo" gatherings I used a non-directive technique during the recording sessions and just let the tape-recorder run. I must admit that at the beginning, the participants were a bit anxious about the presence of the tape-recorder. They would subtly indicate their wariness by asking me if the microphone was "well plugged" or if "the tape [was] on now?" However, after a short period during which I would try to ease the atmosphere by initiating talk about some relatively insignificant event that might have happened during the bingo game, the group would converse freely.

Stress And Politics: Problems Affecting Fieldwork.

In order to maintain the chronological evolution of these related fieldwork experiences, and so as to preserve the ethical perspective with which I was concerned for the whole period during which fieldwork was conducted, I will present and discuss here the major problems I encountered in the course of these initial and relatively lengthy stages of data collecting. During my stay in Cape St. George in the summers of 1985 and 1986, which I thought would be sufficient to gather the necessary data for this project, I was faced with a certain number of problems, which I am sure affected my work and my position in the community in various ways.

The kind of observation I was making required alertness twenty-four hours a day. Also, for one group of participants, I depended on Barbara, in that the group associated me with her. Moreover, she seemed to attach a lot of importance to her role as mediator. It enhanced her status in the community, for as another person once said "...it feels good to be seen walking around with the researcher."¹⁷⁸

Barbara occupied somewhat of a marginal place in her family and among her neighbours in that they did not actively seek her company as often as they would other people's. Barbara appeared to me to be a lonely person, although I never heard her actually complain about it. It is my guess that Barbara knew about how other members of the community perceived her, and that by making it public that she was "helping [me] with [my] work," she would change their perception. I must admit that I was too shy to talk to her about it. I was not really in any position to remedy the situation. On the one hand, I could not refuse Barbara's help, and on the other, I could not stop people's comments either. I must admit however, that Barbara's enthusiasm was occasionally oppressive. She did not always realize that I might on occasion be tired. When we came back from her mother's or from somebody else's place at ten o' clock at night the day was not necessarily over for me, since sometimes I had some more visiting or writing to do, and quite often I would get very little sleep before another day would start.

¹⁷⁸Conversation; Cape St. George, July 1986.

It came to the point where once or twice I had to find excuses not to go to meetings that had been arranged by Barbara without my knowledge. I could not really reprimand her for not consulting me, as she was in fact doing me favours by setting up those meetings. She was certainly anticipating them much more than I did. I could not lie to her either by saying that I had arranged an interview with someone else, as I am a poor liar. So the only excuse appeared to be physically indisposed for a short period of time; although one of the excuses I used could obviously not be used again two weeks later.

Despite all these minor problems, Barbara was very helpful to me during interviews, as she had the insider's insight. Her keen interest often led her to bring up very interesting subjects.¹⁷⁹ Each group always displayed a certain amount of harmony even if it was only temporary.

Other occasional internal tensions, such as the one I mentioned at the Murphys', contributed, to a certain extent, to the stress that was mainly due to the lack of privacy and the consequent lack of sleep. Privacy is not necessarily highly thought of in small communities. In fact, staying alone is often interpreted as being ill or in a bad mood. No one in the family ever seemed to want to retire to their room. After a while I was dying to be on my own, even if it were only for a couple of hours.

¹⁷⁹See John Szwed, *Private Cultures, Public Imagery* (St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1966) 84-120.

I had two ways of coping with this. To remove myself from the community, I would go in my room and "sleep" or read, or, as once happened, a friend of mine came to visit for a couple of days and we went for hikes in the mountains. This was very helpful because when my friend left I was ready to start working again.

Before I left the Port-au-Port Peninsula to go back to St John's I also spent a few days with friends in another community in order to re-adapt myself. However, when I did come back to St John's, I found that I was unable to cope with small group situations without acting as a participant observer. Fortunately this post-fieldwork syndrome only lasted a few days.

Another problem I had was related to the fact that the community had at that time split into two groups over the issue of the French Centre. The executive had changed and not everybody agreed on the whys and wherefores of the matter. As it happened, I was boarding in the home of the parents of an ex-member of the executive and was, therefore, viewed by part of the community as "being on their side"; but as I was doing interviews with people who were "on the other side" as well, it did not take long for me to be perceived as a "spy."

Although I thought of it, I decided against changing residence as my stay there had been arranged before the issue arose. I had to be very diplomatic however, in trying to explain to people that it was not for me, as

an outsider, to take part in or make any judgment on the matter; but once I had been accepted by a "mixed" ("pros" and "cons") group, my problem was solved.

The following anecdote describes an event which, though it sounds humorous now, also interfered with my fieldwork and the "credibility" I had presumably established in the community.

At the time this fieldwork was taking place I was on a student visa which had to be renewed annually. For administrative reasons which I will not detail here, I had previously arranged to meet with the immigration authorities. They would notify me and meet me in Stephenville. The deadline was getting closer and closer and there was still no sign of them, until one Sunday at noon, during my third week in the field the phone rang and the immigration officer announced himself on the line. Joan, who had answered the phone, handed it to me saying "It's for you. I think it's the cops!" It turned out that I had to leave immediately to be in St John's the next day to have my passport stamped. The officer with whom I had made arrangements had gone on vacation, and the matter had been forgotten. The officer on the phone was very uncooperative and I had no alternative but to go to St. John's. Of course, there were no buses that day, I had no car, and no other way out than my thumb. I left immediately with the Parkers who were going as far as Stephenville. I explained to Sean and Joan that this was only a formality and I would be back soon. Joan said, "Well if you have to go you have to go...."

I came back five days later, only to realize that the rumour was going around that "The cops had called and I had to rush back to St John's to appear in court or I'd be deported." I will never know the full nature and all the different versions of that rumour, but it took a while to re-establish some kind of professional credibility around the place. I actually had to show the stamp on my passport to several people before they believed my story. In a sense however, the rumour benefited me. After that incident almost everybody knew who I was, and somehow it 'became easier to talk to people. They were interested in hearing any personal "cop stories" and mine was pretty unusual if not totally foreign to the local repertoire.

During my stays in Cape St. George in 1985 and 1986, I gathered a significant amount of tape-recorded data. Approximately seventy hours of interviews were conducted with individuals as well as with small groups of people. All groups discussed above were equally represented. In addition to the tape-recorded data, I kept diaries and compiled fieldnotes so as to account for factual information as well as for my own reactions to, and interpretation of, the various situations encountered.

It was at that point that I was going to conclude my fieldwork, as I had, in my opinion, collected a sufficient amount of data. However, when I started to review the material, I realised that information concerning the social background was lacking. I had not paid enough attention to the social conditions in which the community was living. For instance, my

interest in the political situation had been limited by my ethical concerns and by my desire to remain neutral. My attention to traditional aspects of the groups I was studying had been directed, to a certain extent, to the detriment of the sociocultural context. It would have been difficult then to draw any pertinent conclusions without having substantial sociocultural references to fall back on. A focus on "tradition" to the exclusion of "social context" is generally the product of an undue or unexamined view of folklore as "commodity" as "items" to be "collected". The ethnography of communication approach, if fully assimilated, should correct that. But the problem of defining "folklore" over against other forms of communicative behaviour remains, here, especially in daily, informal conversational settings. Margaret Mills suggested that the best procedure is not to mystify the notion of "folklore", but to stake out the territory more widely. Folklorists study how people constitute and maintain group membership by more or less conventionalised communicative actions or patterns of actions.¹⁸⁰ Therefore I decided to go back in the field in the summer of 1987 in order to consolidate my previously collected data with information relevant to the sociocultural context. Thus it was necessary to understand "public" events and institutions in order to understand the private sphere, as the two are intertwined and the boundaries between them sometimes fuzzy.

¹⁸⁰Communication with Margaret Mills, 15 Nov. 1991.

My use of the term "sociocultural context" here refers to the circumstances of the gatherings, as well as the atmosphere of the community, that is, events either external or internal which nevertheless affect the community as a whole. Such events might include for example a "beer strike," the announcement of new income tax reforms, or the emergence of child-molesting cases on the Port-au-Port Peninsula. Almost everyone in the community felt and expressed at one time or another his or her concerns regarding the sociocultural context.

Final Fieldtrip: Gathering Circumstantial Data

During my stay in the summer of 1987, I concentrated my efforts on taking notes relating to more general and public aspects of community life. I also interviewed key figures in the community. The mayor shared his views with me on the overall political scene in Cape St. George. The coordinator of the French Centre helped me to trace back the history and investigate the evolution of the organization and its aims. She also agreed to explain the mechanisms of the dispute that had occurred the previous summer. It was interesting to note that my conversations with both these community leaders brought to light an important aspect of the dynamics of the community. It seems that people in Cape St. George have their own understanding of the public domain. Thus, problems occurring were mainly due to the gap between this cognitive interpretation of facts and the more rigid structure of public organization. For instance in the "French

Centre affair," complaints had been made by certain members about missing files. The other party answered that these files were never missing, because they had not existed. Information had been kept and transmitted orally like any other traditional information. Thus conflict arose between guardians of the traditional way and "innovators" who wanted the organization to get credit and credibility.

I also attended meetings of the local Women's Institute in order to have an idea of what a formal women's gathering would be like. The same phenomenon as described above was in process. Attempts were made to give, and keep, some kind of formally structured order to the meetings; that is, to follow certain procedures similar to "Robert's Rules of Order," but soon a more traditional way of interacting took over, and the recognition of authority, linked to hierarchical roles and privileges, gave way to recognition of authority linked to more traditional community values, such as respect for the elderly or the best joke teller. In some ways, these meetings tended to be similar to some of the "after bingo" gatherings I had attended.

That summer I spent a lot of time at home, talking to Joan. I realized that she was suddenly concerned about her daughter's future, not only in terms of work but mostly in terms of her relationships with boys. Lori was now sixteen, an age when her mother could not "ground" her anymore. Teenage daughters' education was an important topic of conversation

among Joan, Jane and Ann, who all had to deal with the same issue. Ann and Jane expected Joan to give them advice but realized that although Joan had had three teenagers to deal with before, they were all boys. Thus the three women had many conversations about the "pill," whether or not they should let their daughters go to dances, choose their own clothes, have their own rooms, smoke, and so on. They referred many times to the way they were educated when they were growing up, but admitted that times had changed and that they could not possibly treat their daughters in the same way. This topic of conversation had hardly been mentioned in previous years as their daughters had not yet reached that critical age. The mothers' conversations re. rearing teenaged girls can be seen as the use of a traditional medium to confront a traditional problem i.e. avoiding pre-marital pregnancy, but also as using a more "modern" solution to the problem.

It is noticeable that my opinion was very often sought with regard to this particular topic of conversation. It is possible that the group was ready to listen to any other woman's point of view on the matter. I was an interesting source of information because of my different background; I was between mothers and daughters, ten years younger than the former group and ten years older than the latter. Belonging to that age group probably played in my favour, in that I could communicate with both groups.

Although data on such a topic as informal women's gatherings is always available and always evolving, I decided finally to put an end to the collecting stage of the project. The situation and the composition of the various groups changed over the years. Some people had died, others had changed their marital or family status. But such modes of expression and interaction as those which will be described in the analysis of the informal women's gatherings presented here, keep their customary aspects and traditional validity. We will see how this mode of customary behaviour contributes to the consideration of women as a folk group in Cape St. George.

Concluding Remarks

The account itself is essentially based on field diaries which were kept on a day-to-day basis throughout. Ethical concerns that are presented here arise from the methodology employed. The fieldwork account is based on two different diaries: one, which contained factual data directly relevant to the experience itself, included such information as names of informants, dates and interview circumstances, interiors descriptions, a map detailing the position and the occupancy of houses in the community, weather information and the like. The second diary, on the other hand, included personal information relevant to my state of mind. I related my feelings vis-à-vis situations, individuals, my position in the community, as well as outside information. I included here the news I was receiving from and

about friends in St. John's and elsewhere and the titles of the books I was reading. I wrote about my frustrations or elations.

There are two reasons for keeping two separate diaries. They lie in the methodological and ethical realms. On the one hand the keeping of those diaries enabled me, to a certain extent, to separate personal feelings from my work, in order to avoid culture-bound interpretation as much as possible, as well as to stay clear-headed. However, I must admit that the line was sometimes hard to draw. On the other hand, it enabled me afterward to measure the influence my state of mind may have had on the conducting of certain interviews or on interpretations I may have given to situations or events in terms of the importance I had attached to them.

As I mentioned above, the ethnographer is selective in the description of culture, and this not only with regard to the choices of documentation, but also to the actual wording of these descriptions. In a way, keeping two different journals helped me to stay aware of this as well as of the fact that after all I would always remain an outsider in people's minds. It kept me away from the "I am fully integrated" trap in the end, although as I have reported, I had felt an increase in the degree of acceptance by the community.

I believe the ethnographer should realise that one can never be fully integrated no matter the effort put into it. One can certainly become aware

of and acquire great insight into the culture studied, but one cannot expect total integration in that an outsider cannot become an insider. Even women who came from outside communities and married into the group are still considered as "outsiders" to an extent.

However, I understand how the feeling of total acceptance and integration would be ideal. This raises the question: "Why do we study cultural groups from the perspective of the outsider?" Although there are various reasons for this, the majority of my acquaintances in folklore studies have had to come to terms to a certain extent with a feeling of marginality which sometimes corresponds to a lack of cultural identity. In many cases, and I will not deny that it is mine, they have been uprooted in one way or another from what could have been a traditional environment with a certain integrity. In some cases, there is a need to go "back" to this environment but it is impossible to do so, because they are no longer members of the group. The problem of course, with such a background, is that one may be inclined to look at a traditional culture with a "romantic" perspective, that is, to consider tradition as something that must be preserved at all costs. Thus there is in some accounts, a certain amount of embellishment that probably comes from a "it didn't or couldn't keep me so

it must be in danger" attitude.¹⁸¹

Some folklorists have been said to consider themselves, and I would hope that this was unconscious on their part, as "saviours" of tradition.¹⁸² This is a trap that I have tried not to fall into. To some extent, conscientious ethnography prevents the writer from this, in that it calls for an accurate description of culture, but again we are still dealing with the problem of selective reporting. At some point during my stay I became aware that items of folklore such as proverbs and sayings were expressed for my own sake. People in Cape St. George are used to visiting folklorists, and by now have formulated an idea, even if we do not share it, of what we are looking for. Thus it is not unusual that occasional displays of folkloric behaviour will take place for the sole purpose of satisfying or at times impressing the fieldworker, but also to test the gullibility of the researcher. I heard of many tricks played on earlier visitors; some of them were very elaborate indeed, and were said to have gone unnoticed. I can recall one particular prank played by community members at the expense

¹⁸¹I am referring here to a conversation I had with my grandmother from Logonna Daoulas, Brittany, in which she argued in a proud but somehow conservative way that Breton scholars such as Pierre-Jakez Hélias held and propagated what she considered alarmist viewpoints about the state of the Breton culture specifically because they had been unwilling and therefore were considered unable to carry on farming or fishing as traditional male activities, and were subsequently brained-washed by irreligious and politically-minded scholars and academics. See Pierre-Jakez Hélias, *Le Cheval d'Orgueil* (Paris: Plon, Collection Terre Humaine, 1975).

¹⁸²See Debora Kodish, "Absent Gender, Silent Encounter," *Journal of American Folklore* 100 (1988): 573-78.

of an undergraduate student. The student was directed to a barn one evening after dark, having been previously led into believing that it was actually a house with no electricity, whose residents were old-timers and avid singers. This happened during one of my visits in Cape St. George in the winter of 1984. When later I read the student's field report as part of my duty as assistant archivist, there was no mention of the prank.

The reader will notice the large number of details at the beginning of this chapter. Although at some point I intended to abbreviate it, I decided against this course of action. This was in order to point out the evolution of my awareness of my role as a fieldworker. I came very close to falling into the "integration" trap. I realise that the beginning of the report, which coincides with the beginning of my fieldwork experience, is indeed tainted with a dash of "romanticism." I was not then fully aware that after all I was intruding into people's routines. They were in fact giving me the hospitality treatment granted to any visitor.

The details provided may at times sound a little too academic if not totally irrelevant, yet more than anything the reporting style results from an attempt to be academically correct, that is, to satisfy what I considered a "requirement." However, a proper examination of details also gives clues to the selective processing of ethnographic information. The fewer the number of petty details, the greater the involvement of the participant observer.

Participant observation as I experienced it was a very progressive process. My involvement with the various groups of women and their informal gatherings grew from observation only to cautious participation. The reason I became a participant is that many of the conversations had to do with the exchange of information and suggestive interpretation of other people's behaviour; namely, gossip. To have remained totally silent and in a strictly observer position would have been awkward after a while, as I would have been perceived as a "busy-nose" or somebody overly curious. However, my non-verbal participation at the beginning was necessary as it was a way to assure the groups that I was not about to go and repeat what I heard, and therefore that I could be trusted.

Eventually then I increased my participation by sharing some of my personal experience narratives relating to whatever topic was being discussed, without nevertheless involving members of the community. This way of participating was appreciated by the groups as the contribution of an external viewpoint. The incongruity of this strategy was that I was getting closer to the groups by asserting my position as an outsider. Although I was consciously doing this, I did not foresee some of the consequences which arose. I did manage to pass as a trustworthy person to an extent which I was soon able to measure.

It came to the point when I was holding more information than any single member of any of the groups. I basically had heard what everybody

had to tell about everybody else, and the load was somewhat heavy to carry. Eventually the situation arose where I had been witness to an argument and was consequently asked to tell my version of the happening. I knew that by doing this I had to take sides or quickly find my way out of this compromising situation. Moreover, a lot of beer had been drunk and the tone of the conversation was becoming louder. Fortunately, on this particular day the crowd was mixed, and I decided to take the men's side rather than that of the women who were arguing. I just said that I did not want to have any part in the whole thing as it was not necessary to have another argument at this point. Although it may have not been the wisest thing to say, it did stop the "fight" between the two women. Instead the women decided to "have a go" at the men. There was to be an argument anyway so I thought I should let everybody who wanted to argue do so, but without me. The next day everything would be forgotten and blamed on alcohol.

With this anecdote, I wish to point out that one cannot easily, if at all, be a full participant and an observer. The concluding note of this chapter remains attached to ethical rules that I have established for myself, from this particular fieldwork experience. The times and experiences that I have shared with the people from Cape St. George, and whatever ethnography comes out of this experience, is only relevant to us. It comes out of a specific relationship which cannot be repeated in any way. It has to be appreciated for what it is and for that only. This ethnographic account can

be considered as documentation of a particular person's experience, but one should be extremely careful before making any general comments or extrapolations that may lead to misrepresentation of the people. Moreover, this fieldwork report as well as the ethnography which follows, has to be understood as a whole. The experience related here is the result of the specific context in which it happened. Without this general context, social, political, cultural, geographical and so on, and without the people who were there or not there at the time, the experience and its report would have been entirely different. I might even add that had I been in a different condition at the time of writing, had I used a different medium, lived in a different place or dealt with different people at the various stages of the experience, the report itself would also have been different. Such a reflexive position on my part does not necessarily preclude the extrapolation of predictive comments about human behaviour in that the situations described remain as they are.

The following chapters spring out of the experience related here, the data is extracted from the interviews I had with the various individuals or groups and the fieldnotes that I gathered. However, I should again remind the reader that the data and their interpretation are not only interdependent, but as a whole depend on the particular interpretation of a unique experience.

Chapter 4

COMPOSITION OF THE VARIOUS GROUPS AND THEIR MODE OF GATHERING

In this chapter, the composition of the various groups of women whose gatherings are under study will be identified. The groups are presented here in terms of the kinship and friendship networks along which they are organised. This organisation is by no means strictly determined; it will be shown that the rules governing the formation of the groups are internally flexible. That is, speech communities result partly from the membership that constitute the informal gatherings and partly from the contextual occasions in which these social gatherings occur. In other words, there is a relation of interdependence between the events and the human components of these events.

Groups essentially constituted by widows hold informal social gatherings whose functions revolve primarily around leisure activities, whereas groups constituted by younger married women or women with children time their gatherings in such a way as to combine work-related activities with their particular need for relaxation and entertainment. However, as will be illustrated by the composition of one particular group, it is not totally unlikely that an occasional gathering will be the outcome of,

or the contextual frame of reference for, communication between members of otherwise differently identified age groups.

Thus a third level of interaction in which communication and transmission of traditional knowledge takes place, involves the participation of members of the same nuclear unit or family, namely mother and daughter. Interaction between such parties varies enormously according to predisposed relationships between the interlocutors, such relationships depending on the nature of the generation gap. Interaction in this case also varies according to the situational context and the composition of the group in which it occurs. To a certain extent such communicative events can also be observed and analysed indirectly or in the absence of one of the interlocutors. That is, reference to mother-daughter communication is often the topic of conversations at informal gatherings of groups of married mothers. It is possible then if not to comment on the observation of direct interaction, to at least account for the values held by mothers and attached to such interaction involving transmission of traditional knowledge to their daughters.

Also, although the possibility to document it accurately did not present itself, I have reason to believe that such verbal exchange between mother and daughter is an important topic of conversation among teenage girls. Interaction involving this particular group is essentially realised through lengthy telephone conversations during which much whispering

and giggling takes place. It is therefore only hypothetically possible to infer that a certain amount of verbal behaviour such as whispering and giggling be attributed to responses to comments associated with existing or non-existing communication between mother and daughter. In other words, it is possible that by acting in such a way when talking to their friends over the phone, daughters may attempt to divert certain topics from their mother's direct attention or, as the case may be, subtly attract the latter's interest to curtail further conversation.

Such instances were observed on several occasions during my stay at the Murphys' when Joan, the mother, would attempt to initiate conversation by questioning her teenage daughter Lori on the content of such telephone exchanges with her peers. Another tactic often employed by the mother to achieve this result was to complain about the length of these calls, occasionally using the almost formulaic turn of phrase "What's so important that you have to spend so much time on the phone?"¹⁸³ It is fairly accurate to say that the older the female generation, the less likely they are to use the phone for their socialisation and gossip.

¹⁸³Fieldwork notes: Cape St. George, 1985, 86, 87. This is certainly not to say that this is the extent of teenage conversation which we all know if we trust our memory can be also very involved.

Elderly Women and Widows

The following section will examine more specifically the immediate surrounding context of informal social gatherings among groups mostly constituted by older women. Membership is most obviously based on age, as it is in fact one of the essential criteria for the definition of this sub-group. However, as evidence will emerge from the outline of the constitution of specific groups, participants are not necessarily all members of the same age groups. In some cases kinship, as well as temporary status, becomes the determining factor for the occasional inclusion in such groups' informal gatherings. Thus, a regular participant's daughter may be present or, less frequently, the presence of a neighbour whose husband is away may be accepted.

The latter situation occurred while I was working with one particular group. In fact my presence at some of their gatherings was facilitated by that of the daughter of one of the participants. Although I was unable to witness it personally, I was told that the group in question had a core of members belonging to the same age group and sharing "widow" status, who would also engage in more "restricted" social gatherings. Reference was often made to these gatherings during the ones I was actually able to attend. The group then, whose members reside exclusively in the

community of Red Brook, adjacent to Degras and a couple of miles away from Cape St. George, can be said to be pretty open to outsiders.

I also witnessed another widows' group's social gatherings. In this case, the group was not as open as the previous one. The group, which was smaller in size, with a maximum of three participants, was age restricted; that is the members were all over seventy years old. Status and friendship, as opposed to kinship, were apparently the essential criteria for participation, although in such a small community one cannot totally rule out the importance of kinship in the establishment of friendship networks.

We will see how these criteria have an emic dimension in that they are defined by the participants rather than by the observer. However, one should be aware that such a definition was not clearly stated by the participants but has been derived ethnoscienceifically from statements and allegations made by the women belonging to these groups.

In comparison to married women, widows generally form a more flexible group. They are not bound by the same domestic demands as their daughters. Although there are some exceptions, widows tend to live alone and be attended to by their children and grandchildren who are expected to visit them regularly, providing them with their basic needs and much enjoyed company. Others, as in the case of Mrs. Rose Murphy and Mrs. Rhonda Connors, live with one of their sons who, in exchange for

cooked meals and the privileges of a house, assumes responsibility for their widowed mother. Such arrangements usually imply that the living-in son will inherit the house after his mother's death. His responsibility lies in insuring the financial and material comfort of his mother. Yet although a son is not directly responsible for his mother's entertainment, he is still expected to fulfill her requests in that regard. That is, if his mother expresses the desire to go visiting her friends or to have them over, he must comply with her requests and ensure that he will bring her home when she decides to come back or, as the case may be, leave the house when she invites or hosts company.

Although it may appear to be so, the relationship between mother and son is seldom one of dependance. Rather it is based on a mutual sense of respect. Despite occasional misunderstandings, which might result in rows presenting them with an opportunity to remind each other of their respective role and status, both parties generally enjoy their privacy without stepping out of bounds.

Moreover, elderly widows, whether they live alone or with one of their sons, regularly receive the visit of what people in this area call a "social worker". This person, usually a young woman from the community or a nearby village, comes once a week to perform heavy household duties such as washing floors or doing the laundry. Beyond this, however, the social worker's duty is to provide company for the beneficiary. Thus

afternoons are spent drinking tea while watching the soap operas on television. Watching the soaps is almost a ritual activity among elderly women in Cape St. George. Like many of her friends, Mrs. Rose Murphy would not miss episodes of her favourite stories for anything. There are five one hour continuing stories every afternoon, five days a week, on television.¹⁸⁴ These programs portray American everyday life in a dramatised yet somewhat realistic way; allowing their viewers to identify, positively or negatively, with the characters or situations depicted. Such identification need not necessarily be personal or provoke attitudes of total belief. Rather, the programs seem to bring out substantial reaction and interest which affect communication at levels other than that of the actual watching of the programs.¹⁸⁵

Depending on the relationship established between the widow and the social worker, the latter's visits may be restricted to the performance of household duties, or extended to such things as hairdressing which is in its own right an expression of the trust that exists between the two persons involved. These social workers are not fully qualified and operate under a government program designed to alleviate unemployment

¹⁸⁴The Young and the Restless, Days of Our Lives, All my Children, Another World, and General Hospital.

¹⁸⁵see Gerald Thomas, "Other Worlds: The Folktale and Soap Opera in Newfoundland's French Tradition," *Folklore Studies in Honour of Herbert Halpert*, eds. Kenneth S. Goldstein and Neil V. Rosenberg (St John's: Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1980) 343-51; Thomas was the first to draw attention to the role of the soap opera in the lives of people from Cape St. George.

statistics and the allocation of welfare benefits to young women by allotting them the required ten weeks work (after which they are laid off) necessary to receive unemployment insurance. Under this program commonly known as "section 38," social workers in rural communities such as Cape St. George are assigned a number of elderly women whom they are to visit regularly to perform the duties described above. Therefore, although it may sometimes be the case, there is not usually a choice as to who may work for whom or be visited by whom. In any case, the implementation of such a program is indeed an addition to the well-being of the recipients. Also, as we will see later, it provides an extra topic of conversation during widows' social gatherings, as well as extra sources of potential gossip.

As noted earlier, I took part basically in the social gatherings of two main groups of elderly widows. One of these was based essentially in Cape St. George and had more restricted membership rules than the second group, based in the nearby community of Red Brook. Both groups are connected however, as their members with one exception, all grew up together as members of the same extended family or as neighbours. It is only after they married that the women moved away from each other.

The Cape St. George Group

The criteria for membership in the Cape St. George group were clearly determined. The group essentially consisted of four members at the time of my fieldwork, although I was led to believe that the membership had formerly been larger and had been reduced to its present number by the death of some of its members. Closer examination of the content and dynamics of some of the gatherings of this group will account for the facts asserted above regarding its composition.

The participants in this particular group all reside within walking distance of each other, except for one woman who lives a couple of miles away from the rest. Her membership within the group is predicated on her sibling relationship with Mrs. Rose Murphy. Thus in the case of Cathy Ryan and Rose Murphy, kinship is an obvious determinant in their participation in the same gatherings. However, because of the distance between Mrs. Ryan's house and her friends' she is not able to attend the gatherings as often as the others. The gatherings usually take place at Mrs. Anita Byrne's house which is located only a few yards away from Rose Murphy's.

Kinship and proximity also influence the dynamics of the group at another level. That is, it is not unlikely for the two Murphy sisters to spend an occasional evening together, whether it is at the one or the other's

house. Proximity also allows Mrs. Rose Murphy and Mrs. Byrne to spend other evenings together, usually at Mrs. Byrne's. Thus, although there are no clear and definite patterns regulating the modes of visiting in terms of attributes and frequency, it is observable that kinship as well as proximity are factors which contribute to the potential formation of occasional subgroups. The existence of such subgroups may provide clues to the understanding of some of the intricacies which affect the dynamics of interactional behaviour during the gatherings of the whole group.

The fourth member of this group, Mrs. Rhonda Connors, is Mrs. Murphy's half-sister. Although Rose refers to Rhonda Connors as her sister, I have never heard Cathy refer to Rhonda Connors in any other manner than by her first name or by using the formula "Aunt Rhonda" which is an acceptable form of address or reference to any older woman in the community. As it happened, Mrs. Murphy's father was married twice and had two families. However, no further mention will be made of this particular point as neither woman felt the need nor the inclination to make a specific case of the situation. Mrs. Connors lives a few hundred yards away from Mrs. Rose Murphy, in a lane off the main road, leading to the government wharf. The location of Mrs. Connors' house will bear further significance in the development of the theoretical argument, when the layout of the community and its relation to communication conduits will be discussed. As it stands, the house can be reached both from the main road and from the path along the shore when coming from Mrs. Murphy's or her daughter-in-law's house.

Mrs. Connors, although now slightly disabled and having trouble walking, enjoys great respect in the community. She was once one of the most hard-working and devoted midwives in Cape St. George and is said to have delivered over five hundred babies. Like Mrs. Rose Murphy, she lives with her son, so the two sisters are in a somewhat similar situation, although Mrs. Connors is a little more geographically isolated than her sister. Unfortunately what was merely a physical isolation in 1985 and 1986 evolved into a more generalized isolation in 1987 when it was discovered that Mrs. Connors' son was involved in a scandal that surfaced in Cape St. George that year. Now handicapped and the mother of one of the men involved, Mrs. Connors then suffered the social consequences of her son's activities, and was subsequently avoided by her peers. This avoidance, according to Mrs. Connors' friends, came from great embarrassment rather than from any sudden dislike or disrespect towards her. People felt very uncomfortable during my stay in 1987, partly because on the one hand they did not know how to deal with the situation in front of an outsider, but on the other hand, as far as insiders like Mrs. Connors were concerned, they just did not know how to behave. They were genuinely concerned by what their friend's reaction would be and rather than hurting her by accidentally confronting or even encountering her, they preferred to stay away until matters settled down.

I was able to tape-record some of this group's gatherings at Mrs. Byrne's house. It was, according to members of the group, the most

convenient place for them to meet. Mrs. Byrne lives alone in a two-bedroom house, approximately a hundred yards away from Mrs. Rose Murphy. As mentioned above the two neighbours thus occasionally meet independently of the whole group. More importantly, the fact that Mrs. Byrne lives alone, combined with the relatively large size of her house, enables her to accommodate overnight visitors without too much disturbance in her daily routine. It was not unusual for Mrs. Connors to spend the night when the four women gathered together, while Rose and Cathy would walk back next door together when the evening was over. Moreover, as Mrs. Byrne herself was suffering from arthritis and had great difficulty walking, hosting the gatherings worked to her advantage.

Mrs. Byrne is not a relative of any other member of the group. Nevertheless, the connections between the Murphy and Byrne families are multiple and exist at other levels than that of friendship among their elderly women members. Mrs. Byrne's son owns the local store and has employed Mrs. Rose Murphy's son for a long time. Whether or not it originally sprung out of the women's friendship, this economic tie is an important one, as the unemployment situation in Cape St. George is as bad as any in Newfoundland.

As I mentioned earlier, the gatherings as well as the composition of this Cape St. George group differ from those of the Red Brook group both in content and nature. Yet before introducing the members of the latter

group, it is necessary to direct the reader's attention to similarities expressed by a couple of apparently exterior factors, which nevertheless play an essential role in the superficial and circumstantial structure of elderly widows' informal social gatherings.

Like married women, widows and other elderly women are to an extent dependent on men, which is to say that the interdependence which exists between men and women in the community tends in most circumstances to weigh in favour of men. In the instance of the particular group of women presented above, the reality of this dependence manifests itself through the organisation of time, which in turn is linked to other factors such as the availability of transportation. Unlike married women or unmarried women with children, elderly women enjoy a considerably more flexible time-table. They are no longer bound by their husbands, and children's activities. Yet they do seem to favour mid-week evenings for the scheduling of their get-togethers. As we will see later, their married counterparts tend to organise their time differently and gather mostly during the day-time, preferably before or immediately after meals.

This option of late evenings as a time slot for the gatherings is not exclusively the result of the participants' choice. In fact elderly women's informal gatherings are tightly linked with other social activities such as bingo, in which a good number of people in their age group take part. Although it is irrelevant and superfluous to elaborate substantially on the

bingo games themselves as social activities, their regular occurrences in the community have an indirect but yet significant impact on the informal social gatherings of elderly women.

It would be a mistake to deny that elderly people enjoy the social venue provided by the various bingo games organised mainly by the Catholic church. It is indeed an opportunity for them to meet with their family and peers through an acceptable form of socializing. Bingo games seem to be a very profitable enterprise for their organisers. In this case, buses are even hired to collect the gamblers and bring them back home after the event. Two buses provide this service, one for the east end and the other for the west end of the community. The "centre" is variable and determined by the location of the bingo game.

Transportation

As mentioned above, elderly women do not have independent access to private transportation. The bingo bus is used not only to attend the games, but also as a means of travelling to a distant house. Because of the geographic layout of the community, this alternative use of the bus does not impose any detour and is thus acceptable. The bingo bus runs three or four times a week. Aside from the Cape St. George High School, Notre-Dame du Cap, which is situated in the local parish district, the bus also accommodates people who attend the Sheaves Cove game and a

larger game held once a week at Ship Cove which members of all the Port-au-Port Peninsula communities, French and English, can attend. The regular eight to nine-thirty p.m. scheduling of the bingo games and the special bus service provided has an effect on the structuring of the pattern of elderly women's informal gatherings, sometimes also referred to as "sprees after bingo."¹⁸⁶ Women will seize the opportunity of catching a bus which goes a certain distance, to go and visit friends who live further down the road.

A woman may ride one bus on the way in to bingo and another in the other direction on the way out, with a friend or friends who live in the right direction. Thus it is not unusual to see a group of older women getting off together at one or the other's house. However, this behaviour is not as spontaneous as it might seem. Members of the community are aware of these traditional get-togethers of older women. In fact they are very attentive as to who gets off where on the way back from bingo. In order not to hurt anybody's feelings unnecessarily or worse, generate unwanted gossip, older women are very careful of previous arrangements made with regard to the organisation of their gatherings. This is done over the telephone, a couple of days before the bingo game. Therefore it is unlikely that Cathy and Rose, who are sisters, will each host a gathering on the

¹⁸⁶Fieldnotes: Cape St. George, July 1985. This expression was used by several of my informants to refer to this particular form of gathering.

same night or if they do, it would involve two distinctively different groups as neither would want to "miss anything."

The actual analysis of the form and content of the gatherings will be the subject matter of the following chapters. However, it is not altogether inappropriate at this point to make an initial suggestion that the internal dynamics that govern the unfolding of the gatherings vary in accordance with the immediate composition of the groups themselves. Not all the members of the "Widows or elderly women" group are present at all the gatherings. The immediate composition of the gatherings varies more or less considering the extent of the total membership of a group. Therefore it is legitimate to suggest that, although included in the broad category of "elderly women and widows," the following group's mode of gathering differs from the one previously mentioned. This is due largely to the evident heterogeneity which characterizes its membership.

The Red Brook Group

Unlike the preceding one, this particular group is for the most part based in the community of Red Brook, a couple of miles down the road from Cape St. George. The gatherings of this group take place in Red Brook, although not systematically in the same homes. The membership of the group is larger than that of the corresponding Cape St. George group and is mainly composed of Red Brook residents, with the exception

of one participant, Barbara, who is married to a Murphy and lives in Cape St. George. Before introducing the members of the group, it is necessary to make a slight digression in order to justify the inclusion of a Red Brook group in an ethnographic study primarily focused on the community of Cape St. George.

The topographic names assigned to residential areas (e.g. Cape St. George, Degras, Red Brook, Sheaves Cove, etc.) are used by locals and outsiders to refer to one's location vis-à-vis the geographic environment.¹⁸⁷ Patterns of settlement have been determined both past and present, economically and genealogically. They are not therefore always consistent with the administrative outline of the general area. Finally, to correctly understand the full significance of this apparent inconsistency, one should bear in mind that the physical layout consists of one long stretch of road and adjoining flatland bordered by the sea on the one side and an elevated plateau on the other. Houses range along both sides of this nine mile long stretch of road. The communities of Red Brook, Degrau and Cape St. George respectively occupy the last four miles at the south western extremity of the peninsula. With this in mind, it is easier to

¹⁸⁷See: Gerald Thomas, "Noms de Lieux et de Lieux-dits associés aux Franco-Terreneuviens de la Presqu'île de Port-au-Port," *450 Ans de Noms de Lieux Français en Amérique du Nord* (Québec: Les Publications du Québec, 1986) 259-75. The author gives a more extensive list of place names, including references to the cognitive mapping of the whole Port-au-Port Peninsula. For instance while both DEGRAU and DEGRAS are used, historically the correct form is DEGRAT.

understand how ethnographic data compiled in this area cannot possibly be restricted to any administratively defined community.

My attention to and subsequent interest in the informal social gatherings of this group of elderly women from Red Brook was prompted by a resident from Cape St. George. Barbara Murphy who, as was noted earlier, is the daughter of Mrs. Pearl Ryan, and grew up in the Red Brook area. Although she moved to Cape St. George after marrying a Murphy, she maintained strong family ties in Red Brook. Her eldest son, who was born from a former union, is now being raised by his maternal grandmother. It did not take long before I realized that Barbara Murphy was definitely not the only connection between the two communities. In fact, the majority of members of the groups I studied were linked by either blood or marital affiliation, thus enhancing the value and validity of the ethnographic case.

Membership of the Red Brook group is larger than that of the Cape St. George one. The group's gatherings are more open and heterogeneous in that they more than occasionally include the presence of married and single daughters in the core of the group. Yet because the group's membership is eclectic and the presence of the members at the gatherings is not regular, the inclusion of these younger participants in the group is not a strong enough factor to study such group under the "married women" category. In other words, the membership of the Red

Brook group consists of married women as well as of widows and elderly women. Nevertheless it provides an extra dimension to the dynamics of interaction within the group as it allows for the observation and analysis of intergenerational communication and vertical transmission of knowledge parallel to the unigenerational and horizontal communicative processes and their content, of more restricted groups. Also, the comparatively large membership of this group favours the formation of a greater variety of smaller subgroups, most of which are composed of elderly, widowed participants. The gatherings of these sub-groups usually take place at a different location than those of the more "open" group.

During the summers of 1986 and 1987, the gatherings of the "open" group, that is, those which included other than elderly women and widows, took place at Pearl Ryan's house. Although some of these gatherings would happen under the same initial circumstances as the previously mentioned "sprees after bingo," others were similar to the pattern of the married women's group gatherings, which mostly revolve around work. For instance, the visit of one of Pearl's daughters, who is a hairdresser in Halifax, provided the opportunity at one point for a gathering which was basically a hairdressing party. In other words, hairdressing was the "excuse," or more accurately the pretext, for the gathering.

It was Barbara Murphy who initially introduced me to her mother Pearl Ryan and, eventually, to the other members of this open group who

held almost exclusively female informal social gatherings. The gatherings were at times disturbed by the occasional brief intrusions of Pearl's youngest son who was fifteen at the time, or by Barbara's thirteen year old boy who was being raised by his grandmother. The nature and the effects of these interruptions by the young boys on the exclusively female company will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Pearl Ryan, usually known by the name of Noreen, hosted most of this group's gatherings. When she did not actually host them she was still a regular member of the group. According to her daughters and other people, she changed her name in order to gain more respect from the community. Pearl, however, argues that the priest told her her "real" name when she got married, and her baptismal certificate had to be produced. She said that because her own mother was only sixteen years of age when Pearl was born, she herself was raised by her godmother, Noreen, who called her after herself.¹⁸⁸

As it happens Mrs. Ryan, who at her request is called Pearl, is not the only woman who so expressed a need for respectful recognition, if we consider her daughters' and neighbours' explanation of this change of identity. Mrs. Rose Murphy's sister Roxanne also insists on being called Pearl except by her close family members who continue to call her Roxie.

¹⁸⁸Tape-recorded interview with Pearl Ryan; Red Brook, 21 July 1986.

It is to be noted however, that this request for such a mark of respect by the two women is perceived as a demonstration of pride and the dislike of nicknames by a number of people in the community and therefore not always observed.¹⁸⁹ This particular point will be elaborated upon in the section dealing more specifically with the social status of women in the community.

Another prominent member of this group is Mrs. Lilian Hunter, also known as "Lil." Mrs. Hunter now lives on her own, in a big house located a couple of hundred yards away from Pearl Ryan. The latter is also a neighbour to her own sister-in-law, Cathy Ryan. Lilian Hunter lives alone, although her youngest son, who is separated from his wife, occasionally stays at his mother's with his own son. Mrs. Lilian Hunter was not a regular participant in any specific group's gatherings. Rather, she could be considered an intermittent member of several groups. She was living alone and when she was young, had been injured in a fire which burned her hand. This made her feel obliged to hide it from view and made her something of a recluse. People tended to fear her for these reasons, as well perhaps on account of her singular physical appearance. She is a tall woman with fuzzy white hair, which has prompted some people to call her

¹⁸⁹In an unpublished and restricted paper, Geraldine Barter elaborates on people's perception and interpretation of nicknames. See Geraldine Barter, "Nicknaming and Nicknames in La Grand' Terre, Port-au-Port Peninsula, Newfoundland" (Memorial U of Newfoundland, Centre d'Etudes Franco-Terraneuviennes, 1974.)

a witch, her appearance seemingly reflecting the description given in local folktales to such characters. Moreover, Lilian Hunter's father David Keenan was said to have been a "witch" who, according to participants in a social gathering of widows in Cape St. George in 1985, had a "black book" with which he would cast spells on people.¹⁹⁰

R.M.: There. He went down there. He comes from David's there.

David did that with the book.

R.C.: Hein?

R.M.: That's David do that with the book. He had a book.

Old David there my dear.

R.C.: The black book he had, it was a black book.

R.M.: He was making. To frighten you to death. He was to read backwards eh. With the book.

R.C.: The black book. He was a witch. He had a witch book.

...

R.M.: Old David there. He was a real good-for-nothing. David Keenan.

R.C.: A Frenchman from France.

...

M.D.: So what was in the book, you seen the book?

R.M.: I never seen it, his wife said it.

R.C.: He pick that book. Sat down. Sign something in that book.

Always something was to happen like that. Yeah.....

All his family is dead. Only two alive.

R.M.: Only two, three.

R.C.: Three.

R.M.: Lil and Linda.

R.C.: And Linda that's all he got.

R.M.: Sharon, three girls.

A.B.: There was three girls. Sharon.

M.D.: The same Lil as Cathy's friend there?

R.M.: Oh yeah she goes to Cathy's.

¹⁹⁰Barbara Rieti has written an article entitled "The Black Heart in Newfoundland: The Magic of the Book," *Culture & Tradition* 13 (1991): 1-13, based MUNFLA and other accounts of the existence of such books in Newfoundland communities.

M.D.: Lil with the hair?

...

R.C.: You're afraid she's gonna put a wish on you (imitating Lil)
 "I'm tell you something that's gonna frighten you" that's the
 way she talks.¹⁹¹

From this excerpt it is possible to conclude that Lilian Hunter may be thought to have inherited her father's powers.

Interestingly enough, her condition brings out mixed feelings of fear and respect from the community. It is also to be noticed that, to an extent, the mystery surrounding her handicapped hand enables her to be a member of several groups as it provides a topic of conversation. She occasionally spends time with Rose Murphy and Cathy Ryan, as well as with a number of other elderly women. As she is no doubt well aware, Mrs. Lilian Hunter's unfortunate but eventful past makes her an interesting storyteller for her peers. In fact, she uses her ability as a performer who tells narratives about her own "mysterious" life to gain access to various informal gatherings. Aside from the fact that she survived a house fire when she was seven years of age, she was also brought up by a strict father and stepmother. She later had an unhappy marriage and eventually ended up rearing her six children on her own. Material quoted from several interviews will later be used to illustrate Lilian Hunter's past hardships and her way of coping with a difficult youth and unfortunate

¹⁹¹Tape-recorded interview MUNFLA 86-012, C8330. The transcription system is explained in the introduction. The format has no special significance other than that dictated by the computer program used.

marriage. Her ability to recount these events, combined with the curiosity of her peers, make her something of a local character.

Mrs. Hunter was also often talked about in her absence, usually to be cited as an example of bravery. Women of all generations regard her as a female survivor, thus demonstrating great respect towards her achievements through life. Yet they also believe that such achievements must have at times resulted from or been induced by the use of supernatural powers, and they therefore fear her for this reason. Lilian is of course aware of the feelings the community and her peers have towards her, and this awareness seems to reinforce her position as a recluse. She rarely mixes with large groups. She tends to feel more at ease in small gatherings of no more than three participants. Then she usually becomes the centre of attention and interaction revolves around her contribution to the conversation. Whereas in larger groups she would tend to sit back and listen. In her experience, as well as from what others have mentioned, this behaviour would make the rest of the participants uncomfortable, with the result that Lilian does not regularly attend "large" informal gatherings or "parties." The fact that she is often talked about, however, makes her a participant *in absentia*.

With the help of Pearl Ryan, I was also introduced to members of another sub-group of elderly women from Red Brook. Marian Hunter is Pearl Ryan's aunt. She used to be a midwife in Red Brook. In a sense she

is very much like Rhonda Connors from Cape St. George. Both are approximately the same age, in their late seventies. Moreover, they both show similar signs of physical weariness undoubtedly induced by the hardships they endured when travelling by foot during the harsh Newfoundland winters to answer the sometimes distant calls from expectant mothers. Like Rhonda Connors, Marian Hunter presents herself as a wise, soft-spoken elder of the community.

Marian Hunter's daughter Sheila, who is in her early fifties and single, although a mother of four, was also present at the gathering I attended at their house. Their situation, as far as their living arrangements are concerned, is comparable to that of Rose Murphy and Rhonda Connors. The latter, however, live with their sons and do not have the same relationship as the two Hunter women. The rules that govern the mother-daughter household are not as strictly defined as in the former cases. For instance, as I myself witnessed, the possibility is there for meaningful communication, that is, on grounds that are directly familiar to the protagonists. Also the sense of privacy, which is clearly defined in the case of the mother-son household, is not necessarily as closely observed in the present case. Further circumstances also allow for gatherings such as those I attended there.

The multigenerational components in one particular case, which involved Pearl Ryan, her daughter Barbara Murphy as well as the Hunters,

brought an interesting group together. This group can be viewed in many ways as a reference in terms of its intermediate position between the three main levels in which women, folklore and communication are to be comprehended in the context of exclusively female informal social gatherings. The present group could then be studied from the three points of view: mother-daughter communication, elderly women's communication and, finally, married women or mothers' intercommunication.

Their gatherings did not take place in exactly the same circumstances as the aforementioned "sprees after bingo," but rather in circumstances which were closer to the "married women" mode of gatherings, which revolve around work. However, the reason for the gathering here, which was to prepare and show costumes for the forthcoming set dancing performances at the folk festival, would not be actually referred to as "work" *per se* by the participants, although the main activity and resulting discussion was caused by and centered around sewing, which is regarded as a traditional female occupation. In this case sewing was the preparation needed for the further enjoyment of a more leisurely, although seriously considered, form of activity. This at least was the attitude of the daughters towards the gathering. It was they and not their elderly mothers who pulled out the dresses and started to talk about "work." Their mothers would have been content without this, as they need no actual justification to get together.

Another element which is in some way indicative of the difference between elderly and middle-aged groups, or from a status point of view, between widows and active mothers' groups, is the time slots in which gatherings take place. The mixed group discussed above held this particular gathering in the afternoon. This was important for those participants who had responsibilities towards their children. In the summertime the children would of course not be at school but would be involved in various recreational activities organised at the community centre. In other words, they were not under the supervision of their mothers, so the latter could enjoy some free time which in this case they chose to spend in the company of their own mothers.

Married Women

Time and Group Organisation

While it is clear that elderly women have a certain amount of freedom to dispose of their time, married women and single mothers operate under more restrictions than their elderly peers. To a certain extent, these responsibilities confine them to their homes. There they have to undertake a variety of household tasks. Such activities are twofold, in that a distinction can be made between those which bind a woman to her home, and those which have to or can be performed elsewhere. In the first category one would obviously place cooking, cleaning and doing the laundry as the main activities common to all in that group. Additional home-bound responsibilities may include tending babies and young children. The second category concerns those responsibilities which require their presence outside the house. The most important one of course is shopping for the family. Shopping facilities in Cape St. George are limited to one rather small convenience store and a little boutique which carries food essentials such as milk, tea, sugar and the occasionally needed tin of vegetables. The convenience store, on the other hand, stocks just about everything, but in a limited quantity and at retail prices which are not really affordable if one were to supply a whole family's

needs. Those stores then are only used for emergencies or small necessities.

The main shopping is done at a supermarket in Stephenville sixty kilometres away. As it is the woman's responsibility to do the shopping, she has to make her way into town to accomplish this task. Trips to Stephenville take place approximately once every two weeks. This timing corresponds with the reception of the husband's unemployment or welfare cheque which comes regularly every fortnight through the post. Shopping is usually done within two days of reception of the cheque. However, it is difficult for the housewife to plan the exact date of her trip as it depends mostly on the post, but may also coincide with other duties such as meeting with one of the children's schoolteachers or some other appointment with local authorities. For instance, the welfare officer or the nurse might be expected that day. Usually however, priority is given to the shopping over other local appointments which can be postponed by phone.

Although one might be inclined to think that such trips to town are an occasion for women to get together, this is not the case. Like their elderly peers, married women do not have ready access, if they have access at all, to private transportation. To go to Stephenville they have to take the morning bus at around eight-thirty to get back around one o'clock in the afternoon, unless they have to do other errands in town, such as going to

the hospital or meeting other demands, in which case they do not get back to Cape St. George until five-thirty in the evening. Also because they more or less depend on the post to determine their shopping, they cannot really choose their day and therefore the group of friends they would like to go with. Shopping trips then do not really favour intimate small group socializing. Yet such outings can provide great opportunities for the dissemination as well as the acquisition of interesting items of news and gossip which may be further discussed and elaborated upon once the small group of friends get back together at home.

Other responsibilities which take the housewife out of her home generally involve collective work, with the exception however, of the everyday walk to the Post Office to collect the mail. As we will see, these are the two activities which almost inevitably ensure the opportunity for informal social gatherings of women belonging to the "married women" group. The mail collection is an everyday event which occurs around eleven o'clock in the morning. Since the residents of the community do not have individual mail boxes, there is a general delivery system. As their husbands are usually at work and children at school, it is the woman's responsibility to go and collect the mail.

These responsibilities also include being in charge of the financial and administrative operations of the household. The mail collection serves as a cognitive timing of a housewife's morning activities. Reference to the

mail collection rather than to the actual "clock" time of the day, are used to schedule such activities. That is by eleven o'clock, she will have done the housework or the laundry, as the case may be. She will also have prepared a lunch for her husband and children who may be coming home around half-past twelve, and she will be ready for a little rest herself.

The mail collection is then an excellent opportunity for one group of usually busy, married women to get together for a cup of tea and a chat. I explained in an previous chapter how I became aware of this group's meetings at Joan Murphy's house. To summarize briefly the circumstances: Joan's house is conveniently located near the post office, which is at the back of Sylvia Parker's house, and a group of four or five of Joan's friends would usually drop in on their way back from the post office.¹⁹² Joan will have anticipated her friends' visit and made a fresh pot of tea. The women will then sit around the kitchen table for a chat which will last about an hour, until each returns to her own house for lunch.

The Group Members

This group consists essentially of six members: Joan Murphy, Barbara Murphy, Ann Murphy, Brenda Ryan, Jane Ryan and Alice Walsh. The relationships which link the members of this group together are

¹⁹²Sylvia's husband Erick runs the post office.

somewhat complex. Although there is an apparent friendship network, the membership of the group is not entirely based on this network alone. In fact, two of the members are married to two of Rose Murphy's sons. Joan is married to Sean, and Ann is married to Jim. Joan and Ann are sisters-in-law by marriage. Brenda and Jane are in a similar situation since they are married respectively to Philip and John Ryan, who are Cathy Ryan's sons. The four men are also first cousins, since their mothers Rose and Cathy are sisters. Moreover, Jane and Barbara, who is married to yet another cousin of the Murphy and Ryan brothers, are sisters. Only Alice, who has since left her husband Colm Walsh to go to live in Stephenville, is not directly connected to this extended family. Rather she is a close neighbour of Jane's, Ann's and Brenda's. Joan and Barbara live a few hundred yards away from this cluster of houses. To further illustrate the complexity of this group, it should be noted that both Jane and Joan are married to their first cousins. This implies that Barbara is also Jane's husband's first cousin whereas Joan, and Barbara's husband Ian, are Jane's husband John's second cousins.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ I recognise that the verbal description of these intertwining relations may be confusing at first glance. A solution would be to provide a sociological tree using conventional symbols, and I initially drew up examples. However I found that the references that would be necessary to illustrate the relationships themselves produced an inordinately complex presentation of relationships and I therefore decided to exclude them. The reader may wish to entertain him/herself by undertaking the same exercise.

The entire group, that is its male and female members, meets fairly often, if only in subgroups. It is fair to suggest that the existing kinship network is organised along the male line with the exception of the two sisters Barbara and Jane who, as it happens, are rarely both present at the same gathering. The male members of this group are also friends and often participate in gatherings similar to their wives'. These gatherings however, are held "outdoors" in the fishermen's stores down on the shore, or in the sheds at the back of the houses.

All six female members belonging to this group are mothers with school age children at home. They are all in their thirties and forties and can be said to have had a rather homogeneous life experience. They are all members of large families and were all married in their late teens. Of the five women's husbands, Brenda's husband Philip is the only one who owns a business (garage) and therefore has a regular income. We will see how this affects Brenda's position within the group through the analysis of the conversation in which she takes part, as well as those of which she is the subject. Ann's husband Jim has a fishing licence and is sometimes able to hire Jane's husband John when the fishing is good. However, this is not often the case, as the inshore fishery on the Port-au-Port Peninsula, as well as in the rest of Newfoundland, has undergone severe recession. Moreover, fishing is a seasonal activity which requires manpower during the summer months only. The unpredictability of their husbands' employment and revenue also affects the relationship the two women have with the group as well as with each other.

Joan Murphy, at whose home the "after the post office" gatherings take place, has no such enviable economic situation. Her husband Sean has neither a business nor a fishing licence. He is unemployed most of the year. He benefits from the "section 38" employment schemes providing for ten weeks work during the summer. This allows him another claim for the ensuing forty-two weeks. Joan's social position in the community is however, enhanced by that of her son Bob, who, for a couple of years, was employed as the coordinator of the French association *Les Terre-neuviens Français*. The association runs the community centre activities, the most prominent one being the annual folk festival which is reputed, among Newfoundland traditional and professional musicians, to have the highest musical standards in Newfoundland. Bob has since quit the position, the reasons for which, however, have provided his mother with interesting insights into the politics of the community. Moreover, the fact that Joan Murphy lives next door to the now former long-time president of the association, Mrs. Sylvia Parker, adds to her status within the group. Sylvia's visits, although very infrequent, would provide an extra source of first hand information regarding the tumultuous politics and emerging arguments involving the divisions among the people running the organisation. Alice Walsh is in a position similar to that of Joan's, without however, enjoying any extra income above that of her husband Colm.

As for Barbara Murphy, she is married to Ian who often travels to the mainland to get work. Her financial situation is comparable to Brenda's

and Ann's in that the three are slightly better off than the two other families in this group. Barbara lives a few hundred yards away from Joan and about a mile away from her sister Jane and her neighbours, Ann and Brenda. Barbara's membership in the group is somewhat clouded by the fact that she has, from a former relationship, a child who is being raised by his maternal grandmother, and by the fact that her husband is often away. Although she is part of this branch of the extended family, her position in the group is restricted as far as economic involvement is concerned. As was noted earlier, there exist economic ties between Ann, Jane and Joan's families. The three families use a common plot of land in which they each grow potatoes. Jim and Ann supply the horse and plough. It is noticeable that these ties occasionally bring the three women together as a subgroup. In a similar way, neighbourhood brings Brenda, Ann, Jane and Alice together as a second subgroup and for the same reasons Joan and Barbara as a third.

The Gatherings

It has already been observed that married women in Cape St. George have important responsibilities as housekeepers, mothers and wives. Because of these heavy and demanding responsibilities they do not enjoy much leisure time. They therefore contrive to make time to socialise, without entirely giving up their role. They thus combine working time with leisure time, in order to be able to socialise with their peers. Although they

have different personalities and backgrounds, the members of the group share a common understanding of the value of time, and during their informal social gatherings, communication through conversational interaction becomes the primary concern while work functions as a frame of reference.

The primary concern as expressed by many of these women for getting together is "to get away from the men and the kids," that is, to escape their traditional occupational role and step into another sphere where they experiment with a different sense of security and power. The form and content of this group's informal social gatherings is thus determined by its members' understanding of time available. As we have seen the "after the post office" gatherings are usually short. They do not revolve around any work-related activity as such, because no work is actually performed during them. Their prime purpose is to allow the participants to mix socially and exchange items of news and gossip. The time allocated for these gatherings has been earned through the careful completion of household responsibilities.

The group, however, meets on other occasions as well. On such occasions, the combination of collective work and leisure comes into effect. As their mothers did before them at the "fileries," which were mostly winter events during which women would combine the spinning and carding of wool with storytelling and singing sessions, married women

nowadays in Cape St. George combine similar collective work with home-made entertainment. It is not unusual for members of this group to get together in the evening after supper, or whenever it is convenient, to work on a project at Jane's house. As mentioned earlier, Jane is the only one in the group who owns a sewing machine. Every now and then members of the group bring their sewing to Jane's. The participants would then be working on a collective project, as for instance the making of curtains or some other major piece of work, as well as on smaller individual tasks which require the use of the sewing machine. The women also use the opportunity not only to exchange news and stories but also to exchange clothes and ideas on clothes. Joan, who has grown-up children as well as a young four-year-old, would trade teenage clothing for children's garments. As we will later discuss and illustrate more substantially, the conversations springing out of these gatherings tend to be more narrative-oriented than those emerging from the "after the post office" gatherings. Conversational exchanges during this former kind of gathering also tend to be geared more evidently towards reminiscences of the past.

The example of this group of women's organisation of time supports Edward T. Hall's hypothesis whereby he attributes to women the conceptualisation and usage of time in a polychronic manner.¹⁹⁴ According to Hall, and as is illustrated by our example of married women

¹⁹⁴See: Edward T. Hall, *The Dance of Life* (New York: Anchor, 1983).

in Cape St. George, women are capable of handling several matters concurrently. He also argues that polychronic time can be equated with informality, while suggesting that Western society is essentially monochronic or based on a strictly scheduled organisation of time. The variety of the customs in this group of married women's gatherings in Cape St. George, shows however, that they use polychronic as well as monochronic time, yet both usages of time are affected by the notion of informality.

Their use of monochronic time and its link to informality is based on their cognitive apprehension of a timing system. That is, informality can be said to be apparent in their cognitive approach. For instance the "after the post office" gatherings qualify as monochronic because they are strictly scheduled. This scheduling however, is not limited by the strict and formal use of a clock but instead by the more informal and cognitive notion of the time of the mail delivery and that of lunch, which takes place when the children are back from school. The latter event is indeed framed by official clock time, yet it also depends on the distance between the school and home. What is important, though, is that there is evidence of a notion of schedule that allows for a monochronic definition of time in this instance.

Finally, married women as well as their elderly peers sometimes engage in a third form of informal social gatherings. These gatherings occur at "parties" when a rather large mixed group of people gets

together, usually on a weekend or on any other festive occasion, to have a good time and a few drinks. Although they are initially meant to be mixed, parties often evolve progressively into two separate and smaller clusters. Women will gather inside the house and men will go in the shed behind the house. The reverse may also happen, however, and may be understood as an expression of exceptionally permitted alternative role assumption. This use of premises is linked to the different drinking habits of men and women. Men usually drink home-made beer, which they brew and store in big buckets in their shed, whereas women favour the more refined store-bought beer which they buy in six-packs or by the case of twelve bottles, and subsequently store inside the refrigerator.

These gatherings take place within the context of larger leisurely gatherings. During these gatherings, the groups would be larger and include participants of different age groups. Such gatherings are also not exclusively female and may be occasionally "interrupted" by male members of the party.

Finally, interaction between mother and daughter can be directly witnessed during gatherings such as those previously described, which involve elderly women and their married or unmarried but adult daughters. Conversational exchanges tend to revolve mostly around reminiscences of the past. Adult mothers and daughters speak freely about their experiences of womanhood. This is not necessarily the case, however,

when married women address their teenage daughters. The generation gap is more obvious and confrontations sometimes occur. Although the level of communication is intermittent and not easily accessible to the observer, married women do communicate with their daughters. This interaction functions as an educational backdrop as well as a medium for the daughter to learn the rules governing women's communication.

Mother and teenage daughter communication also occupies a great deal of married women's conversations as a concept. When discussing more specifically the topics approached by these women during their gatherings, we will see how they understand the traditional aspect of such communication and its place in a social context which provides a constant change of traditional values, and basically modifies the meaning and understanding of the notion of experience, therefore altering the rules governing the transmission of knowledge.

Given this description of the background of the different groups and the circumstances of their informal social gatherings, the next chapter will concentrate on the various folklore genres used by the participants in the context of these gatherings.

Chapter 5

WOMEN'S INFORMAL SOCIAL GATHERINGS: CONTEXT AND EVENTS

In the previous chapter, the members of the various groups of women involved in informal social gatherings have been introduced. Three major groups were identified. The groups are essentially determined by the age of the participants as well as by the degree of kinship relating them to one another, and also by the friendship networks established among the women members of the community.

The sociological circumstances surrounding the communicative events have also been alluded to both in the previous chapter and in the fieldwork account. Thus it has been established that women, depending on the group they belong to or associate with, tend to gather in the evening or at other convenient times during the day. It has also been shown in an ethnographic manner, that is with a description of their everyday life, that the apparent flexibility in the time-table of women in Cape St. George is proportional to their age and marital or family status. That is, elderly women and widows seem to enjoy a greater freedom of time than their married peers. Moreover, common to all women participants and regardless of their membership group, there is the lack of

accessibility to private transportation. It has been demonstrated that this particular factor, along with others, affects the scheduling of some of the informal social gatherings of certain groups and more specifically those of elderly women in the community.

In the present chapter particular attention will be given to the detailed description of examples of women's social informal gatherings as events in which folkloric exchange occur. Transmission of knowledge will be later illustrated by examples of the various folklore genres emerging from the informal social gatherings, which themselves are to be considered as the frame of reference within which communication takes place.

"Sprees" As Customary Events

Some of the informal gatherings of the "elderly women's" group are emically defined by the members of this particular group. Such expressions as "spree after bingo" is commonly used by them to refer to an exclusively female informal social gathering which happens in the evening after a bingo game. I became aware of the use of the term and its customary implication as I was trying to make arrangements for an interview on a different topic. As it turned out, the informant told me that she would not be available on this particular evening as she was going to a "spree after bingo."

M.D.: A spree after bingo?

R.M.: Yeah it's at Cathy's house! Do you want to come? We'll go to bingo first and then we'll go there after.

M.D.: Yeah? How are we going to get there?

R.M.: Well on the bingo bus!

M.D.: And how will we get back?

R.M.: Tomorrow, Bernard [her son] will come and pick us up.

M.D.: Yeah O.K. Who will be there?

R.M.: Well only women! There'll be Cathy and Sarah [her daughter], Lilian and me and you!¹⁹⁵

As suggested by this conversation, "sprees after bingo" are customary events. Their occurrence is regular and expected to the point of being taken for granted, not only by the participants, but also by other members of the community. As already mentioned before, the regular occurrence and scheduling of these elderly women's gatherings is closely linked to and dependent on the limited access to transportation available to the members of this group. As Mrs. Murphy says during the conversational excerpt quoted above, the bingo bus is the mode of transportation used to travel to the pre-arranged meeting place.

I often accompanied Mrs. Murphy to bingo, and to sprees afterwards. The following is a description of a typical night from the time that Mrs. Murphy would call me to "get ready for the bus" until the end of the gathering itself. I will then present here the four main stages of such an

¹⁹⁵Fieldnotes from Cape St. George, July 1985.

evening which are: The ride to the bingo game, the bingo game itself, the ride from the bingo game to the "spree," and finally the spree itself. The first three stages are contextually circumstantial to the spree itself, which is the focus of attention.¹⁹⁶ Yet they are seen and used by participants as necessary steps in the organization of a typical evening. The description and analysis of specific genres occurring during the gatherings per se is the object of the next chapter. The following is reconstructed from fieldnotes.

The Bingo Bus

The night of a "spree," Rose Murphy would ring me just after supper time at around seven o'clock in the evening. She would ask me to get ready and come over to her house so that we would not miss the bus. She herself would have gathered her purse with the essentials for the bingo game and the gathering afterwards. This apparatus consists of: money, a couple of felt markers (her usual one and a spare), her hairbrush, her knitting, and her "needle."¹⁹⁷ When I arrived at her house around ten past seven she would inevitably complain that we were late and after having checked the stove and all other electrical appliances we would stand by

¹⁹⁶The bingo game for those not involved in a subsequent spree will of course be the focal point of the evening.

¹⁹⁷Rose Murphy is a diabetic.

the door for about ten minutes waiting for the time to get on the bus. There are no bus stops in Cape St. George and the people signal the driver from their door or their garden gate.

Mrs. Murphy's house is on the north side of the road, against the cliff. This means that she actually has two chances of catching the bingo bus; on its way up, or on its way down on the other side of the road. The bus driver lives across the road from Mrs. Murphy and would have the bus parked beside his house before going on a run. Mrs. Murphy would almost always be the first one on the bus. We would go across the road and get on the bus.

Being the first one on the bus was advantageous. One could choose where to sit. Also, one would not miss anyone getting on the bus. That is, by the time we would get to bingo, Mrs. Murphy would know exactly who was on the bus; who got on the bus with whom and from where. Also because the bus goes west until the end of the road before it comes down back east to go to the high school or wherever the bingo game takes place, the first person on the bus is there for the whole ride and gets an overview of the whole community. This can be potentially rewarding in terms of what information it may provide for further talk, gossip, or exchange of news.

On these bus trips Mrs. Murphy would pay particular attention to such details as whose car is parked where, or who has their laundry on the line, or in the summertime who is having a barbecue and so on. This information would then be shared and discussed with friends later on, either at the bingo games, on the ride back or at the gathering. Thus the bus ride to the bingo game would usually be very quiet. People would be busy gathering all this information and making mental notes to themselves.

Conversation was also hampered by the order of the distribution of the seating pattern. Taking a place on the bus was almost a ritual. It was a very organised affair. The bingo bus is a typical North American yellow school bus with two rows of seats separated in the middle by an aisle. The first people to get on the bus would sit on the first seats opposite the driver's side and closest to the door. That way they would also be the first ones to get out at bingo and therefore the first ones in the queue to buy bingo cards. The bus then picks up people along the road, on the north side first and theoretically on the south side on its way back down. However, people living on the south side would cross the road so as to get on the bus earlier and benefit from all the advantages mentioned above. The next passengers would sit across the aisle from the first ones. The next passengers would sit behind the first ones and the pattern would follow suit. If there was a choice however, men would sit behind men and women behind women. The pattern adopted is to some extent reflective of

the distribution of houses in the community although not entirely, as not all people in the community attend bingo games.

The communication implications of the trip to the bingo game are as follows: Overall, the people would be generally quiet for reasons explained above. Yet they would not be totally silent and if conversation occurred it would generally be in reference to those getting aboard the bus, and initially started by Mrs. Murphy or others sitting close to the bus driver. Although I never had my tape recorder on when I was riding the bingo bus, the reader may get an idea of the type of conversation which I reconstructed in my fieldnotes. So for instance Mrs. Murphy would notice someone coming out of a house and about to miss the bus. She would then warn the bus driver in these terms: "Oh. Here is Georgina, she is coming tonight, she is late. She must have not paid attention to the time, slow down now will you." And the driver would slow down or stop to pick up the passenger. When the passenger would eventually get aboard he or she would be subjected to teasing such as "You almost missed the bus, it would have gone without you, if it wasn't for me." The answer might be "Well my dear I've never missed bingo once yet, I'm not about to start today." Similar comments would also be passed if people who were expected to go to bingo were not in front of their house or obviously not coming. Excuses would be made for them such as "They got visitors from the mainland" or the like.

The Bingo Game¹⁹⁸

When the bus pulls into the high school parking lot, there is an immediate rush out to the door. Bus riders are now assuming their role as bingo players and flock to buy their cards. Bingo cards sell three for five dollars and it is not unusual for the players to buy ten to twelve cards. This giant rush is also accompanied by several comments justifying it or expressing "disgust" at it. Depending on whether or not Mrs. Murphy is among the first to make it to the door where the cards are sold, she has comments to suit or again justify her behaviour and the number of cards she buys or the colour of cards she gets. Comments regarding her turn in the "queue" range from "We better get there quick to get new cards" (as opposed to the old and not so nice ones) to "I prefer to have the old ones because last time I had those new ones and I never won anything with them." These comments may have belief undertones related to the association of cards with good or bad luck.¹⁹⁹ But also they are used by the players to relieve their frustration for not being able to be among the first ones served. In the same manner similar comments with belief undertones are used to justify the number of cards bought and avoid direct reference to the state of finances of the players. Thus a player who buys a large number of cards is

¹⁹⁸See: Laura B. Delind, "Bingo: Some Whys and Wherefores of a Popular Pastime," *Journal of Popular Culture* 18 (1984): 149-56; the author makes similar remarks about bingo games in the State of Michigan.

¹⁹⁹Delind 150.

likely to say "Tonight I feel lucky. I haven't played for a while," or on the contrary a player with a small number of cards might say something like "The priest don't need all that money anyway, they make enough as it is."

This is not to say however that attitudes are never governed by belief. The mere fact that the game is one of pure luck is sufficient to trigger belief-loaded remarks. Comments associated with the actual colour of the cards are examples of this. Some associate such and such a colour with good or bad luck. Yet there is no definite rule as to which colour is lucky or unlucky. In my opinion and based on observations at several bingo games, women players seem to be using those comments more than men who in fact are in a minority at bingo games and are not very talkative during these preliminaries. Thus when conversing with other women about this particular topic Rose Murphy for example might say: "Look at mine, I got those blue ones again, how do you expect me to win, let me see yours, oh well red ones my dear you got it made." The answer would be likely to be "Oh well my dear that might work for you but not for me." These types of comments are also indirect indications of support and encouragement among women, or to an extent a subtle way to wish each other luck. Although their comments might be interpreted as negative expression of belief, it is to be noted that cards would never be exchanged among players, possibly to avoid envy, embarrassment or conflict if a player were to win with cards that had been obtained directly from an exchange with another player, rather than through an intermediary ("the

door"). Cards however may be and are often exchanged directly from the door. As mentioned above there is no clear pattern as to what colour may be lucky or unlucky. The degree of belief is to be considered at the individual level and essentially based on experience. The nature of experience here is immediate. That is, statements from one person concerning one colour or another are likely to change from week to week unless a major jackpot was won with one card of a specific colour. In that case the person is likely to prefer one particular colour of cards over another.

In Cape St. George bingo games take place in the high school cafeteria. A total of approximately a hundred or a hundred and fifty people take part. People sit around the dining table in groups of five or six. Men usually sit with men and women with women. Everybody knows everybody else. Thus rather than sitting with close friends or neighbours whom they see often, people tend to choose to sit with people they would not otherwise have many opportunities to see. Thus bingo was definitely an opportunity to put faces on names which would sometimes crop up during conversation. Mrs. Murphy would often choose a table with somebody whom she and her friends had recently talked about, or with somebody whom she wanted to share news with or get information from. She would justify her choice with comments such as "Oh! We'll go and sit with Rita. Cathy was telling me her daughter came over from Halifax last week." Such comments are examples of the function of bingo games as

social events. While demonstrating high attention skills by playing what seemed to me like a large number of cards at once, women would exchange news of general community interest as well as information relative to their own or other individuals' well-being. This is also the place where a certain amount of fresh news would be talked about. Some of this news would have been based on observations made during the bus trip to bingo:

R.M.: The Russells at the Bill of the Cape were having a barbecue there on our way in.

X.Y.: That's right their son is visiting from Toronto.

A.B.: He got married him over there last month.

R.M.: Is she from there?

A.B.: No Alberta. She is a lawyer or something.

X.Y.: Well I guess they won't be coming back here.

R.M.: I guess.

A.B.: They say she's nice though.²⁰⁰

Conversational exchange during the actual game would be very short and rhythmized by the calls and overall humming of the crowd following each winner.²⁰¹ The players seem to have an excellent memory; at each winner's announcement or after somebody would shout "bingo!" sarcastic comments of the type "Again, she is going to ruin the priest!" would be uttered followed by a reference to the last time the person had won. The winner would then collect the money from "Le Voleur" (the thief).

²⁰⁰Based on fieldnotes, Cape St. George, July 1986.

²⁰¹Delind, 151.

After ten games there is a short break during which people may choose to exchange or buy more cards. The break which lasts about ten minutes is also an opportunity for the participants to go and greet friends and relatives. After the break the evening proceeds with a couple of very short games played with disposable cards on which players indicate numbers with their markers. Prizes for those games are not cash but mostly household items or groceries.²⁰² Comments referring to the winners of those items are usually directed to praising the items themselves, also indicating that despite the fact that they are not cash they are still very useful to the one who wins them. Another eight bingo games are played after this. The jackpot game where fewer numbers are called is the last game of the evening.

Coming Back from Bingo

Once the game is over, buses carry people back home, or as the case may be for the participants in a "spree," to their destination. The bus then, as well as being a means of transportation, also serves to establish a continuum between the two customary modes of socialization.

On the way back from bingo, the women sit together on the bus. In fact, the order in which people sit on the bus returning from bingo is

²⁰²This game is called "Share the Wealth" in Southeast Bight, Placentia Bay.

almost a reversal of the pattern as it is described earlier. That is, each time somebody gets off they are the subject of jokes or sarcastic remarks, but also, their place is almost immediately taken by the person sitting behind them. Thus the trip on the way back from bingo, far from being quiet, is filled by conversation and the constant movement of people trying to get closer to the door as the bus gets closer to their home. The seating organization pattern delineated by friendship gradually re-orders itself to one that matches the unfolding of the house distribution in the community, with of course the exception of those who use the bingo bus as an opportunity to go and visit friends or relatives.

Thus it can be said that the bingo game has the effect of structuring the pattern of the group's informal social gatherings. To summarise, it is only when the bus goes a certain distance that some women will take the opportunity to go and visit their more distant friends. In some cases however, one bus may be used to travel as far as the bingo game and another to travel to the location of the ensuing "spree." Another circumstantial effect of this particular mode of transportation is that of connecting the two customary events in a relationship between past and present. In a sense bingo games, in which the participants in the later gathering also get involved, are a rather "modern" activity, whereas the "sprees" belong to the tradition of informal house visiting in rural communities. Although it does involve the exchange of money, bingo is not so much regarded as a gambling activity as a means by which one

has the opportunity to socialize and exchange news and information with people one might not otherwise talk to in a face to face situation. As there is not much time to elaborate conversations, due to the somewhat rapid pace of the game, subjects of conversation during bingo games are usually casual and treated in a straightforward manner. A combination of choice and social pressure results in the fact that women and men do not sit together. Thus conversations at women's tables tend to revolve on persons and their well-being, whereas from what I overheard, men talk mostly about matters of a more materialistic nature. The generally relaxed and easy-going atmosphere reigning on the bus coming back from bingo supports the argument of a functional continuum exercised by the bus as a physical mode of transportation, hence communication, between the bingo games and the later informal women's gatherings.

The Gathering

When the bus stops in front of the house where the gathering is going to take place, three or four women get off, answering the usual sarcastic comments which, in fact, function as expressions of community acceptance for the modes of entertainment. The women then proceed into the house and into the kitchen where the hostess puts on tea while her guests sit around the table. Each guest keeps her purse with her knitting and other essentials within reach. Someone looks for a deck of cards and places it on the table for further use. As mentioned previously initial conversation revolves around the preceding events.

Such conversational exchanges can also be considered as introductory communicative events which lead to the unfolding of the entire informal social gatherings. Therefore if the nature of such gatherings is to be analysed from a folkloristic perspective, the customary dimension of these gatherings becomes apparent when they are subjected to a holistic approach similar to that suggested by Dan Ben-Amos in his essay "Analytic Categories and Ethnic Genres" in which he raises the following questions:²⁰³

- How traditional is this mode of behaviour?
- Is it repetitive?
- What rules does it follow?
- Are these rules set by the community?
- Can we talk about folklore behaviour or is folklore only to be found in the content of the interaction situation?

The first three questions asked here are the key questions, in that to address them is to determine the folkloric validity and the internal dynamics of the events from a generic point of view. The last two questions on the other hand attempt to discuss the contextual dimension of these events at the community level as well as in the folkloric expression of community values emerging from the interactional situation in which a selected and limited number of individuals take part.

The issue of repetition is probably the easiest one to tackle. As has already been mentioned in a previous chapter, these informal women's

²⁰³Dan Ben-Amos, "Analytical Categories and Ethnic Genres," *Folklore Genres*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos (Austin: U of Texas P, 1976) 215-42.

gatherings sometimes referred to by their participants as "sprees after bingo" are indeed repetitive. They take place on a fairly regular basis, i.e. after bingo games which themselves are scheduled regularly. The problem of tradition however, seems to raise an eternal debate among scholars. One should therefore be wise and use a working definition so as not to take the academic meaning of "tradition" for granted. Thus it shall be pointed out that the informal social gatherings which are under study here, are traditional because they reflect a mode of behaviour which is customary in that it is itself taken for granted by its participants and to a lesser degree by nonparticipants.²⁰⁴ While they do not actively participate in the gatherings, men are nonetheless fully aware of their existence.

This nonparticipative awareness of these traditional events is clearly expressed through jocular comments made by men when seeing small groups of women getting off the bingo bus. Such comments range from "Be easy on the tea!" to "Ca va jacasser 'cor à soir." (There's gonna be some chat again tonight.)²⁰⁵ Because of their commonplace jocularity and their occasional double-entendre, comments such as these are similar to the traditional retort, hence reinforcing the traditional value and recognition

²⁰⁴For a more substantial argument on the concept of tradition see: Jocelyn S. Linnekin, "Defining Tradition: Variations on the Hawaiian Identity," *American Ethnologist* 10 (1983): 241-52; and Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981).

²⁰⁵Fieldnotes; Cape St. George, summer 1986.

allotted to these women's informal social gatherings by the community at large.

The degree of expectation attached to the actual happenings is another element which helps corroborate the determining of tradition with regard to these events and the importance they sustain in women's lives. Such expectation is expressed in terms of the eagerness with which women talk about these events during the daytime. This kind of talk is comparable to comments pertaining to reminiscences about parties, yet another form of traditional gathering, but in the present case it is gender-restricted.²⁰⁶

Women do talk extensively about the "sprees after bingo," often referring to somebody's behaviour, a story or joke told during a previous gathering. Eagerness and the high level of expectation which contribute to defining the traditional nature of these events can also be determined or measured in terms of the relatively important amount of time actually devoted to discussing and planning these gatherings over the phone.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶For additional information about parties see: W.W. Wareham, "Towards an Ethnography of 'Times': Newfoundland Party Traditions Past and Present," Ph.D. diss. U of Pennsylvania, 1982.

²⁰⁷For obvious ethical reasons I cannot exemplify this point, other than by mentioning that a considerable amount of phone conversation went to deal with the organisation of "sprees after bingo."

Having dealt with the two initial questions formulated above concerning repetition and regarding the traditional value attached to such informal women's gatherings as "sprees after bingo," it now remains to address the last three questions which pertain more specifically to the inherent folkloric dimension of these events as it is expressed through their linear structural form, as it appears through the unfolding of these events, as well as through their generic content. Thus in accordance with the ethnographic concern of this study, these three questions will benefit by being approached through a descriptive example of what happens during a "spree after bingo." The genres and values they convey will be discussed in the next chapter.

As can be deduced from their name, these events take place in the evening after bingo games. As mentioned above, initial conversation usually revolves around the happenings of the preceeding bingo game. Thus, sitting around a cup of tea and a "lunch," usually consisting of homemade bread and jam, the participants discuss questions relative to the amount of money so and so may have won, or again to the luck attributed to such and such a way the bingo cards are placed or the bingo markers are used.

Rose had brought me a bingo marker thus "officially" making me part of the bingo crowd... I was advised, always to keep a finger on one card because "it's supposed to bring luck."²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸Fieldnotes: Cape St. George, Thursday 10 July 1986.

These expressions of folk belief are usually quickly denied and thus immediately transformed into similar expressions of disbelief.²⁰⁹ The group is then eventually led to a consensus on the role of bingo games as yet another form of monetary demand subtly imposed upon them by "the priest," as the majority of the bingo games are indeed organised locally by Church authorities. This feeling of helplessness towards the monetary greed of the Church was succinctly summed up by Mrs. Rose Murphy during one of these gatherings:

People don't have to give collection, the priests don't care, there's bingo games for that, for them to get the money anyhow.²¹⁰

It is interesting to note that statements such as this one would be used as final conclusions to what would otherwise become endless series of complaints about the church and its local representatives.

Following this initial conversation, women participants begin a game of cards. Three card games, "Hundred and Twenty," "Crib" and "Pulligen" are favoured by the people I met in Cape St. George. Any of these three games can be played during informal women's social gatherings. It is to be noted however, that women have a preference for "Hundred and Twenty," a game widely played in Newfoundland and also known as "Auction." I also often played a simplified version of this game called "Forty Five" when I was living in Westgate, England and Cork, Ireland.

²⁰⁹For a discussion on this particular topic see: David Hufford "Traditions of Disbelief," *New York Folklore Quarterly* 8 (1982): 47-55.

²¹⁰Fieldnotes: Cape St. George, 31st July 1985.

"Hundred and Twenty" is a relatively simple bidding game and generally played by up to six participants. For that matter and possibly because of the complexity involved with their description, folklorists have paid little attention to card games.²¹¹ Card games are thus probably a prime example of a traditional activity which most definitely requires learning and explaining by doing. "Crib" or "Cribbage," another favourite game, is also popular in other parts of Newfoundland. It is played with a scoreboard which serves as a point marker. The board has four sets of holes (one per player). Little wooden pegs (two per player) placed in the holes account for the players' progress in the game. This progress is determined by the card game itself. The rules are fairly simple and the game can be played by a maximum number of four participants.²¹²

The last of these three trump card games seems to be typical if not native to the Port-au-Port Peninsula. It is called "Pulligen" and French Newfoundlanders in Cape St. George claim to have inherited this game from their metropolitan French ancestors.

Tonight Bob, Sean, Joan and Tony are playing "Pulligen," a card game similar to "Manille" and "Belote." This game according to the players is

²¹¹There is very little information about card games in the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive, other than contextual description of card parties. See MUNFLA 74-47; 74-55; 84-122; 84-177; 84-440.

²¹²For a description of this game see: *Goren's Hoyle Encyclopedia of Games* (New York: Greystone, 1961).

said to be known only in Cape St. George.²¹³

As a matter of fact, this particular game is very similar to the French games of "Belote" and "Manille"²¹⁴. Like "Manille" and "Belote," "Pulligen" is a team game played by two teams of two. Like its French versions the game can be played by two or three participants, which in the latter case means that a team of two plays against a single participant. The game seems to be more popular at mixed social gatherings where couples play against each other. Nevertheless it is not entirely exclusive to mixed social gatherings and in fact is sometimes played at "sprees after bingo." The rules of this last game are slightly more complicated than those of the other two card games mentioned above, which consequently do not require the same amount of attention and therefore may function as a trigger for further conversation as is illustrated below:

S.H.: Aahh we had some fun though oh yeah (last Sunday).

M.H.: Yeah jolly fun.

S.H.: Yeah had some fun, How many games did youse make?

P.R.: You still beat us, and we put them jinker.²¹⁵

M.H.: Six games eh, you made two and there was Frances and herself.

S.H.: Yeah we put youse jinker.

P.R.: Us jinker I never said.

....

²¹³Fieldnotes: Cape St. George, 9th July, 1985. Information confirmed by Pamela Parker, via Helen Parker, 14th Feb. 1991. According to Gerald Thomas a game was recognised as being a simplified version of Belote by two French natives who observed Emile Benoit and his son Michael and two others playing it during a fieldtrip in Black Duck Brook in March 1991.

²¹⁴Manille is mostly played in the North of France, it is a version of Belote which is the national game of cards.

²¹⁵See *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* 278-79.

S.H.:(still talking about last Sunday) And your grandfather looking at us with his eyes right clear eh. My God. I couldn't look at him, and he was feeling good you know, on the last he wanted for ? To stay with him.

B.M: No!!!

P.R: Ooh Ready for the leap he was feeling good there see eh, yeah he wanted for her to stay with him.

M.H: He, so he told me he say "I wonder if she comes stay with me?"²¹⁶

From observation it seems that the amount and intensity of verbal interaction is inversely proportional to the length of the game of cards which usually lasts for an average of two hours. The verbal exchanges at the beginning of the card games are usually short and to the point. Participants then tend to engage in a ritual-like session of mutual teasing.²¹⁷ They "pick" at and tease each other by calling each other names such as "old witch" or "devil." A winner was once teased as follows: "You and your glass eye!" She wins again!

In other words, the evening starts with the participants playing cards and chatting, and then evolves to a stage where the card playing becomes secondary to the chatting itself. Thus the participants' activity can be referred to as chatting while playing cards to the point where the cards are finally cast aside. Conversation then eventually evolves and almost

²¹⁶Tape-recorded interview, Red Brook, 21 July, 1986.

²¹⁷Similar verbal behaviour was observed on several other occasions during my stay in the community. In a way such short communication acts seem to be used and function at the same level as "coaxing" during a storytelling event.

invariably orients itself towards the sharing of narratives dealing with past memories and experiences. This constitutes the second part of an evening. After the card game the participants have another cup of tea. They take their knitting and start the "chat" during which they exchange mostly narratives but sometimes songs, as will be exemplified in a later chapter.

Knitting while chatting is compulsive behaviour for these women. Without their knitting they would probably feel idle. Although as is said earlier, by the time they have reached widow or elderly women status, women are entitled to having a certain amount of leisure time. Yet it seems unusual to them and they have to keep their hands occupied. Although they recognise and admit to this fact, they supplement and justify it by assuming the necessary role of family knitter.²¹⁸ Thus they make socks, gloves and sweaters for all members of their often large families.

Indeed a woman is never idle. Widows further justify this activity as their responsibility by saying that married women have already enough to do with raising their own family. Undertaking knitting can therefore be interpreted as an elderly woman's way to acknowledge the respect she are given by the younger generation. More importantly it can be seen as a

²¹⁸Fieldnotes based on conversations in Cape St. George, July 1986. I would also like to thank my friend and colleague Anita Best for pointing out the importance of this fact in Newfoundland women's lives.

way of providing active support to their daughters who are now experiencing motherhood. While knitting women exchange what is classified later under the headings - kernel narratives, midwives' stories, frights, songs etc.

When the informal gathering gets to a more advanced stage and participants have passed the jocular mood in which they would usually be after a game of cards, the conversation becomes more seriously involved and may for instance deal with the sharing of their experiences as young women, that is, it mostly revolves around narratives of self-discovery. Referring to a gathering where a jocular story had been told about sexuality in which as it happened, Rose Murphy was describing one event concerning childbirth, and specifically discussing the metaphoric language her mother would use to explain the facts of life to her. Conversation then went on to serious midwives' stories.

Informal social gatherings such as "sprees after bingo" are generically structured. That is, narratives shared seem to follow a pattern based on seriousness as well as on degrees of fictitiousness. The evolution of genres used by the participants and viewed by the researcher as expressions of folkloric verbal behaviour unfold according to their degree of rapport with the immediate reality. Thus in what I consider the second part of a gathering, personal narratives which relate ordinary or occupational life experience such as those later exemplified under the

section on kernel narratives and midwives' stories precede those narratives identified as "frights." The latter also convey personal experience but include a supernatural element which when, they are challenged, suggest a certain distancing from the immediate reality. Accordingly, such genres as songs and jigs, the term used to refer to a tune otherwise known as a "jig" or a "reel", which are respectively fictive and non-narrative, denote further distancing from the immediate reality or the everyday-life context of women's experience.

To recapitulate widows' or older women's informal social gatherings tend to follow the pattern described above. After an initial conversation about the preceding bingo game, a game of cards is played and eventually participants engage in the sharing of narratives.

In conjunction with a desire to move conversational exchanges closer to current reality, such informal social gatherings as "Sprees After Bingo" were more than once brought to an end by an exchange of opinions related to local rumour.

At the end of the evening the hostess would prepare a "lunch." Every participant would be actively involved in setting the table and as they sat down to eat, the degree of interaction would decrease in the same way as it had increased during the card game at the beginning of the evening. Participants would again "pick" at each other for a little while and

eventually stop when the time came to help the hostess wash the dishes. As a final marker to the end of the evening, someone would turn on the television set, systematically denying any interest in the program, and eventually go to bed. Neighbours would sometimes go home or stay in the spare room. The hostess would share her bed with her best friend if there were more people than available beds.

Finally we will note that based on observations made during several "Sprees after Bingo," the above account provides answers to the questions raised previously. The "Sprees" are traditional in that they are recurrent and are considered usual by participants and other members of the community. Their unfolding as communicative events follows certain rules which pattern them structurally in terms of chronology and in the distribution of genres and narration time among the participants. These rules may not be applicable to the community as a whole, but are nevertheless characteristic of exclusively female gatherings. Examples will illustrate in the next chapter, the nature of expressive folkloric behaviour within a situational context of verbal interaction defined by the content of the conversational exchanges as well as by the generic progressions.

Married Women's Gatherings

These gatherings have been referred to in the fieldwork chapter. It has been mentioned that there were two different kinds. On the one hand,

the "after the post office" gatherings and on the other the "work-related gatherings." The former can be considered as breaks from women's household chores whereas the latter are combined with women's work and responsibilities.

"After the Post Office" Gatherings

These particular gatherings were taking place at Joan's house, next to the post office. In Cape St. George people do not have personal mail boxes; they are obliged to go to the office to collect their mail. This they do once or twice a week, although some go regularly every day, as they view this activity as a social occasion of sorts. Since the mail comes in at eleven o' clock in the morning, it is the women's task to go and collect it, since men are usually occupied at some outdoor activity at this time.

Joan would expect people to drop in at that time of the day. So before her friends would drop in, Joan and I would engage in what seemed to me a crash course in housework. Except for her youngest son Christy, all male members of the household would have left for work or other outdoors activity. Joan's teenage daughter Lori would sometimes be sent on her way by her mother who did not always want her to stay with the adults. However, Lori would at times be required to participate in the housework as her mother considered it essential life skills education. Lori's participation therefore was more often required on laundry day

(usually Monday) and on "floor-washing" day (Tuesday or Wednesday). "After the Post Office" gatherings would not usually take place on Mondays as laundry was an all-day activity. Most women in the community do their laundry on Monday, thus confirming to organizational custom in women's life.

On gatherings day as well as on any other day of the week, breakfast would be over by nine-thirty in the morning. The dishes would remain on the table until Joan would be finished with washing and dressing Christy, whom she would then set in a corner of the living room with his toys. Once the child was occupied, Joan and I then would be able to clean the kitchen, that is, clear the breakfast table, wash the dishes, counter, and stove, and sweep the floor. This done, the beds would be made and clothes put away. The bathroom would be cleaned and finally the carpet in the living room vacuumed and the furniture dusted. She would be done with the housework and have tea boiling on the stove (in Cape St. George, tea bags are put directly into the kettle and then boiled on the stove, making a very strong, dark tea). She would then prepare two cups, one for each of us, and go and sit down in her rocking chair saying "Time for a break."

The two of us would sit down then and have a well-deserved cup of tea. Joan would be in the rocking chair beside the heating stove. She would have a cup of tea there. From this position she would be able to

look out the window and observe the passers-by. Joan was also waiting for her friends. She would not necessarily know which of them would drop by beforehand but as she'd see them passing by her house she could tell from the way they were dressed or from the pace at which they were walking or again from the company they would be with, whether or not they would be dropping in and approximately how long they would stay. According to Joan, if a woman was dressed very casually, wearing a lumberjacket and sneakers for example, it would mean that she had had no time to look for a more decent coat and pair of shoes and that she probably had to interrupt her chores to go to the "office" and would not have time to drop by on the way back. The same conclusions would be drawn if a woman was walking at a fast pace. If on the other hand, the passer-by was taking her time and/or looked slightly better dressed, it would mean she was not in such a hurry and might probably drop by on her way back. Similarly, if two of Joan's friends were walking up together and especially if they looked toward the house or gave some hand signal it would definitely show their intention to visit and have a chat for at least an hour or so.²¹⁹

"After the post-office" gatherings are very irregular as they vary in terms of the participants. For instance, it is highly unlikely that the five women will all meet together on such occasions; three is usually the most

²¹⁹Fieldnotes based on a conversation with Joan Murphy, Cape St. George, July 1985.

common number of participants. According to my fieldnotes, any combination of three out of five is likely to occur, with Joan always being one of three, given that her house is the point of rendezvous-vous. Brenda and Ann are most likely to come alone, while Jane and Alice may come together or with any member of the group. Other women who are not regular members of this group may also drop by from time to time. In any case, Joan's kitchen can be considered as a gathering centre for her friends after the mail collection.²²⁰

These gatherings are usually short. They rarely last more than an hour. Unlike others, they do not revolve around any work-related activity, in that their prime purpose is socialization and the exchange of news. The time allocated by the women to this kind of gathering has been saved against their housework which they have completed beforehand. My observations showed that it is also limited by their children's activities, that is, limited to the children's lunch break at school or to how long the elder daughter or the babysitter can take care of the younger ones, or until their husbands' lunch break. Consequently the content of conversation is affected by the nature of the gatherings, which themselves happen on what I would call "stolen" or "saved" time. They would often make reference to this idea by pointing out that they would not stay long because they had this or that to do.

²²⁰Fieldnotes, Cape St. George, 1985, 1986, 1987.

The women would sit at the table in such a way as to be able to monitor the comings and goings of the passers-by, and talk about them. Comments would not necessarily be denigrating. They would usually be guesses as to who was getting a check or why would people go to the post office and how often, or whether they were going there or not. At the time of the "French Centre" crisis, women would comment on the local political situation as it would relate to this or that passer-by. Conversation would also be about the mail itself, discussing incoming mail or pointing at the slow process of it all. When discussing incoming mail, usually welfare checks, interaction would center on economic difficulties and unemployment. Women would then compare each other's situation and most times finally agree that as women they were "all in the same boat." The conversation would then orient itself to problem-solving. That would be the time when they would share narratives of their matrimonial experience and basically talk about men. For instance, Jane would take advantage of this time to have a cigarette, for her husband does not allow her to smoke. The tone of conversation is then tenser than usual and a lot of complaints are expressed by the participants. Women are, as I often heard them say, "glad to get away from the men and the kids."

To recapitulate, these morning gatherings are used by participants as breaks between different sets of household activities. They occur between breakfast and lunch, although they do not occupy all of the time between the two meals. Interaction during these gatherings is characterized by the

sharing of news, comments or talk triggered by the activity on the road and by complaints about economic and matrimonial life. These events are probably the prime opportunity for women of this group to reflect on and discuss their status as women in the community.

Work-Related Gatherings

As mentioned in the previous two chapters, married women would also gather to perform work. These gatherings, unlike the "post office" ones, would take place in the evening usually after supper time. The time would have been previously arranged over the phone.

On such a day Joan, who would have made previous arrangements with Jane or as it sometimes happened would phone her after supper and ask if she had anything planned for the night before she would make the suggestion of "coming over to do a bit of sewing." Jane would then get in touch with her neighbors Alice and Brenda to see if they would be interested. Jane would then ring Joan back and if the answer was positive we would get ready and go over to Jane's.

Before going, Joan would gather up her sewing equipment which consisted of whatever needed repair, thread, and needles. She would also go through old clothing items and the two of us would have a chat about what would fit whom, the intention being to bring clothes to give away to

the other women or to their children. Sorting out their clothing is accompanied by comments such as "I can't wear this anymore, I gained too much weight when I stopped smoking," or "Look at this, that's too small for Lori but it would fit Stephanie, though." These comments sometimes serve the function of justifying the fact that Joan does not like such and such a garment anymore. Yet she would never admit to this, as it would be an expression of pride. Comments about the price of some items serve a similar function. Thus Joan would say, "I bought that last year, thirty dollars I paid and look! I can't wear it. That'd be a shame to throw that away, somebody might as well wear it." Each piece selected would be accompanied by comments as to its origin or its price and the reason why it was not worn anymore.

Joan would pack a couple of plastic bags and we would start walking to Jane's house. There are two different ways of going to Jane's from Joan's house. One can choose between the "road" or the "bank," which is the local name for the path along the shore. Either way the walk takes about fifteen to twenty minutes. The difference between the two as explained by Joan is not in the time that it takes but in the degree of privacy. By walking down by the bank we would not expose ourselves to the comments of the residents who would be behind their curtains watching the passers-by. In other words nobody would know where we would be going.

As mentioned before, the road plays an important part in the spreading of gossip and news. That is, when you see somebody passing by your house, you wait until they pass by again on their way back. You then can tell how long they have been gone. In order to know where they went, you phone a couple of people up the road and ask if they themselves saw the person walking past their house. It therefore takes only a couple of phone calls to know where a person went and for how long. Thus, avoiding the road prevents the community from knowing your own comings and goings to a certain extent. The method is never totally foolproof, however, since the "bank" is frequented by young people on "trikes" (all-terrain vehicles) and other teenagers. Teenagers use the bank for their drinking and courting activities. As we were walking down the bank Joan pointed to areas where the grass had been burnt by teenagers' campfires. Men also have their gatherings down the shore in the fish stores, thus walking that way allows adult women to enter men's domain, as it is easy to see whose store is lit and whose "trike" is parked outside. The shore is prime territory for men and teenagers, and is outside the women's domain.

Women use the lane along the shore but do not actually trespass this cognitive boundary. The information acquired by walking down the shore can be later used during conversations at the gathering. The only inconvenience to not walking down the road is that we do not get to pass by the social centres such as the store, the two clubs, the video store, and

the garage. By missing those, we also miss the activity. One time we actually missed a fight and regretted not having walked down the road and having been able to witness this event, which was the talk of the community for some time. When we would arrive at Jane's house, Ann and Alice would already be there.

Jane owned a sewing machine and was fairly competent with it. Her husband, however, did not encourage her to use it because its noise would drive him out of the house. According to Jane it was not the noise of the sewing machine he was annoyed with, but the talking of the women who came to sew together. Jane would organize sewing sessions. Each participant would bring her work and get Jane to do it on the machine when they had it prepared. They would also do Jane's preliminary sewing so that her own work was ready to go to the machine.

Women would take this opportunity to exchange clothes although such exchange was never clearly defined and understood by them as being the primary reason for the gatherings. Rather, they would bring in various clothes for sewing purposes but with the intention of presenting them to their friends. These gatherings were to some extent an exchange centre for children's clothing. Joan, whose children were tall, would give Jane some of the clothes that they could not wear anymore. Alice who had young children, would present Joan with clothing for her baby.

During these gatherings women occupied the entire social space in Jane's house, that is: the kitchen as well as the living room. This may be a more plausible reason as to why Jane's husband felt compelled to leave the house. There was literally no space for him to be if he did not want to sit with the women. Tables and seats, including those in the living room, were taken up by clothing, sewing apparatus, and the material. The sewing machine was set up on its own table and only a corner of the kitchen table was available for tea cups and ashtrays. The house looked like a beehive. Of the four women present, two would be sitting at the kitchen table hemming and doing other preliminary work with their own material before bringing it to the machine. They would compare patterns bought or recount shopping trips or order from catalogues. These gatherings are also the time to discuss such subjects as children's education and teenage behaviour. News concerning the evolution of every day life and the politics of the community are also exchanged. The two other women were in the living room by the sewing machine. One was at the machine itself while the other prepared and held the curtain or other major piece of work to be sewn. Because of the noise made by the sewing machine, the two women sitting by it did not talk very much. Whoever was holding the large piece of material would take a break every now and then and be replaced by one of the women sitting at the kitchen table. Only when Jane, who operated the sewing machine, took a break did the four women sit together at the table.

These breaks would coincide with interruptions made by a neighbour's visit, a child or a husband's entrance and demands. The women would have a cup of tea and a cigarette or two. Conversation revolved around men and children as well as other current issues such as child molesting or community politics. Local rumours were also discussed. Narratives were short and often introduced by a kernel. During this particular gathering a whole break was spent talking about teenage girls going to dances. Three of the women's daughters were going to a dance the next weekend. Joan had brought Lori's new suit to adjust it. Aside from the fact that Joan wanted to make a show of her daughter's suit to her friends, the suit and the work to be done on it also triggered a whole conversation on the different aspects of teenagers' dances from their mothers' perspectives. That is, topics such as appearance would be broached, and as Joan said "You have to be perfect, if you're not perfect people will talk." This expression "people will talk", was often used as a caution to any remarks or gossip that could be potentially detrimental to an individual, a family or a group of unrelated friends or acquaintances. The expression relates to a general sense of pride people have about themselves and those they associate with.

Teenage dances are also perceived as situations for potential trouble, bringing on discussions of issues such as birth control and unwanted pregnancy. These discussions would eventually turn to the issue of men and take the women back to discussing their marital

problems which could never really be radically solved because of their responsibility towards the children's education.

Concluding Remarks

To conclude this chapter, it is fair to say that according to the main group to which they belong (widows or married) women observe different modes of gathering. Parameters such as time and place are particular to each mode of gatherings. Despite this, the important fact remains: Women in Cape St. George, whether they are widows or married women with family responsibilities, spend time together. During this time they share a sense of group identity as friends and also as daughters, mothers, wives, widows or grandmothers. Each of these five roles is by definition a woman's role. As we have seen by looking at the context of their informal social gatherings it is the experience implied by this woman role which brings meaning to the interaction that occurs during these groups' gatherings. The next chapter will examine examples of folklore genres as they emerge during some of these women's informal gatherings in terms of their function and the values they convey.

Chapter 6

EXAMPLES OF FOLKLORE GENRES EMERGING FROM INTERACTIVE SITUATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF WOMEN'S INFORMAL SOCIAL GATHERINGS

In the present chapter particular attention will be given to the transmission of knowledge important to women's experience, as expressed by examples of the various folklore genres emerging from informal social gatherings of the kind described in the previous chapter. Data excerpts consist of genres which are essentially of the personal narrative kind.

In the folk tradition, narrators who tell personal-experience stories, or participate in enacting other folklore forms, usually work on a specific framework. Because they may choose words, phrases, diction, formulae and performance style, the mode of presentation is their own. However, narrators are conditioned by and restricted to what is traditionally accepted within their own culture.²²¹

These narratives will be generically identified and folkloristically analysed. Considering their content, it can be said that most of these genres are cross-contextual, that is, they can emerge in any of the gatherings

²²¹Eleanor Wachs, *Crime-Victim Stories: New York City Urban Folklore* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988) 39.

described in the previous chapter. However, songs, jigs, frights and midwives' stories tend to be more common to such gatherings as elderly women's sprees after bingo and for the readers' benefit will be examined in a separate chapter.²²²

Beside strict generic description and folkloric analysis, attention and focus will also be given to the meaning of the content of the genres to the women. Discussion will therefore incorporate reference to the values expressed by these genres and especially to those values which are specifically important from a gender perspective.

It is therefore in this broader conversational context that specific folklore genres will be analysed. Such genres, because they belong within this conversational context, are essentially forms of verbal expressive behaviour. In such an instance it is tempting to follow the model developed by Roger Abrahams in his article "The Complex Relations of Simple Forms," as it could be applied to the reality of these informal social gatherings.²²³ Abrahams starts from the premise that genres help focus on the relationship between performer and audience and give names to traditional attitudes and strategies which may be utilized by the performer

²²²"frights" is an emic term for narratives of frightening encounters.

²²³Roger Abrahams, "The Complex Relations of Simple Forms," *Folklore Genres* ed. Dan Ben-Amos (Austin U of Texas P, 1976) 193-214.

in his or her attempt to communicate with and affect the audience.²²⁴

The level of interaction among the participants during the gatherings studied here affects the otherwise identifiable parallel established between genre and performance. Abrahams establishes a parallel between genre and performance which is defined at the communicative level by the degree of interaction which takes place between performer and audience.²²⁵ At the one end of this double spectrum are conversational genres which imply total interpersonal involvement. At the other end are what Abrahams calls "static" genres in which the level of involvement between performer and audience is one of total removal. The scholar however, restricts conversational genres to the smallest elements of patterned expression common to a group (local naming, jargon, slang, etc.) or to formal conventions of the discourse of address, appeal and assault (proverbs, curses, taunts, etc.)²²⁶ He does not consider in his model those genres which, according to our data, emerge from and exist in a conversational context, such as narratives based on experience common to a whole group of participants, or narratives constructed cooperatively by several participants and partially based on hearsay or issuing from gossip.

²²⁴Abrahams 193.

²²⁵Abrahams 207.

²²⁶Abrahams 201.

While Abrahams' model is indeed not totally dismissable, observation has been made during several gatherings in Cape St. George of cooperation in constructive and progressive narration. In such instances, performance is shared in a conversational process which progressively leads to the elaboration of a narrative. The folklore dimension of such narrative is evident in its structural layout as will be shown in the discussion following. Yet it is difficult to restrict its classification to the specific category of personal experience narrative, and therefore consider it, as Abrahams would, within the same category along with fictive genres. The narrative referred to here emerged from input by both participants, hence the term "cooperative construction," between Mrs. Joan Murphy and Barbara Murphy on an item relevant to a local occurrence of child molesting.²²⁷ The context of the narrative is a "work-related" gathering.

Interaction and Cooperative Narrative Construction²²⁸

(1) J.M.: You gotta go down there tonight now.

B.M.: Yeah.

J.M.: What you do tonight though?

B.M.: Tell, no (laughs) no it's just our outing eh

- (5) (laughs) we we have a little meeting and then
after our, our letters are already read well
then we have our outing eh, we're gonna have some
chicken and chips this evening, and some dessert
and the woman, the executive women, they, they
(10) bring the desert and that eh.

²²⁷Personal communication. Cape St. George; 17 June 87.

²²⁸In this narrative as well as in all data quoted in this dissertation, M.D. is me.

- M.D.: How many women belong to the group?
 B.M.: Well, we had twenty when I first started out,
 but now I think we just got thirteen or fourteen left.
 M.D.: Ah yeah.
- (15) B.M.: Yeah, it's dying out now.
 M.D.: And what do you mean, you read your letters and stuff
 like that?
 B.M.: Well we get letters from other, the other institute
 right, the other branches right.
- (20) M.D.: Where is it?
 B.M.: All over the world.
 M.D.: All over the world!
 B.M.: Yes a lot of places, Gander, St John's, Corner Brook,
 Stephenville, Kippens, well Stephenville and Kippens
- (25) is the same institute right!
 M.D.: Yeah.
 B.M.: But it's a lot of places and we have, what would you
 call that now, well it's a lot of women that come
 from all over the place right, and we have, speeches
 and stuff like that you know, it's a convention eh,
- (30) we had one last year in the community college.
 M.D.: Oh yeah so you went?
 B.M.: Oh Yeah!
 M.D.: So, how many people were there?
- (35) B.M.: Oh my! I would say about two hundred people!
 M.D.: Oh Yeah? and what went on, what kind of speeches
 and stuff like that?
 B.M.: Well I didn't take in all the convention, I just,
 I just went for the last night but there was a lot
- (40) of speeches, there a lot of stuff I don't understand
 hein, you know because I only recently started but,
 the only way you who you would like to speak to now
 that would be aunt Miriam, she could fill you in with
 a lot of stuff eh!
- (45) M.D.: Yeah?
 B.M.: You know, but if you come to the meeting tonight you
 probably could get a lot of it.
 M.D.: What time is that now?
 B.M.: Seven o'clock tonight, it's in the French Centre.
- (50) J.M.: Why don't you go down with her?
 M.D.: Maybe I'll go with you.
 J.M.: You're walking down along?
 M.D.: How long does it last?

- B.M.: Well our outing, well it starts at seven and
 (55) sometimes we get out at nine, eight thirty or nine,
 you know, but tonight it will be a little while because,
 well we got our meeting first and then is, then
 it's our outing eh! you know.
- M.D.: Yeah, yeah well I don't know exactly you know, maybe
 (60) I could go just for the meeting but, I'm not sure
 whether it would be better for me to meet Miriam first,
 you know?
- B.M.: You could.
- M.D.: Before I go to a thing like that. When is the next
 (65) meeting after today?
- B.M.: Well this is the last meeting of the year, we start
 again in september.
- M.D.: So if I didn't go tonight, I'll give her a call anyway,
 her phone number is under Miriam Winsor?
- (70) B.M.: No Harold, Harold Winsor. (lower tone)
- J.M.: You better, she doesn't know you really,
 (to Barbara) it'd be better you to call for her right,
 you know.
- M.D.: Ah maybe we could
- (75) B.M.: I'm vice-president so I would
- M.D.: Ah, you're vice-president
- J.M.: Ah that's OK then!
- B.M.: I could invited you to come you know.
- M.D.: Yeah, and explain to her what I'm doing and stuff
 (80) you know, I would like to go and just to see what's
 going on, you know, to meet anyway, the group and see
 what happens at the meetings right, that would be good
 for me, for my research, if I could do that, because I
 study women's groups like that, informal women's groups
- (85) but it would be good for me to know what the formal
 one is about too eh! just to see, so we'll go tonight
- B.M.: Oh Yeah!
- M.D.: Around six or seven, what time did you say?
- B.M.: Well, the meeting is at seven, so I'll leave here
- (90) around about five o'clock, five thirty, because I
 meet her first eh! I go to her house first, and then
 we go over after.
- M.D.: Where is her house?
- B.M.: It's not too far from the French centre.
- (95) M.D.: So maybe the two of us could go to her house first
 and maybe we could do an interview with her first

- J.M.: That would be nice.
 M.D.: Then go to the meeting you know and then after the meeting,
 (100)M.D.: Then go to the meeting you know and then after the meeting, well I'd come back, that could be an idea, well, yeah that would be good for me you know. Now I wanted to know there, what's going on there with the three guys who have
 (105) been caught for child molesting? (to Barbara)
 You said there was one going down the pub tonight, to the club?
 B.M.: That was my brother-in-law, ZZZ.
 he molested four of his children
 (110)J.M.: I thought it was only three me!
 B.M.: Four (whispered).
 J.M.: Four (whispered). Sin though eh?
 B.M.: And myself I think he's gonna get off.
 J.M.: Yeeess... for fuck sake around here.
 (115)M.D.: (at the same time) He's gonna get off like what?
 B.M.: YYY got off!
 J.M.: Plead not guilty eh.
 B.M.: He well, he, they they didn't have anything on him eh.
 (120)J.M.: So he didn't, they're not gonna do nothing! God love eh! and How come they took the kids away then? That makes any sense to you?
 B.M.: No it don't make no sense to me at all.
 J.M.: It's just crazy, they never got no proof, well
 (125) I don't see why, she don't give, they don't give them back the kids, so in court again, the other three is gonna get off too right!
 B.M.: I think so me (in a desperate tone).
 J.M.: Well, them, they're suppose, their sentence's
 (130) suppose to be the last of the month right, thirty-first right?
 B.M.: WWW and
 J.M.: The other three, XXX and YYY.
 B.M.: (at the same time) And YYY young YYY.
 (135)J.M.: And him he's gonna get off too ZZZ I guess
 B.M.: Yeah but now see, he's got four against him eh?
 J.M.: Yeah I suppose so
 B.M.: (at the same time) And he was brutal see, like you know he wasn't only sexual abusing

- (140) them but they, he was brutal to them eh!
 You know he used to be really, he used to
 beat on them and that eh!
 J.M.: Yeah, oh!
 B.M.: The twins right.
- (145) J.M.: Sin that (whispered)!
 M.D.: So the kids, they reported them to their
 mother or what?
 B.M.: Hum hum.
 M.D.: After how many years?
- (150) B.M.: Well now see, they they seen a film on,
 on street proving and like usually when the
 children watched that, things comes out.
 M.D.: You've seen the film you?
 B.M.: Oh Yeah.
- (155) M.D.: Where?
 B.M.: At the school, they got "Street Proving" now,
 they they asked the parents, well they showed
 it to us before they showed it to the children
 right and, the parents said you know, go ahead
- (160) with it because they need it right! They need
 protection eh!
 M.D.: But, the parents, is it only the mothers who go
 to, or is also the fathers?
- B.M.: Well, they ask the parents to go, so the
- (165) mother and the father could go, or just one,
 but it was a nice turn out for that before the
 children, got, you know seen it eh?
- M.D.: So who organized the film, the projection of
 the film, is it the school, or the French
- (170) centre or what?
 B.M.: Well, the sister sent home the letter saying
 you know they had, you know they, they had a
 meeting for, for the parents, for "Street Proving"
 and they asked us to, see the film first and, you
- (175) know but, you know if it was a good idea to us, for
 them to see it right! and I found it interesting.
 M.D.: What kind of a film, what do you see in
 the film, what kind of a film is it?
- B.M.: Well, it, it showed you know, children being,
 (180) molest, right? And like, like the, like the
 ones who abused the children well then they
 tell them, "Don't tell anybody," and then

- like the children used to be nervous right? and some parents didn't believe them, and, and they
- (185) said you know if the children, if the parents won't believe it, go to a person that, would, you know you could confide in right? And this one here was about, they went to the teacher, and and the teacher, did something about it you know.
- (190) M.D.: How long after they had seen the movie did they do that? The kids, how long, the kids saw the movie one night and then, how long it was until they went to the teacher and tell them, that, it was going on?
- B.M.: Well, apparently it wasn't that long ago that,
- (195) (to Joan), how long ago since, since that little girl told the teachers about it there and they record her?
- J.M.: By Jesus, it's about more than a month ago eh? They record it in school right?
- (200) B.M.: Yeah.
- J.M.: I was thinking, that's what it was too, they taped her eh, it must be.
- B.M.: (interrupts) Well see once she start to talk eh!
- J.M.: To the school there eh?
- (205) B.M.: Yeah, she start talking, she start talking to the, well, apparently it was two teachers they were carrying on right!
- J.M.: Hmmmm.
- B.M.: Really I don't know who they are but, I mean I
- (210) heard right, and this little girl here, this little VVV, the little girl there she says well you, you know, she said "What are youse trying to do, trying to get it on" you know eh? and, they was really disgusted about them you know, what she
- (215) was saying right, and then after she seen that, that movie, that film, she start talking and then one day and then they decided to to tape her right, and then after, you know well the sister, heard it well then I guess she...
- (220) J.M.: Go ahead.
- B.M.: She put it ahead yeah.
- M.D.: Oh because it was going on, like it was the teachers who were molesting the girl?
- B.M. & J.M.: (together) No no no!
- (225) B.M.: No see they, like, like after they seen the film, of,

of of sexual abuse, street proving and that, well then she start talking about it because it was happening in her home, see.

J.M.: So the teachers taped her right.

(230)M.D.: Alright, and the teachers what, what did they do with the tape?

B.M.: Well that I don't know but I know they, they called the cops on it and the social services.

J.M.: So it wasn't much chance nothing, nothing's gonna
(235) be done. They can do all they wants now!

B.M.: Yeah, I mean they're, they're reporting them but they're not getting, they're not getting anything for it, I mean you know, like ole, like YYY.

J.M.: He told you he was clear eh?

(240)B.M.: Well see he went to court the ninth of June and, apparently he got off because there was no evidence against him!

J.M.: He had to go there to crack. (pause) Phew!

B.M.: Well, like I say if YYY, if, if ZZZ gets off,
(245) well it might as well for them to forget about "Street Proving" because there's nothing, there's nothing gonna be done about it right!

J.M.: No.

B.M.: I mean you know.

(250)J.M.: And he got four against him.

B.M.: It was put, the the street proving film was supposed to, to get results, so it's getting results I supposed, but they're not getting punished for it eh, I mean you know they're getting found out but they're

(255) not getting punished for it.

J.M.: Tttt, what about Connie, now her she doesn't know, she didn't know anything about that eh?

B.M.: (whispered) No.

J.M.: Sin though.

(260)B.M.: It was only when her children start to talk, see they seen the street proving, film eh, and then when they came home they start, you know, asking her questions and, then they start to talk her eyes just popped right out of her head.

(265)M.D.: But, how come she didn't know?

B.M.: He was threatening them see. He, well he was molesting them right, feel them up and that eh, and, he used to tell them "Don't you tell! If you do tell, I'll crack your neck"

you know, garbage like that eh, so they were terrified of
 (270) him anyway, from before right, and then after, after they
 seen the film, one talk and then the other one
 start talking and the next one talk

J.M.: (Interrupts) Bet she was fucking shocked right there

B.M.: I mean you know, she was sick to her stomach

(275)J.M.: (interrupts) Imagine!

B.M.: She, she said it was just like the, the blood had
 drained out of her face and, he noticed too right! But
 she passed it off, but, they weren't allowed to use the
 phone apparently, so when she seen her chance, she called

(280) the cops from another house.

M.D.: They weren't allowed to use the phone!?

J.M.: Miserable, miserable life!

B.M.: Well see I mean you know, only him right.

J.M.: Miserable life eh, she must be happy now!

(285)B.M.: She gonna get her number change and stuff like that
 there now, but see he's bothering her, he called her
 see that's what

J.M.: (interrupts) Oh yeah.

B.M.: That's what broke his probation eh, you know, but
 (290) he didn't get nothing out of it because he never
 threatened her anyway eh!

J.M.: No.

B.M.: He just want to meet her some place.

J.M.: Did she tell that to the cops now?

(295)B.M.: Oh yeah.

J.M.: Yeah, some place to kill her I suppose!

B.M.: It's all like him see? Why would he want to meet her?

J.M.: Yeah!

M.D.: Because he's not allowed to talk to her no more.

(300)B.M.: He's not allowed to talk to her, he's not allowed
 to, phone her, not allowed to try to see her, not
 allowed to go inside the field, not even allowed to
 try to see the kids or go to the school or anything
 like that, he's not allowed, he's supposed to be ten

(305) miles, either way from her.

M.D.: But he still wants to talk to her?

B.M.: Hmm, to explain, right!

J.M.: (laughs)

B.M.: But he's trying to talk himself out of it eh.

(310)J.M.: Yeah, try to clear his name I guess.

M.D.: To explain what?

- B.M.: (sighs) I don't know!
 J.M.: Explain to her he didn't do it I suppose. It must be.
 B.M.: All I know he's got a hell of a nerve! But see he's
 (315) so brazen eh!
 J.M.: Yeah I suppose eh!
 B.M.: (whispering) Brazen.
 J.M.: They don't know he was at the club right.
 B.M.: He is brazen! He'll cop himself out of anything eh!
 (320)J.M.: Hmm.
 B.M.: And he'll, he'll make it, he'll, he'll talk to her
 and he'll make her, you know he'll try to, pass her
 off for a liar and she'll believe it see, because you
 know, he, he, he's got a way with him
 (325) that, he'll talk himself out of it.
 M.D.: So he hasn't gone to court yet, this one.
 B.M.: Well he went yesterday, but, never heard no talks about
 J.M.: (interrupting) Nothing.
 B.M.: What he's gonna get or did he get off or
 (330)J.M.: (interrupting) Off the hook I guess!
 B.M.: (laughs) My God!
 J.M.: Oh mok!
 B.M.: But see if he gets off the hook, she is baisée!
 J.M.: Hmmm! Tout fini là.
 (335)B.M.: Because, he, he did tell me that he will serve his
 time if he got any time right! But he would, he would
 deal with her in his own way after he get out.
 J.M.: Made me scare that me you know.
 B.M.: But I wouldn't tell her that because I'd be right
 (340) in the middle of it!
 J.M.: Yeah you'd have to go court see.
 B.M.: Oooohhh!!!
 J.M.: He told you eh! (whispered) What a fuck-up!
 M.D.: Yeah but, don't you think somebody has to tell her that?
 (345)B.M.: I, I, I couldn't put myself in telling her something like
 that.
 J.M.: No.
 B.M.: She's having a hard enough time eh!
 J.M.: Yeah.
 (350)B.M.: I mean you know.
 J.M.: Sin boy.
 M.D.: Because, there is a law against that eh.
 B.M.: Because he wouldn't allow her, he wouldn't allow her
 to see any of, any of her family right.

- (355) J.M.: No.
 B.M.: And she's so glad she's back with the family eh.
 J.M.: See now when he told you that now, there could have been somebody else with you.
 B.M.: Yeah but see was over the phone eh they're not gonna take that.
- (360) J.M.: No no I know but like I'm saying if he would have tell you that in person right it would have been somebody else with you that's what I meant. See.
 B.M.: Hmm. But he said he will deal with her in his own way.
- (365) J.M.: (interrupting) He told you eh!
 B.M.: Yeah! Brazen as brass!
 J.M.: (whispering) My oh my.
 B.M.: She told me he would call me, try to clear his name eh! But, I didn't wanna hear anything he had to say!
- (370) He even gave me a message to give to her! What fucking brazen you! eh! She was please!
 J.M.: She must have gone through a hell of a time though.
 B.M.: She said "nineteen years of agony and hell."
 J.M.: (whispering) Honest to God.
- (375) J.M.D.: But the kids now, how about the kids?
 B.M.: Well he drove one of them mentally insane! He had to, go, to the Janeway there, with, I can't say...
 J.M.: (interrupting) You think he did that to him I wonder?
 B.M.: Yes.
- (380) J.M.: Yeah.
 B.M.: But it needs to be proven eh!
 J.M.: Yeah but I mean you can't prove that me.
 B.M.: It's only if the kids would come forward right!
 J.M.: Hmm.
- (385) B.M.: But he's, has been, he's been at him a long time eh! And that's, that's what happened he drove him, he drove him kind of crazy eh!
 J.M.: (whispering) Yeah.
 B.M.: He's on nerve pills and all that and I dare say he, he'll be like that for the rest of his life.
- (390) J.M.: (whispering) What a sin.
 B.M.: But he is pretty stable now though! You know.
 J.M.: They must be some happy.
 B.M.: (interrupting) But he is scared eh!
- (395) J.M.: Yeah they must be some happy to be all with their mother.
 B.M.: Yeah, they told me they were on cloud nine!

- J.M.: Sin, you feel sorry for kids like you know.
 B.M.: Hmm. And they're so loveable.
 M.D.: So what did they say to her, do you know what they
 (400) said to their mother?
 B.M.: Well see she never went in to any details eh. But,
 they, they're scared and especially he pleads not guilty...
 J.M.: (interrupting) Hmm,
 B.M.: They'll all have to go to court.
 (405) J.M.: That's what's gonna happen too.
 B.M.: She said and that's what she's frightened of see.
 The kids're going to crack up, but they got to see, their,
 to see their father eh. They're gonna crack right up.
 M.D.: But, how old is he, the father?
 (410) B.M.: The, the man?
 M.D.: Yeah.
 B.M.: He is, sixty-nine.
 M.D.: Sixty-nine. So he did that...
 B.M.: To his children.
 (415) M.D.: For how long, for twenty years you said?
 B.M.: Well apparently he's he's doing it since they're born
 J.M.: Mmmmmmmmm.
 B.M.: And what kids, what kids did he molest before they
 came along? You know, that's a question you gotta to
 (420) ask right!
 J.M.: That's something to prove, that's something to prove eh.
 B.M.: Yeah.
 J.M.: You know.
 B.M.: Well now, the only one that could, could really convict
 (425) him right that would be the oldest one eh. You know well
 it's only her they could get a statement from eh, in in
 school, like the rest is all underage, but soon they talk
 to her they went pick him up right away.
 J.M.: Hmm.
 (430) B.M.: And for what she told him, she never went in, in any
 details because like it's hard on them eh.
 J.M.: It's hard on her too! Can you imagine Ian doing that
 to your, to, hmmmmmmmm.
 B.M.: He'd never live to tell about it my dear, he'll never
 (435) live to tell about it.
 J.M.: It's must be bad feeling my son.
 B.M.: And them they couldn't stand him from before.
 J.M.: Besides that. Punishment doing all that.
 B.M.: (interrupting) Because he, he made her life a living hell,

(440) they couldn't walk, they couldn't walk by him, he used to knock them right off of their legs.

J.M.: What a thing isn't that cruel!

B.M.: He's not a good man but he, he was not a good man.

(Pause to turn tape)

B.M.: They usually, well they usually say you know, you gotta look out for the father or the uncle or the brother, you know eh?

J.M.: Hmm

B.M.: That's not a very nice, nice thing to...

J.M.: (interrupting) Yeah but some people are sick.

(450) B.M.: To think about stuff like that you know.

J.M.: That's not but some people got it right!

B.M.: Yeah, see that's not normal eh.

J.M.: No. when it comes to your uncle or your brother, man you know.

(455) M.D.: And, do they talk about that at the Women's Institute there when you go?

B.M.: Oh well we never had a meeting since that. (pause)

That's not something you likes to talk about some, some women they, they get to manage to take the foot, they,

(460) they goes overboard with it eh!

J.M.: Hmm.

M.D.: And what about the others, do you know about the other, the other guys there?

B.M.: Which ones is that?

(465) M.D.: Well the other guys that were caught.

B.M.: No I don't know nothing about them.

M.D.: No.

B.M.: I mean there's a lot of rumours but you wouldn't know the truth anyway.

(470) J.M.: Hmm.

B.M.: You know.

M.D.: What do people say about it?

B.M.: Disgusting, they're just, they're disgusted. Wouldn't you, wouldn't you if it happened to your children, if you

(475) had children?

M.D.: I guess so.

J.M.: Oh my god!

B.M.: Well she is, they're just my niece and my nephews but it's just like they would be mine.

(480)J.M.: Hmm.

B.M.: It's just, you know it affect just like it would have been mine right, you know. You look at them, they're so innocent eh.

J.M.: That's a sin.

(485)B.M.: You know, they don't know about life because they, they were never allowed outside the yard of their, of their school, I mean, they weren't even allowed to play outside in the yard they were too ashamed anyway, I mean you know they'd the other children would poke fun at them

(490) they used to call them "jailbirds" and stuff like that you know.

J.M.: Hmm.

B.M.: They weren't allowed outside or anything, they weren't allowed to associate with anybody.

(495)M.D.: Why not?

B.M.: Because he didn't allow.

M.D.: What about her what did she say?

J.M.: What could she do?

B.M.: Yeah what **could** she do, she couldn't say anything, she (500) couldn't talk to her children.

J.M.: Hmmmm.

B.M.: He was there listening eh.

J.M.: I think I would run away.

B.M.: She wasn't even allowed to talk about **her** family, they (505) didn't, well when they came up here after it happened right they didn't know who was their relatives, they didn't know who was their aunts and their uncles, they thought I was just a friend of Connie's, they didn't know I was her sister.

(510)J.M. Hmmmm.

B.M. They never did meet Frank they never did meet Jane, they don't know Jane.

J.M.: Hmm, crime that.

B.M.: The only one they knows now it's me and, me and Jean (515) and Wanda now, they, they met Wanda and they met Mum, but, they don't know their, their family. (sighs)

M.D.: But, how come she, stayed with him all the time if, it was like?

B.M.: Terrified.

(520)M.D.: Terrified?

B.M.: She, she left him once, but he found her.

M.D.: Terrified of what?

B.M.: Of him what he would do.

M.D.: Did he ever beat her up or something like that?

(525) B.M.: He made offers but he never did hit her. A man like that slap you eh, he'd kill you with one smack.

J.M.: Oh one big man.

B.M.: He's an awful big man buddy!

J.M.: Yeah that's right.

(530) B.M.: Ooohh.

J.M.: I wouldn't want to get a crack from him

B.M.: One smack my dear I tell you one smack from him and you're out. And like you know, it's no, it's no good to tell him anything because he knows better he's

(535) a war veterans man and he knows everything right, so he claims that he knows everything nobody knows anything, they're all, they're all nobodies to him eh.

M.D.: And where does he stay now?

B.M.: I don't know now, I don't, I heard that he was living

(540) out at Neil Sullivan's in Sullivan's Creek but I, from what Joan said he was up here last night so I don't know.

M.D.: And when he was up here last night nobody tried to get on his case?

(545) J.M.: No, nobody, nobody goes around with him, talks to him

B.M.: Nobody talks to him.

J.M.: You can imagine.

B.M.: I mean you know they're well I guess they're terrified of him too, of what he's gonna do eh, but he's not

(550) supposed to drink, when he went to court Thursday, he was not allowed to drink, the cop told, the judge told him that if he would ever get caught drinking before his next court he would be back in jail again, he wasn't suppose to drink anymore because he's, he's
(555) been on the booze I don't know it's a long time now he's on the booze. (Sound of the oven buzzer) My bread is out, my bread is ready.

J.M.: Done.

B.M.: Keep talking.

(560) J.M.: It's a hard racket boy! eh!

M.D.: Yeah.

J.M.: How many bread do you make anyway?

B.M.: I made eight today.

J.M.: Yeah, it should do you for a long time eh.

(565) B.M.: Oh yes, that's for a long time.

- J.M.: What a nice, what a nice oven eh, the size!
 B.M.: Not really cooked very good though.
 J.M.: You got "clean by itself" there? (the oven)
 B.M.: Self cleaning yeah but...
 (570)J.M.: Self cleaning.
 B.M.: Just wash it with soap and water.
 J.M.: Yeah.
 B.M.: It all comes out, that's dirty now I needs to
 clean my oven.
 (575)J.M.: I like the colour of that la.
 M.D.: Yeah.
 J.M.: Nice.
 B.M.: I'll leave it in for another couple of minutes.
 J.M.: Who babysits for you tonight now?
 (580)B.M.: Well I'll be taking them with me and Luke will look
 after them eh.
 J.M.: Oh yeah yeah. So you go there and pick them up
 after the meeting.
 B.M.: Yeah.
 (585)J.M.: Hmm.

Discussion

The narrative, which emerged from a conversation between two members of one of the "married women" groups, dealt with one of the then on-going cases of child molesting in the community, and in a generic sense, it belongs somewhere between gossip and personal experience narrative. The main narrator, that is the most expressive participant, actually introduces the narration process by stating her personal connection with the main character in the story, "That was my brother-in-law"(108). The personal nature of this introductory statement is also used as a device to ensure her narrative performance power, in that she understates her

privileged knowledge of the story.²²⁹ Subsequent statements of a similar nature are later used to maintain her position as the main narrator and from an analytical viewpoint support the argument for generically identifying this story as a form of personal experience narrative.²³⁰ For instance, on occasions she mentions a personal contact with the main characters in the story: "He did tell me..." (335) and later "She told me..." (368) and "They told me..." (397). In fact, the narrator's involvement remains at the level of her occasional but nonetheless, from the narrative point of view, important contacts with the various protagonists in the story.²³¹

It is however, by examining the role and the extent of the contribution of the other participant as gossip, to the development of the narrative that its dimension can be established. Contribution is kept to a minimum, in that it is essentially restricted to comments on the content of the main narrator's story. As part of the conversation and therefore in a dialogue form, the functions served by these comments are limited and specific. Apart from expressing an occasional doubt or indirectly asking the odd

²²⁹See remarks made by Rosaldo and Lamphere about the notions of women and power in the introduction essay to *Woman, Culture and Society* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1974).

²³⁰See: Gillian Bennett, "Narrative as Expository Discourse," *Journal of American Folklore* 99 (1986): 419.

²³¹Bennett 429.

question as in "I thought it was only three me!" (110) or "And him he's gonna get off too ZZZ I guess," (135) which are used to coax the main narrator into providing more details, the majority of the secondary narrator's contributions consist of expressive comments emphasizing the characters' behaviour, or as is sometimes the case, her own personal feelings regarding the content and the performance of the narrative itself. For example, after the main narrator has described the awful living conditions of her characters, the other narrator comments by saying "Miserable, miserable life". The comments: "sin though," "Sin that," "Sin boy," "What a sin," "Sin," and "That's a sin" are used several times to that effect (113; 145; 259; 351; 391; 398; 484). These comments also express sympathy toward Connie, the woman whose children were molested. Sympathy and support between the women also appear elsewhere in the narrative. The narrators show these feelings by acknowledging the hardship the mother went through (432-437) as well as by identifying with her situation (476-478).

Thus her performance, which is characterized not only by the nature but also by the regularity and the sympathetic tone of her comments, places this secondary narrator in the role of "moderator" of the narration. As can be observed from the text, she does not actually contribute directly to the content of the story itself. She does not introduce any new material. Rather she regulates the pace of the narration. She subtly elicits further details when she deems appropriate, or suggests a turn in the progression

of the narrative line of events to finally bring her co-narrator into ending her narrative performance. As it happens, the main narrator's speech is interrupted by the oven buzzer which signals that her bread is done. The "moderator" then seizes the opportunity to bring her interlocutor's performance to an end by switching the conversation to the subject of bread:

- B.M.: ... My bread is ready.
 J.M.: Done.
 B.M.: Keep talking.
 (560)J.M.: It's a hard racket boy! Eh!
 M.D.: Yeah.
 J.M.: How many bread do you make anyway?
 B.M.: I made eight today.
 J.M.: Yeah, it should do you for a long time eh.
 (565)B.M.: Oh yes, that's for a long time.
 J.M.: What a nice, what a nice oven eh, the size!
 B.M.: Not really cooked very good though.
 J.M.: You got clean by itself there? (the oven)
 B.M.: Self cleaning yeah but.
 (570)J.M.: Self cleaning.
 B.M.: Just wash it with soap and water.
 J.M.: Yeah.
 B.M.: It all comes out, that's dirty now I needs to
 clean my oven.
 (575)J.M.: I like the colour of that la.
 M.D.: Yeah.
 J.M.: Nice.
 B.M.: I'll leave it for another couple of minutes.
 J.M.: Who babysits for you tonight now?
 (580)B.M.: Well I'll be taking them with me and Luke will
 look after them eh.
 J.M.: Oh yeah yeah. So you go there and pick them up
 after the meeting.

It is interesting to note that the development of the narrative and its potential generic affiliations in folkloric terms are closely linked. Before

discussing these generic affiliations, there is a need to identify the narrative more closely in terms of its "partitional structure."²³² It is obvious from the text that we are dealing with a conversational context in which three persons (B.M, J.M., and M.D) are interacting verbally and exchanging views. There is a need to identify elements, of for instance, characterization in the text of the conversational exchange which justify the use of the term "narrative," that is, to what extent do the participants in this particular excerpt talk about real people as if they were characters in a story.

Martin Laba borrows Teun Van Dijk's terminology to differentiate between "natural" and "artificial" narratives; the former defined as narrative emerging from conversation and the latter as having a "constructed" nature because of their dependence on specific storytelling contexts, these include myths, folktales, short stories, novels etc.²³³ Subsequent data will show that the performers borrow narrative techniques such as "characterization" from artificial or fictional narration and adapt them to natural or personal experience narrative telling.

²³²By partitional structure, I understand: the markers of the beginning, the end and of internal movements in the narrative.

²³³See: Teun A. Van Dijk, "Action, Action Description, and Narrative," *New Literary History* 6 (1975): 273-94; and Martin Laba, "Narrative and Talk: A Study in the Folkloric Communication of Everyday Conversational Exchange," Ph.D. diss., Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1983, 25-26.

The beginning of the narrative section of this conversational excerpt is not clearly or immediately identifiable.²³⁴ That is, there is no distinguishable formula to introduce the narrative. However, it is possible to point out an initial "breakthrough into performance," to use Dell Hymes' term. The breakthrough is triggered by a question raised by myself:

M.D: Now I wanted to know there, what's going on there with the three guys that have been caught for child molesting? (to Barbara) You said there was one going down the pub tonight, to the club?

The question is dual. It is deliberately general in its first part so as to involve the two women present. Yet the second part of the question is intentionally addressed to B.M. whom all participants know and who has some degree of personal knowledge about the matter. Yet due to the delicate nature of the topic, I have to proceed delicately so as not to inhibit her feelings by putting her blatantly on the spot. Therefore the question is phrased with impersonal details, thus giving it a gossip dimension. To an extent then, the interviewer suggests the main perspective or conversational context in which an eventual narrative is to be performed. I must admit at this point that much to my surprise, B.M. caught on immediately and responded by hinting at her knowledge of and interest in sharing and constructing a narrative with J.M.

B.M.: That was my brother in law, ZZZ, he molested four of his children.

At this point, J.M. who has previously been identified as the "moderator,"

²³⁴Bennett 417.

steps into this role and what is sometimes referred to as the narration begins. The beginning of the narrative is therefore triggered by a question which itself is indicative and understood by the participants as a significant change in the conversation topic.

Similarly there is no actual conclusion to the story in that there is no distinctive closing formula.²³⁵ However, the narrative does have an end. As for its beginning, the story is ended by a clear switch in topic and a subsequent return to the immediate reality. As can be seen from the transcript, there is a point when the oven buzzer kicks in. Its noise which signals that the bread which was in the oven is baked, also provokes an interruption in the flow of the conversation (556-584). Finally it acts as reminder of the immediate reality and by the same token brings the participants back from the internal context of this narration to the immediate situational context of the gathering (bread making). Thus, short of an actual conclusion, the moderator as well as the main narrator felt a need to change the subject. This does not deprive the story of its narrative value. Rather it underlines the nature of its structure. By acknowledging the signal of the oven buzzer, the moderator takes the opportunity to make use of an element of immediate reality and by so doing brings the main narrator out of her performing mode. When the hint is not taken:

B.M.: Keep talking.

²³⁵Bennett 423.

and doubt is cast upon its understanding, the moderator reiterates by insisting on discussing these aspects of the immediate reality and comments on some characteristics of the oven. The main narrator eventually catches on by divulging more details about her oven.

B.M.: It all comes out, that's dirty now I needs to clean my oven.

The moderator then mentions a second element of the immediate reality by way of another inquiry:

J.M.: Who babysits for you tonight now?

She therefore takes another step back from the initial narrative. The succinct answers of the main narrator get progressively longer. Analytically and structurally, it can be suggested that this last conversational exchange functions at the same level as would a closing formula in a more formal narrative performance.

The generic identification in folkloristic terms of a narrative such as the one presented above is a difficult task. The excerpt presents elements that allow for the use of the term "narrative" when considered in its performance context. It has a beginning and an end which are identifiable from a performance perspective. Yet if taken out of the conversational environment, the excerpt does not really have any readily identifiable structure. Therefore rather than talk about generic identification and set limitations on the item, one can more cautiously speak of generic affiliation. This less restrictive limitation still permits us to consider the narrative from a folkloristic perspective. Linda Dégh points to the difficulty

in classifying true stories generically without nevertheless dismissing their potential affiliation to established genres:

No matter how loose the structure and how flexible the framework of these everyday stories, they follow the trend of the more established genres. They use such devices as threefold repetition, dramatized dialogues, and endings signalled with a bang. These true stories grow out of reminiscences of the past, and events, hearsay, rumor, gossip, and personal experiences of the present. They may be told in the first or in the third person.²³⁶

It is therefore possible to establish a number of similarities between the present narrative and other narrative forms. As mentioned earlier, the beginning and the end are identifiable. The end marker does have a function similar to that of other folklore narrative genres such as the Märchen or the ballad in that without being formulaic it brings the participants back to the immediate reality. The use of metaphoric language in expressions such as "The blood had drained out of her face" demonstrate the narrator's ability to use stylistic techniques typical of fictional narratives. By using expressions such as "Don't you tell! don't you tell, I'll crack your neck!," she makes her characters speak and renders her story lively and entertaining. Characterization is used extensively throughout the narrative.²³⁷

²³⁶Linda Dègh, "Folk Narrative," *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, ed. Richard Dorson (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1972) 78.

²³⁷Wachs 47.

These narrative devices are examples of what Sandra Stahl refers to as "folklorization".²³⁸ The identification of the above narrative with any established genre would be far-fetched. Yet it contains elements that allow for its affiliation to several generic categories, particularly the personal experience narrative which itself has many close relatives among the genres of folklore, some of which are only distinguishable through the arbitrary emphasis upon certain figures.²³⁹

Context

The context of the communicative event here is clearly conversational and is not really set for a full length uninterrupted narrative. This is due mainly to the gossip dimension of the exchange. Sandra Stahl considers gossip as:

Stories told by someone else than the subject, that is they are not first person accounts. Furthermore they often relate information or describe happenings which the subject would rather not have made public, as in the breaking of the moral or legal code.²⁴⁰

So although it is structurally difficult to ascertain the actual beginning of the story at this particular point, it is possible nevertheless to point out the coincidence of the taking of responsibility by the main narrator with an

²³⁸Sandra Stahl, "The Oral Personal Narrative in its Generic Context," *Fabula* 18.1-2 (1977): 24.

²³⁹Stahl 39.

²⁴⁰Stahl 36.

initial break into the performance of a conversational narrative by both subsequent narrators. The secondary narrator or mediator does not however, break spectacularly into performance as such. Yet she most certainly takes responsibility for her ensuing contribution to the narrative construction:

J.M.: I thought it was only three, me!

The main narrator is then slowly led into the personal narrative. The contextual circumstances of the issue of child molesting are presented first through the establishment of other examples than that directly connected with B.M. Soon however, her brother-in-law's name is mentioned. This has the effect of triggering a second breakthrough into performance which ends the coaxing preliminaries and brings the performer into a more personal narrative style:

B.M.: Yeah but now see, he's got four against him.

J.M.: Yeah I suppose so.

B.M.: (at the same time) And he got brutal see, like you know, he wasn't only...

From this moment on, the frequency of the interruptions, questions and contributions from the interviewer and the moderator diminishes. Also the main narrator's role becomes more apparent as her speech acts increase in length.

In a first stage, the narrator deviates from the personal dimension of her story in order to present the factual circumstances which prompted its narration. She describes how the viewing of relevant material in schools incited the children to talk about the issue. It is then that the moderator steps in again to bring the main narrator back to the telling of her "personal," although not strictly immediate, experience.

J.M.: What about Connie, now her, she doesn't know, she didn't know anything about that eh?

The main narrator takes the hint and proceeds to bring her narrative back to a more personal perspective by exemplifying what had until now been presented at a more general level. Hence the possibility of an affiliation of this narrative to at least two genres, namely Gossip and Personal Experience Narrative. Although one would imagine that child molesting as a subject would entice the narrator into emphasizing the perspective of the children or treat them as their father's actual victims. The narrator instead puts the priority on the incidents involving the mother's trials, thus recounting the events from a woman's point of view. The core of this conversational narrative, during which the moderator's participation mainly consists in assertively acknowledging the main narrator's and her characters' feelings, is essentially the description of the relationship between the "villain-husband" and his "victim-wife," in the contextual circumstances of the events which triggered the emergence of the narrative.²⁴¹ As mentioned above, support, sympathy, and identification with the mother of the children are expressed. Wachs argues that:

²⁴¹Wachs 26; 44.

A common narrative technique allows narrators to relinquish their role for a few moments and utter asides intended to be heard by the audience, thus directing the listeners' attention away from the content and toward evaluation. As a result, the tellers not only align themselves with the victim in the story, but also pull the audience in to do the same.²⁴²

This strategy combined with other aspects of the meaning of this narrative to women's experience is apparent when both narrators agree on the physical fragility of the mother. They compare it to their own and in fact any woman's incapacity and lack of physical strength when confronted by men.

It is only towards the end of the story that attention is given to the children, who were in fact the prime sufferers and without whom there would be no narrative. Yet again their actual part in the narrative is limited by the perspective which adults, both through the portrayal of the characters in the story and the performers themselves, have of them.

Matrimonial Talk

As mentioned in the previous chapter, married women get together after the mail collection. During these "after the post-office" gatherings they talk about various subjects. Common in their conversations is the

²⁴²Wachs 53.

topic of men and specifically their own marital relationships. The following excerpt is an example of how women perceive this relationship in terms of power balance and the significance of assertiveness.

A.M.: She and Joan are going for a smoke.

B.R.: Philip ask me that the next morning.

A.M.: Obvious.

B.R.: "Jane is smoking?"

(005) A.M.: Sure obvious.

B.R.: "How do you know" I said "Jane is smoking" "Yes" he said "I took notice."

A.M.: Yes obvious.

J.M.: Fuck.

(010) J.R.: That night I never touched nothing.

B.R.: I said "I don't know she use to go to the bathroom." I said "I don't know" I said "I went in once me with her" I said "she wasn't smoking" I said "You're not gonna mention that to John."

(015) "Don't be so silly" he said "What time did I mention anything like that to John! her business" he said "if she wants to smoke."

M.D.: You used to smoke last year.

J.R.: Yes but I made a vow that if I'd take it back I

(020) wouldn't do it on the sly.

A.M.: No she would do it in front of him.

J.R.: I'd do it I would tell him.

M.D.: Last year John didn't want her to smoke right.

J.M.: Yeah last year.

(025) J.R.: Yeah what a life eh.

B.R.: See she got a sore stomach and he don't like that eh.

M.D.: That's your stomach.

B.R.: That's right that's what I said me, I mean

(030) everybody got their mind and it's up to them.

J.R.: Now I said I would smoke eh, I'd try to smoke, I can't. He don't like it. I went down to

B. Sharpe eh, she offered me a cigarette, I had all the chances in the world. I said "No thank

(035) you." I could have smoke, it's like sometimes I just want to do it."

J.M.: Yeah.

J.R.: I want to be evil right.

- J.M.: Yeah.
- (040) J.R.: And sometimes eh, I can do it eh, I won't do it.
 When I knows I can't do it, I want to do it.
 But then somebody would offer me a cigarette I
 wouldn't do it. I took a puff and I did it. Me
 I figured if you want to do it, it's your own
 business.
- (045) B.R.: I gave up smoking nine years ago and I said "If I
 want to smoke tomorrow my dear man" I said "I'll
 smoke. I wouldn't ask you." I said "I never
 asked you when I quit and I'm not gonna ask you"
- (050) I said "for smoking again." "Well" he said
 "You can go back smoking again but you'll buy your
 own tobacco." I said "exactly." I said "What did
 I do before." "I never went to you for tobacco,
 I bought my own." I said "I'm 44 years old, do you
- (055) think I'm gonna ask you if I want to smoke." But
 he said "What's the sense in smoking?" I said
 "What's the sense in drinking?"
- J.R.: What's the sense in smoking up too.
- B.R.: Yes and what's the sense in drinking.
- (060) J.M.: Yeah
- B.R.: "Killing your heart smoking" I said "Do you
 think you're doing any good to your heart drinking.
 Some people burns out their liver and everything."
 I said "It's the same frigging thing, there's no
- (065) difference to me. Drinking smoking smoking up,
 it's the same thing. People gotta have a little
 bit of enjoyment somewhere."²⁴³

Folkloristically speaking, the conversational excerpt contains two narrative parts which are based on personal experience (10-45; 46-56). The two narrative sections are embodied in a gossip-like environment (1-10; 61-67). The end of the excerpt consists of more generalized comments which can be interpreted as statements of recognition and

²⁴³Tape-recorded Interview, Cape St. George, 13 July, 1986.

acceptance of a variety of cultural expressions of enjoyment. The last statement in other words points to the worldview of the group of women.²⁴⁴

The excerpt starts with reference to a party which involved a mixed group of men and women. B.R. initiates the talk by pointing out her husband's gossipy attitude and how detrimental it would be to one of her friends (1-9). The issue is smoking. One of the participants, J.R., has been forbidden to smoke by her husband, but has decided to rebel against his order. However, she seems to need the support of her peers to carry out her decision (19-20; 40-44). To do so she details the reasoning behind her decision. The other participants at first lend her passive support by acknowledging her line of reasoning and more importantly by not contradicting her. The participants know that the smoking issue is used by J.R. as one example; the real issue in fact here is the woman's right to be assertive and challenge her husband's authority.

B.R. then offers a supporting narrative based on her own experience, to corroborate J.R.'s narration. B.R.'s narrative is also meant to be taken as an example of her own assertiveness (46-56). She describes a conversation with her own husband. The end of the excerpt does not deal

²⁴⁴Wachs uses the Labovian term "Coda" to refer to narrative ending statements which reflect the worldview of the community. See: Wachs 51-52.

directly with the issue of matrimonial authority. Instead it brings up the issue of smoking at the community level and compares it to other similar issues. The first sentence sums up both issues, smoking and authority, by justifying the first one with a reminder of the community worldview and therefore dismisses the issue of the husbands' authority. The will of one or two husbands cannot go against what the community as a group sees as accepted behaviour.

Church Narratives

As can be deduced from the above example, women's informal social gatherings may be considered to a certain extent as forums for the expression of women's experience and the values that are of importance to them. The need for assertiveness vis à vis men and authority representatives is indeed women's concern. The following excerpts will illustrate how women deal with the Church authoritarian practices. We will see how a combination of fear, respect and rebellious spirit appears through their conversations. The following exchange occurred at an "after the post-office" gathering. As explained in the previous chapter, the women were glancing at the road and noticed someone walking down and apparently going from house to house to collect money for an upcoming community event. Her passing by provoked the following conversational

exchange:²⁴⁵

J.M.: Did she come here, collecting money for the, garden party.

B.M.: Hmm.

J.M.: And then they, and then they're gonna go around
(005) for groceries what in the fuck they think the people is? (sighs) Rich or what?

B.M.: I can't afford things like that me.

J.M.: No. Me neither.

B.M.: Although now when they come around for the French
(010) centre there like they they collect groceries for the French centre for, card games for raise money for the festival there.

J.M.: Oh well that's different right, they...

B.M.: (interrupting) Well then I I I always donate right.

(015) J.M.: I know.

B.M.: But for the priest, forget it!

J.M.: What you're gonna get out of that?

B.M.: Hmm?

J.M.: What you're going to get out it.

(020) B.M.: He only insults anyway.

J.M.: Yeah he does, because us when we went to, when poor Brigett was...

B.M.: Yeah.

J.M.: The funeral there eh.

(025) B.M.: What happened there eh?

J.M.: He insult people you know.

B.M.: (laughs) I wasn't there.

J.M.: What else, how did he say, ah I can't remember how he said that now. He said something just only just
(030) don't only come just because, there's a funeral right! You know like he meant, make a effort to come.

B.M.: Every week.

J.M.: Yeah and then, Marian and Janet was there and he, said something, I don't know me now, about the
(035) Pentecostals I guess because Harvey, Roland's wife was there and she didn't like it because she knew Janet as a friend because she's Pentecostal right so she must, she must have met Janet through going to church

²⁴⁵Tape-recorded Interview, Cape St. George July 1987.

- right and she, she knew Janet so she came to the funeral
 (040) right and you know she didn't like it man she didn't like it she was a poor time for, and he says things like that right, go there to a funeral was bad enough sad enough right and come and saying that over the altar!

B.M.: (whispering) Oh my m...!

- (045) J.M.: And me I was crying me.

B.M.: Yeah but I heard he really, she really told him off at...

J.M.: (interrupting) Well I don't know now.

B.M.: At, at the house eh!

J.M.: Yeah? What she did?

- (050) B.M.: He said he, she said she would never go back to the Catholic Church right!

J.M.: No.

B.M.: And there she was there to the funeral mass I mean you know.

J.M.: Hmm.

B.M.: But he like some things that he, he says makes a

- (055) hell of a lot of sense right.

J.M.: Oh yeah.

B.M.: I mean they don't like the Catholic Church to go to Catholic Church but, when, one of them dies they

- (060) don't go to the Pentecostal Church for that!

J.M.: No.

B.M.: They go to the Catholic Church, they get mad, they get, they get bury in the Catholic grounds so I mean you know.

- (065) M.D.: So if somebody dies it's not...

J.M.: (interrupting) Oh no but like I mean, like I mean...

B.M.: (interrupting) They go in the catholic grounds!

J.M.: Maybe not, well maybe then they might get something made for themselves but this was Brigett she was a

- (070) Catholic right!

B.M.: Yeah she was yeah.

J.M.: But her some of her kids was Pentecostal right but they had to be there because it was their mother, they still had to be there right!

- (075) B.M.: Right yeah.

J.M.: Now that's what they didn't like about him saying that Right! You know I mean.

B.M.: Yeah he could have kept it to himself right!

Like the two preceding ones, this excerpt contains a certain element of gossip. This is triggered by the context which allowed for the conversation. As John Szwed points out in a study based on material collected in an unnamed Roman Catholic community of Western Newfoundland:

Gossip here as among most peasants is the primary source of information and news about other individuals and their behavior when they are out of sight. Not only the facts of gossip are important here, but also the evaluation made by and about other individuals during the information flow, for evaluation is inextricably tied up with face-to-face information exchange. Gossip in this sense, is not only a means for an individual to assemble basic information on his peers, but is also a technique for summarizing community opinions, i.e. it is a sort of tally sheet for public opinion. One draws on gossip to establish an opinion, but also to use it to influence others.²⁴⁶

As it will be seen later, in the context of informal social gatherings such as "sprees after bingo," gossip is sometimes used generically to indicate a wish to return to the reality of the present time and bring an end to the sharing of narratives and other forms of entertainment that link the participants to the past. Here however, the primary function of gossip is to ascertain power and control over community life and especially independence of the individual from the Church.

The two women's initial comments concern the principle of collecting or donating money for community events (0-4). Although they seem not to

²⁴⁶John F. Szwed, "Gossip, Drinking, and Social Control: Consensus and Communication in a Newfoundland Parish," *Ethnology* 5 (1966): 435.

agree with this principle, economic reasons at first dictate their opinions with regard to the validity of community events(7-19). The French centre and the Festival are seen as worthy of interest. The activities organised around these institutions are very likely to provide jobs for members of the community, therefore these institutions are deemed worthy of support, however, limited it might be. Events organised by the Church however, provoke a totally different and aversive reaction. As J.M. points out: "What you're gonna get out of that?" Although Cape St. George is essentially a Catholic community, it also hosts strong anti-clerical feelings that are most likely rooted in history. As was explained in Chapter One, the Catholic Church has had an overtly negative attitude toward the French in Cape St. George. There are still nowadays some feelings of resentment for these reasons²⁴⁷

It is probably this feeling of resentment coupled with the wish to challenge the authority of the Church by expressing aversion which prompted the two women to share the narrative relating the funeral of one of their aunts. The narrative which is a personal experience shared by the two women, points to the courage of one of their cousins who challenged the priest after having been insulted by him. According to practice, people do not usually retort to the priest whose authority they are supposed to fear and respect. The fact that Marian did so is considered almost as an

²⁴⁷Several conversations with Colin Parker in particular support this statement.

heroic act and certainly worth being remembered. The narrative also points out the intolerance of the Church toward Pentecostals who in Cape St. George are former Catholics and who all have Catholic relatives. However, toward the end the anti-clerical line is tempered as B.M. mentioned that the priest occasionally has something sensible to say. This remark and the temperance it induces may be indicative of a remote feeling of fear toward the Church. The ensuing exchange, which can be seen as being directed against the Pentecostals for not respecting Catholic values, reflects the coexistence of attitudes critical both of Pentecostals and the Catholic Church. Yet when the conversational narrative is brought back to the personal level by the mention of the funeral of their aunt, the two women clarify their statements about the Pentecostals and finally agree in criticising the priest. The subsequent reiteration of statements critical of the priest seems to be an implicit attempt to balance the two situations. In this instance, the priest was judged more severely than the Pentecostals.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, some genres are cross-contextual and may occur at married women's gatherings as well as at elderly women's gatherings. Granted that all conversation is conventional to some extent, or else it would not constitute effective communication the conversational processes are patterned and conducive to the formation and articulation of group membership without necessarily being heavily "marked" as performance in the sense attributed to the term

by scholars such as Roger Abrahams or Dan Ben-Amos.²⁴⁸ Conversational exchanges against the Church are not generic in the folkloristic sense of the term in that they do not all share consistency and structure. As we have seen they may take on aspects of the personal experience narrative or be more closely related to gossip. Their commonality lies in their complaint dimension. Topically, they express resentment toward the institution, and generally point out the greed of the Church.

The following is an example of a more elaborate complaint.

S.H.: It was trying to frighten the people with the green bag eh!

The green bags and the purple ones that's what they was after

....

M.D.: What's that the green bag and the purple bag?

S.H.: Well that was \$10 bill the blue is five and the greens was ones eh.

P.R.: And the twenties, you had to make a collection for the priest and if you give less than \$5 you was blacklisted.

M.D.: How did he know who gave what?

P.R.: Everybody had to give something.

S.H.: He expect everybody to give a share he'd go around with a collection box, he'd tell you.

P.R.: There was envelopes and your name had to be on, he passed collection envelopes, now your names was marked on on how much that you had put. And the ones who had put less than five dollars, they'd be called down. If you couldn't give more than five dollars there was not much else about you.

M.D.: But what if you were poor?

S.H.: It didn't matter to them

P.R.: From five up to twenty fifty dollars you had it. Before you had to pay dues to the church and everything and there was one man

²⁴⁸See Chapter 2.

he couldn't pay his dues they went and took his last sheep. You had to pay ten dollars a year and suppose it was your last sheep you had in your field by the time the year was up you had to pay.

S.H.: Come for the time people wouldn't pay their dues or wouldn't give nothing on Sunday in the collection he was gonna mark up their names at the back of the church. So you knew who has given and you knew who hasn't given. Everybody could go there read it. He had us frightened to death.

P.R.: Now they have the bingo to take care of that.

S.H.: That's for sure.²⁴⁹

This excerpt occurred during what I referred to in the previous chapter as an initial conversation during a social gathering of widows in Red Brook. The last comment regarding the role of bingo is an example of many others like it. This subject occurred several times in conversations during my stays in Cape St. George.

Like their married peers, widows and elderly women feel and express this resentment. Here, however, they give an historical dimension to the issue. Thus, in view of the excerpt quoted earlier one can argue for an element of continuity. In terms of the values it conveys, this last excerpt is an example of the elements of fear and respect and how they were once prominent but are now being refuted by the women, at least in as far as they are being talked about. Even if they express their resentment towards it, older women however are not prepared to challenge the authority of the Church in the same way as the younger generation. The following excerpt is an example of the somewhat conflicting yet shared value system of members of the two groups:

²⁴⁹Tape-recorded interview, Red Brook, 21 July 1986.

- B.M.: For me the way I take it, I don't believe in confession,
I don't believe in confession.
P.R.: Now you'll turn like Lil.
B.M.: No but I don't believe in confession and that's it!
P.R.: Lil she don't confess with priests no more.
M.H.: She don't go to church no more I suppose.
P.R.: She don't like priests no more. (imitating I.B.'s voice)
"She shows bad example to the people!"²⁵⁰

In this example, B.M., a young married woman, confronts her elders with her distrust of what I would consider the most important aspect in the Catholic religion, since it is immediately connected with the fundamental idea of sin, without which Catholicism would not stand.²⁵¹ Her attitude triggers warning from her elders. This warning is expressed by fear of punishment which could result in some degree of alienation from the community.

Name Calling

Such conversational strategy serves several communicative functions. When considered together with the evolution of the card game, at an elderly women's gatherings, teasing and "picking" function as a relief from tension in that the winner's ego is controlled by the teasing of the other players. However, teasing and "picking" also imply the need for immediate

²⁵⁰Tape-recorded interview, 21st. July, 1986.

²⁵¹Catholicism is heavily dominated by the concept of "original sin".

and direct response, thus setting the structural pattern of the communicative exchange in a parallel to that which governs turn-taking in the card game. By engaging in such rapid and short verbal interaction women participants establish the dynamics of their informal social gathering so as to distribute the shares of performance responsibility equally among all the participants.

The content of these short verbal exchanges is also significantly appropriate to the gender-restricted nature of the gatherings, in the sense that it contributes to reinforce that particular aspect among the participants. Thus it is not unusual to hear such snappy remarks as "The Old Witch" directed toward a participant who produces a surprising and unexpected winning hand. Name-calling here is a direct reference to the witch's ability to control luck and also given the context here, it also refers to the midwifery tradition. Mothers would explain a new birth to their children by invoking the "Old Witch." The same character was also attributed the powers of taking mischievous children away, hence holding positive and negative supernatural powers.

Such examples of "name calling" reflect an underlying concern on the part of the participants to place themselves at the centre of the interaction. This can be further verified by their narrative selections. It can also be noted that the attention and the involvement of the participants moves gradually from the game proper to the sharing of narratives. In

other words, the evening starts with the participants playing cards and chatting, and then evolves to a stage where the card playing becomes secondary to the chatting itself. Thus the participants' activity can be referred to as chatting while playing cards to the point where the cards are finally cast aside.

Kernel Narratives

The kind of narratives used to share memories and past experiences are very similar in nature to what Susan Kalčík calls "Kernel Stories". Because of its relevance to this study, the notion of Kernel Story needs to be presented at length and elaborated upon:

Most often a kernel story is a brief reference to the subject, the central action or an important piece of dialogue from a longer story. In this form one might say it is a kind of potential story, especially if the details are not known to the audience. It might be clearer to call this brief reference the *kernel* and what develops from it the *kernel story*, keeping in mind however, that many of these kernels do not develop beyond the first stage into kernel stories. Kernel stories lack a specific length, structure, climax or point, although a woman familiar with the genre or subject may predict fairly accurately where a particular story will go. The story developed from the kernel can take a different size and shape depending on the context in which it is told. The structure of a kernel story, therefore, is fluid. It may be very brief, consisting of an introduction of some sort to the kernel itself. The story may not be developed beyond the kernel if the audience already knows the story and an allusion is sufficient or if the kernel is offered by way of a supportive comment indicating that the narrator has had a similar experience to one being presented by someone who has the floor. A kernel may not be developed if no one expresses an interest or asks any questions, if the narrator does not choose to tell anymore, or if another narrator wins a competition to speak next. If the narrator does want to tell more of her story, however, or to answer questions about it.

she may expand the kernel by means of several devices. Kernel stories may be developed by adding exposition or detail or by adding non narrative elements such as a rationale for telling the story; an apology, an analysis of the characters, events or theme; or an emotional response to the story. A story can also be developed by stringing several kernels together to produce an elaborate story or unit longer than a story, such as a serial. In addition most of these stories, even in the briefest form, have some introduction or opening remark, most often one tying them to earlier stories or discussion. Common are "That reminds me..." "Speaking of..." and the single word "Like"²⁵²

This is an example of one of these introductory formulas:

J.R.: Do you remember the time that John there, on the side there all torn with his appendix. He had to put ice cubes and everything.

A.M.: You can't wait when it takes you you know.

J.R.: Oh my God painful. Me I had a lump on the side, poor grammie cured me there, she greased me with, it was cold wintergreen or something : it was good eh.²⁵³

Kernel narratives are again cross-contextual and may be used in any kind of gatherings under study here. These narratives are used by women to refer to various aspects of their personal experience. They are usually short and do not require the same amount of personal involvement or responsibility as far as their performance value is concerned. Because they are triggered by what Kalčík calls the kernel, they do not require much coaxing.

²⁵²Susan Kalčík, "...Like Ann's Gynecologist or the Time I Was almost Raped": Personal Experience Narratives in Women's Rap Groups," *Women and Folklore*, ed. Claire Farrer (Austin: U of Texas P, 1975) 7.

²⁵³Tape-recorded interview, Cape St. George, 13 July 1986.

With regard to "sprees after bingo" a considerable number of narratives consistent with Kalčík's elaborate definition of kernel stories were indeed exchanged by the participants. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the gatherings would start with an initial and often trivial conversation, and a game of cards. Eventually the cards would be cast aside to give way to narrative performance. At the communicative level, this would result in an intensification of personal involvement and individual participation. The increased level of performance and the creative dimension inherent to such verbal display would indeed constitute the central dynamics of these informal social gatherings.²⁵⁴

A blatant example of the name calling described earlier and the way it led into the telling of a kernel narrative occurred in the summer of 1986, during a "spree after bingo" involving a group of widows mostly from Cape St. George. At this point, the card game was over. Its end had been marked incidentally by a remark from Rose Murphy to her sister Cathy. As it happened, Cathy had laid down the final winning hand. This prompted her sister to react and call her "Old Witch." Although the meaning of this remark is explained above, what is interesting to note is how the underlying set of beliefs attached to such an expression triggered the

²⁵⁴For a discussion on the relations between specific genres and performance level see: Abrahams 104-28. See also Lawrence G. Small, "Traditional Expressions in a Newfoundland Community: Genre Change and Functional Variability," *Love and Language* 2 (1975) 15-18 for an analysis of the manner and function of this type of narration.

telling of a longer story. One must bear in mind that at this point in the gathering, the structure of the communicative event was similar to that of a ping-pong game. Cathy then had to produce a quick retort that would match her sister's and yet simultaneously mark the end of the card game-stage of the gathering by leading the participants into the next segment of the event. Cathy thus looked at her sister and repeated her remark in a low voice, "The Old Witch" to which she then added "Oh Paddy, do you remember the time... the stumps!"

If we are to consider this remark in the light of Susan Kalčík's statement, we notice that it contains two of the qualifying elements which justify its generic classification as defined by the scholar. With regard to what Kalčík calls the *kernel*, or the brief reference to the narrative, it can be observed that the two components of Cathy's remark fit Kalčík's definition. In other words, Cathy's remark contains not one but two kernels. The necessity of these two kernels is directly linked to the situational context in which the remark was uttered. As a matter of fact, a closer look at this remark shows two internal pauses and a final one:

OH PADDY (pause no.1) REMEMBER (pause no.2) THE STUMPS
(pause no.3)

As it happened Rose, to whom the remark was initially addressed, acknowledged immediately by giggling after the mention of the name "Paddy." However, as Cathy duly noticed, the other two widows did not show any response until she specified the meaning of her remark and added the expression "The stumps." This latter element, "The stumps," could then be considered as a second kernel in that it fulfills the same function as "Paddy." The remark further validates Kalčík's statement in that it contains the word "Remember," although placed in final rather than initial position. The difference here, however, lies in the fact that what Kalčík would consider as an introductory opening to a narrative is only used, in this particular instance, to introduce the second kernel.²⁵⁵ In this particular case, the statement "Remember" did eventually lead to the telling of the narrative, although not immediately. While the mention of the kernels prompted laughter among the other participants, I was left speechless as I could not identify with nor relate to the reference made. Cathy was quick to notice my disarray and as the whole incident corresponded to the end of the card game and the subsequent need to continue on with the evening, she pointed at her sister Rose, who is a recognised storyteller in the community, and said "Come on tell it to her," thus setting me up as a desirable uninformed audience.

²⁵⁵It is to be noted that my experience in Cane St. George shows that such narrative strategies were not specifically restricted to women's use but also occurred during mixed or exclusively male social gatherings.

After a little coaxing, Rose Murphy proceeded with the telling of the following story:

Now when we were young me and Cathy, we didn't know anything right! And when our mother found a baby one day, well we asked our aunt right! Well she said Maman had found a baby and she said " Well now you behave! because if you go in the stumps you're gonna find one too!" So we went up there me and her to look! But there was nothing there! That's when Old Paddy came by and he said "What are doing there?" "Well we're looking" she said (pointing at Cathy) "But there's no babies there! Did he ever laugh my God what a shame! Now don't you go an tell Sean or anybody about that now."²⁵⁶

It is clear, given the context in which it was told, that one of the main functions of this narrative is entertainment. The purpose of the storyteller in the present case was undoubtedly to provoke the laughter of her audience by mocking her own teenage ignorance. This primary function of the narrative performance is in fact apparent beforehand when the initial kernels "Paddy" and "The stumps" are mentioned. As stated above, the audience has already expressed a laughing reaction at the mention of the kernels ("stumps"). The jocular mood persisted throughout the performance until the end of the story. This mood-sustaining was kept alive by the performance of the storyteller whose responsibility was then to fulfill the expectations of her audience. the concluding statement,

"Did he ever laugh my God what a shame! Now don't you go and tell Sean or anybody about that now!"

²⁵⁶Fieldnotes, Cape St. George, July 1986.

supports and emphasizes the entertainment value of this particular performance of this narrative.

The secondary functions of the narrative performance serve to illustrate the nature of certain aspects of the belief system relative to the origin of children and inherent to children sixty years or so ago. The narrative thus illustrates the previous gullibility of the narrator and her peers. However, what appears here as a secondary function becomes a primary function when another version of the same narrative was told during a similar occasion, that is a "Spree after Bingo". The second time the conversational context as well as the composition of audience were different (Cathy Ryan was not present).

Rose Murphy was describing one event concerning childbirth, and most specifically discussing the metaphoric language her mother would use to explain the facts of life to her. The aforementioned narrative was used once more directly after the following, which obviously represents metaphorically the painful experience of delivery:

R.M.: Sure us we didn't know nothing we thought it was
the Ole Witch, Maman would tell us "The Ole
Witch will soon be here."

M.D.: Who was that?

(005)R.M.: My mother.

M.D.: No the Old Witch?

R.M.: The Ole Witch?

M.D.: Yeah.

R.M.: I don't know who it was the Ole Witch. Oh well
(010) the Ole Witch eh, well that's poor Maman's sister,

- uh, me I forgets her name, uh.
 A.B.: C'était une vieille femme qui va pour les femmes.
 R.M.: Non non.
 A.B.: Les femmes qui avont le bébé.
 (015) R.M.: Ouais.
 A.B.: Puis c'est là qu'la sorciaise elle s'en vient.
 R.M.: Anyhow so we was to go down to Marches Point, to Uncle Angus, go down there us, until, just 'til they come up so, sleep down there. The next morning, they call us.
 (020) Maman in bed with a youngster. "Maman my God what for you're in bed you?" "Oh" she said "The Ole Witch she almost killed me! She had the baby in her arms, I went to grab, she struck me across the back with a big stick she had. She almost killed me." she said. And then
 (025) there's one time she said "I hears babies crying! In the stumps!" In the stumps. So me and Cathy her, we were dressed up and we went about the side of the road, there's a big stump there eh, we tore it all apart. I says "There's no babies here." I told Maman I said "we
 (030) tore down the stump" I says "there's no babies in!" "Oh but" she said "the baby is gone." We used to believe everything like that see.
 M.D.: How old were you then?
 R.M.: I was only thirteen, twelve, eleven, around that.
 (035) M.D.: Who told you that the Old Witch was to come with the baby and you must try to grab the baby?
 R.M.: Well that's Maman. The Ole Witch was to come with the baby eh. My mother told me that. The Ole Witch was to come with the baby and she'd grab the baby from the Ole Witch! So
 (040) the Ole Witch struck her eh. She ran away went for home and in bed.
 M.D.: Oh that's why she was sick?
 R.M.: I guess she was sick, she was supposed to be sick, she had it herself. We didn't know anything us that time before, it's not
 (045) like the youngsters now, they knows everything.

Discussion

This narrative section is framed by two similar statements "Sure us we

didn't know nothing..."(001) and "we didn't know anything us that time before..."(044), which mark its introduction and its conclusion. These refrains are indicative of the didactic function served by the two personal experience accounts constituting this particular section. The main teller here, R.M., emphasises the narrative dimension of her accounts by using a direct internal style in order to focus the attention of her audience on the interaction between the characters involved. By so doing the storyteller also sustains the attention directed to herself as teller and character. Such narrative strategy reinforces the primary function of the stories which is to inform the listener about the nature of the beliefs associated with childbirth. Neither of the stories, which otherwise complete one another, are educational in the proper sense of the term. That is, they do not give any information about the actual facts involved. Yet from the perspective of transmission of traditional knowledge, the didactic function is enhanced by the use of metaphoric language.

Such expressions or turns of phrase as "The Old Witch," "She found a baby" or "I hears babies crying in the stumps" are indicative of an underlying belief system in which the connection between the reality of nature and the supernatural remains somewhat obscure and mysterious to its bearers. Beyond their immediate association with the area of Folk Belief, these narratives including the kernel story mentioned earlier, present by virtue of their folklore content, affiliations to several generic categories.

Although they are told as personal experience narratives, these stories contain a number of legendary attributes which are mainly conveyed by the metaphorical language embedded in them. It is an implication of the process of transmission of traditional knowledge that such etiological legends be told to children as explanations about the origin of babies. Mrs. Murphy's narratives hint at two of these etiological legends. The supernatural element inherent in the belief in the Old Witch as a character which brings children into the world, but also as a frightening figure much like the "boogey man" in other parts of Newfoundland, adds, because of the use of the frightening figure, an element of unquestionable acceptance. This reinforces the legendary aspect relative to the narratives and the beliefs they convey.

Secondly, and still along the same metaphorical pattern, the reference to "the stumps" is an indication of the etiological legend according to which babies are found in cabbage stumps.²⁵⁷ Although it is not really apparent in this series of narratives, the "stumps" metaphor is also sometimes used as a warning: "Stay away from the stumps!" This expression was used several times by Mrs. Joan Murphy and Mrs. Jane

²⁵⁷When I was growing up in France, children were told this legend. However, the distinction was made between boys and girls in that boys were found in cabbage stumps and girls were born in rose bushes.

Ryan when warning their teenage daughters about pregnancy.²⁵⁸ The metaphor then would be a direct reference to the legend mentioned above and its meaning would undoubtedly be understood as such by the teenagers concerned.

However, as it stands in the narratives related by Rose Murphy, the reference to "the stumps," its meaning and the belief associated with it, are taken for granted and interpreted in their literal sense by the young girls. Not only is such a story an indication of the generation gap in the evolution of the belief system in the community; its folkloric dimension and value are also of special interest. The two sisters, protagonists in these narratives, later became mothers and went on transmitting the same set of beliefs to their own children, yet adding the counterbalancing element of disbelief as expressed in these narratives.²⁵⁹

One may argue that these personal experience narratives, when told by and among women during such informal social gatherings, bear a certain amount of meta-traditional value. That is, if we consider that meta-folklore means folklore about folklore, then meta-traditional implies in terms of the transmission process of folklore, that we have a tradition

²⁵⁸Fieldnotes, Cape St. George, July 1987. A common expression in Newfoundland to refer to pregnancy is "to be up the stump."

²⁵⁹Personal communication: Rose Murphy and Cathy Ryan, Cape St. George, July 1987.

about tradition. Therefore it is with regard to such narratives as the ones presented above, and the context in which they are now told, during elderly women's informal social gatherings, that the idea of meta-traditional applies. The narratives are no longer told to convey the primary information they contend. Their tellers do not mean to believe or transmit the beliefs comprehended in the narratives. Yet it is because of the traditional context in which they are told as examples of a once meaningful and traditional method of transmitting knowledge, that these narratives can be said to hold meta-traditional value.

Both narratives, regardless of their potential generic affiliation, deal, by virtue of their content, with the informal but essential transmission of knowledge. It is necessary to consider their internal context, or that relating to their content, to understand the use of the metaphoric language. Such language is used to transmit specific beliefs. It is the challenging of these beliefs however, and particularly that associated with "the stumps," that precludes the element of disbelief. The two sisters were originally told to believe that babies were found in the stumps. By checking the stumps in order to look for babies, they challenged this belief. When eventually their search proved unsuccessful, they discredited this initial belief and consequently transformed it into a disbelief. However, the narration of their experience remains valid as a form of folklore, namely as personal experience narrative about the challenging of belief. This consequently gives a new generic dimension to the narratives in emphasizing their anecdotal value.

Thus in the context of these informal social gatherings, the functional values and generic attributes of personal experience narratives such as those illustrated above transgress their original boundaries. The storyteller's aim is no longer restricted by an educational or a belief-transmitter concern. Rather, such performances bring out an element of jocularisation which borders on what is called above meta-traditional, in that it dismisses the initial functions and generic characteristics attached to the narratives.

Moreover, the argument can be further substantiated by the last explanatory remark in the above-quoted excerpt. Although as an interviewer, I tried by my last question to elicit more ample details relative to the mechanism of the "Old Witch" belief, I triggered instead a comment which implied the obsolescence of the transmission of this particular kind of traditional knowledge and set of beliefs. As Mrs. Murphy said "We didn't know anything us that time before. It's not like the youngsters now, they know everything."

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, attention has been paid to those narrative folklore genres which may occur during any of the women's gatherings under study. It has been shown that these genres are embedded in a broader conversational context. In many instances the narratives presented here require a certain

level of cooperative construction from the participants. This results in a higher degree of informality which itself corresponds to lesser responsibility and involvement for the performer with regards to her narration. Subsequently there is a higher intensity of interactional dynamics. The next chapter will focus on those genres which primarily occur during elderly women's informal social gatherings.

Chapter 7

EXAMPLES OF FOLKLORE GENRES EMERGING FROM ELDERLY WOMEN'S INFORMAL SOCIAL GATHERINGS

In this chapter specific attention will be paid to folklore genres which emerge during elderly women's gatherings such as those described in chapter five. Allusion has been made to these genres in the previous chapter. The perspective governing the analytical approach is similar to that taken in chapter six. Genres are considered in terms of the function they fulfill in the conversational contexts from which they emerge and also in terms of the values they convey. As mentioned in chapter six, the main distinction between the genres examined here and those referred to previously lies essentially in the level of involvement of their performers.²⁶⁰

A considerable amount of time during elderly women's informal gatherings is indeed devoted, be it through casual conversation or the sharing of narratives, to reminiscing about the past and the embellishment of past traditional knowledge and values. It can be hypothesised that

²⁶⁰See Lawrence G. Small, "The Interrelationship of Work and Talk in a Newfoundland Fishing Community," Ph. D. Diss. (U of Pennsylvania, 1979).

these verbal exchanges may account for a desire by the participants to validate among themselves the sense of respect which is due to them by their children and grandchildren.

Coaxing

Considering women's performance of more involved narratives during their social informal gatherings, it is necessary at this point to make a digression, in order to concentrate on the performance strategy displayed by most elderly women and especially Rose Murphy. As a storyteller, Mrs. Murphy belongs to what Gerald Thomas refers to as the "Private Tradition" which he defines in the following terms:

Une veillée familiale, où une mère, quelques vieux parents, parfois un père, distraient les enfants en leur racontant des contes appris aux veillées [publiques]. Ou bien . . . il s'agissait de la rencontre de quelques vieilles amies qui au cours d'une soirée passée ensemble, pouvaient s'amuser en se racontant leurs contes préférés.²⁶¹

The context of this storytelling tradition was therefore restricted to a close knit group either linked by family ties or friendship bonds. Storytellers belonging to this tradition do not enjoy recognition from the community at large, yet their talent is respected and acclaimed by the audiences in front of whom they perform. Although not as accentuated as in the public

²⁶¹Gerald Thomas, *Les Deux Traditions* 55. Thomas first used the term in this context in "Stories, Storytellers and Storytelling in Newfoundland's French Tradition: A Study of the Narrative Art of Four French Newfoundlanders," Ph.D. diss. Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1977.

tradition, the rules governing storytelling at the private or domestic level remain similar. One of the predominant rules in the private tradition operates prior to the actual telling and is called "Coaxing." Coaxing is the ritual-like exchange whereby the audience and the performer engage in a "persuasion-refusal" verbal dance. This exchange can be viewed as part of the performance itself in that it is rare that it is not followed by a breakthrough into performance which itself is characterised by the change of behaviour which modifies the speaker's delivery and changes it into a performance mode.²⁶² In other words, coaxing is the mechanism which the group of participants uses to set up the situational context into one of performance. They do so by assigning the storyteller the responsibility of performance, through verbal expressions of request and praise. By so doing the rest of the participants consequently set themselves up as the audience.

(000)A.B.: Chante une chanson.

R.M.: Oh je sais pas de chansons moi.

R.C.: Ben un conte.

R.M.: There's no time I don't have time me.

A.B.: She knows so much and she don't have time.

(005)R.C.: Moi si je saurais des contes j'en conterais don't you worry.

A.B.: Elle sait plus asteure. Elle a conté trop à elle là.

Il y a peut être une menagerie où autre chose tu sais.

R.M.: Ca c'est une vache. No I never told you too much stories.

M.D.: You never told me too much stories no. Only eight or ten

(010) maximum.

R.M.: Yes that's all I told her.

M.D.: And you know at least fifty.

²⁶²See: Dell Hymes, "Breakthrough Into Performance," *Folklore, Performance and Communication*, eds. D. Ben-Amos & Kenneth S. Goldstein (The Hague: Mouton, 1975) 11-94.

- R.M.: I knows I wish to God I would remember them eh.
 R.C.: I knows some bad stories my God. Comment on oublie des
 (015) affaires pareilles. C'est de pas les dire tu sais. If
 you could say it now and then see.
 R.M.: Oh yes if you keep on going. Now me with the old Olive
 was there, I had to tell her stories. The last one she
 told me it is the Bumble Bee.
 (020) M.D.: That's the one you told me.
 R.M.: That's the one I learned from her.
 M.D.: Ouais c'est celui-là que ben...
 R.M.: See I can't tell stories, I stops too often me eh. I
 wasn't like that before me I could tell stories there
 (025) right out. I can't tell stories like that now.
 A.B.: On oublie. On n'est pas Sweet Sixteen no more.
 R.C.: Les jeunes ils oublient, mais les vieilles ils vont pas oublier.
 R.M.: Oh my God Les jeunes I guess so, take Joan she come home
 with a coat she goes back with no coat. She come home the
 (030) other day I had a cup and saucer on the counter eh. I
 said "Joan bring that cup and saucer going eh!" "yeah".
 She left it there she went home.
 R.C.: Yeah.
 R.M.: Forgetful too. Cruel cruel cruel.
 (035) R.C.: Dolores there yet?
 R.M.: Yes she is there yet eh. Dolores.
 M.D.: Yeah.
 R.C.: She get no place.
 R.M.: She boards there her.
 (040) A.B.: I see her encore aller là la grosse Dolores. Elle va
 là encore elle a une job.
 R.M.: Aillou?
 A.B.: Picadilly. Cinq semaines je crois.
 R.M.: Ouais?
 A.B.: Même job que Wanda.
 (045) R.M.: Yeah?
 A.B.: Ils ont callé ici hier matin. Be there for half ten puis
 ça a donné, ils allont à Corner Brook,
 puis elle a parti avec eux puis ils l'ont emmené à Picadilly.
 (050) R.M.: If Dolores would be more smart for to walk, they would
 be on the job yet. From your place up here they got to
 have a taxil God damn the honte. Jesus Christ.
 A.B.: Je suis folle des fois mais des fois je suis right pour
 lui dire moi.
 (055) R.C.: Last time she come home, she said "Can I come yet?"

- I says "Yes you must have forgot" and I says " My God my God" I says "It's so warm and nice" I say "for what you don't want to come as far as up here?" I says "It's not far!" me I says. Last year I used to walk up the store
- (060) for gas and everything. It's only this year I can't do it.
 R.M.: You can't do it yeah.
 R.C.: I says last year I was able to do it.
 R.M.: Yeah.
 R.C.: I says "You young girl and all like that, "No" she said
 (065) she got to have the car and drive. She got to have the car to drive into. Now.
 R.M.: The taxi is going four trips all day.
 R.C.: My God four trips, more than that I guess! They get up in the morning they go at dinner time and they go again
 (070) in the evening and bring them home.
 R.M.: Yes three trips a day. Four.
 A.B.: One two trips. More.
 R.M.: Four.
 A.B.: If they have a full day in one house you gotta make two
 (75) trips.
 R.M.: They go in the morning and come back dinner time, that's two. Go again at dinner time and come back in the evening, that's two more.
 R.M.: They got to have the money to pay all that.
 R.C.: I tell you. They can't walk. Young girls like that my God
 (080) that's some sin.
 A.B.: My God that's some sin.
 R.M.: Not easy.
 M.D.: I walk.
 R.M.: Her she goes up the Bill of the Cape her.
 (085) R.C.: It do you good walking like that. I wish to God me. Only for my leg like that, my sore my knee (Pause) Conte-nous one là de même.
 R.M.: I know the one, poor Aunt Hélène told me that one, she learned it I forgot from who.
 (090) A.B.: Go on qui c'est ça un conte.
 R.M.: Un conte de poor McCarthy there.
 A.B.: Ah oui.
 R.M.: I told that one, the mother, see I can't think about.
 A.B.: Ah Yes.
 (095) R.M.: It goes from me eh. There's an old man in the woods eh, he prefers to go with young girls.
 A.B.: Yeah.

R.M.: You know. And the young girls were frightened, he use to go there to find her see. You get jail if you do it in town see.

A.B.: Yeah.

(100)R.M.: I knew that story my dear just like a maudit frigging song.
God love story.

M.D.: Is it a true story?

R.M.: No not a true story it's a story.

M.D.: Gayle m'a dit qu'elle avait rencontré un cheval
(105) dans le chemin.

From the above example it can be deduced that "coaxing" can be a lengthy and complex way of bringing a storyteller or a singer to start performing. This process as is shown here can follow several tangents before the goal is actually achieved. In this case, folklore is displayed as much in the process as in the content of the process itself. There are four participants including myself (M.D.), three of whom are trying to bring the fourth one to tell stories.

Initially R.M. is asked by A.B. to sing a song (000). When she replies categorically that she does not know any, (001) she is asked by the other participant, her sister, to tell a story instead (003). Progress is noticed in the process when R.M. does not actually refuse to tell but claims that there is not enough time (004). by this she also implies that there is not enough time for the specific kind of story she is asked to perform: "Un conte" (a Märchen).

R.C. and A.B. then proceed to tease R.M. and also shame her into it (005-010). R.M. then acknowledges the ground given to the coaxers by R.M. by agreeing that stories can be forgotten if they are not told often enough (014-015). The conversational exchange then goes on about one specific story, the title of which is mentioned along with the name of a former storyteller (017-019). R.M. then, probably feeling the evolution of the coaxing process, denies her ability to tell stories in an acceptable way (023), although she admits she was once a good storyteller (024). R.C. and A.B. then offer what seems like contradictory statements about memory loss, with R.C. emphasizing that it is young people who are forgetful but older women do not forget (024-25).

At this point a major digression is made in the coaxing process when R.M. shifts to a tangent with an example of her daughter-in-law's forgetfulness (028-032). R.C. mentions the name of another young woman (035), and the coaxers R.C. and A.B. offer yet another set of criticisms about young people by giving examples of their laziness and their apparent refusal to walk any distance (040-080). By indulging in such criticism, the three older women mean to point to the different set of values, here specifically with regard to money and physical effort, held by members of the two generations. More specifically they mean to reaffirm their superiority over young people (059-63). At this point I wish to defend myself as a young person (083) and my defense is taken up by R.M. (084).

The coaxing however, is not over. When enough time is felt to have been spent on this self-appraisal tangent, R.C. sums up the point of the tangent (085). She then authoritatively continues with the coaxing (086). R.M. is further encouraged by A.B. (090) and after what seems to be like little resistance (091-095), R.M. begins a story she had heard from an aunt (095-098).

However, R.M. seems to be unable to remember the story and because she mentions what appears to me as an element of a true story (098), I ask her if this is the case (102). Her comment "Not a true story, it's a story." is indicative of her own differentiation between what she considers two different categories. In French she would have probably be more explicit and said "Pas une vraie histoire, c'est un conte," then using two different words (histoire, conte).

Now the coaxing is over and I make a comment referring to the telling by someone else of a frightful encounter (104-105). I intend there to make a connection to R.M.'s initial story. This provokes the three women to tell a series of personal frightening experience narratives or "frights" as they refer to them.

Frights

The issue of disbelief alluded to earlier can further be elaborated on and illustrated by the following sequence of narratives. Again these narratives emerge from and are embedded in a conversational context. In this case, the narrators cooperate in the reminiscing and telling of "frights" or what, as a folklorist, I would term personal experience narratives of frightening encounters with the supernatural. R.M., the main performer, tells several of these narratives. R.C., although in an audience role at the beginning, encourages the telling and subscribes to the beliefs evoked by generalizing about them and thus offering the community's acceptance and point of view. The third participant A.B. (not including myself, M.D.) remains in an audience role as she does not actively and positively contribute to the actual performance or telling of the narratives. She does not however, remain totally passive and in a way contributes to the performance by continually dismissing the reality of the supernatural elements in the narratives.

Her expressions of disbelief serve two main apparent functions and a third which may seem secondary although not unimportant to the performance. Thus on the one hand her dismissive comments offer a counterbalance to the beliefs expressed in the narratives, by suggesting what she perceives as a realistic explanation of the others' experiences,

which are clearly emphasized as supernatural. Also on the other hand her numerous questions and dismissive interruptions lead the performers into giving more detail and emphasizing the supernatural or frightening content of their experiences accounts. As mentioned above women in Cape St. George often refer to these stories as "frights," or "peurs," or "venettes," in French. As Gayle Walsh said, after telling a version of one of the following narratives, in which she was frightened by a horse and another version in which she saw a white sheet across the road and could not pass:

J'avais peur, c'était le diable je crois. Il y avait de quoi là pour voir de quoi de même. Ca c'est la grosse peur puis la petite peur. Puis un coup je vais te dire de quoi, j'ai de quoi à te dire encore. J'en ai attrapé moi des venettes. Je suis descendue chez le défunt Mark, moi puis la défunte tante Lynn. Quand j'arrive au même point là.... My God t'aurais vu, un grand homme, c'est la vérité, c'est pas des meneries c'est vrai ça. Un grand homme habillé de noir. (I was afraid, it was the devil I believe. It's the big fright and the little fright. And one time, I'm going to tell you what, I have more to tell you yet. I got my share of frights. I went down too poor Mark's, me and poor aunt Lynn. When I get to the same spot there.... My God you should have seen. A tall man. that's the truth, that's not lies, that's true. A tall man dressed in black.)²⁶³

From this quotation we can see that women in Cape St. George name these narratives after the feelings brought on by the experiences they describe. Like Gayle, R.M. and R.C. believe in the supernatural elements. They describe in their experiences:

R.C.: My God four trips, more than that I guess! They get up in the morning they go at dinner time and they go again in the evening and bring them home.

R.M.: Yes three trips a day. Four.

²⁶³Tape-recorded interview, MUNFLA: 86-012 C8316.

(005) A.B.: One two trips. More.

R.M.: Four.

A.B.: If they have a full day in one house you gotta make two trips.

R.M.: They go in the morning and come back dinner time,
(010) that's two. Go again at dinner time and come back in the evening, that's two more.

R.M.: They got to have the money to pay all that.

R.C.: I tell you. They can't walk. Young girls like that my God that's some sin.

(015) A.B.: My God that's some sin.

R.M.: Not easy.

M.D.: I walk.

R.M.: Her she goes up the Bill of the Cape her.

R.C.: It do you good walking like that. I wish to God me.

(020) Only for my leg like that, my sore my knee (Pause) Conte nous one là de même.

R.M.: I know the one, poor Aunt Héléne told me that one, she learned it I forgot from who.

A.B.: Go on qui sait ça un conte.

(025) R.M.: Un conte de poor McCarthy there.

A.B.: Ah oui.

R.M.: I told that one, the mother, see I can't think about.

A.B.: Ah Yes.

R.M.: It goes from me eh. There's an old man in the woods eh, he
(030) prefers to go with young girls.

A.B.: Yeah.

R.M.: You know. And the young girls were frightened, he use to go there to find her see. You get jail if you do it in town see.

(035) A.B.: Yeah.

R.M.: I knew that story my dear just like a maudit frigging song. God love story.

M.D.: Is it a true story?

R.M.: No not a true story it's a story.

(040) M.D.: Gayle m'a dit qu'elle avait rencontré un cheval dans le chemin.

R.M.: I was there too. That's the night we got a fright. They was down home eh, Vivian and Gayle and poor Lynn and poor Lynn had a baby besides that. And some old I don't

(045) remember me and when we got to the other side of Matthew's there.

A.B.: They use to hear it.

- R.M.: Bless it by God (claps hand) it was frightful my son. I almost fucking died you know. And if I turned back. I
- (050) had to go with Lynn eh. Now us coming back. I don't know who was with us coming back. Somebody. Her son. My God my God. A fright. I tell you. Gerry he goes passing, he hears it too.
- A.B.: Hear what.
- (055)R.M.: I can't tell you what it is now.
- A.B.: No no.
- R.M.: Matthew's field, by the side of the road there. There.
- A.B.: Racket, noise or what?
- R.M.: (Claps hand) Oh My the noise the noise.
- (060)R.C.: I told you that. Il y a du monde qu'y avait peur de passer par là.
- A.B.: Yes.
- R.M.: Gerry Conroy he said the devil must be there he said. Oh my God I was there myself.
- (065)A.B.: You're telling the truth?
- R.M.: The truth! Gospel ah ah. That's a true fright I had in my life.
- A.B.: Yeah?
- R.M.: That one and one when I was a girl home eh, une
- (070) gamine eh. I went down in my bare feet in noon day, a fine day. On my way coming back anyhow I was going down the brook almost and Rhonda was to complain, on both sides of the road.
- A.B.: Maybe somebody was right there.
- (075)R.M.: No no.
- A.B.: Jeewhiz you can't trust.
- R.M.: Well you'll never believe. It was a sound my dear, it was a sound.
- A.B.: Yeah.
- (080)R.C.: Avant ça soundait en masse.
- R.M.: Listen. So I turned back with a fright me.
- A.B.: Yeah, but they knew you were going that way. So they was hiding there for you.
- R.M.: Nobody was after us like that.
- (085)A.B.: I garantie.
- R.M.: No no, so I went down to Hugh's.
- A.B.: Yeah.
- R.M.: And he was all alone, I say " Would you see the devil?" I said. "I never seen it but it was a fucking
- (090) fright I went down with a fright."

- A.B.: You was thinking about that.
 R.M.: I was thinking about it! When I was young! Thinking about something like that, never! I had nothing in my mind before like that me. Then Paddy come. Paddy come to stay
 (095) with me. As far as the big rock. All right he come as far as the big rock and I stay there and I was to hear it right far far far away, I was to hear it yet. He never heard it him you know.
 R.C.: Yeah.
 (100)R.M.: And when I got to the top of the hill going down. La vache je l'ai tapé au cul!
 R.C.: before they use to hear that.
 R.M.: Ah Yes they use to hear that.
 R.C.: That was true that before they use to hear that.
 (105)R.M.: Sure it was true. Look Bill Crane' wife use to come up here with the horse. He chased my brother Richard too
 R.C.: Yes he chased Justin Connors there. From the brook of McCarthy to go as far as down to the brook of Crane there
 R.M.: Crane brook.
 (110)R.C.: There was a pile of log right there and he chases him from there right down to the other brook. They were frightened.
 R.M.: And Richard he was coming up west. David's road.
 R.C.: Yeah coming down the hill there.
 (115)R.M.: When he got, he pass David's road he sees the blaze eh, he seen the blaze then he look there's a frigging big horse with a mouthful of fire (claps hands).
 M.D.: Oh I don't believe that.
 R.M.: His mouth full of fire.
 (120)R.C.: Yeah.
 R.M.: Well that's true he almost died him.
 R.C.: Yes, there's a good many seen that. Son Parker there he was chased one time almost right to Red Brook.
 R.M.: Yeah he was. The blaze right ahead of him. The blaze
 (125) ahead of him.
 R.C.: He was carrying the mail then.
 R.M.: A blaze ahead of him. When he come home he was the colour of a piece of white curtain.
 M.D.: You seen that you?
 (130)R.M.: No my brother seen it you think he go that way since after. No way not alone. He wouldn't go alone. Before my dear.
 R.C.: He come home one night he couldn't eat. Like somebody

- tell him not to go he wouldn't go. He stayed at home.
- (135) He had to come home before the dark eh. The dark, he was frightened to go so he said "Rhonda I can't go home. I'm afraid I'm gonna see something." So I said "Stay here."
- A.B.: Yes but people like that it was tough before, frighten
- (140) the rest and all that. It was tough, some people.
- R.M.: And me too I was staying with Bruce Kirby s eh, and one evening in the evening you see fine. So I was going down home. And I got as far as David's road. No, think I could pass that you? you think I could pass that there.
- (145) If I would go there I would see a man with no head. I had to turn back. (claps hand) Like he was there already for me to see. I turns right back on my heels for home again. I never seen it. I never. I don't know if it was Cathy or poor Lynn. They were going down that way.
- (150) The man chased her.
- R.C.: Yeah.
- R.M.: We use to see a light there all the time to the Bill of the Cape eh. A candle light on the road. There's go up west and come down.
- (i55)A.B.: Some was trying to make some believe it eh. They used to go that way. You know what for. and they was saying some things you know to frighten the crowd so they wouldn't go that way. You know I guess who is it. You should know. They tells them some lies to frighten them
- (160) so them so they wouldn't go eh.
- M.D.: You saw a man with no head?
- A.B.: I heard that moi.
- R.M.: I never saw him. If I had to pass the place there I was going to see him.
- (165)M.D.: How do you know.
- R.M.: Because I knows. It stopped me from going eh. So funny eh. I could as far as there that's all. I had to stay there there. I wouldn't pass see. See if I had keep on going I'd seen him. (claps hand)
- (170)M.D.: How did you know there was a man with no head there.
- R.M.: I knew it was on my mind.
- A.B.: Sometimes you get frightened by your own fault. Me how many times I passed, to the gate alone. I pass all the time me there.
- (175)R.M.: Afraid there was somebody I wouldn't go up the road up there me.

A.B.: I was pass there me I was staying out there eh.
 No don't come down here and I saw ? coming up now
 I was scared there oh my dear.

- (180) R.M.: I was home as a young girl me and Cathy was sleeping
 in the same room and Rhonda was home that time look.
 Rhonda it's just like it was happened last night. That's
 funny eh.

R.C.: Yeah.

- (185) R.M.: Tu vois c'est pas hier. You was home a girl yet you.
 So you had your bed in the big end eh. our side. Now
 while I was to go to bed I always had something on my
 mind me. I was frightened eh. To see a man and all
 kinds of things I had on my mind eh. That time me I was
 (190) to turn down the gauge. Oh by and by the door opened. Now
 the outside door there was nobody could open that door
 with the buttons we had on eh. We had a maudit button on.
 Never hear no noise in the kitchen. The door opened right
 and easy. Right easy. Who walks in? A man dressed in black.
 (195) I seen him myself now. I'm not talking about anybody
 else. Myself. So I said to myself. If he comes in the
 room. I'm going to jump behind Cathy. I had it on my
 mind. Funny eh. I had it on my mind now. if he comes.
 I wasn't frightened at all!

- (200) R.C.: No.

R.M.: No, and then he went to your bed and he look over your face
 like that. And you grunt you. So I watched on, oh. He never.
 He turns on his heels. It was right clear the moon light,
 in the big end. He went out. And he close the door. And I
 (205) fix my ears and that and listen, see if he could walk in
 the kitchen and open the door. No way. I fell asleep dead
 to the world after.

A.B.: Was the door opened, unlocked.

R.M.: The outside door was locked. No one could come in.

- (210) A.B.: Yeah yeah.

R.M.: He never walked even in the kitchen. Never heard him at all.
 First thing at the door. You think that I forget about
 that man. And that's the only time that come to my mind.
 Maman finds it funny she said. I don't, every time I was
 (215) awoke all night see. I couldn't sleep eh, frightened to
 death. Seen people coming in I had on my mind he, ugly.
 That's bad my son. And after that my dear I was to go to
 bed and sleep sound as it could be. Nothing in my mind.
 It took the fright out of me. It took the fright of it out.

- (220) And it's only after I was married. I had Lois, I don't know how many months it was. We's gone home. And he was talking about ghosts. I never told Maman. I said me what's he wants to hear. I says. I never told you so I said.
The fright from me so I forgot him. I forgot him and all.
- (225) You thinks it's funny eh.
R.C.: You thought he'd come to kill you.
R.M.: Oh my God I was glad too.
- (Pause)
A.B.: You were alive.
R.M.: I was all alone in the room awake eh.
- (230) A.B.: Yeah.
R.M.: They was all sleeping. Pas beau.
A.B.: Sometimes you get frightened by your own fault. Scared to death. I knows. I get some me.
R.M.: I got to see what it is me. If I see something me. I gotta see. I see something. I hear something. I gotta go see you know.
- (235) A.B.: Yeah.
R.M.: Oh yes.
M.D.: Yeah, I seen you do that.
- (240) R.M.: Sure. I'm fucking brazen face eh. Hard customer.
R.C.: I'm a hard customer too.
A.B.: The things a person can see eh, la nuit.
R.C.: I'd rather be blind than see anything like that me. I seen a ghost.
- (245) R.M.: Your poor father I suppose.
R.C.: I seen him he was there.
R.M.: Yeah.
R.C.: Yeah. I seen him, I was down the shore. He was passing that side of me there. And when I turn around.
- (250) He was just there. I knew him. I came home. I told Maman. I seen him. He pass right there outside of me there. I turn my head like that and when I turned my head back he was gone. That's the only time I seen him.
R.M.: I know one time me and Cathy eh. I went to Andy Crocker's
- (255) See her she had come to the store eh. To the McCarthys up here. Anyhow bare feet. (claps hand) I say "I'm gonna go me to see." I says "she's gone on a quest." Me and Cathy. It was about that time there. It was going dark and that. So we start going, we went as far as Kay
- (260) stays there that big lane of trees there.
R.C.: That lane of trees. We use to hear that oh my God

my God, the youngsters crying and everything there.

R.M.: We went as far as there (claps hand)

R.C.: Yes.

(265) R.M.: Yes and then we stop and we look. He come he pass
on the side of the road there. He turned down by the bank.
Fucking big bull. With a great big pair of horns.
True as the (she points to an ornament) there là.

A big pair of horns, right clear the horns. And you could
(270) count the pleat in his groins there, only on two paws he was.
That's true that. God mighty's truth that. On two paws he was.
He went down the lane you know the lane that goes down the
shore there.

R.C.: Yeah.

(275) R.M.: The Red Brook.

R.C.: Yeah.

R.M.: There. He went down there. He comes from David's there.²⁶⁴

Discussion

The narratives which result from the coaxing process described earlier and partially included here (0-41) are embedded in a conversational context. R.M. therefore starts with the telling of one experience (41-53). She is interrupted once by A.B. who starts her dismissal process by a generalisation that sets her apart from those who believes in these supernatural encounters (46). A.B. and A.L. maintain the conversational context (54-59). A.B. does so by asking questions or by challenging the narrator's beliefs (54, 58, 65). On the other hand R.C. maintains the conversational context by cooperating with the narrator and thus reinforcing her point of view (60-61). R.M., the teller of the narrative,

²⁶⁴ excerpts from MUNFLA 86-012 C8330-8331

reasserts the experience and the supernatural element she perceives in it by giving more detail and by answering the questions emphasizing the personal element (59, 66-67). She explains the supernatural experience by supporting it with names of other individuals who shared a similar experience (63-64).

At this point, the narrator's intentions become clearer. She is determined to convince her audience of the reality of her encounter with the supernatural and consequently the validity of her belief. To do so she launches into the telling of another experience to corroborate the credibility of that told in the first narrative (69-73). She is again interrupted by A.B. who questions the nature of her experience (74, 76). But R.M. emphasizes her fact by reiterating it (77-78). R.C. on the other hand expresses support for the narrator by generalising (80). Thus she encourages R.M. to continue with the second account (81).

A.B. now explicitly states the nature of her disbelief by offering what she considers an alternative and realistic explanation for what R.M. considers a supernatural encounter (82-83). R.M. however, denies or rather refuses to accept A.B.'s interpretation by making it sound improbable (84, 86). She then continues with her account, stating what she perceives as the actual reason for her encounter and, as in the first narrative, she names another individual who holds a similar belief (88-90). One must note that on both occasions the individuals named as supports

are men. In order to further express her disbelief and dismiss the supernatural element in R.M.'s account, A.B. now challenges R.M. by implying that she could have had impure thoughts (91). It could be deducted or at least suggested that this particular interruption sheds a light on one aspects of both women's belief systems, namely that impure thoughts may trigger supernatural encounters or "frights." Without being explicit, R.M.'s reaction confirms this suggestion (92-94). The tone of her response is highly defensive. R.M. then finishes the narrative by stating that it was indeed a personal experience (98).

R.C., who up to this point only offered generalisations, which to an extent reflected the community's perspective, speaks one more time and repeats R.M.'s final statement, and thus supporting the validity of her belief (102, 104). From now on she participates more actively in the performance of the next narratives and thus emphasizes her support for R.M. (105-138). Due to this cooperation, the performance becomes tenser as the need to assert the validity of the experiences become greater. More names are given as evidence (105-107, 113, 122, 130, 136). Place names are also cited so as to emphasize the credibility of the experiences (108, 111, 113, 114, 123). Also the descriptions of the supernatural elements are more detailed and motif-like (115-117, 119, 124). The elements of disbelief becomes less numerous but longer and more intensified (118, 139-140). At some point I cannot resist and express my total disbelief which almost comes as an instinctive reaction (118). A.B. on the other

hand waits until the end of the narrative and attempts to rationalize the accounts (139-140). However, she does so to no avail as R.M. launches into yet another personalised account of a similar experience (139-150). She evidences it with more names of people who shared the experience (149), more place names (143) and descriptions of supernatural characters (145).

The sequence of narratives is then temporarily suspended and the performance gives way to the conversational context in which it is taking place. A.B. explains more clearly the nature of and the reason for her disbelief (155-159). She suggests that people from the community deliberately set up others so that they can themselves engage in immoral or illegal activities. For different reasons however, and mainly because I am interested in knowing R.M. and R.C.'s perceptions of and reflections on their experiences, I asked for more details (161, 165, 170).

R.M. reflects on her perception of her experiences and comes to the conclusion that in at least one instance, she had a feeling or a premonition which prevented her from going beyond a certain point and which triggers a supernatural encounter (166-169, 171, 175-176). She admits to the peculiarity of that feeling (166). A.B., in accordance with her own disbelief, expresses her thoughts by summing up R.M.'s impressions and crediting them to her own argument (172).

R.M. uses her next narrative to exemplify her state of mind (180-206). She explains how she gets frightened (187-189). In the narrative she tells how once she had faced her own fright she was able to combat it (195-199).

A brief conversational exchange then ensues between R.M. and A.B. during which R.M. resolves the dilemma of her experiences and concludes that she has to face her "frights" in order to keep her peace of mind (234-235). However, she does not discuss the reality of supernatural encounters. The fact that she faces and is aware of her "frights" in this narrative does not prevent her from having subsequent ones, as is illustrated in her last narrative (265-276). Her belief in the supernatural is real and it is further exemplified by her support of R.C.'s ghost encounter narrative, although there might also be an element of courtesy involved (245-47). A.B. on the other hand acknowledges the reality of the "frights" but does not believe in the existence of the supernatural (233). She believes that it is the product of one's imagination (232).

Midwives and Birth Stories

In this community, reminiscing about the past implies sharing narratives which embellish yet at the same time paint a gloomy picture of the past. Through narratives which have important historical value to their

tellers and listeners, women describe themselves and perceive themselves and their peers as people on whom the welfare of the community depended. The contemporary reader may see through these narratives what appears to be a contradiction. On the one hand, previous times are described as harder than the present. Harsher life conditions are emphasized. The following "midwives tales" for instance portray women as heroic survivors. Yet in other narratives about the past, life conditions and economic welfare are embellished and perceived as better than they are now.²⁶⁵

R.M.: You had lots of misery.

R.C.: J'avais en masse de la misère. Beau ou pas beau j'allais.

M.D.: Le premier enfant que t'as mis au monde c'était Sean?

(005) R.C.: Yeah.

M.D.: That's yours, c'est à toi celui là.

R.M.: Yeah.

R.C.: Pas petit tu sais.

R.M.: I guess, poor Dan he asks me. He says "Who you're taking this (010) time?" "Well" I said "I'm taking Rhonda." "Rhonda!" he said

"She got a heart to do anything like that?" I says " She told me she got a heart to do it and she knows how to do it." So I said I'd take her. Somebody got to learn anyway. So I

(015) took her.

M.D.: It's your husband he asked you who you wanted?

R.M.: Yeah.

M.D.: But that was your first one there Sean?

R.M.: No Jim, Lois was my first one.

(020) R.C.: Après que j'ai mis Sean, le premier qu'est venu au monde après Sean c'était Darlene. Hamish.

R.M.: Her first one, second one.

R.C.: Second one, quand je l'ai mis au monde, elle vivait chez

²⁶⁵Carole Carpenter, "Tales Women Tell: The Function of Birth Experience Narratives," *Canadian Folklore canadien* 7 (1985): 21-24, considers the point of view of mothers as opposed to that of midwives.

Hamish à ce temps là.

(025) R.M.: She went there in a what? Skidoo.

R.C.: Oh my God à ce coup là , ce coup là.

R.M.: She went up to Hamish for a girl.

R.C.: Sa fille puis son homme ils étaient là. Elle a été au docteur puis le docteur lui avait dit,

(030) c'est une serious birth, qu'elle va avoir eh. All right so.

Fallait qu'elle allait à l'hôpital mais, la neige, la neige tombe partout, puis aussitôt que la neige était finie, c'était le verglas. Tout partout de la charrie de verglas. Et j'ai monté en haut là avec un

(035) skidoo. C'est à skidoo j'ai monté en haut là.

Et puis j'ai dû mettre mes grappins à mes pieds, pour venir pour me voir d'en haut à la maison, du grand chemin. Des grappins. Puis je rentre dans la maison puis là anyhow I swear là , le power s'en va took

(040) off. Et puis le power cut off anyhow parti les lignes cassées tout en grand. Là on s'est arrangé les lampes. Puis là mettre la lampe sur une petite table au pied du lit. All right. Prend la lampe et met là. Elle a eu son tout petit. Il a venu. Le petit cul

(045) premier.

R.M.: Oh my God.

R.C.: En deux il était replié right en deux. Tout en deux de même il était replié. Y'avait besoin to push it back pour avoir les pieds, pour pouvoir l'avoir eh. Mais

(050) je l'ai eu. Il a venu comme il faut. J'aurais pas pu faire mieux. Pense donc ils phonaient pour avoir un copteur.

R.M.: Un hélicopteur.

R.C.: Ils phonaient pour ça pour venir essayer de l'avoir, il pouvait pas venir, ils étaient pris là. Dead or

(055) alive.

R.M.: Yeah you made.

R.C.: Je l'ai toute fait right complete until it was all over, un grand merci au bon Dieu. Asteure elle avait dit qu'elle l'aurait pas fait à la maison. Elle l'aurait à (060) l'hôpital eh.

R.M.: It was no trouble with you years ago, no trouble with you nowhere.

R.C.: Non j'ai pas eu de grande misère, tu sais j'avais de la misère all right. Mais j'ai toujours succeed eh à

(065) mon ouvrage, toujours succeed avec mon ouvrage.

M.D.: Qui c'est qui t'as mis tes enfants au monde.

R.C.: Bien moi j'ai eu four midwomen. Le premier j'ai eu Jennifer

- pour venir pour moi. Après j'ai eu grand mère
 Fiona pour les deux autres, et j'ai eu Cathy Green
 (070) pour l'autre et puis j'ai eu la femme à Fred Connors
 pour la dernière. C'est du grand bon Dieu
 astheure c'était pas rien. Parce que moi j'ai mis en
 masse et en masse au monde. Le nez premier, les fesses
 premier. J'ai mis toutes sortes puis toujours succed de
 (075) faire mon ouvrage (claps hands) j'ai pas fait mal pas de
 cassé pas déchiré les femmes, pas fait mal
 aux enfants, non rien du tout. Tout en grand a été
 complete tout le temps.
 R.M.: There's two besides that.
 (080) R.C.: Cathy elle a eu deux filles, toutes les deux avont venu
 les pieds premiers. Toutes les deux, des twins eh.
 R.M.: She was lucky.
 R.C.: Par deux fois je lui ai sauvé la vie.
 R.M.: Yes you're right.
 (085) R.C.: Un coup elle était assis sur une chaise elle pouvait
 pas se briser, j'étais là , j'ai bouillie l'eau,
 je lui fait boire de l'eau bouillie, de l'eau chaude. Je
 l'ai fait bouillir et là je l'ai fait boire, je l'ai
 fait vomir. Elle a vomi un pot, elle avait un grand pot
 (090) de même, elle a vomi dedans. C'était noir noir,
 le content qu'elle a vomi. Après elle a vomi elle
 était all right. Elle pouvait pas se coucher rien.
 Que capable de rester debout de même tout le temps.
 Elle était en bas quand elle a trouvé ses twins.
 (095) Ils sont venus pour moi, j'étais là quand elle
 a eu ses twins. Elle avait peur avec ça. J'ai mis
 la tique à bouillir puis là je lui donne une
 dose, encore avec l'eau chaude. Puis je l'ai fait vomir.
 Elle a vomi ça. Ell était all right encore.
 (100) R.M.: Yeah.
 R.C.: Pas longtemps après elle a eu ses deux twins.
 J'étais là pour dix jours de temps pour elle
 à soigner. dix jours j'étais là. Tous les
 matins j'allais là laver les deux enfants. Changer
 (105) son lit, laver pour elle, mettre du pain à lever,
 tout ça.
 R.M.: Yeah.
 R.C.: Tous les matins dix jours de temps.
 R.M.: Dix jours.
 (110) R.C.: Pour deux pièces.

M.D.: Deux pièces.

R.C.: Deux pièces pour le complete, pour les dix jours, deux pièces.

R.M.: Deux pièces, two dollars.

- (115) R.C.: A ce temps là eh, l'argent était rare, c'est pas les payes qui avont asteure. Ils travaillent cinq minutes s'ils ont pas une pièce they won't do it. Non, maudits sous. Moi j'ai été de toutes sortes de manières. J'ai été sur des skidoo, j'ai été sur des
- (120) bike, j'ai été sur des traines avec des chiens, j'ai été, j'ai été avec des chevaux, des traines, J'ai été de toutes les manières puis j'ai été à pied. A Loretto j'allais, c'était un grand bout tu sais de chez nous, aller là bas en
- (125) arrière de Loretto, puis la montée. C'était pas mignon. Des maisons, comment j'étais reçue là bas. Des maisons avec toute la grande vitre de même partie. Un sac à farine pour faire une vitre. Passer la nuit avec rien que du feu dans le poêle eh.
- (130) R.M.: She was tough.
- R.C.: Puis des fois, une pile de bois pour le poêle, je mettais ma capote par dessus de ça, puis je me couchais pour un spell puis je faisais du feu. Toute la nuit à faire du feu, pas de rest. Le lendemain matin, je me
- (135) levais, chauffer de l'eau, mettre du pain à lever. J'ai bourlingué moi, personne sais ce que j'ai fait. C'est rien que le bon Dieu en haut puis moi. Tu sais les femmes, si elle aviont passé ce que j'ai passé moi asteure elles seriont pas si vieilles que je suis moi aujourd'hui.
- (140) R.M.: Non. That's for sure.²⁶⁶

Discussion

Encouraged by R.M. who points out the fact that R.C. was a courageous woman (10-13), R.C. describes the harsh winter conditions she had to

²⁶⁶Tape-recorded interview: MUNFLA, 86-012, C8332.

brave to go and deliver children (30-32). Yet she and the other participants never actually use that phrase, rather they talk about "aller pour les femmes" (to go for the women). Similarly a midwife is defined as "une femme qui va pour les femmes" (a woman who goes for women). This in a way clearly defines the context of women's experience.

In the first narrative R.C. heroically helps a woman through a difficult birth. This happens during a storm when the power has been interrupted, and vain attempts have been made by the parents to get a helicopter and fly the expectant mother to the hospital (28-45). R.C. insists that she never failed in her task (63-65). She even saved her sister's life twice (83). When asked about her own experience of having children she does not give many details, other than the names of the midwives who helped her through (67-71). Rather she goes on describing her own trials with difficult births and harsh weather conditions (72-140). R.C. points out that financial gain was minimal, since money was scarce (110-115). She compares the past to the present, commenting on the greed of young people (115-118). By so doing she makes a value statement similar to the one mentioned earlier regarding younger generations, and primarily derogatory.

In these narratives as well as in her accounting of her experiences as a midwife, R.C. emphasizes five main points: harsh winter conditions, difficult births, dedication to helping other women beyond the strict delivery of children, strong-heartedness, and the religious fervour that helped her

through her trials.²⁶⁷ This last point can be contrasted with the "frights" narratives cited earlier. R.C. claims here never to have had supernatural encounters when going at night to deliver children. She credits this to the help of God and her religious fervour:

R.C.: Le Bon Dieu me donnait la main, j'ai venu de chez Achille à chez nous, j'avais pas eu rien à l'idée, pas peur rien du tout.

R.M.: Non.

R.C.: Le Bon Dieu me donnait la main. Il y a rien que ça qui peut y avoir, parce que moi après la nuit, je serais peur ... Mais je priais moi, je marchais à la place puis je priais. J'avais pas peur du tout.²⁶⁸

(God was helping me, I came home from A's. I had nothing in my mind, I wasn't afraid at all. It can only be that. Because, after, in the night, I was afraid ... But I used to pray. I would walk to the place and pray. I wasn't afraid at all.)

A.B. further confirmed this religious fervour: *T'étais une sainte*. Religious fervour in the case of these occupational narratives should be contrasted to the anti-clerical narratives presented earlier in this chapter. Religiosity is to be considered more in terms of individual spirituality rather than in connection with the Catholic Church as an authoritarian institution. Along with other characteristics of difficult births solidarity is also mentioned during another elderly women's social gathering during which narratives were shared about birth and the role of midwives.

²⁶⁷In her dissertation entitled "The Role of the Newfoundland Midwife in Traditional Healthcare, 1900-1970" (Memorial U. of Newfoundland, 1990), Janet McLaughlin discusses these particular points in a chapter dealing with the occupational lifeworld of midwives (209-268) where she points out that these concerns are traditional among midwives.

²⁶⁸MUNFLA, 86-012; C8332.

- P.R: She borned five home.
 M.H: I got something in my shoulder.
 B.M: What about Nancy and Peter she borned Peter eh he was doubled in two, that's her done the. Rhonda give up her and
 (005) Cathy beyond too eh, give up.
 M.H: Yeah.
 P.R: She sit down, on the little bench down to pray her she said "I'm going to do it" she said "It got to come" she gets on her two knees and she start to say the beads three times!
 (010) When she blessed herself and got clear of the beads I gobbled a grunt I had (lust sentence) eh I gobbled a grunt she jumped up and he was born but bad eh.
 S.H: And who is that now.
 P.R: Poor Ronald's birth, he doubled in two like that.
 (015)S.H: Oh my god.
 B.M: He was, that's breech birth is it?
 S.H: Breech birth is feet first eh.
 M.D: What's that?
 B.M: Breech birth, that's double in two or feet first.
 (020)P.R: and I come locked I was locked.
 B.M: I dare say you never sat down for a long time after.
 P.R: That was for poor Peter that, he even picked at anything else he used to have his bottle of juice.
 S.H: Sometimes you can get infection or anything and there's little
 (025) else to be left good wallop of the face of the earth and then that's it eh.
 P.R: God and she'd come home with a bottle of juice, the frigging times were so cool. It was a long while it was a long while for Nancy.
 (030)B.M: Now what about Nancy?
 P.R: It was there it was there on the first, the chin come out first.
 J.R: The chin comes out and the head would go back.
 B.M: So you couldn't push and fix him back?
 P.R: It wasn't easy. I come locked I couldn't move, I was still
 (035) born.
 J.R: In a case like that.
 S.H: You can't do it on your own sometimes, it's a doctor's case and you have to take it on your own, Rhonda gave up.
 P.R: Rhonda gave up her she said "there's nothing that we can do
 (040) for her you got to send her, to bring her to the hospital" and when somebody come on horse, I don't know me I couldn't remember, and tell that the car was coming they said to

send back the car.

J.R: Yeah one had come, he had stopped there.

(045) P.R: When he stopped it was just getting to work.

B.M: So he didn't go back for him to come out right or what?

P.R: No no they tried all around it was me got locked, there was nothing they could do eh.

S.H: He still had come. He was good, the back way, see he used to
(050) come up to come up here, and he used to go in the back to go outdoor instead of in the front and you know there was no way eh.

P.R: So me I killed out and I killed out like that là.

B.M: So what did you do to make her come to?

(055) J.R: A slap in the mouth.

B.M: You slapped her in the mouth.

S.H: They did what they thought it was best eh.

J.R: Well after she was clear I did my best.

S.H: Yeah anything Rhonda give her, she was bawling or screaming
(060) oh my god it was frightening.

J.R: I took all over.

B.M: Hmm Yeah.

P.R: There that's what she done now? well I don't remember that now but when she'd seen I was locked like that she wants
(065) to come here, me slap in the mouth, and I let my legs go and when I left my legs go she got to work. But do you remember trying to move there, she was bawling her well I tell you.

S.H: Yeah she was screech.

(070) P.R: She was holding the lamp what do you call, Mina hold the lamp the lamp break the glass full of blood, Mina pregnant eh.

M.H: Waiting for her too.

S.H: So well she took the lamp away from her, and when come
(075) the little boy after, she pack it in a blanket she passed it to me, it was right blue.

M.H: Oh my God.

B.M: But he was a sickly kid.

P.R: And his hair was all on one side eh and he's still like
(080) that you know.

M.H: Yeah?

S.H: And besides his long whiskers he's got one side right back and the other side right forth.

P.R: His head was along this way, I'm sure his head, it look
(85) mum, it went a little bit that way. Poor Peter, his head

wasn't round, his head was long this way.

S.H: For the name of God, in the name of God it with all fairness on it.

P.R: But sure when she blessed for the third time I got the
(090) grunt she loves, and it got to work, but Cathy stayed there sitting down smoking her pipe her.²⁶⁹

Unlike those mentioned above this narrative is told from the point of view of the expectant mother. The midwife who delivered the children is also present (M.H.) But she offers only scattered comments. The narratives which are clearly embedded in a conversational context here are sometimes confused. Religious attitudes and paraphernalia are mentioned twice, at the beginning and at the end of the excerpt, and are in fact part of the same birth description (6-7, 89). The narrative which emphasizes the difficulties presented by one particular delivery includes references to other difficult deliveries (14). These references to what seem to be commonalities of women's experience can be seen as being used as expressions of solidarity, especially the references to hospital care unavailability in time of need. A dominant theme of these narratives emphasises women's ability to support each other where support from public male-dominated institutions, are theoretically there to perform these functions, is absent or inadequate. One of the main goals of the narrative is to point out the seemingly unorthodox method used by the midwife to come to terms with a difficult birth situation (55-58). One must note that as

²⁶⁹Social gathering, Red Brook, 21 July 1986

in other midwives' narratives quoted earlier, the midwife insists that she did her best (58). The method employed and described here is viewed as the only resort short of taking the woman to hospital, which, as is also mentioned in previous narratives, is not always possible (37). This narrative also presents an example of folk taxonomy in opposition to medical jargon (16-19).

Jigs²⁷⁰

Elderly women's informal social gatherings are also the time when participants display their ability to perform genres which are otherwise mostly restricted to the male domain. There are a number of male musicians in Cape St. George who are publicly known for their talents.²⁷¹ As Debora Kodish points out in her article "Fair Young Ladies and Bonny Irish Boys:

The display of songs is most often done by men at "times" and "parties".²⁷²

The same is also true for tunes. However, this does not mean that women do not know the tunes. The following excerpt is an example of women's knowledge of what is usually considered a man's performance domain.

²⁷⁰excerpt from 86-012 C8331.

²⁷¹Ron Felix, Victor Comler and Plus Robin can be cited as examples of the men who regularly play in public places (clubs, festivals) or at parties.

²⁷²Debora Kodish, "Fair Young Ladies and Bonny Irish Boys," *Journal of American Folklore* 96 (1983): 132.

(001)A.B.: That's tough sometimes. Demande-lui comment qu'il est si il est chez ieusses ou pas. Je sais qu'il était à l'hôpital.

R.M.: Allo! Diane! C'est Rose ça. Is the hospital through?

(005)A.B.: Demande donc si Hamish est chez ieusses...

(pause)

R.M.: 91 years old

(pause: we now look at the accordion Rose picks up)

R.M.: You could fix the bass you know

A.B.: Ah they can't fix it.

R.M.: Yes they can fix it. It's not so hard to fix you know the

(010) bass is there you know.

A.B.: Je l'ai eu en France. Elle m'a envoyé ça. Moi je sais pas jouer

(R.M. starts playing)

A.B.: T'en avais un aussi toi.

R.M.: Ah before I use to play good yet. I got no accordion me.

(015)A.B.: You got one before.

R.M.: Ah yes I could play that time (she tries again) I can't play with that.

(she starts playing "Up the Southern Shore")

R.M.: I could play. I use to play the dances everywhere me. Ship Cove I guess. It was Roxie, Ronald's accordion

(020) was for me that. They goes to give it to Noreen.

Because I never went down to Corner Brook. It's all right for them. I can't look at dead people me anyway.

R.C.: No when you can't go you can't go.

R.M.: I can't go I told them what for.

(025)R.C.: Me before I could go and see dead people. Now I can't.

R.M.: Yeah.

A.B.: Elle peut y jouer elle Noreen?

R.M.: Non.

A.B.: Si elle sais pas, pourquoi tu vas pas la voir

(030) demander voir si elle a encore l'accordion si elle sait pas jouer, elle va peut être te le donner.

(Rose starts again)

R.C.: Your fingers are kinda stiff.

R.M.: Yes my fingers are stiff.

(she starts again)

A.B.: Nadine Hunter qui restait en haut elle avait un accordion

(035) avant aussi.

R.M.: Sure

A.B.: Elle m'a dit qu'elle en avait un.

- R.M.: I didn't know God love. That's the only kind of accordion
I can play on there. Those big ones they got there
- (040) I can't play on that. Too heavy.
A.B.: Lesquels?
R.M.: The big ones they got. I can't play on that me. Too big.
A.B.: Susan elle en avait une aussi.
(Rose starts again "The Liverpool Lou")
R.M.: I can't.
(045) A.B.: She can't do it.
R.M.: You too you play good.
A.B.: Who?
R.M.: You.
A.B.: You're going nuts dear.
(050) R.M.: God damn. I never heard you play I suppose!
A.B.: Tu rêves. Tu rêves ma chère. Je peux pas
bouger mes bras.
R.M.: Play a little bit.
(Rose starts a version of Minnie White's "Little Wedding")
A.B.: The poor accordion est toute demolish.
(055) R.M.: The keys is number one it's only the bass. You could
think of one of Minnie White's there. I can't think
about it. That's funny I gets a pain in my arm there.
I can think of all kinds of jigs.
(she starts again)
R.M.: I can't play the bass see, the bass fools me up eh.
(060) A.B.: hein?
R.M.: It fools me up, of course that one there, I know that.
(she plays what sounds like a French tune)
A.B.: Louise elle jouait, puis aunt Lynn chantait.
R.M.: my god my God Louise she use to play piano.
A.B.: Elle jouait puis elle chantait.
(065) R.M.: She got her piano yet?
A.B.: I guess so.
R.M.: We should go one night to Louise's.
R.C.: She's not there her.
R.M.: Where she is?
(070) R.C.: She's gone.
A.B.: She left Saturday.
R.M.: Where she's gone?
A.B.: Halifax.
R.M.: All alone?
(075) A.B.: With big Lucy.
R.C.: Yeah.

- A.B.: You didn't know that. I was going to tell you last night
me I though you knew it.
- R.C.: They're gone since Thursday or Friday last week eh.
- (080)A.B.: Yeah Friday. She'll be here Saturday I guess, I don't
know me. She gone, the baby too.
- R.M.: Yeah?
- A.B.: She ask ? to come with her.
- R.M.: It's almost sure she's gonna come.
- (085)A.B.: She got no job yet, none at all.
- R.C.: Oh oh.
- A.B.: Oh no job. She give it to Shirley Parker there after
working there since Christmas.
- R.M.: Là play mignonne
- (090)A.B.: Moi je sais pas là tu rêve mignonne.
- R.M.: Try a little bit you can play a little bit.
- A.B.: moi j'ai tellement de mal avec mes os, j'ai le
cancer en masse. C'est le cancer tu sais.
- R.M.: Ca fait rien.
- (Anita picks up the accordion, plays two bars)
- (095)A.B.: Rien c'est tout ce que je peux faire.
(she plays on)
- R.M.: (sings along) That's nice.
- R.C.: Nice.
- (she continues to play a version of "Good Bye Johnny Dear")
- R.M.: Keep on going eh, damn.
- R.C.: Oh yes.
- (Anita plays on)
- (100)R.M.: When Jean comes there. I'm going to get her to come
down with me to Rosie's there. I'm gonna find the old woman,
she got an accordion see if she's going to sell it to me.
- A.B.: She knows eh.
- R.M.: I'm going to get the old man's accordion that was suppose
(105) to be mine.
- A.B.: Her (to R.M.)
- R.M.: I can't play me. (she takes it again and starts)
- (pause)
- R.M.: Jesus Christ.
- (Rose plays a tune that sounds like an American song)
- R.C.: Play a jig.
- (110)R.M.: je sais pas de gigue. Play it.
- A.B.: Je sais pas je suis pas fine.
- R.C.: Avant, dis ça elle était pleine mais
pleine de giges.

- R.M.: Pleine de gigue.
 (115)A.B.: Non si je prend ça , je l'essaye. Il y a rien du tout.
 R.M.: I had a lot of jigs on my mind I take the accordion it's gone clean. Cathy would be there my son.
 M.D.: She can play it?
 (120)R.M.: You play it you?
 M.D.: No.
 R.C.: Chante une petite chanson.

As can be seen from this excerpt, the performance of accordion tunes occurs within a conversational context. The tunes are not complete, yet they are identifiable.²⁷³ The women say that they no longer play the accordion, but that once their talent was largely appreciated by the community (13-19). Thus it seems that the women do not play the tunes for the quality of the performance but rather to show to each other and to me that they are no strangers to the instrument. Moreover, R.M. discusses the pitfalls of the accordion thereby displaying her knowledge of the technology of the instrument(7-10; 55, 59). The playing is used here as a way of evoking memories of times past but also to talk about other women musicians(19, 34, 56, 63-66). This implies that there was once a tradition of women musicians in Cape St. George. Another of my informants, Gayle

²⁷³ I would like to thank fiddlers Seamus Creagh and Kelly Russell for identifying the tunes whose titles are mentioned in parentheses in the text. Kelly Russell transcribed the score of "Up the Southern Shore," as played by the late Newfoundland fiddler Rufus Guinchard and recorded for Pigeon Inlet Productions in 1969. See: Kelly Russell, *Rufus Guinchard, the Man and his Music* (St John's: Harry Cuff, 1982) 59. A version of "Little Wedding" was recorded by Newfoundland accordion player Minnie White. (Audat 477 9058). The song "Good Bye Johnny Dear" is an Irish-American song sung by the McNulty Family who, according to Newfoundland singer Anita Best, were very popular in Newfoundland in the 1940s and 1950s.

Walsh, also plays a few tunes which I recorded during one of my visits at her house.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴MUNFLA: 86-012, C8316.

Songs²⁷⁵

Considering the unfolding of elderly women's informal social gatherings in Cape St. George and the progression of genre performance in these contexts, singing holds a special position. When it occurs it is usually towards the end of the gathering. The conversational context inherent to other genres presented earlier gives way to a more formal context in which interruption of performance by the participants is limited. In this sense the roles of performer and audience become more clearly defined. Here it is in part the genre that influences the level of interaction; yet different microsocial situations, such as topics and distribution of interlocutors, part of the groups' overall patterns of cohesion, are resolved by different performance means at different stages in the event.

Songs do not belong to the sharing of experience in the same way as other narratives presented above do. They belong to what Abrahams calls fictive genres and as a result the level of interpersonal involvement during their performance decreases.²⁷⁶ Moreover, because songs are sung and not spoken the breakthrough into performance is clearer as the performer uses her voice in a distinct way that clearly sets her apart from her

²⁷⁵excerpt from MUNFLA 86-012 C8331.

²⁷⁶Abrahams 207.

audience. If she wishes to communicate directly and in an interactive way with the audience, she uses the speaking mode. This spoken mode is either indicated in parentheses or can be deduced by the reader as it is immediately followed by a very short dialogue between the performer and the audience (119-125; 191-192).

(001) R.C.: Chante une petite chanson.

A.B.: Le petit chat noir.

R.C.: Chante toi mignonne.

A.B.: Je sais pas chanter moi. Chante toi. Tu sais chanter.

(005) Chante. Moi je sais pas chanter. Je sais pas nothing.

R.M.: Yes you know. I heard you. Sing des petits morceaux.

A.B.: Oh des petits morceaux.

R.M.: Bien ça fait rien. Un couple de même.

A.B.: Mon bon chat noir.

(010) R.M.: Chante ça.

A.B.: Mon bon chat noir avec son collier blanc avec sa chemise fine pour aller voir la zizine.

(laughs)

R.C.: C'est bien.

R.M.: Chante-le.

(015) R.C.: Chante-le. A.B.: Oh Jeewhiz je vais prendre la porte.

R.M.: Ah come on.

A.B.: Y'a une porte là au delà.

R.M.: I wish I could sing me. I got no way at all of singing.

Go on.

(020) A.B. (sings) C'était un bon chat noir.

R.M.: Louder than that.

A.B.: Moi j'ai jamais chanté de ma vie.

R.M.: Ça fait rien.

A.B.: J'ai jamais chanté de ma vie. Pourquoi faut que je

(025) chante ça asteure.

R.M.: Come on, tête dure.

A.B.: Je sais pas chanter moi.

R.M.: Ah come on, chante ça.

A.B.: Je savais avant, j'aurais pas eu ma tête si dure.

(030) R.M.: Sing some the same. Sing le petit chat blanc.

A.B.: Le petit chat noir.

R.M.: Le petit chat noir. Come on, petit chat noir.

R.C.: Chante le petit chat noir.

- A.B.: Puis vous vous savez chanter.
 (035) R.M.: I wish to God I could sing me. You wouldn't have
 to coax me to sing me.
 A.B.: Me the same.
 R.M.: And her so clear, the nice voice you got.
 R.C.: Yes for sure.
 (040) R.M.: Grand Bon Dieu regarde comme la peste (she slaps Anita)
 A.B.: J'ai assez de mal comme ça si tu me tapes.
 R.M.: Dépêche-toi mignonne. You'd be done now look
 it's only a short one come one.
 A.B.: (sings)
 (045) C'était un petit chat noir
 Qui portait son collier blanc
 Sa chemise fine
 C'est pour aller voir la zizine
 (three incomprehensible verses)
 (050) Il a voulu sauter
 Il a été catcher
 Il a dit "Ah Bon Dieu
 Ça va pas faire."
 Tiens.
 (055) R.M.: C'est mignon ça.
 M.D.: C'est bien ça
 R.M.: C'est all right eh, sure. There's nothing wrong with that.
 M.D.: Qui c'est qui t'a chanté ça.
 R.M.: From where you learn that now, who sing that for you?
 (060) A.B.: My poor brother.
 R.M.: What one?
 A.B.: Jean.
 R.M.: Oh, petit Jean. Oh my God. She knows them all her all
 the little ones. Sing more mignonne. Some more besides
 (065) that.
 A.B.: Non j'ai pas d'autres, j'en ai pas d'autres.
 (pause)
 (Anita sings)
 Marie s'en va tirer au moulin (bis)
 Pour se faire monter son vin (bis)
 A chez mon homme mon 'tite mon homme.

(I sing along)

(070) A.B.: Tu le sais toi chante le.

M.D.: Non mais je sais pas les mots je sais juste l'air

- mais je sais pas les mots.
 R.M.: Elle sait l'air c'est tout.
 A.B.: Mais moi je sais pas continuer à chanter. Je me
 (075) trompe.
 R.M.: Ça fait rien.
 M.D.: Tu connais ça toi Rose?
 R.M.: Quoi?
 M.D.: Cette chanson.
 (080)R.M.: No I wish I could do it.
 M.D.: Chez nous autres on chante pas de la même façon.
 Les mots, tu peux me rechanter. J'ai jamais su les
 vraies paroles.
 R.M.: She never hear the words. Sing it for her.
 (085)R.C.: Elle a pas entendu les paroles là.
 A.B.: C'est pas vrai ça. C'est pas des menteries?
 M.D.: Non non c'est vrai.
 A.B.: Moi je sais pas moi.
 R.M.: Sing what you knows you can't sing anymore than you
 (090) knows
 M.D.: C'est une chanson de France ça.
 R.M.: C'est une chanson de France ça. Her brother he was
 in the war. He knows a lot. He'd be alive. We'd be off
 down there mignonne. He knows lots of stories. Des
 (095) chansons des riddles, all kinds.
 (A.B sings again)
 A.B.: Toute ça all that.
 R.C.: Chante toi.
 R.M.: Moi j'écoute sing.
 M.D.: Tu sais chanter la chanson que Cathy elle a chanté
 (100) l'autre fois.
 R.M.: Laquelle? (sings) Trois petits coups frappés.
 M.D.: Ouais, c'est ça.
 R.C.: Hein.
 (Rose sings)
 Marie part à la ville
 (105) Arrivant à la ville
 J'ai aperçu une clarté
 En rentrant à la ville
 J'ai aperçu une clarté
 Et je pense à ma maîtresse
 (110) Qui allait si coucher
 (bis)

Arrivant à la porte
Trois petits coups frappés
(bis)

Ouvrez Ouvrez la porte
La belle à votre amant
(115) Qui revenait de la guerre
Dans un grand bâtiment.
(bis)

Mon père est ici
Ma mère est dans le lit couchée.
Ils ont barré la porte
(120) Puis ont emporté les clefs

Oh j'irais à ta fenêtre
No that's the last one there. (spoken)
A.B.: J'ouvre ta fenêtre. tu m'ouvres tu.
R.M.: Yeah. Arrivant à la
(125) A.B.: A la fenêtre sur
R.M.: (sings) Arrivant à la fenêtre
A la fenêtre!
A.B.: Tu l'ouvriras-tu. Je suis couvert de neige.
R.M.: (sings)
Ah j'irais à ta fenêtre
(130) Marie ouvrez vous
(bis)

Je suis couvert de neige
Dans l'eau jusqu'aux genoux
(bis)

Les oiseaux dans ma chambre
Ils disent aux pruvost(?)
(bis)

(135) Ils disent les engages gallant(?)
Tu perds ton temps
(bis)

Oh si je perds mon temps
J'avais gagné mes peines
(bis)

Combien de fois la belle
(140) Et quand que j'étions tous deux

Le soir à la chandelle
Comme de vrais amoureux (bis)

A.B.: Maudite garce
R.M.: I wish I had. No I can't sing I'm hoarsed up eh. I can't
(145) sing at all.
R.C.: Excuse!
A.B.: Chante une autre.
R.M.: That one there.
(R.M starts singing)

C'est une triste besogne
(150) Une femme dans sa maison
De voir son jeune homme
Qui est toujours en boisson
(bis)

Tu sais que je suis jeune
Je l'aime le plaisir
(155) C'est avec ma bouteille
Je me peux conforter

C'est pour la bouteille
Je n'en dis rien
C'est quand tu vas voir
(160) La fille du voisin

La fille du voisin
C'est une amour de fille
Trois fois par semaine
Je faisais l'amour

(laughs)
(she sings the first two verses again)
(165) R.M.: What I am doing twice over.
M.D.: Non.
R.C.: Non.
(Rose sings the third verse again)
R.M.: Oh that's no good.
A.B.: Il s'en va pour faire l'amour.
(170) R.M.: I made my fool

(she starts again)

C'est une triste nouvelle
Une femme dans sa maison
De voir jeune homme
Qui est toujours en boisson
(bis)

(175) Tu sais que je suis jeune
Je l'aime le plaisir
C'est avec ma bouteille
Je me peux conforter
(bis)

C'est pour ta bouteille
(180) Je n'en dis rien
C'est quand tu vas voir
La fille du voisin
(bis)

La fille du voisin
C'est un amour de fille
(185) Trois fois par semaine
Je faisais l'amour
(bis)

Quand qu'on m'éclairait
C'est qu'encore tous les deux
Sur la table ronde
(190) Comme de vrais amoureux

R.M.: There's another verse I don't know.

A.B.: Passe moi la bouteille j'ai la gorge sec
(Rose sings)

J'ai la gorge sec
Je peux plus chanter
(195) Viens t'en ma bouteille
Viens t'en me mouiller

R.M.: C'est tout

M.D.: C'est une belle chanson. Qui c'est qui t'as
chanté ça?

(200) R.M.: I learned that from poor Maman. I learned that song from poor Maman yeah.

R.C.: Maman en savait en masse des chansons.

R.M.: God dash.

A.B.: Maman serait pas longtemps si elle serait ici puis elle
(205) serait en vie. Et puis Lynn. Elle elle chantait des chansons.

M.D.: Lynn qui?

R.M.: Keenan.

M.D.: Ah oui.

(210) R.C.: Des contes, elle savait des contes.

A.B.: Après quand elle est venue là. Des chansons moi je savais pas du tout et des contes je savais pas du tout. Des chansons. Funny eh?

R.M.: Yeah.

The two longest and most important songs presented here are well known in Cape St. George.²⁷⁷ The performance of songs here is preceded by a period of coaxing in which women deny their ability to sing, or claim memory loss.

Eventhough there are few singers and few lengthy songs involved, one can nonetheless note that the constant of performance events (initial coaxing and subsequent praise) are present. As Thomas noted the intensity of the coaxing, praise may vary in degree and in nature²⁷⁸ It is

²⁷⁷See: Gerald Thomas, *Songs Sung by French Newfoundlanders: A Catalogue of the Holdings of the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive* (St. John's, Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1978). The song "Marie Part à la Ville" was collected in several versions (see: CEFT: C89-54, C2402, C3217, C2299, C3585, C91-64.) The song "C'est une Triste Besogne" also exists in several versions. (see CEFT: C2398, C86-64, C3259).

²⁷⁸Thomas, *Les Deux Traditions* 83.

possible although I did not obtain verbal confirmation of this that the coxer consciously or unconsciously used different coaxing strategies with each singer. Because of the different performance frames (i.e. talking, singing, narrating) and because of the greater degree of formality associated with singing, it is possible that coaxing may have supplementary functions not unrelated to issues of authority, respect and power within the group. These values in this particular instance have to be understood within the perspective of repertoire and the ability to sustain a longer performance. R.M. has a more extensive repertoire than A.B. and she is also willing to share it with her friends. She does not however, impose her competence which is used in a measured fashion. R.M. therefore waits until A.B. has finished before starting. It is perhaps because of A.B.'s recognition of, and respect for R.M.'s competence that more coaxing is required to induce her to sing. In other words there is a degree of sharedness. The performance as a whole suggests an easy progression from one level to another of performer-competence.

Coaxing in this particular context therefore applies as much to the genre as to the performance insofar as it is the songs which are esteemed more than the voice of the singers. A.B. has a better voice but a lesser repertoire than R.M. yet it is R.M. who on account of the little coaxing required, occupies the "star" position.

As for the accordion tunes presented earlier, the singing seems to be a way for the participants to remind each other of their repertoire, or rather of the song repertoire of the community. They mention several times other singers who once sung those songs as well (60-6, 92, 204-205).

Ostensibly, both songs present a woman's point of view and are expressive of women's experience and of women's values. They represent two aspects of women's relationship to men. The first one (141-142) is a courting song in which a young woman is visited at night by her beau. The second song (149-190) deals with the unfaithfulness of a woman's husband in which infidelity is considered the worse of two evils, the lesser evil being drink. I have not however attempted to examine the texts in terms of their meaning to the singers, male or female, within the community, a study in its own right.

Older Women; Gossip and Rumour

Roger Abrahams argues that:

The function of gossip in specific groups cannot be fully understood until it is related not only to the system of ideals and the technique of achieving power, but also to the system of performance.²⁷⁹

Unlike their married and younger peers, elderly women do not exclusively

²⁷⁹Roger Abrahams, "A Performance-Centred Approach to Gossip," *Man* 5 (1970): 300.

use gossip to ascertain control, and gain status and authority. To an extent they already have control, status and authority. People in the Cape calls this "respect". Older people in the Cape are owed respect. In "sprees after bingo" women's use of gossip clearly relates to their system of performance. As mentioned earlier, they use this particular genre as a marker which breaks the involvement and what Irvine might refer to as the formality of the previous performances. They also use this genre as a link between past and present; the former having occupied most of their previous conversation.

Such transitions from past to present bring the participants back to the reality of the present time. Although I do not wish to elaborate on gossip so as not to put the persons who entrusted me with it in jeopardy, I will use the following example which illustrates this particular point. During a gathering where the presence of a midwife had triggered the telling of such narratives as the ones presented above, the participants' attention was subsequently directed towards the former midwife whose narrative and expert opinion were then solicited by the group. By way of coaxing her to share some of her experiences, names of people who are nowadays in their thirties and forties were dropped, and this consequently led to narration. It is interesting to note however, how the former midwife, who also happened to be a rather shy person, managed to bring back the conversation to the topic of current gossip:

P.R.: And her there (pointing at L.H.) she was an Old Witch!

- Tell us about (?)'s birth?
- L.H.: Oh yeah she was so thin she slipped like a worm,
but now she is some fat she can't get a man!
- C.R.: Oh yes she can!
- P.R.: What do you mean?
- C.R.: Well my dear, she was at the club last Saturday night
and my God she was busy! And I can't tell you who it
is either, you'll die.
- P.R.: It's a sin though, like that one there this afternoon.
Did you watch the story?
- L.H.: Yeah but that's different, and the poor girl from Red
Brook.
- C.R.: Imagine! Her own uncle! That's a sin that!
- P.R.: I thought it was her cousin did that.
- C.R.: Oh I don't know, same thing anyway.²⁸⁰

On a different occasion, Lilian Hunter went to some lengths in the description of the exceptionally easy delivery due to the slimness of the baby. This time however, it was getting late and the former midwife, who was also the host of this particular gathering, felt the need to orient the conversation to a more current level. She did so by giving the opportunity to her guests to pick on the last element of her initial statement. The rest of the evening was then spent gossiping about the behaviour of some of the local residents and neighbours. The conversational exchanges at this point became shorter as the personal involvement of the narrators in community life increased. During the older women's gatherings that I attended, the amount of time spent gossiping or talking about other people's and especially younger people's behaviour was substantially less

²⁸⁰Tape-recorded interview, Red Brook, 14 July 1986.

than that devoted to the exchange of personal experience narratives. In other words, it seems from these informal social gatherings that elderly women's involvement with the community at large is somewhat removed. Although they are aware of community life, they choose, as is exemplified above, not to become too personal by gossiping, which implies involvement in matters which do not concern them either individually or as as group.²⁸¹

Elderly women's groups are partly defined by age and marital status. Thus widows who participate in such informal social gatherings as "Sprees After Bingo" tend not to gossip about others who do not belong to their group. They occasionally talk, however, about their peers in their absence. According to fieldnotes from July 1987, a fair amount of gossip, although not necessarily negative, was spread about a member of the group whose living-in son had been involved in a local scandal. The content of the gossip was always sympathetic to the woman and mostly discussed whether or not she would be able to overcome this crisis. It is to be noticed that the subject of the gossip, because of her son's behaviour, was, according to other members, temporarily excluded from the group. It was never clear whether this exclusion was self-imposed or not, but in accordance with Paine's statement it was gossip in its content and

²⁸¹For further Hypotheses on the function of gossip see: Robert Paine, "What is Gossip All About? An Alternative Hypothesis," *Man* 2 (1967): 279.

personal implications that helped demarcate the group in that particular instance.

Unlike gossip, rumours deal with issues of a larger magnitude and are not necessarily based on substantiated facts nor do they involve individuals known by their perpetrators.²⁸² In that sense rumour allows for a more secure involvement on behalf of the narrators. For this reason, the genre was more favoured as a topic of conversation by the participants than the more committing gossip exchanges. To understand the example and the way rumour functioned in elderly women's gatherings one must bear in mind, as has already been mentioned, that most women on the Port-au-Port Peninsula and undoubtedly elsewhere, spend their afternoons watching the soap operas on television. During the summer of 1987, one episode of "The Young And The Restless" treated the problem of teenage pregnancy. This particular aspect of the story, whenever it came on (every two or three days) led to comments and conversations among the women. In fact, rather than discuss aspects of life in their own community, elderly women chose to make allegations about the happenings on their favourite television programs. Such allegations would then inevitably revert to community life as comparisons would be drawn between the two. To achieve this, they made use of a kernel narrative.

²⁸²See: Stahl 36.

In the conversational excerpt quoted earlier P.R. attempted to initiate gossip about the behaviour of a local woman. Instead, the conversation oriented itself towards a discussion of the moral issues involved using supporting examples from comparisons made to the situation in the soap opera. The subject of teenage pregnancy was then discussed and brought closer to home through a connection with a local rumour about "The Girl From Red Brook" (sometimes Sheaves Cove). During that summer, there was a rumour that a thirteen year-old girl had been made pregnant by her uncle and that she was being paid by members of the family not to tell anybody who the father was. The rumour, although never substantiated, was very similar to the story on the soap opera.

Because of their topical contents, the two stories and their comparison allowed the participants in a "spree" to elaborate on the moral issues at stake. Yet it is the removal of the stories from actual reality, that is the fictional element in one case, and the lack of substance in the other, that also entitled the group to dismiss them as lies and thus bring the conversational part of their social gathering to an end. Such communal strategy was often employed to mark the approaching end of an evening.

Concluding Remarks

The selection of genres examined in this chapter is representative of the various forms interaction may take during elderly women's informal social gatherings. Our aim here has been to use examples so as to present the dynamics of women's folkloric discourse in the context of these gatherings. It has been pointed out that in this context, performance occurs at a higher level of formality. Interaction and narrative cooperation is not as systematic as they are during married women's gatherings. Topics approached and values expressed convey a concern for the past which seems to have a greater importance and significance for elderly women than it has for their younger peers. It would be difficult to argue that the genres used by these women are exclusively gender-bound. Yet if considered in combination with the topics they raise and the values they convey, there is little doubt of their essentially gendered quality and of the gender-consciousness of their performers. The important fact here is that even if not all topics discussed during the informal social gatherings concern women directly, they are indeed approached from a woman's perspective. Moreover, the values that are expressed through the genres and topics in these last two chapters are the determining factors which identify these women as a folk group in the community of Cape St. George.

CONCLUSION

As an ethnographic document, this study applied the method of participant observation to expressive folkloric behaviour as it emerged from interactive situations. The contextual framework of the study was constituted by informal social gatherings of restricted groups of women in an ethnic community on the Port-au-Port Peninsula, Newfoundland.

As noted in chapter two, the literature pertaining to relevant studies in ethnography and their relation to material of particular interest to the domain of women and folklore set the theoretical premises and framework from and within which presentation and analysis of the collected data was undertaken. Although varied and enlightening, previous studies have not presented a perspective which considers the combination of factors presently at work in this particular study. That is, while ethnographic studies of communication have focused on similar areas of interest such as informal interactive situations, in which expressive folklore behaviour could be observed, those studies have mainly been concerned with male groups.²⁸³ On the other hand folkloristic studies which emphasized a

²⁸³Roger D. Abrahams, *Deep Down In The Jungle* (Chicago: Aldine, 1963); Richard Bauman, "The La Have Island General Store: Sociability and Verbal Art in a Nova Scotia Community," *Journal of American Folklore* 85 (1972): 330-43.; Martin Laba, "Narrative and Talk: A Study in the Folkloristic Communication of Everyday Conversational Exchange," Ph.D. diss., Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1983.

special interest in the area of women have been restricted in terms of the folklore genres which they examined. Although recent publications have demonstrated scholars' interest in considering gender as a valid determinant for folk group identification, gender studies in folklore have tended to be limited to women as individual performers of specific genres.²⁶⁴ The present study therefore has attempted to bridge some of the gaps left open by previous ethnographic and other folklore studies with particular foci on women's interactive traditions.

The groups of women who contributed to my research did so without having to step into performance roles which shed a different light on themselves. They were ordinary individuals who gathered regularly in what, as a folklorist, I term a "customary" way. They participated in group activities in which verbal interaction would take place whether or not I attended. Thus their informal social gatherings were not extraordinary events but rather an integrated part of these women's everyday lives.

As pointed out in chapter three, the folkloristic interest of these gatherings was not immediately obvious to me. Instead, I had begun my fieldwork looking for individual storytellers. However, when I gradually

²⁶⁴See Claire Farrer, ed. *Women and Folklore* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1975); Anna Caravell-Chaves, "Bridge Between Two Worlds: The Greek Women's Lament as Communicative Event," *Journal of American Folklore* 93 (1980): 129-57; Pauline Greenhill, "The Family Album: A Newfoundland Women's Recitation," *Canadian Folklore canadien* 6 (1984): 39-61.

became aware of this mode of behaviour, I realized the importance it had in women's lives. The decision to undertake further research in this particular aspect of women's lives led me to reflect on the actual meaning which, as folklorists, we attach to the concept of folk group and more specifically in its relation to gender.

A woman storyteller in the eyes of the scholar, is above all a storyteller who also happens to be a woman. More often than not this latter point is not even considered. What I tried to achieve by looking at interactive expressive behaviour in the groups I observed and in which I participated, was to show that in order to consider women as a folk group we need to look at the basic common factors which the members of this group use and recognize to identify themselves as women. Moreover, as folklorists whose interest lies in the study of traditional or customary expressive behaviour, we cannot restrict ourselves to taking biological differences as the only identifying factor for the justification of gender study.

Thus, considering women's informal social gatherings as a form of expressive behaviour has several implications for the validation of gender-group studies in a broader and more diverse perspective. Chapter four shows not only the mechanisms but also the social and kinship patterns that operate in the formation of these particular groups. While it would be inappropriate to generalize and assert that these same patterns and

circumstances are common to the formation of any informal group of women, it is possible from these observations to say that women's groups are not randomly formed and the principles and criteria that underlie specific group formation affect and are exclusively determined by women. Those factors are inherent in how women organise their lives as women.

Chapter five has detailed the patterns of the different kinds of gatherings. It has been shown from description that this mode of behaviour and socialisation is fully integrated in women's lives. From the folklorist's point of view, these gatherings take on meaning as qualifiers for defining women as a folk group.

In the same way, and again without any extraordinary dimension attached to it, we have seen in chapters six and seven that the content or actual verbal interaction during the informal social gatherings is characteristic of the participants' everyday lives as they understand and experience them. The folkloric material that emerges from the gatherings is not the fulfillment of the folklorist's expectations provided by the participants, but rather the result of a lengthy effort on my part as a fieldworker to dissociate myself from my role as a collector to become a participant, even if I was not always directly and actively involved.²⁸⁵ The

²⁸⁵I did occasionally refrain from getting drunk or taking sides in community politics! But on the other hand I was probably at some point the major holder of gossip and personal information in the group.

conversations during the gatherings were, in fact, reflective of the values considered important to and shared by members of the groups.

It is subsequent scholarly analysis which enabled me to look at the material and extract generic folkloristic features relative to the conversational dynamics and not otherwise immediately apparent. It led me to understand the importance of comprehending the gender element in studying women as a folk group. I believe that nowhere is this element more adequately realized than in conversations in such settings as informal social gatherings where women's interaction is a direct reflection of the values that render their everyday lives meaningful. The study of these informal social gatherings also helped me realize that among her peers a woman is first a woman, and then a storyteller.

This study has pointed to the existence of women's gatherings in small groups. Within this mode of socialisation, a continuum can be established along marital status and age groups. Examples and ethnographic descriptions have focused largely on groups of elderly women who spend significantly more time with one another than their married peers do as the latter are often constrained by their numerous marital and parental responsibilities. This is not to say that women who are presently wives and mothers will not eventually change their modes of gatherings as they grow older and as their present responsibilities decrease. In the same manner teenage daughters will change their own mode of socialisation as they take on new roles.

Thus life stages and marital/maternal status are important factors influencing in the informal gatherings of women in Cape St. George. While it is logical to expect changes in the modes of women's gatherings as women will pass through their life cycle because of a still rapidly developing technology and its influence on community life, it is difficult to predict to what extent women's organisation of their time will be similar twenty years from now to its present organisation. Finally the constant factor however is the social nature of human beings and their apparent need to find ways of creating contexts in which to share and listen to each other's experiences and coping strategies.

Independently of this and with regard to these particular groups in an ethnic community, research led me to some interesting insights into the particular situation in which these women found themselves with respect to a bilingual environment. Chapter one had raised the issue in order to emphasize the ramifications and significance of these women's preferred language choice. It is obvious that a socio-linguistic study of the community with special reference to gender would be a significant contribution to other social scientific perspectives on this specific area of Newfoundland but also on the social study of women's discourse in general.

To conclude, I would like to point out that gender studies must not necessarily be restricted to women, and it would be very interesting to see

a gender-conscious approach to what constitutes male conversational dynamics and behaviour in similar circumstances.

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