

For the period after 1950, the author also calls upon statistical information on levels and categories of help, which he has carefully standardized to allow comparison, in a third chapter devoted to federal initiatives and a fourth to further exploration of provincial regimes. Having established that the convergence towards national standards is a myth, Boychuk nevertheless identifies some general trends. In all provinces, the poor reputation of assistance has tended to undermine the kind of strong popular support that would be necessary for the imposition of national norms, as the more successful attempts of central authorities to implement health policies have shown. All provinces have also witnessed, if at a different pace, “an increasing concern with the effect of assistance on the economy rather than with the moral implication of assistance” (p. 95). In the light of these recent changes, the strength of “Conservative” regimes in curbing the logic of the market by considering single mothers as “unemployable” appears as a most interesting phenomenon.

The published reports and regulations of governments and social agencies comprise the main sources through which the author establishes the importance of local economic, social, and political traditions in the history of assistance. Despite his insistence on the importance of history, Boychuk makes little use of the abundant literature on the history of welfare and poverty recently contributed by Canadian historians. As a result, the author rarely seeks to analyse further the provincial economic and social elements that helped to compose one tradition: readers are left asking why, for instance, the regime of British Columbia since the 1950s is one of the most “market-oriented” in the country (p. 76); or they are invited to believe uncritically the interpretation of the causes of rural depopulation contained in Quebec’s *Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Health and Social Welfare* of 1963 (p. 84), despite important warnings made by Bernard Vigod in the 1987 collection of Allen Moscovitch and Jim Albert entitled *The Benevolent State*.

The author proves convincingly that “Canada has not one assistance system but ten distinct provincial variants, each reflecting a particular way in which the state reinforces or undermines the market and the family” (p. xx). For policy makers, the book is explicitly intended to warn about the possibilities of centralization and its false association with progress. For historians, it provides a new, thorough, and detailed map of problems waiting for explanations.

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David Cannadine — *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. Pp. xv, 293.

Class as an analytical concept has been taking a drubbing over the past decade. The collapse of communist regimes, the Blairing of the British Labour Party, and the recanting of numerous erstwhile Marxist social scientists, including a number of social historians, have set in motion a prolonged, and not particularly productive, debate about the relevance of class. David Cannadine has not so much waded in as

attempted to rise above the polarities of these controversies. He rejects Marxist interpretations of history, which, he claims, in even their most sophisticated forms, have not come close to describing the complexities of social reality over the past three centuries. He also castigates the postmodernists who, he believes, have failed to appreciate that there is a social reality beyond language. He argues that in capitalist society class has operated in some form, and he looks for it in what people at the time claimed they meant when they used the term. He wants us to understand that this notion of class does not correspond to a precise social category; he is at pains to show throughout the book that it made bad sociology. Rather it was a rhetorical device used in various ways to promote or defend positions. Politicians, he argues, were key agents in using these class concepts to mobilize support in a broad constituency.

Looking back over the past three centuries in Britain (including the Celtic fringe and the various parts of its overseas empire), Cannadine sees a consistent repetition of three distinct “models” of class in the articulations of intellectuals, commentators, politicians, and others. The first apparently pre-dated the others and, in Cannadine’s mind, was the most tenacious. It was a view that equated class with an individual’s rank, station, or status in a hierarchically ordered society. In the eighteenth century, it evidently had medieval roots and was the model employed by the powerful to describe and rationalize their society. With the rise of industrial capitalism, it became more of a rallying cry to avoid class polarization. In the twentieth century, it was the bedrock of Baldwinite Toryism, though, curiously for his argument, the re-evocation of hierarchy as paternalism and order eschewed the term “class” itself (Thatcher, for example, never wanted to talk about class). In Cannadine’s book, this “model” becomes the fall-back position for the great majority of the British people, who were allegedly wedded to a hierarchical class structure — an assertion that is never proven.

The second model of class that Cannadine claims was bandied about in Britain was a “triadic” version, which saw society as having essentially three distinct social classes — upper, middle, and lower — though precisely what these were could vary a good deal. The most likely proponents of this model were those in the middle, who were usually using such a configuration to assert their own social and political virtues over the upper and lower orders. Adam Smith was one of the earliest proponents of this three-class model (Marx picked it up half a century later). In the nineteenth century, this could be a triumphant assertion of class. By the early twentieth, it was often defensive, as the middle class found itself caught in the crossfire between upper and lower.

The third model was the polarized (at one point Cannadine calls it “populist”) conception that there were only two classes — some version of “them-and-us”. This “dichotomous” model was confrontational, activated by those who wanted significant social change. Again, he asserts, this conceptualization did not conform to any actual social structure. Indeed, there was tremendous variety in who was confronting whom, though, from eighteenth-century crowds to twentieth-century unions, subordinate classes and their allies were the ones articulating this social vision.

This extremely simple taxonomy is at least interesting and does have the merit of suggesting that, whatever their social experience within capitalist society, people

had to be rallied to a class identity. But how much does it help us to understand? If, as Cannadine suggests, “most Britons have easily moved from one model to another” (p.169), what is the usefulness of this approach to class in history? What is the connection between this kind of “class” and the materialist world that he admits still matters for people “in influencing their life chances, their senses of identity, and the historical part that they and their contemporaries may (or may not) play” (p.18)? Cannadine sees some kind of link but contends that the three notions of class oversimplified the real world. Only those who defended the hierarchical view of class seem to get credit for appreciating the actual complexities of British society.

Ultimately, this is a curious book — elegantly written, rooted in a vast literature on British social history (the footnotes run to 78 pages), and fully engaged with British high politics in the 1990s, yet too simplistic and ambiguous to make a significant contribution to the great debate about class.

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Chantal Collard — *Une famille, un village, une nation. La parenté dans Charlevoix 1900–1960*, Montréal, Boréal, 1999, 194 p.

L'ouvrage de Chantal Collard s'avère être un complément fort utile à celui de Gérard Bouchard, *Quelques arpents d'Amérique*. Tous deux portent sur le même ensemble régional : Charlevoix, région qui a fourni la majorité des migrants vers le Saguenay. De plus, les périodes étudiées se chevauchent. Mais alors que Bouchard a adopté ce qui est en train de devenir la « vieille » histoire sociale, privilégiant l'approche quantitative appuyée par une impressionnante banque de données, l'anthropologue Chantal Collard nous livre un travail presque exclusivement qualitatif et capture des aspects de la parenté, de son fonctionnement et de sa signification qui échappent aux historiens puisque ces aspects laissent très peu de traces dans les sources.

Une partie des conclusions de Collard rejoignent celles de Bouchard, ce qui est surtout le cas dans la deuxième partie du livre et dans le chapitre sur le mariage : l'importance de la pluri-activité, des activités tournées vers l'autoconsommation et le relatif égalitarisme économique. La famille joue un rôle très important au sein de la société charlevoisienne : elle structure la société locale, détermine largement le rôle économique des femmes et des enfants, ainsi que les modes de transmission des patrimoines et les choix matrimoniaux. Les similarités dans les conclusions ne sont pas fortuites, parce que Collard interprète délibérément ses données à la lumière des hypothèses de Bouchard.

Les aspects les plus intéressants de l'ouvrage sont ceux qui abordent la culture de la parenté : comment on la perçoit et comment on l'exprime. Comme l'auteure l'indique, « certaines de ces narrations sont constitutives en ce sens qu'elles sont génératrices de phénomènes sociaux » (p. 12). On les retrouve principalement dans la troisième partie intitulée « Les idéologies de la parenté ».