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*Village on the Border: A Social Study of Religion, Politics and Football
in a North Wales Community*

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In *Village on the Border: A Social Study of Religion, Politics and Football in a North Wales Community*, Ronald Frankenberg applies anthropological techniques for the study of tribal groups to a village in North Wales. Since North Wales is part of a Western, industrialized nation, he assumes that marriage patterns, religious beliefs, and many other cultural attributes of the village studied are already known to himself and the reader. Therefore, he specifically investigated the affects of religion, politics, and external pressures on the social organization of the village as well as how internal divisions affect the outcome of social activities.

Dr. Frankenberg lived for almost a full year in the village of Pentrediwaith in North Wales between 1953 and 1954. Pentrediwaith is a Welsh word meaning “village of no work.” Dr. Frankenberg used this term to conceal the village’s true identity since it is a part of the United Kingdom. He also changed other place names in the region in order to avoid giving away Pentrediwaith’s location. He collected data on the social and political lives of the villagers through observation of and participation in various village councils, clubs, and activities. Although he did not state his methods specifically, statements throughout the book seem to indicate that Dr. Frankenberg also obtained data through interviews of the villagers about their opinions as well as the recent history of the village. Statistical data was limited to descriptions of attendance of organizational meetings and the attendance numbers of the various types of churches. Dr. Frankenberg did not return to Pentrediwaith following his one year of research, and he did not learn the Welsh language, so he was not able to participate in any activities the involved the use of Welsh, which was the first language of many of the members of the village.

In the opening chapter, Dr. Frankenberg describes the political, economic, geographical, and social environment of Pentrediwaith. Pentrediwaith was a village of about 600 inhabitants in North Wales, close to the English border. The hills around the village contain slate and granite,

and the mining of these materials led to the town's original growth. Due to these industries, the town was not isolated. It was connected to the larger towns of Castell and Bigtown through roads and a small-gauge railway. However, the villagers sometimes felt isolated due to the fact that busing services were infrequent and unreliable and food had to be fetched from Bigtown by the local grocers, so it was often the case that certain foods could only be had on certain days.

✓ Mining no longer took place in Pentrediwaith in the 1950's, and the majority of the men had to travel elsewhere for their day jobs. Thus, while the women of the village still spent their days together in the village, Pentre men spent their days away from the village and no longer worked side by side with their neighbors. The absence of the men during the day is similar to Zapotec culture, where the men will be away from the home for most of the day. Furthermore, although men were considered to be of higher status than women and women did not hold political offices, women seemed to play an important role in village affairs and activities. From Dr. Frankenberg's descriptions it seems that Pentre women were treated much better than Yanomamo women are, but *Village on the Border* contains no direct discussion of gender inequality or possible matrifocality.

✓ The people of Pentrediwaith, like the Isthmus Zapotecs, are part of a wider state system with a centralized government monopolizing the use of physical coercion, determining the laws, and administering justice for them. Thus, lineages and tribal groups are not important for either Pentrediwaith or the Zapotecs. Both groups also have cultures that are different from the dominant culture of the state. In Pentrediwaith, as in many Welsh villages, people were divided based on English or Welsh ancestry. There has been a long history of English control over Wales, with the English as the landlords and the Welsh as the tenants. This class division could still be seen in the local governmental system in 1953. Higher governmental bodies such as the

Bench of Magistrates were made up of English-speakers who were well-off and did not take part in the day-to-day life of any one village. The Parish Council of Pentrediwaith on the other hand consisted of Welsh-speakers who were typically employed for hourly wages and were exclusively involved in the affairs of their village. Furthermore, the people of Pentrediwaith felt that the Parish Council was the only governmental body which understands their needs.

Two other divisions in Pentrediwaith were divisions between Pentre people and outsiders and divisions between Church and Chapel people. Church people belonged to the Anglican Church and were typically English-speaking. Chapel people attended the Baptist chapels rather than the Anglican Church, and were Welsh-speaking and Nonconformist, meaning they will not conform to English culture and control. Both types of religions are universalistic and ecclesiastical with regular, predetermined rituals and holy days. Pentre people do not have a shamanistic, need-based religion comparable to the traditional religions of the Yanomamo and Netsilik. Although the Church-Chapel division may have been absolute at one time, it is now bridged by many formal and informal ties at the village level. For example church and chapel people marry each other and participate in social activities together. Although it was not true in the past, by 1953 there were "ordinary" villagers who belonged to the Church. Church and Chapel people got along well in public, and people only divided into groups based on Church or Chapel when there was a disagreement over something in the community. However, there was one religious group that was ostracized: the Catholics. There were very few Catholics in the area, but the few Catholics were well known and villagers were very hostile to them.

The division drawn between Pentre people and outsiders helped to keep people within the village despite the fact that it would have been easier economically for them to move. In fact, some Pentrediwaith men expressed to Dr. Frankenberg the wish to move, but they claimed their

wives would not let them because then they would become strangers elsewhere. Three main reasons accounted for this. The first is the fact that kin and Chapel groups would have to be left behind. During genealogical constructions, the author found only one couple where neither the husband nor the wife had a relative in the village. Secondly, there is a strong sense of attachment to the place of birth in Wales. This is possibly an outcome of the Welsh movement against acculturation by the English. Finally, there is the Welsh language, which is often considered a symbol of the national Welsh identity. Again, the importance attached to the Welsh language is probably due to past divisions between English-speaking landlords and their Welsh tenants. In a sense, it is the result of two ethnocentric cultures opposed to each other.

✓ In contrast to Netsilik culture, where strangers were feared, strangers (or outsiders) played an important role in Pentrediwaith. They were often used as judges of activities or the presidents of various clubs and committees. Outsiders were used in this way to maintain solidarity in the community. If anything went wrong with an activity or a dispute was caused, then the outsider could be blamed. Furthermore, strangers used in this way filled the role that English gentry filled before they were removed by outside causes. It was difficult for this leadership role to be filled by a Pentre person because the villagers knew each other well and did not take kindly to being “bossed around” by their neighbors.

The definition of a stranger could change depending on the context. Broadly, villagers could be defined as Welsh-speaking, chapel-attending, having kin in the village, and living on the housing estate, in a house in Pentrediwaith, or being a local farmer. However, like

✓ Yanomamo definitions of kinship, the definition of a stranger was flexible and could be changed in different contexts as needed. For example, church people could sometimes be considered Pentre people, but in other instances they acted as a group in opposition to the rest of the village

and were considered outsiders. Economic class could also cause a person to be an outsider. Self-employed individuals, educated professionals such as doctors, small traders, English-speaking professional men, and those who had large incomes derived from outside the valley were considered outsiders. Furthermore, someone could be classified as a stranger based on remoteness from the village or a lack of kin participating in a given activity. This allowed them to judge an activity without a bias and avoided causing strife among the villagers.

Social position among the villagers themselves was not judged by birth but by the social groups and activities which they could be linked to. Kinship was used by the villagers to exclude outsiders, but brothers and sisters within the village might have had different social status based on the groups to which they belonged. However, people in Pentrediwaith were very proud of their inter-relatedness and their relative "Welshness". Furthermore, family members were very respectful of one another and often cooperated in household tasks and would take each other's side in inter-village disputes. This is similar to the way the Yanomamo take sides in disputes based upon degree of relatedness. Despite this inter-relatedness, there was an absence in Pentrediwaith of the first-cousin marriages that occur among the Netsilik and Yanomamo. The author poses two reasons for this. The first is the fact that marriages were used to extend the range of political aid and friendship. The second is that there was strong sibling solidarity in the parent generation which resulted in much intimacy between the children of siblings. Although Dr. Frankenberg does not state it explicitly, he seems to imply that the Westermarck effect leads to this pattern of marriage exogamy.

Within the village there was a major division based on sex. This was similar in some ways to Isthmus Zapotec culture, where young women were kept apart from young men. Whereas Netsilik children were encouraged to experiment sexually, boys and girls in

Pentrediwaith were kept apart, and girls were supposed to remain virgins until marriage. Furthermore, men and women did not mix in clubs or committees. For example, the football committee consisted entirely of men, whereas the women made up the football supporters committee. Social functions like dances, concerts, and plays were generally attended only by women. Due to the fact that men worked outside the village, their activities tended to fail whereas women's activities tended to flourish.

Politically, the people of Pentrediwaith had two main concerns: work and education. Dr. Frankenberg used case studies of the villagers' attempts to improve work and education in Pentrediwaith to show how villagers function politically. Unemployment was a problem in Wales for a long time before the 1950's. During 1953, the Parish Council called a meeting about employment in the valley. The Baptist minister put forth the idea that the government would listen to groups but not individuals. The villagers at the meeting decided to form a committee of ratepayers to help bring work to the valley. This was an example of villagers uniting for against outsiders. However, the village was not always united in dealing with outsiders.

There were two schools used in Pentrediwaith. These were the Church school and the Council school. The Council school was seen as the Welsh, nonconformist school whereas the Church school was the national or controlled school. The Council school sought permission to expand in 1904 but was refused. At the same time a surveyor determined that the Church school required rebuilding. However, nothing was done. In 1953, the County Council Education Committee proposed that all children under eleven be sent to the Church school and all children over eleven go to the Council school. A meeting was called, and the villagers at the meeting divided over the proposal based upon the religious divisions described earlier. Chapel people claimed that the Church school building was unsafe. Church people claimed that it was and that

Chapel people were attempting to defame the Church. However, the villagers did not want their divisions to be known externally, so they eventually compromised and agreed to the proposal under protest. The villagers never broke into camps over the issue. The quarrel was blamed on strangers. The Church-Chapel division was recognized by villagers in private conversations with Dr. Frankenberg but never in public. This was a device to keep the peace. As long as no public divisions took place, the villagers could go about their lives as if there were no division.

In order for public activities to succeed in Pentrediwaith they had to follow a simple formula. A single person could not run his or her own activity and expect it to succeed. The people of Pentrediwaith felt that they had an interest in any public activity and therefore felt that they should be represented by a committee. This committee should have a president, secretary, treasurer and multiple members from the village in order to keep anyone from "putting anything across" the villagers. Furthermore, activities were not typically held simply for the fun of the activity. Rather, any activity was supposed to be held in support of some sort of charity or fund for a club like the football club. This was different from Netsilik and Yanomamo meat sharing because everything was given for the community as a whole and never given to any individual based on need. From Dr. Frankenberg's descriptions it seems that the villagers had a form of balanced reciprocity. They did not feel comfortable receiving gifts since gifts always came with an obligation to repay the giver. Receiving something for nothing was considered a disgrace.

In the final section of *Village on the Border*, Dr Frankenberg uses a case study of the Football Club to analyze the social organization of Pentrediwaith. The football club made the decision to include outsiders during the years following World War II and had some success. However, in 1953 the football pitch was moved out of the village. This made it difficult for women to come watch the games because they were often busy in the village. The combination

of outside players and the move away from the village caused conflicts between the men of the football club and the women of the supporters' club. During this same year a new secretary entered the club. Many members of the club found him to be too bossy in choosing the players. Pente people formed small informal groups within committees. These groups tended to make decisions together and join or leave a club together. The secretary was supported by a group of miners. When disputes over player choice and the allocation of funds forced out the secretary, this group of miners followed. Dr. Frankenberg claims that disputes were often solved this way. The group on one side of the dispute would simply break away and quit, leaving the rest to continue on. This is a marked contrast to Netsilik song dueling or Yanomamo chest pounding. ✓
Rather than settling a dispute through competition, the people of Pentrediwaith simply avoided the people they had a dispute with and pretended it did not exist.

Eventually, the football club failed due to internal divisions, conflict with the supporters' club, and a lack of support from the village. Based on conversations with villagers about the village's history and his own observation of the football club, Dr Frankenberg determined that any activity within the village built up opposition groups over time. Furthermore, internal opposition resulted in poor performance externally. For example, in its last year the football team won only two games. Eventually, the combination of internal pressures and external failure will cause the activity to fail. A new activity will arise to replace it, but the old conflicts will carry over to that activity. Villagers attempted to use strangers to mitigate these conflicts so that intra-village activities could continue and the village could maintain its unified identity. However, the men working outside the village and intrusions from television, radio, and other types of media were diminishing interest in the village and its affairs during 1953. Dr. Frankenberg concluded that these factors might eventually lead to a dissolution of the village as a discrete community.

Dr. Frankenberg does a good job of using case studies to support his theories about social activities in Pentrediwaith, and his generalizations of his findings to social life in North Wales and other parts of Britain are mostly conservative and never baseless. I find his argument for the history of conflict between the Welsh and the English giving rise to the social divisions between outsiders and Pentre people to be convincing. The Isthmus Zapotecs provide another example of how the invasion of another culture can result in a strong unification of the invaded culture and lead to divisions between the two cultures. Furthermore, his conclusions about the affects of religion and politics on village solidarity, social activities, and divisions within the village are well supported by case study examples. His conclusion about the rise and fall of social activities in Pentrediwaith is very convincing, but his application of the theory to all of rural Britain seems tentative at best. Similar studies in other parts of Britain would be needed to make any real conclusions as to whether the patterns observed in Pentrediwaith apply to the entire nation.

I think Dr. Frankenberg could have benefited from more time in Pentrediwaith and perhaps other villages in North Wales. His conclusions are based on a snapshot of a year in the village and conversations with villagers about the past of the village, so some of his conclusions might be colored by the villagers own opinions of things. Furthermore, he was limited by the fact that he did not learn Welsh. Although all of the villagers were bilingual, there were still many occasions where Welsh was used, and Dr. Frankenberg could not observe or analyze these occasions due to the language barrier. However, I think Dr. Frankenberg makes some good generalizations about the affects of politics and religion on social groups and activities in Pentrediwaith. He was fair to the villagers and was careful not to impose ethnocentric beliefs or unsupported theories onto his conclusions.