**History 3212.3**

**Society in Preindustrial Europe**

**Fall, 2016**

Tom Cohen

2156 Vari Hall

416 736 5123

[tcohen@yorku.ca](mailto:tcohen@yorku.ca)

office hours: Thursdays, 2:30-4:00 and by appointment

The idea of the course: This course is an experiment for the professor. The larger subject is pre-modern European society. Now society is both a thing, and a set of processes. It is thing of a very complex nature, certainly, and its processes are always multiple: the control and distribution of material resources, and of immaterial ones like moral, cultural, and intellectual capital. So social history can study the distribution and circulation of goods, both tangible and intangible, and lay out the relationships that channel them in their movement. Or, to take the same issues but to look at who possesses these assorted assets, it can trace stratification, and clumping, and mobility. And, in that connection, it can study conflicts over assets. But this social history, in our course, will take a different tack: it will focus on control, social control, in the widest sense. So it will approach social history through the lens of what social scientists call ‘disputes and settlements.’

Social control is a fascinating subject. Some control is conscious and intentional. Much, however, is reflexive, habitual, and often barely perceived. What force is it, for instance, that stops most professors from dying their hair blue? How many professors are even aware that such a subtle force exists? And what force inhibits students from blowing soap bubbles, singing camp songs, or turning cartwheels in class? Embarrassment is a powerful, subtle device for shaping behaviour.

Some social control comes from above: magistrates, decrees, police forces, and prisons control human behaviour, as do churches, schools, hospitals, convents, and guilds and boards and business managers. And other social control comes from below. And a third kind comes from inside the head, via conscience, an internalization of moral imperatives, or via fear of shame or embarrassment or scorn.

In premodern Europe, social control evolved, from an early time when states were rudimentary. Indeed, ‘state’ is a misnomer, for, say, medieval France or Poland; it is a modern term with connotations of regularity and scale that thoroughly misfit those early times. To make Europe’s evolution from loose to tight, from informal to formal, as clear as possible, we start with medieval Iceland, a society almost without institutions, a case of social control by society itself. At the other end of the course and the semester, we arrive in early modern France, in a time of nascent absolutism. By what devices and what erratic pathway did Europe arrive at that latter point, at that stage in the meandering evolution towards top-down control, makeshift and incomplete as it then still was?

The books: They cost a bit more than we all would wish. The consolation: they are all very good books and we will work them hard. We have five, and we read them all, from end to end. We also have some articles on our Moodle or via links to YUL.

The book list (in order of use): all versions paperback

*Njal’s Saga*, Penguin, 2001, ISBN 978 0 140 44769 9 (note: avoid older Penguin editions with different pagination).

William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law and Society in Saga Iceland*, University of Chicago Press, 1990

Daniel Lord Smail, *The Consumption of Justice*, Cornell University Press, 2003

Edward Muir, *Mad Blood Stirring*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998 (abridged paperback version)

James R. Farr, *A Tale of Two Murders*, Duke University Press, 2005

Operating principles: I have three: honesty, trust, community.

Honesty: The University wants all courses to remind students of the importance of intellectual honesty. No plagiarism is allowed. But this course is beyond plagiarizable; the assignments are quirky and very personal. There is no way to pull them off the web. Fine! But honesty still matters, as a general stance, mine with you and yours with all of us.

Trust: This, for me as a professor, is a basic operating principle. I like trusting my students. I consider their word golden. Thus, I respect what they tell me and to treat it as true. As a result, I never ask for doctors’ notes and other proof of problems. If there is a problem, just tell me. I ask no details. “I was away for good reason” suffices. But, to be prudent, do get doctors’ notes if you need them for York’s officialdom. (Social control of students!)

Community: This one is crucial for all of us. Learning is not something I dump on students, like gravel down a chute, but a thing that professor and students produce by working together as a group. Accordingly, ‘being there’ is crucial. Everybody has to come, bring the books, read the books, and plug in the head to what is going on in class. So, I ban not only all telephones and text-messengers (as is usual in classes) but also **all laptops and tablets** unless we all agree it is time to fish them out and look things up. **No laptops!** You bet! But people live these days on their laptops. Indeed they do, and they email and Facebook and play solitaire and review pictures of last Saturday’s party and watch TV and movies and home videos and download music and write papers for other courses and buy tickets to Cancun and, well, all sorts of things, and more and more they do it in the middle of class. So? So shut the machines and join the group. End of story! The only exceptions are special needs and special missions. If so, see me.

Lecture notes on Moodle

I will be posting write-ups of lectures and of what we say in class on Moodle. That fact should reduce worries about how to take notes without the laptop open. On the other hand, I will not be using Moodle’s email or chat. But I will send lots of emails to the whole class via Moodle, so make sure Moodle and you agree as to your best email address.

Work breakdown

7 log entries 35% (7 x 5%)

Njal paper 15%

final paper 20%

final exam 20%

participation 10%

Logs: rules of the game: It is important to do the log before the class when we discuss the passage in question. So **sign** and **date** each log entry. No signature, no grade. I will be grading the early logs in mid-course, so that you receive some feedback as you build your log collection. A log entry should be about a page and a half to two pages long, double-spaced. I give good grades for careful reading, careful thinking, independence of mind, and imagination.

week 1 8/9 Meet the course, sort out directions, solve problems

**Build ‘families’**

week 2 13/9 Njal, vii-xxxiii (Intro) and ch. 1-36 (to page 58)

15/9 Njal, ch. 37-65 (to p. 109)

Miller, Prologue (pp. 1-12) Introduction: Institutional

Setting, Ranks of Persons (pp. 12-42)

**log** question **1**: What is your name and your character and what traits have you acquired?

week 3 20/9 Njal, ch. 66-91 (to p. 156)

Miller, “Making Sense of the Sources” (pp. 43-76)

**(dossier of our Iceland posted on Moodle and handed out to families in hard copy)**

22/9 Miller, “Some Aspects of the Economy,” 77-110

**log** question **2**: Find an exchange in Njal and see what Miller would have said about it.

week 4 27/9 Njal’s Saga, ch. 92-131 (to p. 229)

Miller, “Householding Patterns”, “Bonds of Kinship”

(pp. 111-138, 139-178)

**Problems Problems Problems (handed out) and pondered**

29/9 Njal’s Saga, ch. 132-143 (to p. 264)

**log** question **3**: On p. 164, Miller talks of the work one must be willing to do to hold relations with one’s kin. So what sacrifices might you, as Icelander, make for your kin?

All **logs** handed in for first grading.

week 5 4/10 Njal’s Saga, ch. 144-159

Miller, “Feud, Vengeance, and the Disputing Process” (pp. 179-220)

**Negotiations in class**

6/10 Miller, “Law and Legal Process” (221-58)

**Negotiations in class**

week 6 11/10 Miller, “Peacemaking and Arbitration” “Concluding

Observations” (pp. 259-300, 301-8)

**Negotiations in class**

13/10 Daniel Lord Smail, *Consumption of Justice*, “Using the Courts,”

1-88

T. Cohen, “Three Forms of Jeopardy: Honor, Pain, and Truth-

Telling in a Sixteenth-Century Italian Courtroom,” *Sixteenth Century Journal,* 29.4 (1998): 78-98 (**JStor)**

week 7 18/10 Smail, *Consumption of Justice*, “Structures of Hatred,” 89-132.

20/10 Smail, *Consumption of Justice,* “The Pursuit of Debt”, 133-159.

T. Cohen, "Bourdieu in Bed: the Seduction of Innocentia (Rome, 1570)." *Journal of Early Modern History*, Spring, 2003, vol. 7, no. 1-2 55-85 **[Moodle?]**

**paper due** (ca. 5 pp.) Reflect on your experience as an Icelander in dispute

week 825/10Smail, *Consumption*, “The Body and Bona,” 160-205

**log** question **4**: Do you accept Smail’s explanation of why courts so often went after property?

27/10  *>>>>*No classes – Fall break<<<<

week 91/11Smail, *Consumption*, “Creation of the Archive,” 207-58

3/11Muir, *Mad Blood*, *xi-xxviii*, “Friulian Enigma,” 2-49

**log** question **5**: Why does Muir so stress local conditions in Friuli?

week 10 8/11 Muir, *Mad Blood*, “Approaching Thunder,”, “The Tempest of

1511,” 50-109

10/11 Muir, *Mad Blood,* “The Problem of Meaning,” “Retaliation,” 110-

132

**log** question **6**: Meditate on the pig that ate Savorgnan’s brain, and what culture made of that grisly event.

week 11 15/11 Muir, *Mad Blood*, “Toward the Duel,” 157-192

**Swordplay** in class

17/11 Aaron Miedema,Paper on Cellini’s swordfights (**Moodle**)

**log** question **7**: What did you learn when you held in your own hand a convincing replica of Renaissance sword or dagger?

week 12 22/11 T. Cohen, “A Daughter-killing Glossed, Digested, and

Reluctantly Accepted,” for a volume on murder in Renaissance Italy, edited by Trevor Dean and Kate Lowe, forthcoming with Cambridge University Press (**Moodle**)

24/11 Farr, *Tale of Two Murders*, pp. 1-39

week 13 1/12 Farr, pp. 40-85

29/12 Farr, pp. 86-135

week 14 1/12 Farr, pp. 136-204

**paper** due

Paper questions: do only one.

The model here: a close reading of Farr’s book, using it to attach what you

see on its pages to what you have learned in the course. So footnotes help, both to his book and, where useful, to other readings.

1. By the time we arrive in Farr’s early modern France, how much self help survives in the face of the rise of state law?

2. If Farr’s story bears on social control, what are its lessons?

3. How modern, and how archaic, were the workings of justice in Farr’s story?