

# **Cultural Violence, Stigma and the Legacy of the Anti-Sealing Movement**

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## **The Newfoundland and Labrador Anti-Sealing Movement Experience**

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## 4 The Newfoundland and Labrador Anti-Sealing Movement Experience

This chapter explores how activism against seal hunting devolved into cultural violence against sealers, their families and communities in Newfoundland and Labrador. Drawing on archival research from the Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador, in addition to supplementary interviews, this chapter illustrates how the Newfoundland and Labrador experiences with anti-sealing protesters escalated to the normalization of cultural violence in the 1970s–1980s as a means to destabilize the sealing industry and groups associated with it.

The chapter argues that the rural and coastal Newfoundland and Labrador experience with anti-sealing protesters amounts to cultural violence as the techniques used by activists over decades based on five dimensions of cultural violence distilled from the literature: (1) inflictors of violence believe they are operating from a place of moral authority; (2) the attackers are identifiably distinct from the group(s) they are targeting; (3) the instances of violence are unidirectional; (4) the targets of violence are immobile; and (5) the actions and attitudes are pushing people into forced assimilation (e.g. Belsky and Klagsbrun 2018; Campbell 2009; Kingston 2015; also see Burke 2021b, c). Much of the focus is on the height of the anti-sealing protests in the 1970s and 1980s which has had long-term effects on framing global perceptions about sealing and sealers. The following sections address the above five characteristics with some of these characteristics being addressed together – the attackers are identifiably distinct from the group(s) targeted with forced assimilation and unidirectional violence with immobility of targets. These dimensions are explored together because they are closely tied when discussing the experiences of cultural violence in Newfoundland and Labrador. This chapter argues that over the years anti-sealing activists and their supporters have created and encouraged an implicitly pursued and fostered overarching campaign of cultural violence against Newfoundland and Labrador sealers through attitudes, actions and behaviours that have blurred the lines of morality and acceptable conduct toward disproportionately weaker rural and coastal sealers, their families and communities. Reported experiences in rural and coastal Newfoundland and Labrador that have arguably contributed to the outcome of cultural violence, and which are explored in more detail in this chapter, include: anonymous threats to kidnap and skin local children of

sealers to pressure parents to abandon their cultural and economic practices; swarming of rural coastal communities by protester and media; in at least one documented instance, protesters reportedly holding a sealer hostage on a floating ice pan while verbally and psychologically abusing him; deliberately equating Newfoundland and Labrador's centuries-old sealing culture and economic practices to misrepresent the role of sealing and the sealing industry in the Canadian economy; and pushing for the assimilation of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians into becoming "Canadian".

### **Inflictors of Violence and Self-Appointed Moral Authorities**

For non-state actors to effectively do their work they "must encourage outsiders of the legitimacy of their cause(s), often without the benefit of nationalism or other existing cultural or moral resources" (Lowe 2008, 71). Organizations like IFAW, PETA and Greenpeace sought to legitimize their work against sealing by taking the moral position that hunting is wrong (Randhawa 2017) and set about crafting narratives to support this position. The narratives were crafted and communicated in many ways including through media coverage, films/documentaries, newsletters and petitions (Patey 1990), but the environmental organizations rarely distributed images that portrayed the negative impacts they were having on local peoples. Rather their "[s]kilful manipulation of the mass media engender[ed] enormous sympathy for their cause" (Kalland 2009, 82).

Greenpeace stands out in this discussion because when it originally protested against what it argued was the unsustainability of the sealing industry starting in 1976, it initially recognized the cultural importance of sealing for Inuit and Newfoundland and Labrador (Burke 2021c).

The fact is that the commercial fleets owned by Norwegian companies are wiping out the seal herds. The fact is the Norwegians destroyed three great herds of seals prior to starting on the Labrador herds in 1947. The fact is that the commercial fleets take only the pelts, leaving the meat on the ice, while the fishermen and [Inuit] of Newfoundland and Labrador do eat the meat. With a conservation stand the seals could have a chance.

(Greenpeace Chronicles 1976, 6 as quoted  
in Harter 2004, 96)

Quickly, however, Greenpeace abandoned its nuanced approach and focused on pushing for an end to all sealing, or what they considered to be "the savage, uncontrolled slaughter of helpless baby seals for their white pelts" (Woods 1986, 2). The organization deliberately tied the sealing debate to questions about the value of the sealing industry to the Canadian economy because the average sealers earned returns of around 100–200 CAD (in 1970s–early

1980s) off pelts from animals killed for family/personal use (Greenpeace Foundation 1977).

Paul Watson was instrumental in Greenpeace's rapid move away from nuance on the sealing issue. Watson promoted extreme action against sealers and sealing communities leading to "increased publicity and, subsequently, more donations for Greenpeace" (Nagtzaam et al. 2019). However, Rex Weyler, a former leader in Greenpeace, noted that "Watson tended to push the end of non-violence" which put Greenpeace into a difficult position as Watson's stances and actions undermined Greenpeace position that it was a non-violent organization. As a result the "Greenpeace Foundation board censured and removed Watson by a vote of 11-1, his being the dissenting vote" (Weyler 2004, 457), though Watson contends that his work was non-violent and justified (Essemlali and Watson 2013).

Greenpeace, however, has not offered an explicit and public apology to Newfoundland and Labrador sealers, their families and communities for the violence they experienced while targeted by their organization and its supporters (Burke 2021c). Rather there is a subtle, implicit and somewhat vague possible inclusion of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians under the broad category of coastal peoples in Greenpeace's 2014 apology. However, the 2014 apology lacks specifics about different coastal peoples in Canada and only highlights Inuit in Canada for any detailed reference in the apology (Kerr 2014).

Anti-sealing protesters also downplayed and largely ignored that "the seal hunt is an integral part of the seasonal fishing cycle for most of the longliner operations in northern Newfoundland and is absolutely essential to the economic viability of many vessels in the fleet" (Sinclair et al. 1989, 35) and that "in a rural economy with so few opportunities to earn cash, even these small amounts may take on a social significance far greater than for most urban dwellers" (Sinclair et al. 1989, 29). As Wright (1981, p. 62) notes, protesters preferred to focus on their interpretation of the "material viability of the hunt" in order "to argue that since the seal hunt adds only about \$5 500 000 ... to the total economy of the province, it cannot have a claim as an important or vital part of the economy" while underplaying the "culturally meaningful aspect of sealing".

The income from the commercial sealing in some coastal fishing communities, for example, accounted for 30–50 per cent of the income for those that operated the longliners in the 1970s and early 1980s (Royal Commission on Seals and the Sealing Industry in Canada, Volume 1, Economic Options, Prospects and Issues 1986, 4), and still does for some fishers (Troake 2005). There are also knock-on effects of removing 30–50 per cent of a person's income, for individuals, their families and communities which can have major societal and cultural implications which have been largely unacknowledged in the whole sealing debate.

The negative economic impacts of undermining inshore sealing necessitates greater dependence on summer tourism, which, on the surface might

appear relatively benign, but it forces our communities into a dependence on global mobility and its entwinement with fossil fuel use as well as casting us and our towns in a performative role wherein we must also depend on fulfilling the curiosity and comfort requirements of vacationers. So on one hand, the loss of sealing serves up more desperate workers to Big Industry and on the other, it casts rural Newfoundlanders and Labradorians as the Piper in the old adage: He who pays the piper calls the tune. We lose members of our communities to migrant work and we are dependent on the interest of tourists in consuming a commoditized version of our culture.

(Interview with Anne Troake 2022 - see Burke 2023)

In contemporary times,

[t]he average harvester earns only 20-35% of his yearly income – a meager \$5,000 to 8,000 – from sealing, and relies on other work to survive. A vast majority of sealers come from Canada’s poorest, most isolated regions and have few alternatives for work (Crockett 2015).

A key part of the approach of many frontline anti-sealing actors, like Greenpeace, was to stage direct action opportunities and image events for maximum media and promotional material coverage and impact directly against hunting by targeting sealers on the ice or in their isolated and rural communities. According to Link and Phelan (2001, 375) “[s]tigma is entirely dependent on social, economic, and political power – it takes power to stigmatize”. Greenpeace, for example, knew that many of the people participating in the seal fishery had an average “3.5 dependents, [and] an average education of grade 9, living in isolated communities with limited occupational mobility” according to a Greenpeace report from 1977 (Greenpeace Foundation 1977, 2), so it is reasonable to argue that they knew that the likelihood of the individuals they were targeting would be able to mount an effective defence of their culture and practices against what the activist organizations were doing at a global scale was very low on the basis of resources, skills and access to opportunities.

Instead, sealers and their communities were inundated with protesters and media who attacked them in their homes and while they were out hunting; there was no escape for them and their families.

The legacy of the anti-sealing activists is that emotional propaganda defeats facts, that ignorance trumps knowledge, and that media can be manipulated to become your PR arm. For sealers and their families the victimization exists every day. We are unlikely to see any change in this attitude while governments, institutions, individuals, and media accept fiction over fact.

(Interview with James Winter 2021 - see Burke 2022a)

Activists pushed narratives of brave protesters against savage peasants. Anne Troake recalls in her documentary on her family's experience with the protesters and their view of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians: "Some say we are lazy. Others say we are savages" (Troake 2005). Leaders in the protests such as Brian Davies of IFAW and Paul Watson of Sea Shepherd (formerly of Greenpeace) wrote passionately about their work against sealing, for example (e.g. Davis 1970; Essemli and Watson 2013; also see Weyler 2004).

Regardless of the longevity and importance of sealing in Newfoundland and Labrador, and in many coastal areas of the Canadian Arctic and Northeast, protesters and their supporters levelled repeated personal attacks, bigotry, xenophobia and threats of physical harm against sealers for decades (e.g. Patey 1990; Roswell 1977; Felsberg 1985). In some cases, the vitriol and calls for physical violence and the promotion of psychological and cultural violence against sealers continue to be supported by anti-sealing activists (CBC News 2005a, b). Watson, for example, expressed support in 2005 for a Sea Shepherd board member – Jerry Vlasak – who has reportedly "endorsed assassination as a means to save animal life" and has participated in direct action during the Canadian seal hunt (CBC News 2005a, b).

At the height of the anti-sealing movement in the mid-1970s, Newfoundland and Labrador sealers had limited support and recourse when trying to deal with national and international media coverage, letters and telephone calls filled with hatred. Francis Patey of St. Anthony, Newfoundland, was at the heart of the local effort to protect Newfoundland and Labrador during the anti-sealing movement. In his book, *A Battle Lost*, Patey reproduces copies of some of the letters received by local sealers which included things like: "murderers, may you be damned from here to eternity!" (Patey 1990, 62); "You people of Newfoundland are a bunch of murderers ... I guess it's true, Newfoundland IS backward, ignorant and prehistoric" (1990, 56); "If [killing seals] is the only way these men can make a living, I hope they all starve to death. Better still, maybe we could CLUB them to death" (1990, 55);

You dirty, rotten son-of-a-bitch! If I could get to you, I would beat you senseless; then I would skin your hide. You are a mean bastard and you will pay for your sins. You're lucky I don't go up there now and do it. I hope you die. Don't be surprised if you hear me or see me ... I'd pay anything to have you for five minutes";

(1990, 50)

"You Murdering Bastards" (1990, 53); and "I have heard you are tired of being called murderers, but if the shoe fits, wear it! ... It is unfortunate that the world is populated with money-hungry people like your gang" (1990, 52–3).

Threats designed to dissuade people in Newfoundland and Labrador from practice or supporting their cultural sealing traditions or participating in commercial sealing continue to this day. In one case in the mid-2010s, for example,

a Newfoundland woman whose father is a sealer reportedly received “a threat to kidnap and skin her three-year-old child after she posted a photo of them wearing a seal-fur bow tie and hat” in order to simulate how the anti-sealing supporter believes seals are killed (Burke 2021b; also see CBC The Broadcast with Jane Adey 2021). When considering that leading anti-sealing advocates like Watson have expressed support for a member of his organization who is reportedly fine with the idea to assassinate people to protect animals (CBC News 2005a, b), threats to kidnap, torture and kill children to promote the anti-sealing case are taken very seriously and terrify sealers and their families in Newfoundland and Labrador, such as the mother in this example (CBC The Broadcast with Jane Adey 2021).

In the 1970s–1980s, a way of thinking began to emerge within the environmental movement that humans are the environment’s problem, which helps to explain why the demonization, abuse and dehumanization of sealers quickly became normalized and still has a strong following to this day. Patrick Moore, the controversial former Greenpeace President reflected that:

by the time I left [Greenpeace]...the environmental movement had changed ... [it turned] to “humans are the enemies of the Earth” “humans are the enemies of nature” as if we’re the only bad or evil species on the planet and everything else is either benign or good or whatever you want to say. They’re not evil. This is original sin reinvented for environmentalism.

(Moore 2021)<sup>1</sup>

When people operate from a position that their work is essential to eradicate original sin, then any people, actors or cultures that they perceive to be in the way of fulfilling their calling are likely to be viewed as transgressors to be converted or eliminated in some fashion. In the case of the anti-sealing protesters, the discourse around calls to reform the sealing industry very rapidly shifted away from conservation and sustainable use of seals became drowned out as calls for an outright ban of all sealing became to dominate the debate (Phelps Bondaroff and Burke 2014).<sup>2</sup> Anyone or any culture between the followers of the anti-sealing cause and their objectives risk being stigmatized as unworthy and subhuman; a status of being less-than that underpins questionable actions, attitudes and behaviours toward vulnerable peoples and cultures in this case.

### **Attackers Are Identifiably Distinct From Their Targets and Forced Assimilation**

According to Sinclair et al. in a *Report for the Royal Commission on Seals and the Sealing Industry in Canada* (1989):

Sealing takes place in Canada's most marginal or peripheral regions, and the fact that commercial utilization of seal products has declined so dramatically in recent years is a threat to the very existence of some of Canada's most isolated settlements. Consequently, it is important to evaluate sealing not in relation to its contribution to Canadian society as a whole, but with reference to the general resources and economic condition of the regions in which sealing takes place.

(Sinclair et al. 1989, 2)

Anti-sealing advocates, however, have long framed sealing as an antiquated practice in Canadian history (McDermott 1985, 2) in which the Canadian majority are now against (Scheffer 1984, 4).

By blurring the lines between the wider Canadian economy and the importance of sealing to specific cultural and ethnically distinct segments of Canada operating within that economy, activists used "taken-for-granted cultural circumstances" (Link and Phelan 2014, 24). In this case the taken-for-granted circumstance is that the sealers are Canadian. The Canadian framing blocks out any ethnic or cultural nuances that also identify who these sealers and their families are beyond the very broad "Canadian" classification. By eradicating nuance, protesters distort the discussion about the economic benefits of sealing to Canadian society and the cultural importance of sealing traditions and practices to sub-sets of cultural and ethnically distinct peoples who also happen to be Canadian citizens.

The eradication of nuance about the peoples who make up Canada and Canadians is particularly prevalent in the sealing debate and the experiences of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who have long been stigmatized in Canada as "less-than" while also being culturally, and arguably ethnically, distinct (see Baker 2014 for exploration of Newfoundland [and Labrador] ethnicity).

From the beginning the anti-sealing movement focused on Newfoundland and Labrador . . . . The anti-sealing corporations fully understood the political and cultural reality in Canada towards Newfoundland and Labrador as the new province versus the established province of Quebec. Also in Canada this was the era of the "Newfie joke" and the establishment of the concept of Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans as being stupid, redneck, and somehow not deserving of being considered as "Canadian". As a tactic it worked for a couple of decades helping the propaganda to influence Canadian, and to a degree international, thought.

(Interview with James Winter 2021 - see Burke 2022a)

However, sealing means more for rural and coastal Newfoundland and Labrador culture and society than its role as an economic enterprise.<sup>3</sup> Sealing created a culture and a working-class solidarity among the sealing



communities with “[t]he class formation of sealers...[differing] from the more typical development of waged workers in Canada” (Harter 2004, 94).

In the case of Newfoundland and Labrador, the location from which the majority of sealing in Canada takes place, the peoples of the province were essentially Canadian immigrants when the protests against them began, having only joined Canada in 1949 (Cochrane and Parsons 1949).<sup>4</sup> Anti-sealing activists in the late 1960s–1980s came from outside of the province and attacked the traditional ways of life and economic practices of rural and coastal peoples of Newfoundland and Labrador who are ethnically and culturally distinct from the people who they attacked (e.g. Burke 2021c; Baker 2014; Harter 2004).<sup>5</sup>

While it is easy to comprehend the cultural, ethnic and racial differences between the largely non-Indigenous protesters and Inuit peoples, for example, Newfoundland and Labrador was a separate country that joined Canada, and the Newfoundlanders and Labradorians (and their descendants) at the time of Confederation in 1949 are also culturally and ethnically distinct people. According to James Baker and his work on Newfoundland ethnicity, ethnicity

is very much at the core of the individual; in fact, ethnic identity can influence how we perceive both ourselves and others . . . . Loosely speaking, an ethnic group is defined as a group of people whose members identify with one another through a number of shared characteristics (such as culture, language, or religion).

(Baker 2014, 74)<sup>6</sup>

Baker argues that Newfoundland<sup>7</sup> ethnicity exists and has developed since the 17th century, solidifying in the mid to late 1800s (2014, 82) and includes key characteristics of ethno-symbolism including (but not limited to) a collective name, historical memories, a specific homeland and a sense of solidarity for large parts of the population (2014, 86).

Harter (2004) also notes that generations of sealing and the working-class experiences with the sealing industry greatly inform the fostering and articulation of the thoughts, beliefs, values and customs that we now identify as distinct to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Furthermore, the socio-linguistic distinctiveness of Newfoundland (and Labrador) English is yet another aspect of Newfoundland and Labrador’s distinctiveness that identifies Newfoundlanders and Labradorians as a cultural and ethnic group separate from Canadians (Clarke 2012; also see Smith 2017). Therefore, when protesters came into Newfoundland and Labrador, starting in the 1960s, distinguishing between local peoples and non-locals was very easy to do. The ethnic and cultural characteristics of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians made locals easily identifiable targets, with their identifiability amplified by their inability to move their cultural practices, like seal hunting and associated activities

elsewhere away from protesters, and still exist as a cohesive, active cultural group.<sup>8</sup>

In 1969 when IFAW started the formalized anti-sealing movement (IFAW n.d.; also see Davies 1970; Patey 1990), for example, Newfoundland and Labrador had only been part of Canada for 20 years (Burke 2021c).<sup>9</sup> Canadian, and international, protesters from organizations like Greenpeace (initially from British Columbia) (Greenpeace n.d.), began to protest against Newfoundland and Labrador's sealing; they argued that sealing is not an acceptable practice (e.g. Weyler 2004; Patey 1990; IFAW 2019). The cultural distinctiveness of sealers in Newfoundland and Labrador, especially rural residents in many centuries-old traditional coastal communities in the province, was ignored and dismissed as antiquated. The actions, attitudes and behaviours of anti-sealing protesters who came overwhelmingly from outside of the province conveyed a desire to get sealers and their families to assimilate into an idea of what protesters viewed as "Canadian", whether locals wanted to change or not, at the expense of their own Newfoundlander and Labradorian identities, traditions and cultural practices (Burke 2021c).

Cultural violence is in effect "an invariant, a 'permanence'" (Galtung 1990, 295) and the aim of assimilation underpinning the anti-sealing messaging was so prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s that even school children in Newfoundland and Labrador understood what was happening around them and were upset and frustrated by it. For example, in 1977 an observer report on the seal hunt noted that during a presentation and discussion with fisheries officers, Newfoundland school children in the Northern Peninsula were distressed by the actions and attitudes of the protesters and their Canadian supporters.

It was obvious that the students and their teachers were upset at the attitudes of others Canadians, who failed to understand the manner in which they lived, their emphasis on family life and not on money. Their desire is to live their own lives in the manner in which they have been living for many generations, a life style which continues to be a driving force in the outports of Newfoundland. They believed that others in Canada were attempting to force them to give up their way of live to adopt that of those in the mainland. This was unacceptable to them. They were frustrated by the lack of understanding of their geographic difference, their social and cultural life and their opportunities for employment peculiar to the Newfoundlander.

(Roswell 1977, 24)

Local people struggled under the unrelenting pressure from activists and media that portrayed their culture as backward. Even local children knew that protesters viewed them as "needing re-education into the 'Canadian' way of doing things" (Burke 2021b; also see Burke 2021c).

Again in 1985 Newfoundland school children sought cultural tolerance and understanding about their ethnicity and the role of sealing in their culture as they observed their family members and communities being abused by protesters that dismissed their right to exist. Students at a rural school on the Northern Peninsula wrote:

We ... believe that the seal hunt is a vital part of our economical, social and cultural life; therefore we are writing this brief to express our concern. Attacks have been made on our culture before, but never more so than the ever-present frenzy being displayed by various protest groups. The seal hunt has been a vital part of the Newfoundland fishery for hundreds of years and has been a reliable source of income during the long, harsh winter months.

(Royal Commission on Seals and Sealing  
Industry in Canada 1985)

The experiences of cultural violence reported by school children in Newfoundland in 1985 are serious, and yet largely ignored in historical and contemporary discussions about the legacy and outcomes of the anti-sealing movement. A plausible reason why the experiences of children, in particular, might have become ignored by protesters and debates about the merits of sealing – commercial or otherwise – might be linked to the repercussions of cultural violence which “preaches, teaches, admonishes, eggs on, and dulls us into seeing exploitation and/or repression as normal and natural, or into not seeing them...at all” (Galtung 1990, 296).

While local sealers and their families in Newfoundland and Labrador understood their cultural distinctiveness from those attacking them made them targets, decades of repetitive narratives aimed to stigmatize sealing and sealers have dulled audiences (e.g. media, national and international politicians and protesters) to recognizing, acknowledging and caring about the harm that rural and coastal peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador have been experiencing. Instead, the effort to undermine the sealing dimension and heritage of Newfoundland and Labrador culture is seemingly rooted in the belief of some of the more aggressive and vocal protesters that they were ultimately educating Newfoundlanders and Labradorians into the correct way of being Canadian, which in their view means not sealing.<sup>10</sup>

### **Unidirectional Violence and Immobility of Targets**

The concept of unidirectional violence – one group attacking another unprovoked – is controversial to apply in protracted disputes, like the anti-sealing protests. Many high-profile protesting organizations like Greenpeace and Sea Shepherd have argued, for example, that their work is grounded in the philosophy of non-violence (e.g. Greenpeace Canada 2022; Greenpeace UK n.d.;

Sea Shepherd n.d.). However, again reflecting on Johan Galtung's work on cultural violence (1990, 293), one side's perception of their self-defined non-violence does not necessarily mean that their attitudes, actions and behaviours which they frame as non-violent are in fact non-violent from the perspective of those on the receiving end of the strategies and tactics employed (e.g. see Goodin 1992).<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, instigators of violence may point to actions by those they target who respond in ways that may also be interpreted as violent which can lead to a cycle of attitudes, actions and behaviours on both sides that may escalate a situation.

For example, Sea Shepherd protestor Jerry Vlasak allegedly received a bloody nose after purportedly being hit in the face by a Newfoundland sealer on the ice while participating in anti-sealing protests in 2005. During the altercation Sea Shepherd claims that "8 sealers physically assaulted 7 Sea Shepherd crewmembers on the ice with hak-a-piks and clubs" (Sea Shepherd 2005). However, if we look at this situation from the perspective of the sealers on the ice, Vlasak came to Canada to participate in Sea Shepherd's direct action, which it frames as non-violent, with a likely outcome of the direct action being physical interference in seal hunting activities.

Additionally Vlasak also reportedly promoted the idea that the assassination of hunters to protect animals is a valid way to protect animals (Doward 2004). If we consider what the atmosphere would have been like on the ice for the sealers leading up to and during the confrontation with Sea Shepherd protesters, the sealers would likely have learned that an individual protesting against them on the ice for Sea Shepherd is reportedly endorsing assassination and this would have likely contributed to an atmosphere of fear and anxiety when the protesters and sealers met (e.g. Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans 2006; CBC 2005a, b). Underscoring the seriousness of Vlasak's position, the year before his sealing protests he was supposedly banned from entering the United Kingdom in 2004 because he promoted the killing of scientists to protect animals (Doward 2004).

Therefore, this book argues that a case can be made that the decades of anti-sealing activism against Newfoundlanders and Labradorians qualifies as unidirectional violence because in the sealing campaigns Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are almost always in the responding self-defence position. Over the decades protesters have come into rural and isolated communities and coastal areas in or near Newfoundland and Labrador without local invitation or desire. The experience of communities in the 1970s–early 1980s in particular, such as St. Anthony on the Northern Peninsula, was akin to siege warfare; the small rural community and local sealers from the area were inundated with protesters and media for the months of the seal hunt (March–May), year after year in their community and while on the ice with no means to make the situation stop (Patey 1990). The only possible "out" for locals to get protesters to leave them alone would have been to abandon hundreds of years, and thousands of years for Indigenous Newfoundlanders and Labradorians,

of sealing practices and the cultural, economic and other benefits associated with it.

The intentional and explicit attribution of conduct/tribal stigma (Page 1984, 11; Goffman 1963) is a key way in which protesters targeted sealing and pushed people into abandoning cultural and economic practices and discouraged the passing on of local traditional sealing knowledge. Protesters promoted the devaluation of the rights and experiences of sealers and their culture by presenting themselves as moral authorities who are social agents for positive change and locals as cruel, uncivilized savages that need to be educated and corrected.<sup>12</sup> As social agents, protesters and organizations in effect sought to “impose their vision of the world or the vision of their own position in that world, and [seek] to define their social identity” (Bourdieu 1987, 10–11). In this instance, protesters have in effect argued that sealing is antithetical to what it meant to be a good Canadian and/or global citizen. In doing so activists actively stigmatized sealers as part of their process to push for change because audiences confer stigmatization “to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier” (Goffman 1963, 1)

To pursue their agendas for change, protesters created situations in which the outcomes could be used to portray sealers as the savages and barbarians they need them to be to argue the moral legitimacy of their actions and justify dehumanizing sealers and their cultural practices. For example, in 1977 when Paul Watson lead Greenpeace members on the ice during the annual seal hunt, Greenpeace members are reported to have proceeded to bully, intimidate, destroy property and, in at least one instance, take a sealer hostage on the ice by surrounding him and stopping him from moving while shouting insults and abuse (Rowse 1977; Burke 2021c). One official observer to the 1977 hunt also recalled that Watson instigated a direct action stunt where he hooked himself to a load of seal pelts being brought onboard a vessel by a winch. The winch operator did not see Watson and mistakenly dropped him into icy water. Once the mistake was realized, sealers from the vessel rescued Watson. Watson claimed he was paralyzed, so the sealers took him aboard their vessel to try and help him but once he was onboard and they got him dry, Watson began to walk around the vessel, clearly not paralyzed, and taunted the sealers with threats of legal action (Rowse 1977, 23). In Watson’s view, however, he stands by his belief that his actions while protesting sealing are examples of non-violent intervention (Essemlali and Watson 2013; also see Weyler 2004).

Again in 1977, Greenpeace members reportedly destroyed sealers’ equipment by throwing it, and harvested pelts, into the water (Patey 1990). At one point four Greenpeace members were observed to have taken a sealer hostage, isolating the sealer on a moving piece of ice in March 1977.

Four of them [Greenpeace members] surrounded a sealer and refused to let him move from the pan. This intimidation can only be considered

as bullying. In spite of the intimidation, the harassment and the provocation, the Newfoundland sealer did not strike out against Greenpeace members or attempt to take any form of defensive action.

(Roswell 1977, 25)

On top of the risks of physical violence, sealers and their families have been repeatedly subjected to psychological terrorizing through highly derogatory, often anonymous, letters, emails and telephone calls, and the weaponization of familial love through threats to kidnap, torture and murder the children and grandchildren of sealers.

For example, in the 2005 documentary *My Ancestors Were Rogues and Murderers* an anti-sealing protester was recorded contacting a sealer by telephone, saying:

Would you like a meat hook stuck in your brain? Lay off the animal rights people. I think it's fucking reprehensible. You people out there, you don't even know whose money you're living off of. You're living off of Central Canada and Western Canada. You can't even make your own fucking way in life. If you don't like it get the fuck out of our country you fucking assholes.

(Troake 2005)

Many individuals received messages filled with threats and bigotry, such as the one above which tells Newfoundland sealers to conform to the "Canadian" way of being or leave the country.

In 2006, for example, while testifying for the Canadian Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, sealing advocate James Winter recalled "I've had death threats. I've had people threatening to skin my children alive, when they were much younger, so that I would understand how a mommy seal feels" (Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans 2006). Others, like John Gillett, a fisherman from Twillingate, Newfoundland, have tried desperately to keep local traditional sealing knowledge and practices alive for current and future generations but is in despair as their culture erodes around them: "I killed my first seal when I was only 12 years old, and sold pelts in 1980s when the price was only a dollar to try to keep the industry going. Now it's being taken away from me bit by bit" (Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans 2006).

John Gillett is not alone in his concern that the decades of anti-sealing protests are destroying the Newfoundland and Labrador culture. Hedley Butler, a fisherman and a town councillor for the community of Bonavista, Newfoundland, expressed anxiety about the impact of anti-sealing movement: "The seal fishery for fishermen in coastal communities is a very important part of our livelihood. We have taken seals for the past 500 years for food and as a means of making a living. [But now we] have thousands of people

in our communities who are leaving” (Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans 2006).

There is a profound sense of defeat and sadness amongst fishers who are sealers as they experience decades of degradation and dismissal of their experience by people with the ability to help. The frustration is perhaps most eloquently summarized by fisher/sealer Garry Troake:

I’m fed up with incompetent politicians. I am tired of rich movie stars and the like that know as much about seals as I know about being Captain Kirk. I’m sick of animal welfare groups who are about as concerned about the future of seals as I am about the insects that live in the firewood in my basement. I am fed up with hypocritical scientists and misinformed, sensationalised media coverage and I’m angered with some sealers that treat our resource like it’s so much garbage. Why can’t common sense prevail? ... As a sealer, I don’t think I’m asking for much. Just some good scientific advice, good government management, good accurate media coverage and maybe a true environmental group that will realize that you won’t save the seals by destroying what I do any more than you’ll save the rainforest by destroying the native peoples.

(Troake 2005)

Individuals who have been strong believers in Newfoundland and Labrador’s culture, such as the late Garry Troake,<sup>13</sup> attempted to defend the way of life of sealers and on multiple occasions protesters spat in his face. On one occasion: “A young woman spat in Garry’s face at a seal protest, and all Garry did was wipe the spit away with his sleeve, look at her, and smile. This put her over the edge, with her swearing and stamping her feet” (Gillett 2015, 65–6).

As the years progress, however, fear of protesters and their violence has sapped many sealers and their communities of their ability to hold out against the desire of outsiders to eradicate their cultural and economic practices. Many people now self-censor and discourage younger generations from participating in or talking about sealing to avoid protester violence, which coupled with mass outmigration (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador 2020) is corroding Newfoundland and Labrador’s traditional sealing practices as some community elders/elderly and practitioners who hold the traditional sealing knowledge fear of openly discussing sealing and passing on knowledge and traditions to the youth that are still around.

As targets of protesters, actively participating members of traditional sealing cultures in Canada are effectively immobile. Their continuation depends on their presence in, and access to, their coastal communities and coastlines. They cannot continue their existence as cohesive, active cultural groups by moving elsewhere because they depend on unimpeded access to, and the presence of, the seal herds during the stages of its seasonal migration cycle. This

means that sealing cultures in the Canadian Arctic and Northeast are tied to their particular geographic areas along the Canadian coastline where their cultures are located, formed and evolved, meaning they cannot move away from their returning attackers in search of refuge and also continue to exist at the same time.

## Notes

- 1 It is important to acknowledge that, to the best of this author's knowledge, Moore continues to be against commercial sealing and is proud of his work against the seal hunt, and his comments quoted in this book were not made in the context of the sealing debate but rather a reflection on the state of the environmental movement as a whole.
- 2 Acknowledgement of Indigenous peoples in the sealing debate and more nuanced discourse around Indigenous traditional rights, for example, only started to get some traction in the mid-1980s (Woods 1986).
- 3 According to Wright, the anti-sealing protests "is a direct intrusion of *them* against *us*, of urban values clashing with rural traditions, which seems to sum up various complaints Newfoundlanders [and Labradorians] have about the intrusion of mainland cultural values to the detriment of their own heritage" (Wright 1981, 62).
- 4 Broadly speaking culture is made up of learned behaviours and attitudes (thoughts, beliefs, values and customs) and ethnicity is based around identifying with those that you have strong commonality, especially in areas such as culture, a common language/dialect and ancestry (it can be from the same racial group like people who identify as ethnically Indian or Chinese, but ancestry can also be people who identify from the same city/region such as Sicily or from a broader geographic area like the British Isles or Scandinavia).
- 5 Similar arguments of cultural and ethnic distinctiveness can be made for the coastal Quebecois of the Quebec North Shore and Magdalen Islands who also have strong "elements of common culture" associated with sealing and recognition in Canada as distinct people; Quebec is recognized as a nation within a nation in Canada (Secrétariat du Québec aux relations canadiennes 2015).
- 6 Baker (2014, 79) goes on to assert that the origins of a Newfoundland ethnicity date back to the 17th century: "The hybrid nature of seventeenth century Newfoundland society – that is, the intertwined resident and migratory fishery – perhaps heralded the beginning of a Newfoundland ethnogenesis. This is especially true as the Newfoundland settlers began to accumulate the markers of a Newfoundland ethnicity not only through interaction with their physical environment but also through emergent cultural integration and religious tolerance".
- 7 The official name of Newfoundland and Labrador was the Dominion of Newfoundland at the point of Confederation with Canada in 1949, though Labrador was long-known as Labrador beyond the official name of the country, later province. Given that Baker's assessment of the emergence of a Newfoundland post-Confederation "ethnicity", using Confederation as the analytical starting point, this may explain why Labrador is not overtly discussed in the analysis as it may be implicitly included as part of the dominion/province's ethnicity which at that time was legally referred to as the Province of Newfoundland in the post-Confederation period.
- 8 Examples of activities include social gatherings around the processing and sharing of seal meat, consuming seal meat they hunted at home and in social places like community halls and making and wearing clothes and other items with seal furs that are socially acceptable to wear without fear of appraisal or physical attack.



- 9 Before joining Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador was a separate, older country from Canada within the British Empire. Newfoundland and Labrador's amalgamation into Canada includes a complicated journey of questionable actions taken by the Canadian and British governments that caused tensions and mistrust in the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador bilateral relations that continue to fester to this day (e.g. Baker 2003; Cadigan 2006). For example, in 1944, during bilateral discussions about Confederation: "Canadian interest would also be prompted by the economic potential of Labrador's resources, especially its potential iron ore reserves in western Labrador [present day Labrador City and Wabush area] which Canadian government officials were well aware of by 1944. Canada in 1947 would keep knowledge of its discovery by a Canadian company secret so Newfoundlanders [and Labradorians] would not be adversely influenced in their perception of Canada" (Baker 2003, 38–9). Both at the time, and in retrospect, there are Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who "felt [and continue to feel] coerced into Confederation not only by overt British interests and Canadian lust for its resources, but, many suspected, by covert manipulation of the narrowly decisive 1948 referendum" (Lowenthal 2017, 156; also see Malone 2012, 239). There were two referendums about whether the Dominion of Newfoundland, as Newfoundland and Labrador was then known, would join Canada. The first referendum did not result in a vote to join Canada but a second vote was held in 1948 and the Dominion voted to become a Canadian province by a margin of 7000 votes: "On July 22, 1948, the option to join Canada won by the narrow margin of 7,000 votes – 52% voting for confederation with Canada and 47% for responsible government. (The count was protested by the losing side for a generation) ... In the newest province of Canada, black drapes were hung in mourning. Black flags were raised in a mute elegy for the lost nation" (CBC 2001).
- 10 An irony of promoting sealing as not a Canadian practice omits sealing traditions in other provinces in rural and coastal communities in places like Quebec, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.
- 11 Robert Goodin's research on non-violence in environmental and animal rights activism includes an exploration of violence-prone environmentalists, such as "the self-styled 'monkeywrenchers' of the American West". Goodin argues that these activists claim their work is non-violent resistance because their activities are "not directed towards harming human beings or other forms of life" but rather "inanimate machines and tools". The monkeywrenchers use tactics like spiking roads and trees and unscrewing crucial bolts in machinery and argue that this is non-violent, but Goodin points out that these activities can cause enormous harm to sawyers and millers such as causing major economic harm to businesses and potentially life threatening and altering injuries to workers due to machinery malfunctions or hitting a spike in a tree while sawing it, for example (Goodin 1992, 134).
- 12 According to Nuttall (1990, 240), there is also a tendency to describe Inuit subsistence as traditional but this is problematic because "the definition of tradition is tenuous, invoking images of a romantic idealised past, before the days of European contact, when both humans and animals were perceived to be part of an integrated biological harmony".
- 13 Troake and his colleague Roger Blake lost their lives in a commercial fishing accident in 2000 (Gillett 2015, 65–6).