

# Newfoundland Landsmen Sealing Interrogating the Limits of Ecomasculinity in the Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries

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Article abstract

The much-publicized debate over the Newfoundland seal fishery since the mid-1960s has marginalized the sealers' own experiences. This article will situate the sealers' thoughts, bodies, and emotions in that sealing controversy, exploring landsmen's performance of respectable masculinity as humane and responsible harvesters with a legitimate place within the ecosystem of the northwestern Atlantic. It will parse landsmen discourse about an ecologically sustainable hunt that is rooted in traditional and local knowledge and is also culturally and economically significant. In so doing, this article will challenge practitioners and theorists of ecomasculinity to have more inclusive conversations with less-privileged rural harvesters, local economies, and resource-based ways of life.

## **Newfoundland Landsmen Sealing: Interrogating the Limits of Ecomasculinity in the Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries**

WILLEEN KEOUGH

Le débat très médiatisé entourant la chasse au phoque à Terre-Neuve depuis le milieu des années 1960 a marginalisé l'expérience personnelle des chasseurs de phoque. Le présent article fera un portrait corporel et situera les réflexions et les émotions des chasseurs de phoque dans le contexte de cette controverse, en explorant la performance d'une masculinité respectable chez les chasseurs côtiers en tant que récolteurs responsables et sans cruauté qui ont une place légitime dans l'écosystème de l'Atlantique Nord-Ouest. Il analysera le discours des chasseurs côtiers sur la pratique d'une chasse écologiquement viable qui est ancrée dans le savoir traditionnel et local, et qui a une importance culturelle et économique. Ce faisant, l'article invitera les praticiens et les théoriciens de l'écomasculinité à avoir des discussions plus inclusives avec les récolteurs ruraux moins privilégiés, les économies locales et les communautés dont le mode de vie est tributaire des ressources naturelles.

The much-publicized debate over the Newfoundland seal fishery since the mid-1960s has marginalized the sealers' own experiences. This article will situate the sealers' thoughts, bodies, and emotions in that sealing controversy, exploring landsmen's performance of respectable masculinity as humane and responsible harvesters with a legitimate place within the ecosystem of the northwestern Atlantic. It will parse landsmen discourse about an ecologically sustainable hunt that is rooted in traditional and local knowledge and is also culturally and economically significant. In so doing, this article will challenge practitioners and theorists of ecomasculinity to have more inclusive conversations with less-privileged rural harvesters, local economies, and resource-based ways of life.

**IN 1999, GARRY TROAKE OF TWILLINGATE, A YOUNG FISHER and respected advocate of the landsman seal hunt in Newfoundland, reflected on the frustrations of trying to maintain a responsible and sustainable harvest in the face of what he saw as conflicting scientific information, erratic government regulations, and emotionally charged accusations from those who did not understand the intricate interrelationships in coastal**

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communities among all creatures – human as well as nonhuman – of the land and sea:

I'm fed up with incompetent politicians, I'm tired of rich movie stars and the like who 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'm fed up with hypocritical scientists and misinformed, sensationalized media coverage. And I'm angered with some sealers who treat our resource like it was so much garbage. Why can't common sense prevail? . . . As a sealer, I don't feel that I am asking for much, just some good scientific advice, good government management, good accurate media coverage, and maybe a true environmental group who realizes that you won't save the seals by destroying what I do any more than you'll save the rain forests by destroying the native peoples.<sup>1</sup>

Troake's comments demonstrate the profound tensions that have been forged in the cauldron of pro- and anti-sealing politics since the late 1960s, when a cacophony of voices erupted over Canadian sealing, as politicians, media, pro- and anti-sealing activists, celebrities, and ordinary people argued about the legitimacy of the settler Newfoundland seal hunt.<sup>2</sup> The ensuing debates have become sites of creating knowledge about Newfoundland sealing masculinity and have frequently been freighted with emotion; yet the sealers' own embodied experiences and emotions in relation to their work and their masculinity have been muffled. Pressured by Newfoundland cultural expectations to project an image of stoic, working-class heroism and denounced by anti-sealing activists and international

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1 Garry Troake, 1999 interview, in *My Ancestors Were Rogues and Murderers*, NFB film, directed by Anne Troake, 2005. I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for helping to fund this research. I appreciate the insightful feedback I received from the anonymous readers of *Acadiensis*. I am indebted to the staffs of the Provincial Archives at The Rooms, St. John's, and the Centre for Newfoundland Studies with its associated archive at Memorial University for their attentive research assistance. And I am very grateful to all my oral history narrators for generously sharing their time and their stories with me.

2 Unless otherwise specified, all references in this article to Newfoundland sealing, sealers, and landsmen refer to the seal hunt that has been carried out by white settler society off the northeast coast of Newfoundland and the whelping ice off the Labrador coast.

media as hyper-masculine and unfeeling, sealers have struggled to position their subjectivity within a discursive vortex that has swirled around them yet largely excluded them from the conversation. This difficulty has increased with the explosive growth of social media in the 21st century – a phenomenon that has given a louder voice to outside observers while virtually muting rural sealers because of their geographical peripherality, limited bandwidth access, and economic marginality.

Particularly frustrating for the sealers has been the stark contrast that has been drawn between working-class primary producers and environmentalists. In environmental discourse about marine life, male animal rights and animal welfare activists have been cast as seal saviours and shepherds of all the creatures of the seas: an embodiment of gentle, ethical ecomasculinity.<sup>3</sup> In juxtaposition, the sealer has appeared as a symbol of waste and rapine – a barbarian who, out of ignorance or greed or both, is devastating the environment: “the club-wielding, gun-toting Canadian embarrassment.”<sup>4</sup> Missing from the frame has been the conservationism, the determination to maintain ecological balance, that has undergirded Newfoundland sealing masculinity – a perspective that has been evidenced by sealers’ return to the traditional, sustainable landsman hunt, their determination to maintain humane killing methods, and their renewed efforts to utilize the entire animal in processing as well as their concerns about the impact of increasing seal herds on other marine species. Also missing has been any understanding of sealers as emotionally embodied creatures with the capacity to manifest a whole range of feelings, from affection and empathy to fear, pain, and frustration.

Parsing life narratives and other self-representations of sealers on Newfoundland’s northeast coast, this article situates the sealers’ thoughts, bodies, and emotions in the sealing controversy of the past 50 years.<sup>5</sup> It explores sealers’ performance of respectable masculinity as humane and responsible harvesters who have a legitimate place within the ecosystem of the northwestern Atlantic. And it will challenge practitioners and theorists

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3 Willeen Keough, “Sea Shepherds, Eco-warriors, and Impresarios: The Performance of Eco-masculinity in the Canadian Seal Hunt of the Late Twentieth Century,” in *Making Men, Making History: Canadian Masculinities across Time and Place*, ed. Peter Gossage and Robert Rutherford (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018), 218–35.

4 G. Troake, in *My Ancestors*, 2005.

5 My oral history fieldwork included interviews conducted with 32 sealers, former sealers, family and community members, and cultural producers in 14 communities along the Great Northern Peninsula, the northeast coast, and St. John’s in 2009 and 2010.



**Newfoundland landsmen's shop floor.**

Source: Photograph by John Gillett, a landsman from Durrell, NL.

of ecomasculinity to find a more inclusive way to have conversations with rural harvesters, local economies, and resource-based ways of life<sup>6</sup>

Two types of sealing have been carried out by European settlers and their descendants on the northeast coast of Newfoundland over the past four centuries. In its original articulation, the seal fishery was a landsman hunt, carried out by men, women, and children as seals (primarily adults) came into bays and harbours, where they were netted or harvested from

6 There is a dearth of literature on non-Indigenous, rural working people who hunt for subsistence or combine subsistence and small-scale commercial purposes. Writings on hunting in Canada have tended to reflect a very real and pervasive conflict between "recreational" or "sport" hunters (usually middle class or elite) and Indigenous "subsistence" hunters. Lacking, however, are treatments of those hunters who do not fit either category tidily. In addition, there has been a tendency in the literature to attach the concepts of "traditional hunting" and "local knowledge" exclusively to Indigenous peoples – creating a boundary that is too rigid for the complexity on the ground. Also muted has been an understanding that non-Indigenous hunting has been, for some, not only an economic necessity but also a cultural (even spiritual) experience that creates identity, a sense of relationship with nature, and an appreciation of the importance of conservation. While the focus of this article is on masculinities and affect, it also attempts to trouble this rather simplistic dichotomy of white settler "recreational" hunter versus Indigenous "subsistence" hunter. For some compelling literature on hunting, conservation, and provincial and federal regimes of resource management and assimilation, see John Sandlos, *Hunters at the Margin: Native People and Wildlife Conservation in the Northwest Territories* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008); Tina Loo, *States of Nature: Conserving Canada's Wildlife in the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007); and Hans M. Carlsen, *Home is the Hunter: The James Bay Cree and Their Land* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008). An anthology edited by Jean L. Manore and Dale G. Miner – *The Culture of Hunting in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006) – attempts to present perspectives in relation to both "recreational" and Indigenous hunting.

small boats. Communities utilized the entire animal: meat and flippers fed humans and work dogs; pelts (both waterproof and warm) became hats, coats, mitts, and boots; blubber was rendered into oil for heating and lighting. From the late 18th century onwards, as larger vessels were able to go out further to the actual whelping ice of the harp seals, and as a demand for seal oil arose to light the streets and grease the machine belts of the industrial age, the hunt focused on whitecoats (newborn harp seals) and the thick protective coating of blubber under their fur. This effort was carried out on a much greater and more destructive scale than the landsman hunt. Vessel owners dispatched sealers to the Labrador Front (“the Front”)<sup>7</sup> with the toast “Bloody decks and a bumper crop!” By the 1830s and 1840s, seal skin production often exceeded 400,000 pelts per year, with totals in the 600,000 range in four of those years.<sup>8</sup> This intensification of effort led to over-harvesting of the resource; it also radically changed the relationship of many sealers to their livelihoods. Like other rural producers of the period, they were separated from their means of production and forced to work to the rhythms and expectations of capitalist employers. These sealers worked extremely hard in sub-zero temperatures – running over heaving ice floes, hauling vessels with tow ropes through packed ice, pulling heavy pelts for miles – not just for subsistence but also to try to earn some extra income in the down season of other fisheries. They also risked their health and their lives in deplorable conditions – overcrowding, poor diet, the constant threat of ice blindness and “swile finger,” and the dangers of falling into the arctic water or being stranded on the ice for extended periods.<sup>9</sup> As steam power replaced sails in the 1860s and 1870s, the requirement for increased capital caused a concentration of the industry in larger firms and ports. The greater capacity of the new steamers to bring large numbers of sealers farther into the whelping ice created further pressure on the resource, and catches decreased to levels in the 200,000s and 300,000s by the latter decades of the

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7 The Labrador Front is a major whelping ice of the harp seal, situated off the northeast coast of Newfoundland and the southeast coast of Labrador.

8 Shannon Ryan, *A History of Newfoundland Sealing to 1914* (St. John's: Breakwater, 1994), Appendix, Table 2.5, p. 445. In 1803, the combined landsman and vessel hunt had taken just over 43,500 seals; see Ryan, *History of Newfoundland Sealing*, Appendix, Table Intro.12, p. 427.

9 “Swile finger” is a local term for a badly infected and inflamed finger resulting from repetitive work with pelts. The condition caused extreme pain for several weeks and usually resulted in a permanently locked finger joint or joints. Sealers often sought amputation of the affected finger because it interfered with their ability to carry out their sealing and fishing work.

19th century.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, owners struggled to find markets for their most important product – seal oil – as petroleum products became more readily available. Employment in the spring vessel fishery declined, and berths to the ice became increasingly competitive. And as Newfoundland's economy suffered various recessions related to declining fisheries and generally ineffective landward development, its sealing effort was much reduced by the early 20th century.<sup>11</sup>

The landsmen hunt maintained its important place in local sealing communities, which still utilized the entire animal and produced seal oil for local consumption and a reduced market demand.<sup>12</sup> By the 1950s, however, demand for the whitecoat pelt itself was increasing, not as much for its blubber as for its luxurious fur, which was finding a growing market in the fur fashion industry. Newspapers and trade papers of the period, nonetheless, indicate a diminishing presence of the Canadian sealing fleet at the Front throughout that decade and into the next, with just a handful of Nova Scotian vessels (often manned by Newfoundland sealers) in attendance that were occasionally joined by one or two Newfoundland vessels. Norway maintained a moderate-sized fleet, and the 1960s witnessed the appearance of large, well-equipped Russian sealing vessels: icebreakers with factory and refrigeration capacity and helicopters to seek out the seal herds.<sup>13</sup> While a number of government scientists and several observers from humane societies began attending the hunt and expressing concerns about killing methods and the sustainability of the hunt for both adult and young seals, the main thrust of various investigations, reports, and media coverage was to reach international agreement about quotas, opening and closing dates,

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10 Ryan, *History of Sealing*, Appendix, Table 3.7, p. 467.

11 For overviews of Newfoundland sealing in this period, see Ryan, *History of Sealing*, and James E. Candow, *Of Men and Seals: A History of the Newfoundland Seal Hunt* (Ottawa: National Historic Parks and Sites, Canadian Parks Service, Environment Canada, 1989).

12 "Land-Based Seal Hunt Is Important Seasonal Item In Local Economy," *Newfoundland Journal of Commerce* 23, no. 3 (March 1956): 23; "Seal Hunt by Steamers has Steadily Declined though Landsmen Continue to Make Large Catches Each Season," *Newfoundland Journal of Commerce* 24, no. 3 (March 1957): 21; Bruce Woodland, "Canada's Atlantic Seal Fishery," *Trade News* 10, no. 8 (February 1958): 3–6.

13 N.J. Berrill, "Hair Seals in Danger," *Nature Magazine* 46 (March 1953): 148, 162; "Newfoundland: Dwindling Seals," *Times* (31 March 1961): 11–12; "The Seal Hunt," *Bowring Magazine* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1961): 192; "The Dwindling Sealfishery," *Newfoundland Record* 1, no. 1 (March 1962): 9; R.A. Parsons, "The Menace of Freight Ships to Newfoundland's Sealing and Fishing Industry," *Whitty's Law Journal* 14, no. 2 (February 1966): 42–7.



and maintaining the resource for the benefit of the sealing industry.<sup>14</sup> But this conversation would change with the arrival of animal rights and animal welfare activists to protest the hunt in the mid-1960s and the 1970s.

The “moment” that triggered the shift from discourses about “conservation of the resource” to an international outcry against “the murder of baby seals” was the airing of a film by the CBC’s French-language television network in March 1965. *Les Phoques de la Banquise*, more commonly known as “the Artek film,” was first shown on German television and was quickly picked up by other networks. It contained footage of the hunt from the Magdalen Islands, Quebec, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence – including a gruesome scene of a sealer skinning a whitecoat alive and leaving it to die, screaming, on the ice. Images from the film were broadcast around the world, and an appalled international audience focused its wrath on Canadian sealers.<sup>15</sup> Most Newfoundland sealers were also revolted by the scene, claiming that live skinning was completely against their harvesting standards. They argued that they had developed expertise in dispatching the animals by a blow to the skull with a “gaff” – a long staff with a hook that also served as a safety device, helping them to pull ice pans together to facilitate walking over the icefields or to hook themselves out of freezing water if they fell through the ice.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, a House of Commons inquiry into the film revealed that the offensive footage had been staged – a finding that was based on a deposition of the Quebec sealer involved that he had been paid by Artek Films to skin the seal without first killing it. At the 1966 hunt, a majority of

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14 See, for example, “Great Seal Hunt: Icy Slaughter Off Newfoundland Yields More Than 200,000 Pelts,” *Life Magazine*, 15 May 1950, 64; G.M. Drover, “Bon Voyage to the 1952 Sealing Fleet,” *Newfoundlander* (St. John’s), March 1952; “Trip of Fat,” *Trade News* 7, no. 8 (January 1955): 11; Dr. Harry R. Lillie, “Seals of the Pack Ice,” *Journal of the Fauna Preservation Society* III, no. 2 (August 1955): 75–88; H.D. Fisher, “Utilization of Atlantic Harp Seal Populations,” North American Wildlife Conference, *Transactions* 20 (1955): 507–17; “Scientific Survey of Sealing Herds Continued this Year,” *Daily News* (St. John’s), 6 March 1953; Dr. Harry R. Lillie, “Seals of the Pack Ice,” *Journal of the Fauna Preservation Society* III, no. 2 (August 1955): 75–88; “Canadian Fisheries News,” *Trade News* 15, no. 4 (1961): 12–13; Dick Sergeant, “Harp Seals and the Sealing Industry,” *Canadian Audubon* 25, no. 2 (March–April 1963): 29–35; *Atlantic Fisherman and Shipping Review* (Sackville, NB), May 1964; Mark Ronayne, “Saddlebacks’ and ‘Bladdernoses,” *Canadian Geographical Journal* LXIX, no. 1 (July 1964): 10–11; and “New Regulations to Protect Seals: Audubon Society to Observe Sealing Operations,” *Canadian Audubon* (November–December 1964): 165–6.

15 Gerald Taaffe and Nicholas Steed, “The Bloody Smear on our Image Overseas,” *Maclean’s* 79, no. 5 (5 March 1966), 10A–11A.

16 While they have since adopted other killing methods – such as the Norwegian hakapik and high-powered rifles – most sealers still feel that a well-aimed blow with the gaff was, and is, the best way to kill the animal swiftly.



invited observers from humane societies deemed the gaff to be more efficient and humane than techniques used in abattoirs and noted that most carcasses they had studied had presented with crushed skulls, having been “rendered completely unconscious and unable to feel pain” before skinning.<sup>17</sup> However, the damage to the reputation of all seal harvesters had been done. In a 1966 article “The Cruel Seal Hunt,” Brian Davies (then, an observer for the New Brunswick SPCA) repeated the charge that whitecoats were being clubbed before their mothers’ eyes and skinned while still alive.<sup>18</sup> In the following years, newly forming environmental groups, such as the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and Greenpeace, as well as celebrities and media, descended upon whelping ices in the North Atlantic, particularly the Labrador Front, to protest what was described as a “savage” slaughter perpetrated by Newfoundland “barbarians.”<sup>19</sup>

Early Greenpeace activists, such as Bob Hunter, Paul Watson, Patrick Moore, and Rex Weyler, protested the hunt by creating “mind bombs” (after McLuhan) at the Front, throwing themselves between whitecoats and sealers and, at one point, putting their bodies in front of a charging sealing vessel to create images meant to “sail across an electronic sea” and “explode in people’s minds.”<sup>20</sup> Davies, founder of IFAW, shifted gears from merely observing and reporting on the hunt to “exploiting the goodwill of the international media” in order to stop the hunt altogether.<sup>21</sup> In 1976, he flew three stewardesses<sup>22</sup> out to the whelping ice to pose with the whitecoats; the stewardesses were meant to evoke feminine helplessness, echoing the plight of the young seals at the mercy of the hypermasculinity of the hunters. And situated as a foil to both was the

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17 Douglas H. Pimlott, “Seals and Sealing in the North Atlantic,” *Canadian Audubon*, March–April 1966, pp. 33–9. The majority included Tom Hughes and Dr. Norman Scollard of the Ontario Humane Society, John Walsh of the International Society for the Protection of Animals, Jacques Vallée of the Canadian SPCA, and Dr. Forbes MacLeod of the Saint John SPCA. Brian Davies and Dr. Elizabeth Simpson also attended, on behalf of the New Brunswick SPCA, but they did not endorse the majority’s joint statement.

18 Brian Davies, “The Cruel Seal Hunt,” *Weekend Magazine* 12 (19 March 1966): 36, 38–9. It is worth noting that two years later, veterinary pathologists Dr. H.C. Loliger of West Germany and Dr. Lars Karstad of Canada, who had been invited to observe the hunt by Davies, found that 96.7 per cent of the 361 seal carcasses they studied had been fully unconscious before skinning; see Candow, *Of Men and Seals*, 120.

19 Nicholas Steed, “Epilogue on a Massacre,” *Maclean’s* 79, no. 9 (2 May 1966): 3.

20 Robert Hunter, quoted in Rex Weyler, *Greenpeace: How a Group of Ecologists, Journalists, and Visionaries Changed the World* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2004), 73, 76.

21 Davies, quoted in Farley Mowat, *Rescue the Earth! Conversations with the Green Crusaders* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990), 152.

22 I am employing this older term to elicit its historical, sexualized connotation. These women were not brought out to the ice in any professional capacity.

chivalrous masculinity of the animal rights/welfare activists. Indeed, this new ecomasculinity was eroticized by some. As one of the stewardesses explained: “Basically what [Brian is] doing is sexy. Very sexy. So many women these days are bored and revolted by the traditional male thing – you know, going out in the woods and proving your manhood by killing animals – that they really get turned on by someone who saves animals.”<sup>23</sup> This spectacle on ice was repeated the following year, when Davies flew Yvette Mimieux to the ice and Swiss conservationist Franz Weber arrived with Brigitte Bardot.<sup>24</sup> “They lapped it up, the media,” Davies told me in a 2012 interview.<sup>25</sup> Davies knew his international audience well and was particularly good at using graphic, contrasting images in media campaigns: the whitecoat cowering from the dark-clothed sealer; the white ice covered with red blood; images of lightness and darkness; evocations of good and evil.<sup>26</sup> This mixture of female sexuality, blood, and violence in advertising and recruitment campaigns has continued to serve anti-sealing movements into the 21st century.<sup>27</sup>

Sealers and sealing communities were initially bewildered by this gendered and eroticized display on the ice, but they also soon became angry and frustrated, as evidenced by the sharp words exchanged with activists. For the most part, however, sealers just attempted to get on with their job without resorting to physical violence. One did, though, throw a recently killed and skinned whitecoat at Bardot’s feet during a press conference; it was not Newfoundland’s proudest moment.<sup>28</sup> Many sealers on the Great Northern

23 Quoted in Silver Donald Cameron, “Seals and Sinners: Over the Bloodied Ice, A Haze of Mixed Moralities,” *Evening Telegram: Weekend Magazine* 26, no. 22 (29 May 1976): 4.

24 “Swiss Group Plans to Disrupt the Seal Hunt,” *Evening Telegram* (St. John’s), 14 January 1977; “Swiss Conservationist Receives Warning from Sealing Skippers,” *Evening Telegram*, 17 January 1977; Brigitte Bardot, “A Labrador Journal,” *Greenpeace Chronicles*, no. 5 (July 1977): 10A-11A.

25 Brian Davies, interview by author, Sanibel Island, Florida, 18 January 2012, audio recording and typescript in possession of author; Cameron, “Seals and Sinners,” 4-11.

26 Davies interview.

27 PETA, in particular, has adopted this strategy, employing a scantily-clad Pamela Anderson in their campaigns as well as other, less famous but equally sexualized young women. See, for example, Dave Abel, “Topless protesters take on seal hunt,” *Vancouver Sun*, 10 April 2018, <https://torontosun.com/news/local-news/topless-protesters-take-on-seal-hunt-as-well-as-a-related-video> – “Peta Protest – ‘No More Seal Slaughter’ as Red Smoke Bombs Go Off,” YouTube, 10 April 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uw33i0PUZKM>; PETA, “PETA Members Pour Buckets of ‘Blood’ to Protest Seal Slaughter,” 11 April 2017, <https://www.peta.org/blog/photos-peta-members-pour-buckets-blood-protest-seal-slaughter/>; and PETA, “The Fight Against the Seal Slaughter Circles the Globe,” 1 April 2009, <https://www.peta.org/blog/fight-seal-slaughter-circles-globe/>.

28 Bardot, “Labrador Journal,” 11.

Peninsula carried out a non-violent, pro-sealing protest in 1976, picketing Davies's hotel in St. Anthony and lying on the snow between the hotel and Davies's helicopter to try to prevent him from flying out to the whelping ice.<sup>29</sup> In 1977, landsmen leaders such as Roy Pilgrim also sat down with Greenpeace members Bob Hunter and Patrick Moore and convinced them to halt Greenpeace plans to spray-dye whitecoat pelts green so as not to ruin markets for the landsmen seal hunt – a much smaller-scale effort that some Greenpeace members saw as less damaging to the herd than the large-vessel commercial hunt offshore.<sup>30</sup> The decision can also be read as a sound public relations move, as Greenpeace did not want to be seen as an elitist, urban movement ganging up on the rural working class. Yet there was compassion and compromise in this resolution as well.<sup>31</sup>

But by then international outrage had been fully stoked against the sealers, regardless of the nature of their sealing efforts, and vitriolic letters – missives addressed directly to, and thus targeting, individual sealers – were pouring into sealing communities on Newfoundland's northeast coast. This discourse was saturated with images of deviant, bloodthirsty masculinity:

Compared to you, a pimp is a hero and his whore is a saint . . . I pray that the death you harbor in your heart sinks into your groin to render you impotent. Better that no child be born than that one be born to your sort. Better that such a child sink into eternal darkness than that it exist to pass along the heritage of bloodlust to another generation.<sup>32</sup>

YOU DIRTY ROTTEN SON OF A BITCH, IF I COULD GET TO YOU I'D BEAT YOU SENSELESS AND THEN I'D SKIN YOUR HIDE. YOU ARE A MEAN BASTARD AND YOU WILL PAY FOR

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29 Sandra Gwynn, "The Media Go to the Seal Hunt: Radical Chic Versus the Newfie Swilers," *Saturday Night* 92, no. 4 (May 1977): 26–9.

30 Some members of Greenpeace left the organization at this point, decrying its passivity and bureaucracy. One of its most militant activists, Paul Watson, founded Earthforce in 1977, which would become the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society in 1981.

31 Weyler, *Greenpeace*, 358–61.

32 Maura Baird, Santa Cruz, California, to Pearce Cull, St. Anthony, March 20, 1977, in personal scrapbook of Francis Patey, St. Anthony, NL and also in Canadian Sealers Union fonds, MF-255, Centre for Newfoundland Studies (CNS) Archive, Memorial University, St. John's.

YOUR SINS. YOUR LUCK[Y] I DON'T GO UP THERE NOW AND DO IT. I HOPE YOU DIE!<sup>33</sup>

Persons such as you and the other inhuman and unhumane beings there in Newfoundland are beneath contempt . . . You aren't even brave (?) enough to kill anything but baby seals, newly born. Such savagery is unthinkable in a civilized society – but whoever said Newfoundland is a “civilized society”? You even use clubs to do your savagery: shades of Neanderthal Man!<sup>34</sup>

I have heard that you are very tired of being labeled a murderer, but “If the shoe fits, wear it!” There is no other title that so aptly fits you and your group of thugs. You obviously have extremely low intelligence.<sup>35</sup>

This outpouring of anger and hatred took Newfoundland sealers, and Newfoundlanders in general, by surprise. Newfoundlanders saw sealing as an essential part of maintaining a marine-oriented livelihood in communities that had been almost completely dependent on the sea for survival for some four centuries. Fishing families on the northeast coast, who carried out various fisheries from late spring to late fall, depended on sealing to see them through the lean winter months and to provide some income to help them “gear up” for these other fisheries. Local communities saw sealers as responsible breadwinners, even courageous to the extent that they endured highly dangerous working conditions to help their families survive. Most were respected fathers and grandfathers, caring husbands, sons, and brothers. They were responsible community members, who looked after families and neighbours. If the seal harvest generated any extra cash, the sealers' good fortune was reflected in the collection plates of local churches in the late spring.

But after intensive lobbying by IFAW and Greenpeace, the European Economic Community banned the import of products derived from whitecoats in 1983, and it and its successor, the European Union, have

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33 John McLaughlin, Miami, Florida, to Hector Taylor, St. Anthony, NL, 1977, Canadian Sealers Union fonds, MF-255, CNS Archive (emphasis in original).

34 Joseph J. Christ, McHenry, Illinois, to “Sir,” 1977, Canadian Sealers Union fonds, MF-255, CNS Archive.

35 Susan Wright (no address given) to Roy Pilgrim, St. Anthony, NL, 1977, Canadian Sealers Union fonds, MF-255, CNS Archive.

continued the prohibition ever since. Although sealers and the Canadian and Newfoundland governments attempted to negotiate with activists in meetings and in the media, discussions ended in a further entrenchment of positions. In the following years, IFAW led a wide-scale boycott of all Canadian fish products, forcing the Canadian government to ban the offshore hunting of whitecoats and bluebacks (newborn hood seals) in Canadian waters in 1987. These measures brought the larger commercial hunt to its knees, making it an unprofitable venture for sealing vessels and companies operating within the Canadian regulatory regime.<sup>36</sup> Newfoundland landsmen had actually been supporting the moratorium on whitecoats and bluebacks since 1982.<sup>37</sup> The fall-out from these anti-sealing campaigns, nonetheless, had devastating effects on both the landsman hunt and the Inuit seal hunt. Still, the Newfoundland landsman hunt continued to employ some 5,000 men in the 1980s, harvesting juvenile, bedlamer, and adult seals on the ice close to their communities either on foot or from with small vessels – motorboats, 35 feet and under, and longliners, 65 feet and under. By 2016 the number of commercial sealing license holders in Canada had increased to 9,710, but only about 1,000 of them were active.<sup>38</sup> Yet the reduction in the number of landsmen had nothing to do with a decrease in seal herds but rather reflected a declining demand in world markets that remained convinced that newborn seals were still being harvested, despite 30-year-old bans. In particular, the condemnation of the “cruelty” of the hunt persisted, even though Canada implemented a three-step killing process that had been recommended by an independent, international group of veterinarians and approved by the EU’s Food Safety Authority as effective in killing seals “without causing avoidable pain, distress, fear, and other forms of suffering.”<sup>39</sup> Canada’s Marine Mammals Regulations were amended in 2009

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36 Davies interview; “Feds Must Fight British Boycott,” *Evening Telegram*, 8 February 1984; Michael Clugston, “A Boycott to Kill a Seal Hunt,” *Maclean’s* 97, no. 13 (26 March 1984), 24; “Canadian Fish Boycott: The Campaign is On,” *Evening Telegram*, 11 May 1984; Stephen Kimber, “Without the Seal Fishery, What’s a Man Supposed to Do? The Boycott has Dealt a Cruel Blow to the Livelihoods of Landsmen like Jack Troake,” *Financial Post Magazine*, 1 March 1985, 18–24; Peter Dauvergne, *The Shadows of Consumption: Consequences for the Global Environment* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 183–92.

37 Candow, *Of Men and Seals*, 144.

38 “Statistics on the Seal Harvest,” Fisheries and Oceans Canada website, <https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fisheries-peches/seals-phoques/seal-stats-phoques-eng.html>.

39 See Bruce Smith, “Improving Humane Practice in the Canadian Harp Seal Hunt: A Report of the Independent Veterinarians’ Working Group on the Canadian Harp Seal Hunt,” BLSmith Group, August 2005 as well as Campbell Clark, “New Sealing Rules in Place for More Humane Hunt,” *Globe and Mail*, 10 March 2008, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/new-sealing-rules-in-place-for-more-humane-hunt/article18446602/>.

to implement these three stages: 1) shooting the animal or striking the animal (with a hakapik or club) on the top of the cranium; 2) checking or palpating the skull to ensure that is crushed; and 3) bleeding the animal by severing two auxiliary arteries beneath the front flippers for at least one minute.<sup>40</sup> Yet animal rights activists have represented these efforts as even more barbaric, portraying sealers as frenzied by blood-lust – no longer content to just shoot the animals, but rushing onto the ice to club them and slit their throats.<sup>41</sup>

Nonetheless, these working-class sealers have continued to struggle to position themselves as responsible and ethical harvesters. In exploring these efforts, it is important to listen to the life stories of Newfoundland landsmen and to attend not only to rationality of argument but also to affect – the feelings and emotions they reveal – in order to problematize facile representations of “club-wielding, gun-toting” hypermasculinity.

Clearly, the landsmen distance themselves from this image. They also dissociate themselves from the cultural misrepresentation of the “jolly ice hunters” – the rakish, happy-go-lucky adventurers that had been created by middle-class discourse in Newfoundland and Britain to encourage working-class sealers to take part in the large-vessel offshore hunt.<sup>42</sup> Most of them feel apprehension and fear of the very real dangers that they encounter. And while they appreciate the comradeship of other sealers, they do not use the hunt to escape into a homosocial idyll. Most have usually felt the tug of home and family while they were away, especially in difficult weather and ice conditions. Take the sentiments of a first-time sealer, trapped on the ice in a snow “dwhig” (sudden squall), who sadly noted to a fellow sealer: “You know, John . . . they’ll be all home with mother, tonight . . . They’ll be all home with mother but

40 Government of Canada, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, “Ensuring the Seal Hunt is Humane,” 1 March 2016.

41 See Paul Watson, “The Seven Deadly Sins of the Sealers – The Seven Heavenly Virtues of Seal Defenders,” Sea Shepherd UK website, 11 April 2012, <https://www.seashepherd.org.uk/news-and-commentary/commentary/the-seven-deadly-sins-of-the-sealers-the-seven-heavenly-virtues-of-seal-defenders.html>; Katherine Sullivan, “Striking, Checking, and Bleeding: Canada’s ‘Humane’ Seal-Slaughter Process,” PETA website, 27 April 2017, <https://www.peta.org/blog/canada-seal-slaughter-process-inhumane/>; “About the Canadian Seal Hunt: Responsible for the Deaths of Hundreds of Thousands of Baby Seals Each Year,” Humane Society of the United States webpage, n.d., <https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/about-canadian-seal-hunt>; and Sheryl Fink, “IFAW’s History Working to End Canada’s East Coast Commercial Seal Hunt,” IFAW webpage, 28 March 2019, <https://www.ifaw.org/eu/journal/ifaws-history-working-to-end-canadas-east-coast-commercial-seal-hunt>.

42 I have discussed this discursive process in Willeen Keough, “(Re-)telling Newfoundland Sealing Masculinity: Narrative and Counter-Narrative,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 21, no. 1 (2010): 131-50.

me.<sup>43</sup> They have certainly not been hunting for sport or trophies, or seeking a sense of manhood that had been lost in the process of urbanization and industrialization.<sup>44</sup> Most have found the killing of an animal, especially a very appealing young animal, difficult. Even the most experienced sealers say that they do not enjoy the killing and that they never really get used to the red blood smeared across the white ice, but that they do it as humanely as possible because sealing is essential to surviving in their coastal communities. They most certainly do not see their environment as a playground for hypermasculine recreation, but rather as a space that must be respected – both physically and spiritually. John Gillett, a landsman from Durrell, articulates that sense of unworldly connection in a reminiscence about a recent voyage in his longliner (a fishing vessel equipped with a long line from which multiple baited hooks are attached):

So, we were out, ah, we were out there about 35 miles southeast of the Funk Islands, and the wind was nor'west about 40 to 50 knots, very clear, clear night. And, ah, I went out and, you know, just had a look around about 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning there. And, ah, when I went out on the deck, there was no other lights – you couldn't see another boat, you couldn't see anything. All you could see was the, uh, stars, you know, they were right in three dimensions . . . . And you could look right up through, like you're looking into heaven, you know. And, ah, this is where you feel very, very small, you know . . . . You're, you're in somebody else's domain, that's right, you know . . . that's right, you know.<sup>45</sup>

Like other landsmen, Gillett realizes that he is part of systems, both worldly and transcendent, that extend well beyond his own concerns and experiences.

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43 John Gillett, interview by author, 3 August 2009, Durrell, NL, audio recording and transcript in possession of the author.

44 For this type of interpretation of recreational hunting as a means to stave off the over-civilizing effects of industrialization, see Lisa M. Fine, "Rights of Men, Rites of Passage: Hunting and Masculinity at Reo Motors of Lansing, Michigan, 1945-1975," *Journal of Social History* 33, no. 4 (Summer 2000): 805-23; Tina Loo, "Of Moose and Men: Hunting for Masculinities in British Columbia, 1880-1939," *Western Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 296-319; Simon J. Bronner, "This Is Why We Hunt: Social-Psychological Meanings of the Traditions and Rituals of Deer Camp," *Western Folklore* 63, no. 1/2 (Winter/Spring 2004): 11-50; and Mark Simpson, "Power of Liveness: Reading Hornaday's *Camp-Fires*," in Manore and Miner, eds., *Culture of Hunting*, 56-85.

45 Gillett interview.



These landsmen also acknowledge that the large commercial hunt in the 19th and early 20th centuries was destroying the harp seal population and could not have been sustained. But the sealers point out that they were also trapped in the maw of industrial capitalism: they were not driven by hunger for profit but by the need to survive through a hunt that had moved beyond their control. It is unfortunate, then, if not rather disingenuous on the part of protesters, that the sealers themselves became and continue to be the target of the brunt of international anger. They, too, recognize the immorality of that large-scale, capitalist effort offshore, which separated them “from the sea and the topsoil that feeds us.” Some of my older narrators participated very occasionally in the offshore hunt, out of economic necessity, when they were younger. As a result, one observed, they were “forced to do things to satisfy the market, and that’s very destructive to the food that’s feeding us.”<sup>46</sup> But those whose families have been primarily involved in the landsman hunt for generations argue that they have always been good stewards of the environment: “Our [landsmen] forefathers . . . had more insight and were more conservation-minded than what the protesters are now, because they only took what they needed” – tens of seals, not thousands – to provide for their families and other community members.<sup>47</sup> Although landsmen catches increased during the 20th century with the adoption of motorboats and then longliners, this hunt has remained primarily a landward effort that has been enmeshed in year-long fishing activities.<sup>48</sup> Sealing was just something that coastal communities did

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46 Raymond Elliott, interview by author, 23 July 2009, St. Anthony, NL, audio recording and transcript in possession of author.

47 Boyd Noel, interview by author, 25 July 2009, St. Anthony, NL, audio recording and transcript in possession of author.

48 Landsmen catches are very difficult to locate in the records. Occasionally, one finds in a newspaper the catch of a particular district or community for a specific year, but there are yawning gaps in coverage. The catches of the larger vessel fishery are more easily traced because governments, individual sealing vessel owners, and sealing firms kept statistics more regularly. But even these were sometimes compilations of vessel and landsmen catches. DFO recently compiled some separate figures for landsmen catches from 1946 to 2019, but these figures combine catches from the Front and the Gulf of St. Lawrence. We can see in those figures, though, a pattern that is repeated in anecdotal sources in relation to Newfoundland. The landsmen effort began to equal and sometimes outpace the foundering offshore industry in the 1950s to 1982, when the average annual landsmen catch (Front and Gulf) was 64,268 seals. From the 1983 ban on the whitecoat hunt to 1995, the average annual catch for both areas dropped to 50,781 seals. As a result of the Canadian government’s significant increase in TACs (total allowable catches) from 1996 onward, the landsmen hunt responded with average annual catches of 264,675 seals up to and including 2008. After the EU imposed a ban in 2009 on all seal products other than those deriving from Indigenous hunts, the landsmen effort at the Front and in the Gulf shrank back to an annual average harvest of 63,068 seals. These

as part of “the rhythm of the seasons,” sealers explain.<sup>49</sup> It heralded the start of the fishing year, and the income helped fishers prepare for other fisheries: herring, then capelin, followed by groundfish such as cod, turbot, and flounder (and since the 1990s crab and shrimp have also become important species in the fishing cycle along the northeast coast). The intrinsic logic of pursuing these interlocking activities to survive in rural communities along the northeast coast seems lost on those critics who argue that sealing produces only a portion of sealers’ incomes. Jack Troake, a sealing skipper descended from a long line of swilers (sealers) in Twillingate, describes the vulnerability of coastal people’s livelihoods and the havoc that can be wrought when any part of that cycle of survival starts unraveling:

Life here goes in circles. . . . Some years because of the weather, you won’t be able to start groundfishing before July month, and the weather will get bad and you’ll be finished again September. But that year you might have a real good sealing season and make up for it. . . . But when they start taking away parts of the circle, like stopping the seal hunt, well, by and by, the whole circle’s gone and that’s the end of it.<sup>50</sup>

This is not to say that sealers demand the right to hunt regardless of its impact on the environment. But they feel that they have developed a better sense than most outside “experts” of what is happening in the natural world because they are completely immersed in it. In many ways, their understanding of their place in the ecosystem is very like that of Inuit sealers. It is also traditional, local knowledge that deserves acknowledgement and respect.<sup>51</sup>

Landsmen and sealing communities have increasingly presented themselves as conservationists who are keenly attuned to the needs of the environment.

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figures are derived from Gary B. Stenson and Peter Upward, “Updated Estimates of Harp Seal Bycatch and Total Removals in the Northwest Atlantic,” Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat, DFO, Research Document 2020/014, Table 1, March 2020.

49 Elliott interview.

50 Jack Troake, quoted in Stephen Kimber, “Without the Seal Fishery,” 24.

51 A willingness to recognize the importance of traditional, local knowledge about the fisheries has been growing in Newfoundland and Labrador among academics and government fisheries managers. See, for example, Barbara Neis and Lawrence Felt, eds., *Finding Our Sea Legs: Linking Fishery People and their Knowledge with Science and Management* (St. John’s: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University, 2000).

“We’re on the ocean,” one told me. “We see what’s going on . . . . We know what to look for.”<sup>52</sup> These sealers feel that they are far more in tune with nature than scientists and “urbanites” who are too removed from the realities of living in a coastal environment to appreciate fully the interconnectedness of all species. And they argue that they come from a cultural tradition that has always respected the ocean: an understanding that “you should use it wisely, and if you use it wisely, it will always be there.”<sup>53</sup> Sealers see themselves as very much part of the ecosystem – just one of the species that is part of maintaining a balance. “Life depends on life,” Allan Richards told me. “There’s no way out. Fish eat smaller fish, and smaller fish depend on an insect . . . . If I’m going to live, an animal must die.”<sup>54</sup> Animal rights activists might take issue with this line of argument, but it does reflect the limited options for proper nutrition in northern communities on the island. Ray Elliott compared himself to the polar bear. “We were all predators,” he observed; yet predators have their place in the system as well.<sup>55</sup> Sealers wonder, then, why they are not seen as a part of the ecosystem that is worth saving – why a sustainable landsman hunt is seen as out of place and why their local traditions and knowledge, their need to maintain a marine-based livelihood, are so devalued.

Sealers, meanwhile, have experienced the devastation of rural communities wrought by poorly managed marine harvesting, dictated by scientists and politicians far removed from the outcomes of the quotas and regulations that they have imposed. By the early 1980s sealers were worried not only about lost sealing income but about the effect that increasing herds would have on the seals’ prey, such as cod and capelin. The worst of many fishers’ fears seemed to be realized when, in the face of drastically declining stocks, the Canadian government called a moratorium on harvesting northern cod in 1992, adding other groundfish species the following year.<sup>56</sup> Although Newfoundland fishers

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52 Gillett interview.

53 Mark Small, interview by author, 27 July 2009, Wild Cove, NL, audio recording and transcript in possession of author.

54 Allan Richards, interview by author, 25 July 2009, St. Anthony, NL, audio recording and transcript in possession of author.

55 Elliott interview.

56 For discussions of the mismanagement of the northern cod stocks by government policy makers and scientists, see Dean Bavington, *Managed Annihilation: An Unnatural History of the Newfoundland Cod Collapse* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010) and Miriam Wright, *A Fishery for Modern Times: The State and the Industrialization of the Newfoundland Fishery, 1934-1968* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001). By the end of 1993, six cod populations, American plaice, flounder, and witch flounder had been included in the moratorium.

acknowledged that overfishing offshore (both Canadian and international) was part of the problem, common sense told them that allowing larger fish-eating mammal populations to increase dramatically was also wreaking havoc with smaller species in the food chain. “Nature is crying out,” one landsman told me. “The resources of the sea are no longer in balance.”<sup>57</sup> Another argued that sealers have always “respected the role of the seal in the environment,” but that the privileging of this species above others would ultimately require a seal cull if groundfish in Newfoundland waters were to be saved.<sup>58</sup> A return to equilibrium was needed.<sup>59</sup>

Scientists offered evidence on both sides of the debates about increasing seal quotas and actual culls. DFO and FRCC studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s, for example, revealed that the population of harp seals off Newfoundland and Labrador’s coast had “ballooned” to some three million animals and were having “catastrophic” effects on fish stocks, including the northern cod. Animal rights experts countered that cod made up only about 1 per cent of the seals’ diet, so that their impact on cod stocks was negligible. Dr. Leslie Harris, of Memorial University, pointed out that, even at this very conservative estimate, basic arithmetic revealed that seals might be consuming at least 50,000 tonnes of northern cod per year, with a more likely estimate being 100,000 tonnes. He also argued that capelin, an essential food of the northern cod, comprised 25 percent of the seals’ diet.<sup>60</sup>

Newfoundland fishers and sealers, already cynical about “objective” research that undergirded such varying opinions, had other compelling evidence to consider. Fishers were observing seals with voracious appetites (perhaps victims of their own unsustainable numbers) becoming tangled in fishing gear in search of prey, coming deep into bays, and crawling up into

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57 Richards interview.

58 John Blackmore, interview by author, 6 August 2009, Port Union, NL, audio recording and transcript in possession of author.

59 Similar concerns have been raised about the re-introduction of otters to the waters off British Columbia. Otters had been over-hunted for their pelts and were almost extinct in the area by the 1920s. They were reintroduced to the waters between 1969 and 1972 and are now so numerous that local inshore fishers, including Indigenous groups, are worried about their impact on species that fishers depend upon for their livelihoods and food security, such as sea urchins, clams, crab, and abalone. See Hamdi Issawi, “Otter, otter everywhere,” *Maclean’s* 133, no. 9 (October 2020): 58–60 and “Return of Sea Otters to B.C. Coast Worth Millions, But Not Everyone Seeing the Benefits, Study Says,” CBC News, 11 June 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/science/sea-otter-study-1.5608282>.

60 Ted Phillips, “The Case in Favour of a Revived Seal Hunt,” *Newfoundland Herald* 45, no. 6 (3 February 1990): 112–3; FRCC, *Conservation – Stay the Course*, Report to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans (Ottawa: Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 1994).

the woods for food. Videos surfaced of seals charging fishing nets, trapping and eating cod in a cove in Bonavista Bay, biting livers out of cod and leaving the gutted fish along the ocean floor.<sup>61</sup> In June 1999, the House of Commons fisheries committee recommended that the seal herd be cut in half.<sup>62</sup> Even the Canadian Nature Federation approved a limited cull to protect prey species, provided that the impact on seal numbers be monitored and that no federal subsidies be offered to provide any form of incentive.<sup>63</sup>

Interestingly, amidst calls by politicians, sealing companies, and many fishers to increase seal quotas and even to revive the larger offshore seal hunt, some of the province's most respected landsmen provided a voice of sober second thought about re-introducing such an intensive sealing effort. Harold Small of Wild Cove, president of the Northeast Coast Sealers Co-operative, warned against "killing seals just because they're out there." If anything, he noted, the re-instatement of an offshore hunt would set back the careful efforts of the landsmen to create markets for adult seals. He also warned against making the seal the scapegoat for the declining cod fishery – "trying to cover up the wrongs the deep sea fishing fleet have committed in destroying our fish stocks."<sup>64</sup> In 1994, Mark Small of Wild Cove, landsman and president of the Canadian Sealers Association, questioned whether the seal population was growing as dramatically as some were indicating, and he particularly warned against permitting non-professional sealers on the ice to harvest seals – a decision that would result in an inhumane hunt.<sup>65</sup> Wilf Aylward of St. Anthony

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- 61 David Chidley, quoted by Jean Edwards Stacey, "Fishermen Plagued by Net-Busting Harp Seals," *Evening Telegram*, 29 June 1993; John Efford, quoted in Mike Flynn, "FPI Head has Video Showing Seals Eating Fish in Nets, Efford Claims," *Evening Telegram*, 3 May 1994; Glen Whiffen, "Fishermen Say Seals Putting Catches on Ice," *Evening Telegram*, 4 June 1995; Glen Whiffen, "Common Science: Sealers Find Stomachs Filled with Small Cod," *Evening Telegram*, 25 February 1996; Glen Whiffen, "Seals Take to Ground," *Evening Telegram*, 9 February 1998; Glen Whiffen, "Trapped Cod Slaughtered by Seals: Witness," *Evening Telegram*, 23 February 1999; Anne Barker, "Devastation at Deer Island Tickle: Diver Finds Thousands of Cod Carcasses Left Behind by Seals," *Advertiser* (Grand Falls-Windsor), 1 March 1999; Brian Callahan, "Video Captures Mass Fish Kill: Cameraman," *Evening Telegram*, 3 April 1999; Jack Duffett, St. John's, Letter-to-Editor, *Downhomer* 11, no. 11 (April 1999): 57-8; Erin Anderssen, "New Seal Squabble Erupts Over Cod Carnage," *Globe and Mail*, 18 May 1999.
- 62 Stephen Thorne, "Cut Herd in Half: Committee Supports Seal Reduction," *Western Star* (Corner Brook), 4 June 1999.
- 63 Allan Stein, "CNF Update: Submission to the Second Seal Forum, St. John's, 2 October 1995," *Osprey* 26, no. 3-4 (December 1995): 151-3.
- 64 Harold Small, quoted in Moira Baird, "Sealers Head Opposes Hunt If Markets Not There," *Evening Telegram*, 23 February 1991.
- 65 Mark Small, quoted by Bernie Bennett, "Sealers Opposed to Open Permits," *Evening Telegram*, 8 May 1994.

cautioned discretion until a DFO survey established more exact numbers: “I don’t think we should go out and slaughter seals just for the sake of getting rid of them.”<sup>66</sup> Jack Troake of Twillingate agreed: “It’s not the seals’ fault that there’s not enough fish for us and them,” he told a journalist from Ottawa.<sup>67</sup> These sealers were stressing several key themes of landsman discourse shaped in conversation with the evolving nature of the ecosystem they were part of: seal harvesting must be sustainable, the hunt must be professional and humane, and the seal is not the enemy of coastal communities.

These sealers have continued their efforts to set standards in the industry and ensure that they are being met by all practitioners. In the past three decades, they have worked on creating a professional group of qualified sealing specialists: ensuring that killing methods are humane, committing fully to a more sustainable landsman hunt, training in new technologies such as radar on board small boats, observing regulations around seal harvesting licenses, and forming the Canadian Sealers’ Association (in 1982) to oversee the landsman effort and lobby on its behalf.<sup>68</sup> One of my narrators, a landsman who had occasionally worked in the offshore hunt, even credited this transition in part to encounters with anti-sealing protestors in the late 20th century:

What I have found, with all of this protest and the various groups, is I’ve learned a few things. Maybe, yes, I did some things wrong and I admitted that, but from all of this I have learned, and not only me, but hundreds of our sealers, have learned to be more professional through the debates that have taken place over the years. So if there’s any credit I could give to some of these groups, it’s that, yes, there was some people who went out and who probably didn’t respect animals the way they should, but we’ve educated ourselves and we’ve learned a lot of things, and if there was people who done things in a cruel way, you know, we have decided that if you’re going to go

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66 “Sealer Doesn’t Want Seal Cull,” *Northern Pen*, 15 March 1999.

67 Jack Troake, quoted by Graeme Hamilton, “Sealers Fight for a Way of Life,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 5 April 1997.

68 Various interviews with landsmen sealers cited above; Randy White, “Doing Their Best to Keep Sealing Alive,” *Newfoundland Herald* 39, no. 14 (31 March 1984): 23; “Sealers to Set Up Co-op; Hoping for New Industry,” *Evening Telegram*, 27 March 1985; Calvin Coish, “Can the Seal Hunt be Brought Back?” *Atlantic Advocate* 77, no. 7 (March 1987): 32-4; Newfoundland Department of Development, “The Troakes – A Family of Sealers,” *This Land* 2, no. 1 (1987): 41-4.

out, you're going to do your job right, and . . . do [your] work in a professional manner.<sup>69</sup>

Those few who fail to meet these standards are seen by other landsmen as “amateurs” and “yahoos” – a disgrace to the industry.<sup>70</sup> While regulations and penalties can also be a deterrent to inhumane killings, they can be circumvented in small outharbours. Yet there is also a strong cultural ethic among landsmen to carry out their work proficiently and humanely. In 2016, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans observed that in some 3,000 inspections carried out over the previous five years by DFO’s fishery officers, 96 per cent of Canadian sealers had been in compliance with the Canadian Marine Mammals Regulations.<sup>71</sup>

So sealers feel that they have been betrayed by many animal rights activists who have not only failed to recognize non-Indigenous human populations as part of the ecosystem but have continued to deploy the discourse of an “inhumane” hunt to create huge war chests for other causes, leaving the sealers with no other way to supplement their livelihoods in areas that have few or no alternative work opportunities. Executive Director Kenneth Brynaert of the Canadian Wildlife Federation warned in 1987 that animal rights activism could potentially “destroy the traditional lifestyles of Canadians whose livelihood depends on wildlife resources.” Neither conservation nor humane killing principles were at stake in the hunt, he observed, but the highly emotional campaign run by the animal rights movement had blurred in the public mind “the distinction between animal rights and conservation.”<sup>72</sup> The conflation of conservationist hunting with cruelty and “savagery” has continued into the 21st century. As a result, activists have bred a disdain for working-class harvesters and a callous disregard for disrupting local economies and ways of life. The

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69 Small interview.

70 These terms cropped up in numerous interviews about outliers. They should not be conflated with the traditional term of “bedlamer boy,” which referred to a novice sealer (a “bedlamer” being a young seal) who was on his first trip to the ice and was considered to be in training. According to my informants, more experienced sealers took time with these novices to ensure that they learned the skills of the industry well.

71 Government of Canada, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, “Ensuring the Seal Hunt is Humane,” 1 March 2016, <https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fisheries-peches/seals-phoques/humane-sans-cruaute-eng.html>.

72 “Animal Rights Movement Betrays Conservationists, Will Do More Harm Than Good, says Federation Head,” *Evening Telegram*, 26 March 1987.



very real consequences of that contempt have been the devastation of fishing communities and the rural depopulation of the province.

And perhaps this is now the landmen's biggest fear. I have heard landmen talk about extremely difficult voyages – getting lost in snowstorms, walking for miles in blizzards to reach safety, losing boats and pelts and lives – with a tremendous amount of stoicism, even fatalism, that are also articulations of an older sealing masculinity. But the potential death of sealing and fishing communities provokes profound emotions among the sealers: anxiety about their livelihoods, despair about the loss of a coastal way of life that stretches back for centuries, and heartbreak at the sight of young people heading out over the highway to the mainland with all their belongings packed in U-Haul trailers.

Mark Small talks about his own feelings of distress and frustration in trying to fight larger, wealthier forces that have continued to attack the small-scale landsman hunt:

It was an emotional issue for me because it was a part of my livelihood; it was a part of our people's culture. . . . For 400 years, this has been a way of life for many families growing up in coastal communities. And there was a loss of life many, many times . . . . I don't mean to put culture ahead of conservation or humaneness when it comes to taking any animal. But . . . there was those people that were, were coming at us from various parts of the world . . . [claiming] that those people in Newfoundland and Labrador in rural areas, they don't need the seal hunt, it's not important to them . . . . And, you know, . . . if you make \$2-3-4,000 from seal hunting or seal harvesting or the seal fishery – whatever, I prefer seal fishery – that's a lot of money to a person that only probably has an annual income of \$10,000 or \$12,000 a year. Two or three thousand dollars may not be much to someone who is making \$40- or \$50- or \$60,000; but to our people, who live in those small communities and depend on the land and the sea for a livelihood, it meant a lot. So . . . then you were called things that wasn't very pleasant, and you knew . . . in your own heart and, and feeling that this is not right. You're not a barbarian, you're not a savage, you're not a cruel person. . . . If you're depending on these resources to, to survive and to feed your family and . . . educate your children, . . . then that's very important to you. And to

see people who don't really understand how much it means, to come and say, "We're going to take that away from you, because we don't think you needs this; . . . we think the way you're harvesting these resources is wrong, uh, it's cruel, and it has to be stopped. You have to give up that way of life." Man-oh-man, that, that, that was a lot . . .<sup>73</sup>

Yet Small and other landsmen have remained in the industry. Juvenile and adult seal pelts are still used for local clothing and boots, meat is still being bottled for local consumption, and flipper pie is a very welcome and nutritious addition to the local diet in the spring. But it has also become imperative for these landsmen to find new markets, develop new products, and market themselves as responsible coastal harvesters. As did their ancestors, they have continued to make efforts to utilize the full animal, albeit with a modern twist: producing canned seal meat, seal sausages, and pepperoni for broader consumption; manufacturing seal oil capsules as health supplements; and processing organs such as heart and liver as specialty food items, by-products for poultry food, and adult seal pelts for a wider clothing market. In some cases, they have coordinated their efforts. On the Baie Verte Peninsula, for example, a cluster of plants have developed over the past three decades to share the same catches: one, processing pelts; another, canning seal meat; a third, making seal oil capsules. But the landsmen know that they have an uphill climb as environmentalist and animal rights groups continue to batter away at their modest efforts, still using the whitecoat – not hunted since the late 1980s – as their poster child.<sup>74</sup>

Small once described the tightrope on which landsmen were balanced as he spoke before the Royal Commission on Sealing in 1985:

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73 Small interview.

74 Recent examples include "Demand For Seal Products Has Fallen – So Why Do Canadians Keep Hunting?" *National Geographic*, 25 April 2017, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2017/04/wildlife-watch-canada-harp-seal-hunt/>; "Bloody Seal Hunt," Last Chance for Animals website, 29 April 2016, <https://www.lcanimal.org/index.php/campaigns/other-issues/canadian-seal-hunt/>; Aisling Maria Cronin, "Take Action to End the Cruel Canadian Seal Hunt Today," Living Green Planet website, 10 April 2017, <https://www.onegreenplanet.org/animalsandnature/end-the-cruel-canadian-seal-hunt/>; and Paul Watson, "The Strategy Behind Sea Shepherd's Opposition to the Canadian Seal Slaughter," Sea Shepherd Conservation Society website, 13 April 2015, <https://seashepherd.org/2015/04/13/the-strategy-behind-sea-shepherds-opposition-to-the-canadian-seal-slaughter/>.

Man's role on this planet is not to preserve what nature provides, but to conserve it . . . . We depend on renewable marine resources and we have a responsibility to utilize them wisely. This year for the first time I will not take my longliner out sealing, except to get meat for family and neighbors. Many thousands of fishermen like me have too much pride to let our industry go. We want to survive by the work of our own hands, with the pride and dignity of an earned income. We want to contribute to the economy. Canadians do not know who the endangered species really is. As a sealer, as a fisherman, standing before you today, I say to you that I am the endangered species. I am endangered but I will fight back and I will survive.<sup>75</sup>

What animal rights activists heard in this moment was anthropocentric arrogance. But it was much more a *cri de coeur*, rooted in a conservationist masculinity shared by landsmen who wanted to maintain a sustainable inshore hunt – and thereby, rural communities – along the northeast coast of Newfoundland. These sealers and fishers continue to walk that tightrope today.

The question remains as to why their environmental ethos has never been embraced by a more broadly framed ecomasculinity. Individuals and families in these communities have harvested seals in small boats since the 17th century, taking seals as they came close to land in a process that differs quite profoundly from the rapacious, large-vessel, capitalist ventures of the 19th and 20th centuries. Landsmen have agreed with activists that the large-vessel, offshore hunt was destructive. They have changed their killing methods (although they still maintain that the original gaff is the most humane) and made efforts to professionalize their industry. They have treated the environment with respect and a strong appreciation of the need for balance among all species, including themselves. Still, they continue to find themselves sidelined by anti-sealing rhetoric that represents them as “savages” and “barbarians.”<sup>76</sup>

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75 Mark Small, quoted in “Ending Widespread Myths,” *Decks Awash* 14, no. 2 (March–April 1985): 67.

76 See, for example: Emily Barca, “Canada’s Annual Seal Slaughter Just Ended: Should There Be Another One?” 19 June 2010, [https://www.harpseals.org/resources/news\\_and\\_press/2010/sealhunt\\_protests\\_10.php](https://www.harpseals.org/resources/news_and_press/2010/sealhunt_protests_10.php); Sarah Rogers, “Hockey Motor-Mouth Don Cherry’s ‘Barbarian’ Remark Ignites Seal Meat Furor,” *Nunatsiaq News*, 9 February 2015, [https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/65674seal\\_meat\\_eaters\\_barbarian\\_says\\_hockey\\_commentator/](https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/65674seal_meat_eaters_barbarian_says_hockey_commentator/) as well as Katie Mansfield, “Graphic Content: Thousands of Baby Seals Clubbed to Death in Shocking and Barbaric Slaughter,” *Express*, 14 April 2016, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/nature/660801/seal-clubbing-thousands-baby-seals-killed-annual-twisted-hunt-Canada>.

There are also overtones of racism in these terms that are both complex and disturbing. Historically, their meanings have been constructed within various contexts of colonialism to reference the subaltern other, and their usage is thereby highly problematic. Ironically, these terms would never be applied in today's world to Inuit sealers – at least, not without considerable public outcry. In order to sidestep the awkwardness of this exemption, environmentalists have subconsciously or deliberately fallen back on another Eurocentric trope, the “noble savage” – primitive, ignorant, immersed in nature, and incapable of harming the environment, to make allowance for Indigenous hunts. This decision has sometimes been quite pragmatic: Brian Davies, for example, told me that he did not agree with the Inuit hunt, but that it would have been “impolitic” to protest it.<sup>77</sup> Other animal rights activists have diluted their arguments against Inuit seal hunting to focus their critique on non-Indigenous hunting. Both Greenpeace and IFAW, for example, have apologized for the impact of their anti-sealing campaigns on Inuit communities; although they have been reluctant to condone Inuit sealing for profit, they have not targeted it for a long time.<sup>78</sup> PETA has only recently begun to soften its

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77 Davies interview.

78 Editors' Note: Keough's note reference to Alethea Arnaquq-Baril's 2016 documentary film *Angry Inuk* leads us to highlight Inuit sealers' perspectives on settler-based environmental and animal rights organizations such as Greenpeace and IFAW. Though this is not the primary focus of Keough's article, she does refer to Arnaquq-Baril's film as a resource to explore Inuit perspectives on the hunt. The film demonstrates that the tactics of Greenpeace and IFAW have been to purposely move away from critiquing “traditional” non-commercial Inuit seal hunts in favour of targeting Inuit and settler commercial hunts together. The film demonstrates that these organizations have deployed visuals about white coats to raise funds for their organization, even though seals are not on the endangered species list and even though Inuit have not participated in white coat harvesting. Crucially, what Arnaquq-Baril shows is that the contemporary Inuit seal hunt is a sustenance and subsistence hunt, which means using seals as sustenance food and to earn a subsistence living. Seal hunting for Inuit is also connected to histories of colonization in the north, which have introduced food insecurity and have forced relocation to permanent communities, impacting Inuit hunting cycles. Inuit sealers use all parts of the seal for community food and also sell pelts to commercial dealers in order to supplement incomes, much like the settler hunters that Keough examines; the film shows that in many parts of the north, seal skins remain one of the last monetarily valuable hunting products for Inuit due to the uneven impacts of settler colonization on Inuit. The documentary also argues that the 2009 European Union ban on the sale of all seal products impacted Inuit disproportionately because of their strong reliance on commercial seal product sales to combat the realities of northern food deserts, high unemployment and poverty, and elevated suicide rates among youth. So, even if Greenpeace and IFAW do not lobby against Inuit “traditional” hunting, as Keough notes and as the film demonstrates, these environmental groups' attempts to undermine the commercial seal hunt of non-Indigenous hunters has impacts for Inuit and non-Inuit sealers alike. See Arnaquq-Baril, *Angry Inuk* (National Film Board of Canada, 2016): [https://www.nfb.ca/film/angry\\_inuk/](https://www.nfb.ca/film/angry_inuk/).

critique of the subsistence Inuit hunt, but still does not condone their small-scale commercial hunting.<sup>79</sup> Throughout this ethical equivocation, however, Newfoundland sealers have been continuously positioned as “degraded” white men who have failed to meet the standards of respectable white masculinity in the “civilized” Global North (“But whoever said that Newfoundland was a ‘civilized society?’”). Landsmen’s local knowledge and long-held traditions have been framed as an embarrassment. The critically depressed economy in their region and their attachment to their homes and way of life do not count in mitigation. This is not to underplay the devastation that has been wrought in Inuit communities by declining markets for seal products as a result of animal rights pressure – and for full transparency, I support the Inuit hunt – but rather to try to understand why different standards have applied to the two groups at a “moral” level.<sup>80</sup>

Ethnic and regional marginalization has also been clearly in play in the targeting of Newfoundland landsmen. In a region that has long been disadvantaged by federal policy decisions that have privileged the central provinces, Newfoundland and Labrador has been seen as the poorest cousin of Confederation, until it became a “have province” in 2008 as a result of a very short-lived boom in the energy sector.<sup>81</sup> In the late 20th century, the lazy, ignorant, feckless “Newfie” was an easy scapegoat for activists, who tapped into much broader stereotypes of ethnic others as ignorant, brutish thugs. Classism has also been rife in this context. An opinion often articulated among anti-sealing protestors is that Newfoundland sealers should “just find something

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79 Joanna Kerr, “Greenpeace Apology to Inuit for Impacts of Seal Campaign,” Greenpeace website, 24 June 2014, <https://www.greenpeace.org/canada/en/story/5473/greenpeace-apology-to-inuit-for-impacts-of-seal-campaign/>; Dwane Wilkin, “We’re Not After Inuit Seal Hunters, IFAW Claims,” *Nunatsiaq News*, 9 January 1998, [https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/were\\_not\\_after\\_inuit\\_seal\\_hunters\\_ifaw\\_claims/](https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/were_not_after_inuit_seal_hunters_ifaw_claims/); Alexandra Pope, “An ‘Angry Inuk’ defends the seal hunt, again,” *Canadian Geographic*, 5 January 2018, <https://www.canadiangeographic.ca/article/angry-inuk-defends-seal-hunt-again>; Selena Randhawa, “Animal Rights Activists and Inuit Clash Over Canada’s Indigenous Food Traditions,” *Guardian*, 1 November 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/nov/01/animal-rights-activists-inuit-clash-canada-indigenous-food-traditions>.

80 George Wenzel provides a comprehensive discussion of that social, economic, and cultural trauma in “The Harp Seal Controversy and the Inuit Economy,” *Arctic* 31, no. 1 (January 1978): 1–6, and “‘I Was Once Independent’: The Southern Seal Protest and Inuit,” *Anthropologica* 29, no. 2 (1987): 195–210 (Special Issue – “Trans-National Problems and Northern Native Peoples”). See also Don Charles Foote, “Remarks on Eskimo Sealing and the Harp Seal Controversy,” *Arctic* 20, no. 4 (December 1967): 267–8.

81 As of this writing, Newfoundland and Labrador remains a “have” province because of the idiosyncrasies of the equalization formula employed by the federal government even though the province’s economy has been declining for years and is now on the verge of bankruptcy.

else to do.” At best, this attitude has demonstrated tremendous naivety about the potential for people to sustain themselves in rural communities when a way of life unravels. Simplistic solutions were in ample evidence in the early days of the protests, when activists suggested brushing whitecoats for their fur or bringing eco-tourists to the whelping ice to engage with the seals – ideas that would have put both human and non-human creatures in danger. But there was something elitist in this opinion as well – a whiff of “let them eat brioche.” In the past several decades suggestions have been made that the Canadian government buy out sealing licenses, but no viable alternatives for economic survival have been forthcoming from the animal rights lobby. Sealing/fishing communities will simply have to pack up their homes and move to larger cities, where they will become part of the ghettoized, unskilled working poor. Or they can stay put and go on welfare or starve to death in the dark.

But to see Newfoundland landsmen and ecomasculinist activists as polar opposites is also to oversimplify the context. These two groups do share some values in relation to the natural world, so is it possible for them to have a less-heated conversation about those areas of agreement? A recent article by ecomasculinity theorist Bob Pease inadvertently outlines some bases for actual negotiation. He argues that men must acknowledge their “embeddedness in nature” and cease viewing nature as a commodity over which humans can exercise complete control. “It is our vulnerability and our corporeal connection to the material world,” he observes, “that fosters an ethic of care for the environment.” He encourages men to open themselves up to “greater emotional and physical vulnerability in response to nature” and to articulate the “rage, grief, fear, and despair about the environmental challenges we face.”<sup>82</sup> It can be argued that landsmen sealers are already embodying many of Pease’s recommendations.

The greatest impediment to a conversation between the two groups seems obvious: landsmen kill seals for survival, while ecomasculinity abjures the killing of non-human creatures by non-Indigenous humans. But the latter stance fails to recognize the cultural importance of fish and wild game in the diet of rural Newfoundlanders as well as the expense and carbon footprint of importing food (by container ship, ferry, and truck) to maintain a healthy

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82 Bob Pease, “Recreating Men’s Relationship with Nature: Toward a Profeminist Environmentalism,” *Men and Masculinities* 22, no. 1 (March 2019): 121–2.

vegan or vegetarian diet in a colder climate.<sup>83</sup> Ecomasculinity, as a theory and practice, also tends not to interrogate the variety of circumstances – based on multiple systems of oppression such as class, race, sexuality, region, and age – that complicate the lives of men across time, place, and culture. It situates itself as an idealized alternative to hegemonic masculinity of the Global North, but it errs in conceptualizing hegemonic masculinity by clumping together all industrial/breadwinner masculinities – regardless of class and other systems of difference – as the most toxic, “obscene” form of dominance on earth<sup>84</sup> while overlooking the vast differences in experience encompassed by such a crudely rendered category. Ecomasculinity claims to be non-essentialist in its thinking, yet it still delegates men, women, racialized others, and other-than-human others into categories that are seen as neatly defined; it does not aspire to move beyond systems of gender, race, class, and so on as historical artifacts that forward thinkers should try to deconstruct. And while ecomasculinity wants to challenge hegemonic masculinity, it is underpinned by the assumption that it is middle-class and elite (primarily white) Western men who must be taught to care for and liberate all creatures of the earth because this privileged group are the most significant historical agents in creating effective change.<sup>85</sup> Ultimately, ecomasculinity founders on its own paternalism, rigidity, and lack of reflexivity.

If practitioners and theorists of ecomasculinity want to avoid charges of elitism and exclusion, it might be time for them to try to understand people whose experiences are grounded in a harsher world. There is a precedent in

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83 The province of Newfoundland and Labrador lacks food security because of its short growing season and harsh winters. Even the denizens of St. John’s listen anxiously during the winter for news of the Oceanex vessels, ferries, and trucks that transport foodstuffs to their local supermarkets. Rural communities are poorly served all year round, with very little fresh produce beyond locally grown root vegetables and potatoes. Transportation costs are prohibitive in terms of more nutritious offerings – certainly in terms of maintaining a vegan or vegetarian diet. The best insurance against malnutrition (for “townies” and “baymen” alike) has been salt fish, salt meat, and, in more modern days, a freezer full of fish, game, and wild berries.

84 Martin Hultman and Paul M. Pulé, *Ecological Masculinities: Theoretical Foundations and Practical Guidance* (Abingdon-on-Thames, UK: Routledge, 2018), 43.

85 See, for example, Hultman and Pulé, *Ecological Masculinities*; Richard Twine, “Masculinity, Nature, Ecofeminism,” *Ecofeminism Organization Journal*, 2001, <http://richardtwin.com/ecofem/masc.pdf>; Greta Gaard, “Towards New EcoMasculinities, EcoGenders, and EcoSexualities,” in *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 225–39; Rubén Cenamor and Stefan L. Brandt, eds., *Ecomasculinities: Negotiating Male Gender Identity in U.S. Fiction* (Landham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019); and Pease, “Recreating Men’s Relationship with Nature.”



the sealing and anti-sealing campaigns of the late 20th century. In 1977, when people were lining up behind two extreme positions about the seal hunt, Bob Hunter and Patrick Moore of Greenpeace sat down with Newfoundland sealers and found a way to compromise on the conservationist, sustainable landsmen hunt. In the present context, it is time once again for ecomasculinity to check its entitlement and find some compassion for all the creatures – human as well as nonhuman – of the land and sea.

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