

## C08-P03

### MORALITY, PRACTICE AND ECONOMY IN A COMMERCIAL SEAL HUNTING COMMUNITY IN CANADA

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The images and claims of cruelty of the commercial seal hunt in Canada are well known and have found their way into political discourses, resulting in a large number of trade bans, such as that of the European Union in 2009. Little is known, however, about the people involved in the seal hunt, the socio-economic value of the hunt and the normative influence of the hunt on the socio-cultural fabric of a seal hunting community.

This paper aims to shed light on exactly these commonly not recognised features of the commercial seal hunt in a small hunting community in northern Newfoundland, Canada. Results have been gathered through multitemporal fieldwork in Newfoundland in 2013 in the seal hunt, seal hunting communities and the processing sector. The paper argues that the moral and social structure on the hunting boat and within the community is strongly influenced by the ability to provide, resulting in specific moral actions on the water and on land. A change in the ability to go out and hunt seals ultimately changes the moral landscape in the community, altering generations-old mechanisms of human interaction.

Apart from the moral implications of the seal hunt for the community itself, it is also the direct link between the community sphere of exchange and the market sphere of exchange which shape the socio-economic fabric of the community. This is based on the fact that the community sphere of exchange undergoes significant changes with regard to subsistence activities when the markets for seal products change. In 2009, for example, due to the adoption of the trade ban on seal products in the European Union, global prices for seal products dropped significantly rendering the commercial, large-vessel-based seal hunt economically unviable. That year saw therefore an increase in subsistence hunts in which commercial commodities were merely traded in as by-products of the subsistence, speedboat-based hunts.

This paper offers a first ethnographic insight into the commercial seal hunt and argues that the sustainability of the communities engaged in it suffer increasing pressures with a decline of the markets. While the seal hunt is not the socio-economic glue per se, it is nevertheless an important element of the overall affordances of the sea, the predominant element in all activities in northern Newfoundland.