Bridging Troubled Waters: History as Political Opportunity Structure

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ABSTRACT This article seeks to provide insight into the formulation of non-governmental organization (NGO) and transnational advocacy network (TAN) campaign strategy. We argue that the history of previous campaigns comprises an important aspect of the political opportunity structure faced by NGOs and TANs. We also argue that when formulating campaign strategy, campaigners should not only consider the legacies of previous campaigns, but also how their current strategies could impact on political opportunity structure and thereby influence future campaigns. This article uses the case study of the movement against seal hunting in Atlantic and Northern Canada, and considers the potential for collaboration between previous opponents on other environmental issues. We examine the history of the anti-sealing campaigns looking at the various actors involved, and the impact that these campaigns had on these actors and their current relations with one another. The case study demonstrates that the history of previous campaigns matters and that history is a vital component of political opportunity structure.

KEY WORDS: Political opportunity structure, transnational advocacy networks, Canadian seal hunt, nongovernmental organization, environmentalism, activism.

Introduction

History matters. When activists set out to establish campaigns they evaluate the political opportunity structure, looking for ideal venues in which to pursue their issues and see them to fruition. Tarrow describes a political opportunity structure as ‘consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent or national – dimensions of the political environment that either encourage or
discourage people from using collective action’ (Tarrow, 1998, p. 18). The political opportunity structure in which a campaign occurs dramatically affects the tools available to activists. Much has been written concerning the characteristics of political opportunity structures that are conducive to the execution of a successful campaign. These have typically been forward-looking, examining structural aspects which grant activists access, dictate the range of strategies available to them, and provide windows of opportunity. One aspect of political opportunity structure which is often overlooked is the legacy of previous campaigns. Through an examination of the legacy of the campaigns against Canada’s annual seal hunt, this article makes a case that the history of previous campaigns is an important aspect of the political opportunity structure faced by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and transnational advocacy networks (TANs). When formulating campaign strategy and forming alliances, campaigners should not only consider the legacies of previous campaigns, but also how their current strategies could impact the current political opportunity structure and thereby influence future campaigns. This is in effect an argument that the strategy of an NGO or TAN for a single campaign should be considered as part of a ‘grand strategy’ seeking to achieve the broader goals of those organizations.

The anti-sealing campaigns proved successful in reducing the scale of seal hunting in Canada and in changing the way that sealing is conducted. Over the course of several decades, an international network of anti-sealing activists succeeded in getting seal products banned in a number of traditional markets, such as Europe and Russia. While the campaigns were largely successful in achieving many of the anti-sealing movement’s overarching goals, the nature of the campaigns themselves, and some of the tactics and strategies they employed, caused considerable discord and ill-will between seal hunters and activists. Now, many of the same NGOs which campaigned against sealing are seeking allies in broader campaigns on environmental issues which impact Northern and Atlantic Canada; issues which include climate change, the protection of marine areas, the accumulation of persistent organic pollutants, and resource extraction (see for example Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, 2004; Byers, 2009; Carnaghan & Goody, 2006). The lingering animosity from the anti-sealing campaigns, however, represents a significant challenge to cooperation between sealing communities and these organizations.

This history of strained relationships often means that each group remains alienated from a potentially valuable ally in combating these burgeoning issues. As a result, sealing communities potentially forfeit access to the capabilities, experience, reach and influence of international environmental organizations. The communities lack the reach and the range of strategies which come with working with international NGOs (see for example Keck and Sikkink 1998). Equally, environmental organizations lose an important source of grassroots support, legitimacy, and campaign potential. Collaboration could be mutually beneficial, but this collaboration is threatened by the legacy of the anti-sealing movement.

We conduct an empirical analysis of the anti-sealing campaigns, focusing on the early origins of the issue from the 1960s until the present time. We also provide some early historical context from which the anti-sealing campaigns emerged. The empirical analysis was conducted using both primary and secondary sources. In order to look at how various components of these campaigns affected the relations between the relevant actors, we examine sources including academic and activists’ literature, newspaper and media coverage, and federal and provincial government sources. We are particularly interested in the collaborative potential of large international NGOs, in so far as these have the greatest range of resources to offer sealing
communities. Accordingly, our analysis will give particular focus to Greenpeace and the World Wide Fund For Nature (formerly and also World Wildlife Fund) (WWF). Through this case study we explore the impact of history on the current political opportunity structure faced by activists seeking to campaign on other issues in Northern and Atlantic Canada. We argue that collaboration may be possible between sealing communities and organizations which participated in the anti-sealing movement; however, this cooperation is dependent on the type of organization, the measures that organization undertakes to foster good relations, and upon the duration and extent of the organization’s previous involvement in the anti-sealing campaigns. In other words, collaboration depends in part on the legacy of previous campaigns.

The broader aim of this study is to provide insight into the formulation of NGO and TAN campaign strategies. One lesson learned from the anti-sealing movement is that NGOs and TANs should consider the implications that one form of campaign messaging can have on other, non-targeted, audiences. Some campaign tactics which make significant gains in achieving results in a single campaign can have implications for future collaboration and potential alliances; ultimately shaping the political opportunity structure which activists will encounter in future campaigns. This speaks to the idea of some NGOs and TANs situating a single campaign within a broader ‘grand strategy.’ The idea is that the broader goals of an organization may transcend the specific objectives of any one campaign. Therefore, not only do activists need to strategize in order to achieve success on a particular campaign, but also consider how and in what context their potential victory and methods used in achieving this victory will affect the political opportunity structure which results at the conclusion of the campaign. NGOs and TANs must also be mindful of the legacies of previous campaigns when formulating strategies. A study of the history of previous campaigns may reveal potential opportunities for collaboration but also residual backlash from previous campaigns which must be addressed.

**History as Political Opportunity Structure**

Scholars document a potential for backlash as a result of activist campaigns. Tarrow elaborates that ‘heavy-handed or culturally insensitive transnational agents can delegitimize their partners and produce a backlash against foreign intervention’ (Tarrow 2005, p. 200). Betsill and Corell argue that outsider tactics, such as boycotts and protests, are prone to backlash due to their confrontational nature (2008). Environmental campaigns are particularly at risk to backlash due to the contested nature of environmental norms. Keck and Sikkink note that ‘environmentalism is less a set of universally agreed upon principles than it is a frame within which the relations among a variety of claims about resources use, property, rights, and power may be reconfigured’ (Keck & Sikkink, 1998, p. 121).

Environmentalists often address issues that involve access to public goods or that intersect with trade and development priorities in a complex fashion. This places environmental campaigns at risk of backlash in so far as they potentially introduce competing claims by disadvantaged groups. For example, Vivanco documents how conservationist campaigns in Monte Verde, Costa Rica alienated locals through their framing which unintentionally presented rural Costa Ricans as destroyers of nature (2003). Bratman (2012) relates how a large-scale campaign against foreign NGOs formed as a result of an international campaign to stop the Belo Monte dam in the Brazilian Amazon. Further examples of backlash are explored by Rowell
(1996) and van Gin Kel (2007) *inter alia*. One area that is often ignored, and a gap in the literature that we seek to address, is the impact of backlash on future campaigns and campaign strategy formulation, and to potential alliance formation between the various actors. Backlash does not disappear once a campaign ends, as we shall see, rather it persists in the collective social memory of those affected. This lingering sentiment then becomes part of the background in which future campaigns must operate. With respect to campaign strategy and tactics, there is often little discussion of how tactics which are effective in one campaign influence the political opportunity structure in which future campaigns will operate, and even less discussion of how current tactics might ultimately frustrate an organizations’ ability to accomplish its overarching goals.

Tarrow and others explain how a political opportunity structure ‘captures the institutional context which imposes obstacles on and provides opportunities for actors engaged in framing processes’ (Joachim, 2003, p. 247, citing Tarrow, 1994; McAdam, et al., 1996). The literature generally considers political opportunity structure as comprised of such things as the degree of openness of international institutions, the presence of influential allies, and changes in political alignments and conflicts (see Sikkink, 2005; Joachim, 2003). The strategies adopted by activists are then carefully matched to political opportunity structures in order to achieve optimum effect (see *inter alia* Joachim, 2003; Swindler, 1986). The literature on political opportunity structure generally takes the position that

> [p]olitical actors make history, but they do not do so in circumstances of their own making. Instead, they encounter constraints and are presented with opportunities configured by the institutional arrangements and the prevailing patterns of political power which are the inescapable contexts of political action. There has recently been a tendency to refer to these contexts of action as ‘political opportunity structures’ (Rootes, 1999, p. 75).

What this reasoning ignores is the fact that the history made by political actors becomes a component of the political opportunity structure to be faced by future political actors; that sometimes actors influence the circumstances in which they operate through previous actions; and that some constraints may indeed be of their own making.

Tilly and Tarrow examine the impact of history on the formation of campaign strategy and describe how repertoires develop out of inherited forms of collective action, yet little attention is paid to the effect that the history of these repertoires have on shaping the political opportunity structure in which they are employed (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 4). Also, Meyer and Staggenborg (1996) discuss the effects that movement-countermovement interactions have on one another and on political opportunity structure in the context of ongoing campaigns. What we seek to do in this study is examine the impact of campaign backlash as it affects the political opportunity structure for future campaigns on unrelated issues but involving similar actors. We use the case study of the Canadian seal hunt to exemplify the impact that backlash from these campaigns has had on the current political opportunity structure facing environmental groups seeking to campaign on other issues involving Northern and Atlantic Canada.

**The Canadian Seal Hunt and the Dominant Discourse**
The case study we present is the campaigns against the Canadian seal hunt. Seal hunting in Canada is commonly depicted as the ‘Newfoundland Seal Hunt’ – a single large-scale hunt of white-coated harp seal pups. This is a misleading and inaccurate portrayal of sealing in Canada. Sealing is not exclusive to Newfoundland; seals are also hunted by communities in other parts of Atlantic and Northern Canada. While harp seals make up the largest number of seals hunted, they are not the exclusive target. Also, different hunting methods are employed to hunt different seal species, depending on seal ecology, local practices, cultural traditions, and government regulations.

A harp seal pup, also known as a ‘whitecoat’ because its fur remains white for about two weeks after birth, is the most internationally publicized and recognizable seal. Due to the media attention they received as a result of the anti-sealing campaigns, harp seal pups are the symbol most widely associated with the seal hunt. Harp seal pups are immobile for the first weeks after birth and were historically hunted by being bludgeoning with a using a ‘hakapiks’, after which the seal was skinned for its fur or sculp (Kovacs, Lavigne, & Stewart, 1985, p. 556). In recent years, due to pressure to abandon this hunting method, 70 per cent of seals hunted are killed exclusively with high-powered rifles (Fisheries and Oceans, 2014). The commercial harp and hooded seal hunts are part of the seasonal sealing industry, and the typical sealer is a fisherman who also works at a number of different seasonal fisheries (e.g., crab, lobster, shrimp, and cod).

The Emergence of the Anti-Sealing Movement

In order to appreciate the current political opportunity structure within which sealing communities and NGOs and TANs are operating, one should first have some foundational knowledge of the anti-sealing movement. Criticism of Canada’s seal hunt can be found throughout its history, though the anti-sealing movement began in earnest in the 1960s (see for example J.B. Jukes 1842, quoted by Busch, 1985, p. 60). The movement started under the leadership of animal welfare organizations such as various Canadian chapters of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) and the Humane Society Canada (HSC), along with groups such as the Audubon Society, and several individuals, particularly Brian Davies, the author of ‘Savage Luxury: The Slaughter of the Baby Seals’ (1970) and founder of the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW). The catalyst for the 1960s anti-sealing movement was the release in March 1964 of a film by a small Montreal studio, Artek Films, which graphically depicted the hunt (Lynge, 1992, p. 13; Barry, 2005). While the film only had a limited distribution, it was followed in April 1964 by an article which appeared in Montreal, which spread negative publicity about the hunt to Europe when it was reprinted in the Hamburger Morgenpost (Coish, 1979, p. 76).

Initially, the anti-sealing movement had two primary goals. While some organizations, including the Audubon Society, the WWF, and the Canadian Wildlife Federation, focused on the harp seal’s long-term survival, others, especially animal welfare organizations such as the RSPCA and HSC, placed emphasis on the way the hunt was conducted. Both groups ran information campaigns, displaying graphic images in order to raise awareness of the issue through the media. This was accompanied by a letter-writing campaign which took advantage of the large memberships of these organizations. The first few decades of the anti-sealing movement generated considerable media coverage. For example, Maclean’s magazine ran an article on
March 5, 1966, which called the annual hunt ‘the bloody smear on our image overseas’ (Coish, 1979, p. 88), and the March 21, 1969, edition of Life magazine carried a three-page spread on the seal hunt under the headline ‘A Bloody Business in Canada Causes Uproar All Over’ (Coish, 1979, p. 112).

The early 1970s heralded the beginning of a second phase of the anti-sealing movement, characterized by public protest and the use of direct action on the ice floes. This phase was particularly the result of the work of IFAW, which documented and photographed the alleged atrocities of the hunt and disseminated powerful graphic images globally (IFAW, 2013). IFAW was soon joined by other animal rights groups such as the Fund for Animals and Friends of Animals (FOA).

A particularly important event in the history of the anti-sealing movement was the entrance of Greenpeace in 1975. Greenpeace was the first group to employ direct action on the ice, with some of its activists physically intervening to prevent sealers from bludgeoning seals by lying across the seals or by removing seals from the reach of sealers. Activists also resorted to blocking and to chaining themselves to sealing vessels (Brown & May, 1989). These tactics particularly incensed members of the sealing industry (see Dauvergne & Neville, 2011; and discussion below).

The late 1970s saw noticeable successes for the anti-sealing movement insofar as the campaigning became increasingly international. Public protests against the hunt were held in many major cities in North America and in Europe. In 1977, French starlet, Brigitte Bardot, joined the campaign and arrived on the ice floes. She was famously photographed cuddling a harp seal pup. This incident created one of the most iconic images for the anti-sealing movement, which was originally published on the cover of the 1 April 1977 edition of Paris Match (Paris Match, 1977). The use of celebrity appearances and photo opportunities on the ice floes is still a standard practice of the anti-sealing movement.

The movement also achieved success in the policy realm. On March 22, 1977, the US government approved a motion condemning Canada’s seal hunt as ‘a cruel practice’ (Coish, 1979, p. 2, 166-7). France’s 1978 total ban on seal fur had an even greater impact on the seal industry because the French market, one of the principle markets within the European Economic Community (EEC), was responsible for 75% of the market for harp seal products (Wenzel, 1991, p. 123). Outcomes such as market closures were considered successes of the anti-sealing campaigns, but they are also examples of the historical legacy that influences the political opportunity structure of present-day campaigns that focus on other subjects but involve similar, and in some cases the same, actors.

The Continued Campaigns and the Emergence of a Counter-Movement

The late 1970s also saw the emergence of backlash against the anti-sealing movement in the form of a well-funded counter-protest. Groups such as Codpeace and the Society for the Retention of Our Sealing Industry (SRSI) received funding from the Provincial Government of Newfoundland and launched a campaign to explain the cultural importance of the seal hunt to the province. The Progressive Rights Organization (PRO) funded a touring group of Mummers to produce a play entitled ‘They Club Seals Don’t They’ which travelled across Canada presenting the hunters’ side of the story (Barry, 2005, p. 51-2). And though the Canadian Arctic
Resources Committee argues that this came too late to effectively counter the momentum of the anti-sealing movement, the Canadian Sealers Association was founded in 1982 (Canadian Arctic Resources Committee, n.d.).

Michael Amarook, the President of the Inuit Tapirisat, published an article in the Canadian press presenting the views of Canada’s Inuit people regarding the anti-sealing movement. He noted on November 11, 1978, that ‘thanks to Mr. Davies [head of IFAW] and his hysterical propaganda, Inuit hunters face economic ruin’ (Coish, 1979, p. 194). Amarook was flagging a tangible result of the anti-sealing movement, notably the decline of markets for seal products and the resultant negative economic impact on hunters. The successes of the anti-sealing movement had considerable impact upon the livelihood of people involved in the sealing industry with communities throughout Northern Canada being particularly vulnerable to these campaigns. In 1978 the price of seal pelts dropped from a high of $23.65 per pelt, to less than a dollar per pelt. The fur market has remained volatile and has responded dramatically to external factors; for example, when an EEC ban was passed in 1983 (see below) the price of a pelt dropped from $17.60 to $3.45 CAN (McDonald, 2007; see also Wenzel, 1991).

In the early 1980s vessels were introduced as part of the anti-sealing movement repertoire. The use of ocean-going vessels served as a means for organizations to avoid many of the Canadian regulations designed to limit activists’ access to the ice floes. Activists could approach seal calving grounds via international waters. Greenpeace, for example, brought the Rainbow Warrior to the ice in 1981 (Brown & May, 1989). The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (SSCS) used the Sea Shepherd II to transport activists to the floes and for blockade operations, such as its 1983 blockade of St. John’s harbour (Morris, 1995, p. 183). Given that in 1979 the Sea Shepherd II’s predecessor had rammed and disabled the pirate whaling ship Sierra, off the Portuguese coast, these threats were taken seriously (Day, 1987, p. 57).

The anti-sealing movement scored a powerful victory in 1983 when the EEC issued Directive 83/129/EEC which ‘forbade the importation of commercially hunted sealskins and products manufactured from them into any part of the European Community’ from October 1983 to October 1985 (Wenzel, 1991, p. 1; 83/129/EEC, 1983), and in 1985 extended the ban indefinitely (85/444/EEC, 1985). Though the ban only applied to whitecoat seal pups as their fur represented the most popular and highest valued seal product, it was effective in shutting down a major market. In response, the Canadian government banned the practice of hunting whitecoat seals in 1987 (Beckman, 2012, p. 315).

It was at this juncture that many of the more moderate environmental and humane organizations (the WWF, the Canadian Audubon Society, the Ontario Humane Society) withdrew from the campaign (Wenzel, 1991). Here we see that these groups recognized that the political opportunity structure had evolved over the course of the campaign. At this same time, as a result of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972, the environmental movement as a whole was undergoing a change in focus from protecting individual animals to include broader issues such as sustainable development. Despite the withdrawal of large organizations and pressure from an increasingly coordinated counter-movement, the anti-sealing movement persisted, driven largely by animal rights groups and less moderate environmental organizations. There was a growing perception that the organizations that continued to protest the seal hunt at this point were exercising ‘a self-ascribed moral imperative toward Inuit and other aboriginal peoples’ (Wenzel, 1991, p. 8).
One of the most significant issues the anti-sealing movement faces currently is the dissipation of its network. The movement is shifting from a network dominated by large, high-profile organizations working exclusively on the sealing issue, to one where organizations that are still involved have diversified their agendas. Furthermore, the anti-sealing network now contains a multiplicity of small internet-based organizations, which often consist of a webpage or online petition, engaging in so-called ‘clicktivism’ or ‘slacktivism,’ which have debatable impact (see for example Clark & Themudo, 2006; Karpf, 2010). Despite a waning global interest in the seal-hunt controversy, the achievement of many of its original goals, dramatically lower numbers of seals hunted and killed, and the growing effectiveness of counter efforts from sealing advocates, the anti-sealing movement persists.

Actions by confrontational organizations continue, though with less media attention. Fewer activists visit the floes annually, and organizations such as the Humane Society International and IFAW have directed their attention towards lobbying the European Union (EU) to completely ban seal products. Public protests are still used, and a Global Action Against Seal Hunts was held in 2000 (Watson, 2002, p. 231). Media and awareness campaigns continue to be waged by a variety of groups.

The anti-sealing movement achieved further success in 2009 when the EU banned the importation of all seal products (Official Journal of the European Union, No 1007/2009). Canada’s challenge to this decision was rejected by the European General Court, and Canada has subsequently appealed the case to the World Trade Organization (WTO) (see CBC, 2011a; WTO, 2012). Russia followed the EU’s example and passed laws banning Canadian seal products in 2011 (Globe and Mail, 2011a). Canada sought to appeal the issue of closing markets; however, subsequent attempts to reopen markets, most notably in China, have had only marginal success (Globe and Mail, 2011b; and see China Daily, 2011).

For its part, the Canadian government has responded to pressure from the anti-sealing movement throughout the decades of its campaigning. In 1967 the government introduced regulations, primarily focused on humane killing methods, in an attempt to placate demands by animal welfare organizations. They regulated such aspects of the hunt as club lengths, banned the killing of whitecoats, and allowed for the inclusion of observers to ensure that humane killing practices were followed (Fink, 2007, p. 4; Dauvergne & Neville, 2011, p. 200). The government implemented Total Allowable Catches (TACs) in 1971; the initial TAC of 245,000 was quickly reduced to 150,000. TACs were gradually increased to a historic high of 350,000 in 2004 (Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2011).

These measures did not placate all of the organizations involved in the anti-sealing movement, since the measures only addressed some of the concerns motivating the organizations involved. A more detailed examination of the organizations and ideologies which comprised the anti-sealing movement helps explain why some organizations persisted in their opposition to the hunt while others exited the movement at various stages. It also gives insight into which groups may be more likely to become involved in future issues in Atlantic Canada and the Arctic and, as a result, expect to encounter the legacy of the anti-sealing campaigns.

Anti-Sealing Movement

The Anti-Sealing Movement – Actors and Ideas
The anti-sealing movement has never been a single, unified entity; rather it can be defined as a transnational advocacy network (TAN), characterized by pluralism and loose coupling. An examination of the anti-sealing movement’s complexity demonstrates the need for a broader appreciation for the diversity that can exist within and between actors that operate within a TAN. The structure and composition of a TAN itself has an impact on the ability of that TAN to accomplish outcomes and react to changes in political opportunity structures. The anti-sealing movement’s membership spans a spectrum of environmental and animal welfare/rights groups. The philosophical and ideological underpinning of these organizations has influenced their involvement in the anti-sealing movement, affected the timing and duration of these organizations’ involvement, and determined the strategies and tactics they employed. These strategies have, in turn, directly influenced the relations these organizations have had with other parties, in particular, the sealing communities. It should be noted that these categories are not exclusive, and that many organizations could easily fall into multiple categories. Organizations belonging to one category often used imagery and arguments from another category, and some organizations changed categories over the course of the campaigns.

**Environmental Organization Repertoires**

When discussing the environmental movement, it is useful to classify organizations based on their willingness to compromise and on the level and type of confrontation inherent in their repertoires. Many long-standing moderate environmental organizations such as the Canadian Audubon Society, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and the WWF, employed tactics which were primarily directed towards the establishment of sustainable seal quotas to ensure the long-term survival of seal species. These non-confrontational tactics included such components as advocacy and awareness-raising, letter-writing campaigns, petitions, and lobbying. Inherent in their position was the willingness to compromise, as they fundamentally accepted the continuation of a seal hunt. Under this view, the hunting of seals is permissible so long as it is sustainable. Many of these groups withdrew from the movement relatively early, generally once ‘the ecological viability of the harp seal seemed assured’ (Wenzel, 1991, p. 47). And many activists from these organizations were critical of other organizations which continued to protest against the seal hunt once the viability of seal species was assured.

There were also organizations such as Greenpeace whose message underwent transformation over the course of the seal hunt. It initially employed a more confrontational repertoire which included threats of painting the targeted seals (applying paint to the coats of live seals thereby rendering the coat unusable for commercial markets), and physically frustrating sealing on the ice floes; all while continuing to call for an end to the hunt. The organization gradually modified its message, sharpening its focus on the commercial hunt, making a distinction between indigenous and industrial-scale commercial hunting, and even differentiating between Canadian Atlantic and Norwegian hunting. In so doing, Greenpeace moderated its message from one which opposed all sealing, to one which sought to build coalitions drawing upon support and cooperation with local people affected by the sealing industry. These efforts were often frustrated by resentment of the organization’s initial tactics and stance. Greenpeace
eventually abandoned its active involvement in the anti-sealing movement, though as recently as 2005 it released a report condemning commercial sealing in Canada (Johnston and Santillo, 2005) and condemnation of the seal hunt can still be found on some of its websites (Greenpeace UK, 2014).²

Finally there are those organizations which opposed the hunt completely and were unwilling to compromise in favour of sustainable TACs. Chief amongst these organizations was the SSCS, formed in 1977 by Paul Watson, which drew much of its motivation from the philosophy of deep ecology (Naess, 1973; see also Devall & Sessions, 2002, p. 120). Deep ecology advocates for biocentrism, which argues that ‘the future health of the ecosystem is of primary importance’ (Lee, 1995, p. 35) and that ‘present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening’ (Devall & Sessions, 2002, p. 120-5). The argument stemming from deep ecology is that all sealing is wrong, as humans have no right to reduce the richness and diversity of life forms on earth except to satisfy vital needs, and that sealing does not serve a vital need. Deep ecology does not offer much room for compromise; it calls for adherents to take action, and this often translates into the use of confrontational tactics. The use of confrontational methods such as blockading ports and ramming vessels rendered deep ecology groups like SSCS unpopular with the people they targeted and greatly reduced the potential for future collaboration (St. Catherine’s Standard, 2008; and see Watson 2002).

Animal Rights/Welfare Philosophies and Organizations

Another category of organizations involved in the anti-sealing movement includes organizations specifically concerned with animals and their well-being. This category can be divided into two broad segments: animal welfare groups and animal rights groups. Animal welfare groups concern themselves principally with the physical and psychological well-being of animals. This does not preclude the use of animals by humans, but suggests that when humans do use animals, they should treat them as humanely as possible by not causing them unnecessary pain and suffering (Rolston, 2002, p. 33). In the context of the seal hunt, organizations following this perspective advocated the introduction of humane killing regulations, as well as the establishment of sustainable quotas.

Animal welfare organizations which participated included the Animal Protection Institute of America, the Seal Rescue Fund, the World Society for the Protection of Animals, the Humane Society of the United States, the Defenders of Wildlife, the RSPCA, and the HSC (see for example Lyng, 1992, p. 11; Wenzel, 1991, p. 1). Many of these organizations advocate for both animal welfarism and animal rights to varying degrees, and it is often hard to discern the difference between the graphic imagery designed to invoke animal welfare arguments from those used by animal rights organizations. Also, some organizations transitioned from animal welfare to animal rights over the course of the anti-sealing movement. The repertoire of tactics employed by animal welfare organizations was generally considered mainstream and typically involved information politics such as petitions, letter-writing, direct lobbying, and the use of media.

However, for animal rights organizations, the belief is that the seal hunt should be banned since the suffering of the seals is considered to be greater than the benefits humans derive from the by-products of the hunt. Many animal rights advocates condemn the use of animals for any purpose. The seal hunt is seen as particularly heinous since the primary output of the sealing
industry is fur, used in fashion, and therefore not a basic human necessity. Animal rights organizations which have campaigned against sealing include the Fund for Animals, IFAW, FOA, and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA).

**Sealers and Sentiment in Atlantic Canada**

*Promoting the Sealing Industry*

At its core, the debate over sealing in Canada is a quintessential example of a war of words. The conflict over the past 50 years is exemplified by continuous volleys of conflicting word choices bantered about in the public forum. Terms are persistently debated: hunt vs. slaughter, baby seal vs. sea mammal, clubbed vs. harvested, ‘traditional way of life’ vs. ‘unnecessary industry’ (CBC, 2009b; and also Watson, 2002, p. 14). Each side has used politically charged and carefully selected terminology to describe their interpretation of the issues.

When the anti-sealing movement emerged in the 1960s, the Government of Canada, the sealing industry, and sealers were caught unawares. They were unprepared to counter techniques such as sensationalized media campaigns, celebrity visits, staged image events, and direct action (see for example Report of the Royal Commission 1986, p. 18, 24-25; Dauvergne & Neville, 2011, p. 196-8). A counter-movement was hastily constructed in the 1970s, but it did not gain much momentum until the 1990s (Dauvergne & Neville, 2011, p. 204). Many of the sealing organizations formed in the early 1970s, such as ‘Codpeace’ and the SRSI, were ineffective and short-lived (see for example Busch, 1985, p. 253). It took some time for the Government of Canada, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, and the sealing industry to put together a coordinated response to the anti-sealing movement with actions including the passage of more industry-specific legislation. Both the federal and some provincial governments provided loans and subsidies to the sealers who were having their incomes reduced by the diminishing market demand for seal products.

In recent years a great deal of money and energy has been dedicated to promoting and improving the industry and its public image (see for example CBC, 2012). The diversification appears to be driven by two motivations: the desire to increase the utility of the seal harvest, and the need to increase the marketability, and hence, the viability of the industry. By-products of the sealing industry extend beyond luxury fur. The industry has taken extensive measures to highlight the fact that auxiliary products include Omega-3 oil, crafts, and seal penises for the ‘traditional’ medicines market in Asia (Report of the Royal Commission, 1986, p. 33; Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c; Livernois, 2010, p. 45). In a further effort to expand the positive image of the industry, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has reported that seal heart valves are promising replacements for defective human heart valves (Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, 2012c). Media coverage of these efforts at economic diversification appear to have had limited traction outside of the regions of Canada engaged in the seal industry.

*Anti-Sealing Movement Impact on Sealers*
Like the anti-sealing movement, the counter-movement also influenced the political opportunity structure which emerged as a result of the anti-sealing movement. In this case study, the negative sentiments that emerged in sealing communities as a product of the anti-sealing movement and its tactics are a significant element in the resulting political opportunity structure. Sealers have felt persecuted, personally targeted, and vilified. There exists an overall perception that fair assessment was not given to the negative economic consequences resulting from the closure of markets for seal products. As Dauvergne and Neville note, ‘Many Newfoundlanders were angry as the activists turned images of their heroes and hunters into cowards and killers, but found it difficult to counter the portrayals of a “brutal” and “inhumane” hunt’ (2011, p. 195). Generally, members of the sealing industry felt that the anti-sealing movement was focused on saving seals at the expense of human livelihoods, and that the anti-sealing movement did not consider the impacts that achieving its goals would have on local communities directly involved in the industry.

The iconic images of wide-eyed whitecoats cowering below the shadows of club-wielding sealers generated sympathy for the seals. In anthropomorphizing seals in this way, the anti-sealing movement dehumanized the sealers, who were portrayed as ‘blood-spattered barbarians’ (see for example CBC, 2009a). This portrayal was seen as a highly personal challenge to the status of the sealers in their communities. Traditionally, sealers were highly esteemed in their local communities and ‘were considered heroes, family men and brave sons’ (Dauvergne & Neville, 2011, p. 198). But this image contrasted to that presented by the anti-sealing movement which portrayed sealers as ‘cowardly’ and cruel for killing immobile seal pups. Some sealing advocates felt that campaigners refused to comprehend the dangers and difficulties of being a sealer, and that anti-sealing campaigners were unwilling to give a fair assessment of the traditional and economic importance of the industry (Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d). The belief that they were being systematically and unrepentantly attacked for practicing a traditional and economically important occupation embittered many sealers and their families. Their general perception was that the tactics and campaigning of the anti-sealing movement were unwarranted and inaccurate.

Causing further irritation and confusion was the perception that the anti-sealing movement was targeting all Newfoundlanders as being associated with the sealing industry, despite the fact that only a small number of individuals actually participated in the hunt. According to government estimates for Newfoundland and Labrador, ‘between 5,000 and 6,000 individuals derive some income from sealing. This is approximately 1 per cent of the total provincial population, and 2 per cent of the labour force’ (Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2005). While Newfoundland and Labrador has taken a central role in promoting the sealing industry, the industry itself is a marginal component of the province’s overall economy. While the majority of sealing occurs off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, commercial sealing is also conducted in other provinces in Atlantic Canada and in some parts of Quebec (Report of the Royal Commission, 1986, p. 29-30; Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2014). The almost exclusive focus of the anti-sealing movement on sealing in Newfoundland and Labrador left sealers in the province with the feeling of being unfairly persecuted.

Sealers were also incensed over the economic impact which resulted from the closure of markets for seal products. The localized impact of the hunt on communities where people participate in the seal hunt is considerable; some sealers report that sealing currently accounts for up to 35 per cent of their income (Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, 2012c). The seal pelt
market was already a volatile market prior to the anti-sealing movement, but the campaigns added further problems through market closures.

The Inuit communities in Labrador and across Northern Canada were particularly affected (Dauvergne & Neville, 2011, p. 201). For many years, little mention was made by activists or by the media of the specifics of the Inuit hunts. At the height of the anti-sealing movement in the mid-1970s, Inuit and First Nations communities were only beginning to assert traditional rights and claims, and their ability to counter the powerful messaging of the anti-sealing movement was limited (Dauvergne & Neville, 2011, p. 195; Sale & Potapov, 2010, p. 93-4). Those targeting the seal hunt failed to adequately distinguish between subsistence-style hunting done for traditional and cultural reasons and commercial hunts. Government regulations in Canada have taken into consideration the culture of subsistence-style hunting by coastal communities:

Only individuals with a valid sealing licence, or Aboriginal peoples participating in a subsistence hunt in designated areas, are legally allowed to harvest seals….Since 1995, personal use sealing licences have been issued to residents adjacent to sealing areas in Newfoundland and Labrador (south of 53°N latitude), the Quebec North Shore, the Gaspé Peninsula and the Magdalen Islands. This type of licence allows the holder to take up to six seals for personal consumption (Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2014).

Government recognition of subsistence hunting is an indication that there are factors other than economic inherent to the sealing industry. Tradition and cultural considerations have often been overlooked by the anti-sealing movement’s campaigns.

It bears noting that subsistence is itself a contested term. As Wenzel notes, for many the ‘notion [of] subsistence can only exist in a closed system’ (Wenzel, 1991, p. 58). In other words, as soon as any money or other tokens are created and exchanged for various items with other groups, this constitutes the end to subsistence. Yet it is now the case that the Inuit, though still relying heavily on country food and hunted meat, now exchange some products from the hunt, especially surplus skins, for money which is then used to purchase things like gasoline. The challenge in distinguishing a hunt as ‘subsistence’ is where to draw the line.

Regardless of the different reasons behind the seal hunt, the markets make no distinction. Inuit communities were poorly diversified, relying heavily on the income from the sales of seal products. When European markets for seal products closed, the price of pelts dropped and the livelihoods of the people in the Inuit communities were significantly and negatively impacted (Dauvergne & Neville, 2011, p. 204; Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, 2012d; Report of the Royal Commission, 1986, p. 32). And even though many activists gave limited support for traditional indigenous hunting, sealing communities faced considerable economic hardship resulting from the anti-sealing campaigns (Report of the Royal Commission, 1986, p. 33).

Organizations involved in the anti-sealing campaigns learned that campaigning against subsistence hunts can be problematic. When targeting subsistence groups – who are often marginalized – campaigners reverse the traditional underdog image of NGOs, undermine their own credibility, and weaken their ability to present their position as one of principle. It is very
hard to evoke provocative ‘David and Goliath’ imagery when the target of a campaign is a marginalized population (see for example the literature on image politics, particularly DeLuca & Peeples, 2002; Deluca, 1999; Dale, 1996; Carter, 2005).

Issues relating to First Nations’ land and resource claims are politically sensitive in Canada, so much so that WWF-Canada, despite considerable pressure from its international parent organization, has maintained strong support for Inuit seal hunting, including sealskin sales. In its early years, Greenpeace incorporated indigenous symbolism into their campaign, for example covering their vessels in Haida iconography. Indigenous symbolism and myth are also cited as the origins of the name of Greenpeace’s famous flagship, the Rainbow Warrior (Wyler, 2004, p. 101-2; Hunter, 2004, p. 34; Wenzel, 1991, p. 41). Given such intentional links to indigenous culture, Greenpeace’s opposition to the seal hunt appeared to some as inconsistent and somewhat hypocritical.  

Members of the Inuit communities have remained opposed to generalizations made of the sealing industry by the anti-sealing movement and to the support given by some politicians in Canada to the anti-sealing movement (CBC, 2011b). Despite the Canadian government’s efforts to encourage the European community to make exceptions for seal products from Inuit communities, Inuit people continue to suffer from the negative impact of the closure of European markets to Inuit sealing products.

Building Bridges

The anti-sealing movement’s campaigns were successful in closing markets and thereby reducing the extent of the seal hunt. This led to considerable animosity from sealing communities against the organizations involved, or perceived as having been involved, in the anti-sealing movement. NGOs wishing to engage in issues related to Arctic climate change and other environmental issues such as fisheries, pollution, species loss, and resource extraction have had to make concessions and expend considerable effort in order to rebuild some level of trust and cooperation with the communities affected. Thus far animal rights organizations have expressed little interest in these environmental issues and continue to propose a complete ban on the hunt. The environmental organizations seeking to work with local communities are those which either left the anti-sealing movement by the mid-1980s (once the survival of the species had been assured) or have not been involved in the anti-sealing movement.

Environmental NGOs working on climate change in the Arctic and hoping to collaborate with northern communities have gone to great lengths to improve relations with those communities and to distance themselves from the anti-sealing movement. However, this effort has met with limited success due to the residual detrimental effect of the anti-sealing movement on people in some Northern Canadian communities. The WWF and Greenpeace are two of the NGOs from the anti-sealing movement which have attempted to reconcile differences with northern communities. When the WWF sought to establish a chapter in the north, its press release contained the following statement: ‘Because of past economic damage inflicted upon Inuit communities by groups like Greenpeace, [the WWF has had] to launch a communications project to explain to people why the group has come to the Eastern Arctic’ (McClusky, 1998).

Greenpeace has had to go to even greater lengths to distance itself from its previous involvement in the anti-sealing movement, and significantly moderated its stance. This is
evidenced by its increasing willingness to compromise even in the midst of the campaign. In 1976, Greenpeace proposed that it would paint whitecoat seals with organic indelible green dye, and by so doing render their coats commercially worthless (see for example Busch, 1985, p. 43-4). Greenpeace’s decision to ally itself with the Newfoundland Fishermen, Food and Allied Workers’ Union, was the principle reason for its abandonment of its plans to paint the seal pups (Brown & May, 1989, p. 86). In changing its plans Greenpeace sought to shift its critical discourse away from Newfoundland fishermen toward Norway’s larger corporate sealing operations (Coish, 1979, p. 126, 132). This represented the first instance where a member of the anti-sealing movement made concessions in order to build alliances with supporters of the seal hunt.

In 1985 when two members of Greenpeace visited West Greenland to apologize to Kalaallit people, Greenpeace was criticized for not distinguishing Inuit seal hunting as culturally and economically different from Atlantic Canadian sealing activities (Wenzel, 1991, p. 147). Subsequent to this, Greenpeace underwent further transformation in an effort to forge partnerships with indigenous peoples. In August 1985, in a clear effort toward building bridges, Greenpeace declared its withdrawal from the anti-sealing movement, retracted its initial call for a complete ban of the hunt, and issued an apology for its previous campaigns (Watson, 2002: 195). Greenpeace also ended its anti-fur and trapping campaigns and announced that ‘Greenpeace had no problem with a 15,000-pelt subsistence [seal] hunt’ (Watson, 2002, p. 196). In the mid-1990s, Greenpeace sent two missions to Inuvik in order to ‘present data on the effects of global warming on the North, [b]ut it also came to repair rocky relations with Northerners, hurt by past anti-fur campaigns’ (Northern News Service, 1996). At this meeting with the Inuvik Hunters and Trappers Committee, the Inuvialuit Game Council, and the Gwich’in Renewable Resources Committee, Greenpeace distributed papers which strongly emphasized that it no longer campaigned against fur and regretted the error of previous involvement in the anti-sealing movement (Northern News Service, 1996; see also Wenzel, 1991, p. 147).

A survey by the Northern News Service revealed that Inuit opinions remained divided, though opinions towards Greenpeace may have been warming (Hrynyshyn, 1997). There are still those who do not think Greenpeace has gone far enough in its apologies and conciliatory efforts, and feel as though such efforts do not make up for the economic harms which resulted from the anti-sealing movement (Seals and Sealing Network and the Fur Institute of Canada, 2006). Further confusing the matter is the fact that while Greenpeace no longer actively campaigns on the sealing issue (by which we mean it no longer creates image events or engages in direct action), it continues to express opposition to the commercial hunt. In expressing this opposition, Greenpeace does not always clearly communicate a distinction between its opposition to the commercial hunt and its support for indigenous hunting. Greenpeace’s recent ‘Save the Arctic’ Campaign has been met with mixed reviews on the part of Northerners, many still sceptical of Greenpeace’s intentions (Greenpeace International, 2012; Speca, 2012; and Ritter, 2012).

**Conclusion**

As the result of decades of campaigning, the anti-sealing movement created a wide gulf between environmental organizations and sealing communities in Atlantic and Northern Canada. Some environmental organizations now recognize the benefits of a collaborative effort with former
targets of the anti-sealing movement in pursuing pressing campaigns on environmental issues, most notably the effect of climate change on the Arctic. These organizations recognize that the legacy of the anti-sealing movement is itself part of the current political opportunity structure they now face. Collaboration is important for all parties; however, the strained relations which resulted from the anti-sealing movement need to be addressed as part of the new political opportunity structure. To start the process of cooperation, organizations need to consider their involvement in past campaigns. Even groups which were not directly involved in the anti-sealing movement need to consider previous campaigns when building coalitions.

We have identified several lessons relating to NGO and TAN campaign strategy formulation with regard to political opportunity structure and strategy formation. Taking into consideration the legacy of previous campaigns is important. Campaigns are not waged as isolated incidents; rather, they interact with the remnants of previous campaigns and influence future campaigns. Good strategy not only considers the past but also looks to the future. Campaigners should weigh the possible long-term repercussions of short-term tactics and strategies when assessing their usefulness to a campaign. They should be aware that actions taken in a current campaign may affect opportunities for future campaigns. Assuming that an organization is pursuing strategic objectives beyond those of a single campaign, it is important that it considers the implications of current and previous campaigns on the political opportunity structure in which the future campaign will occur. In essence, organizations must consider how the strategies employed in their current campaign fit into their ‘grand strategy.’ Activists should be aware that the use of powerful moral messages and direct attacks against identifiable (and uncoordinated) groups can potentially lead to damaging backlash – especially if the targeted groups become organized. This backlash is then part of the legacy faced by future campaigners seeking to work with this now coordinated group. Campaigns leave a legacy and activists do affect history. This legacy becomes part of the political opportunity structure in which future campaigns are waged.

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1 The official name of the province was changed to Newfoundland and Labrador in 2001.

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