

## **‘Greenshit go home!’ Greenpeace, Greenland and green colonialism in the Arctic**

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*Last summer, Greenpeace activists boarded an oil rig off Russia’s arctic coast in an act of protest—and generated a media storm when the Russians arrested them for ‘piracy’. A brave stand in the face of powerful industrial forces arrayed against our planet? Not according to the Inuit of Greenland, who roundly denounced Greenpeace for boarding an oil rig in Greenlandic waters some years previously. In fact, Greenpeace’s reputation has scraped rock-bottom amongst many Inuit ever since the sealing and whaling protests of the 1970s and 1980s cost them their traditional livelihoods. Today, they see Greenpeace’s global campaign to ‘save the Arctic’ from development as another attack on their rights as an indigenous people. Have Greenpeace’s ‘rainbow warriors’ become the new ‘green colonialists’?*

### **Free the Arctic 30!**

This past autumn, the bored London commuter scanning the posters lining her Tube carriage might have stopped her eyes on a bold new banner. ‘Free the Arctic 30!’ it declared in thick block capitals, intruding between the transport system map and the usual drab advertisements. Helping interpret the cryptic slogan was perhaps the most instantly recognisable emblem of environmental activism: the arcing white dove of Greenpeace, a rainbow erupting in its slipstream.<sup>1</sup>

Greenpeace’s ‘Arctic 30’ were a band of peaceful rainbow warriors held in custody in Russia’s arctic port of Murmansk. Last summer, they sailed their icebreaker *Arctic Sunrise* from the Norwegian port of Kirkenes into the Pechora Sea off Russia’s northern coast. Bravely heedless of warnings to the contrary from Russian authorities, they intended to interfere physically with oil drilling in the Arctic.<sup>2</sup>

The Arctic 30 saw themselves on the front lines of a battle against an industry that they believed was dangerously likely to pollute one of the last great wild frontiers on earth. In the words of Greenpeace International Executive Director Kumi Naidoo, they were engaged in:

*. . . a fight for sanity against the madness of those who see the disappearance of the Arctic sea ice as an opportunity to profit. As the ice retreats the oil companies want to send the rigs in and drill for the fossil fuels that got us into this mess in the first place.*<sup>3</sup>

On their first foray into Russian waters, as they approached a seismic exploration vessel, the Arctic 30 were intercepted by the Russian coastguard. When they failed to obey radio commands to back away and be boarded, the coastguard threatened them with preventative fire—‘at first’. Rather than test the coastguard’s resolve actually to shoot, the Arctic 30 retreated to port in Norway.<sup>4</sup>

A month later, they rallied, and this time they sailed into Russian waters with the radio switched off.<sup>5</sup> The coastguard tracked them to the rig *Prirazlomnaya*, the Arctic’s first permanent offshore oil platform, operated by Russian petroleum giant Gazprom. ‘We’ve got 4 boats in the water heading towards Gazprom’s Arctic rig. We’re going to try and stop the drilling’, tweeted the bridge of the *Arctic Sunrise* as the protest began on 18 September.<sup>6</sup>

Not to be doubted a second time, the coastguard fired rifles and cannon to intimidate the activists, and Russian agents in zodiacs menaced their boarding parties with knives and pistols. Undaunted by the show of force, and disregarding the exclusion zone Russia had imposed around the rig, two of the activists managed to board it briefly. They endured lashings of cold seawater from pressure hoses as they climbed. But after a struggle, they were forced back down and arrested.

The next morning, before the Arctic 30 could take further action, the Russians cut their mission short. Armed commandos boarded the *Arctic Sunrise* by helicopter, seized control of the vessel and arrested the remainder of the crew. Two of those arrested were journalists not formally aligned with Greenpeace. All thirty were jailed and charged with piracy.

Russia’s stern response to the protest made its position on arctic oil development clear. It also attracted a barrage of international criticism. Kumi Naidoo

compared it to the infamous sabotage of the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior* by the French government in 1985.<sup>7</sup> Demonstrators, celebrities and Nobel Peace Prize laureates, including no less a moral authority than Archbishop Desmond Tutu, decried the seizure and arrests.<sup>8</sup> Numerous legal experts challenged the validity of the piracy charges, which carried a maximum sentence of fifteen years in prison.<sup>9</sup>

The dramatic story—helicopters and zodiacs, activists and commandos clashing in icy arctic seas—made headlines around the world. Together, the thirty detainees represented eighteen countries, mostly Western. Prime Minister David Cameron and other sovereign leaders appealed directly to President Vladimir Putin for their release.<sup>10</sup> The Netherlands, whose flag the *Arctic Sunrise* flew, successfully argued before the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea that Russia had failed to follow proper maritime protocols.<sup>11</sup>

By November, the Arctic 30 were granted bail. The charges of piracy were then downgraded to hooliganism, which carried a maximum sentence of seven years. Finally, in an amnesty announced just before Christmas—and ahead of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Russia’s Black Sea resort of Sochi—Putin personally pardoned them all, along with two members of the Russian protest band Pussy Riot.<sup>12</sup> Just over three months after their arrests, the Arctic 30 went free.

Their protest on the *Prirazlomnaya* was classic Greenpeace activism. It harkened back to the legendary seaborne campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s that had vaulted Greenpeace to their still uncontested pre-eminence in the environmental movement. Like the Greenpeace pioneers, who had put themselves in physical danger year after year to end whaling and nuclear testing in the Pacific, the new generation were in fact returning to the *Prirazlomnaya* for a second summer to fight their cause.<sup>13</sup> They cannot be faulted for the courage of their conviction.

The Russians, however, wouldn’t be alone in faulting them for their conviction itself. The protests on the *Prirazlomnaya* in 2012 and 2013 were part of Greenpeace’s wider campaign to ‘save the Arctic’ from industrial development by banning oil drilling and commercial fishing there.<sup>14</sup> Before spreading to Russia’s Pechora Sea and other locations, the campaign had begun two years previously in Baffin Bay, between Canada and Greenland.<sup>15</sup> There, off Greenland’s western coast, the Scottish oil junior Cairn Energy was drilling exploratory wells in waters famous for towering icebergs and vibrant arctic wildlife.

In the summers of 2010 and 2011, Greenpeace sailed their ship *Esperanza* into Baffin Bay to interdict Cairn’s operations. Launching zodiacs, evading the Danish navy, and suffering blasts of cold seawater—but at least no gunfire—their activists boarded Cairn’s floating rig, the *Leiv Eiriksson*. In one action, they breached restricted areas and temporarily halted operations for twelve hours.<sup>16</sup> All were arrested and deported, including Kumi Naidoo himself, who radioed from his perch on the rig:

*It looks like I’m being arrested now . . . I did this because Arctic oil drilling is one of the defining environmental battles of our age . . . We have to draw a line and say no more. I’m drawing that line here and now in the Arctic ice.*<sup>17</sup>

Yet Naidoo already knew that many Greenlanders profoundly disagreed with him, and that they rejected his ‘line in the ice’ running through their homeland. Just before the 2010 protest, Greenpeace had called a public meeting in Greenland’s capital Nuuk to explain their intentions. Their welcome was a demonstration party brandishing banners that read ‘Greenshit go home!’<sup>18</sup>

Despite the angry reception, Greenlanders are by no means unanimously in favour of a rush to drill off their breathtakingly beautiful fjords. But many resent what they perceive as Greenpeace’s unsolicited interference in their decisions.<sup>19</sup> Greenland is no Russia, but a Western country with robust participatory politics and an independent press. Kuupik Kleist, Greenland’s prime minister at the time, accused Greenpeace of purposefully ignoring Greenland’s democratic will and damaging its fledgling economy.<sup>20</sup>

Kleist was expressing moral indignation, not laying a legal charge. The activists who boarded the *Leiv Eiriksson* may have been foreign to Greenland—and unlike Cairn Energy, they hadn’t been invited there. But in a democracy such as Greenland’s the right to protest is protected, even if Greenpeace’s act of trespass was itself illegal, and punished by deportation and fines.

All the same, Kleist captured the sentiment of many Greenlanders when he went on to castigate Greenpeace for launching an ‘attack on Greenland’s constitutional rights’.<sup>21</sup> He meant by this the rights enshrined in Greenland’s two nation-building agreements with Denmark, the 1979 Home Rule Agreement and the 2009 Self Rule Agreement. These agreements are the salient landmarks on Greenland’s journey from Danish colony to autonomous homeland, and perhaps

even to independent state. The 2009 agreement in particular provides for Greenland's right to exploit and benefit from the oil and gas under its seabed.<sup>22</sup>

Here Kleist touched the heart of the matter. As the aboriginal inhabitants of their island, and as a colonised people, the Inuit Greenlanders had struggled with their Danish colonial governors for decades to win recognition of rights they had never formally surrendered. In the past, their resources had been exploited without their consent, to profit Danish outsiders who had simply planted their flag on Greenland three centuries ago.

Today, Greenlanders believe they can turn these resources to their own profit, to help undo the social and economic damage of colonisation, and perhaps even to finance their future independence. They want no more foreign direction, not even from well-intentioned environmentalists. Aleqa Hammond, Greenland's current prime minister, reinforced this message at a recent international conference on the Arctic:

*Let there be no misunderstanding, that it is my clear political priority to ensure that the people living in Greenland should be the beneficiaries of developments within the oil, gas and minerals sectors in Greenland . . .*

*Our new mining and oil activities are taking place in some of the vastest and most pristine environments anywhere in the world. We do not need to be reminded by others of the preciousness of nature's wealth, because it continues to feed us, clothe us and sustain us every day.<sup>23</sup>*

The Greenlandic Inuit, with their traditional ties to the land, would be its surest guardians. As far as Hammond was concerned, Greenpeace could indeed go home.

### **Save the seals!**

The Greenlanders' distaste for Greenpeace stretches back well beyond the protests in Baffin Bay. After Greenpeace formally launched their 'Save the Arctic' campaign, I asked Aqqaluk Lynge, the Greenlandic Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), for his views. Lynge has cautioned Greenlanders to consider carefully how oil drilling might affect their land and society.<sup>24</sup> But he recalled Greenpeace's attacks on the seal hunt in the 1970s and 1980s, and the cultural and economic damage they inflicted on Inuit. In his view, this past injustice makes dialogue with Greenpeace difficult, if not impossible.<sup>25</sup>

Canadian Inuit share with their Greenlandic cousins the same painful sense of injury. Kirt Ejesiak, Vice-President of ICC Canada, told me in response to Greenpeace’s arctic campaign that ‘Inuit have long memories’. He assured me that Inuit have not forgotten the price they paid for the collapse of the trade in seal fur.<sup>26</sup>

Neither Lynge nor Ejesiak were dwelling on past wrongs for their own sake. They see Greenpeace—and much of the environmental movement—as essentially unreformed today. Whether the objection is to hunting seals or drilling oil, many Inuit believe Greenpeace has little regard for Inuit rights and Inuit reality. To see why, it’s worth looking in depth at the story of the Inuit seal hunt, and Greenpeace’s campaign to ‘save the seals’.

Seals are culturally vital to virtually all Inuit from Alaska to Greenland. Inuit hunt mostly ringed seal or *natsiq*, which inhabits the Arctic year-round, though harp seal or *qairrulik* is also important, especially in Greenland where they migrate as adults. In pre-colonial times, Inuit ate the meat of the seal, burned its fat in stone lamps for light and heat, and wore its skin and fur on their bodies.<sup>27</sup> Properly made, sealskin boots or *kamiit* are impervious to water—a critical innovation for a bitterly cold climate.

Today, Inuit no longer typically burn seal fat as fuel. But traditional Inuit seamstresses continue to make *kamiit*, and modern Inuit fashion designers transform ringed seal pelts into warm and attractive mitts, coats and other clothing and accessories.<sup>28</sup> Many—if not nearly all—Inuit also still prefer to eat seal rather than beef or other ‘southern’ meats. When Michaëlle Jean, Canada’s former Governor General, tasted the raw heart of a seal butchered in her honour at a community feast, Inuit were moved by her gesture of respect.<sup>29</sup>

Inuit have sold the silvery, mottled pelts of adult ringed and harp seal to fur traders since at least the early nineteenth century.<sup>30</sup> But it was a minor and opportunistic trade. The real demand in the fur market was for the luxurious snow-white coats of newborn harp seal pups.<sup>31</sup> Unlike ringed seals, which whelp their pups in Greenland and arctic Canada, harp seals whelp on the spring sea ice off Newfoundland, around Norway’s Jan Mayen Island, and in Russia’s White Sea.<sup>32</sup> For geographical reasons if nothing else, the hunt for ‘whitecoats’—later denounced as an inhumane slaughter by environmental activists—involved no Inuit.

However, it did involve intensive and unregulated hunting by Canadians, Norwegians and Russians. By 1940, after a century and a half of unbridled exploitation, the harp seal was nearly exterminated in Norwegian and Russian waters. The hunt in Atlantic Canada escalated in scale. Then, in 1961, a Norwegian company developed a commercial process for tanning seal pelts, and demand jumped. Even adult ringed and harp seal pelts rose in value, and fur merchants began to buy pelts from the Inuit harvest as well.<sup>33</sup>

The timing could not have been better for Inuit to enter the seal trade. In the 1960s, the last of the Inuit of Greenland and Canada to live on the land were settling into permanent villages. This movement was at least partially involuntary. Both the Danish and Canadian governments adopted resettlement policies, and each went so far as to move Inuit like pawns on a chessboard to suit their own political objectives—in Greenland, to make way for military bases, and in Canada to assert sovereignty over otherwise remote and uninhabited areas.<sup>34</sup> As a result of concentration into permanent villages, Inuit were separated from the hunting grounds between which they'd once moved in a seasonal round.

Inuit responded to this colonial intrusion not by abandoning their hunting economy, but by adapting their methods. Greater distance from wildlife necessitated greater hunting efficiency, which Inuit achieved with rifles, motorboats and snowmobiles.<sup>35</sup> The pressure to adapt could be bruising. In the eastern Canadian Arctic, police officers appear to have systematically shot the dog teams that pulled Inuit sledges or *qammutiit*, in a misguided attempt to impose southern Canadian animal-control laws on a people who customarily allowed their dogs to run loose.<sup>36</sup> Whatever the impetus, the consequence of village life was the same for Inuit everywhere. Hunting now required modern kit, and modern kit required money.

Jobs were scarce in the Arctic, but some Inuit found employment in government offices, on construction sites, in mines or at oil wells.<sup>37</sup> In Greenland, the fisheries also offered some hunters the prospect of paid work.<sup>38</sup> But every day that an Inuk worked for wages was a day that he—and almost all Inuit hunters are male—lost to a traditional life of hunting. The new demand for ringed seal pelts offered a far more attractive alternative, for it enabled Inuit to earn money from the hunt itself. Rather than replace traditional Inuit hunting culture, the commercial trade in seal pelts helped to preserve it.<sup>39</sup>

But it wasn't to last. Within fifteen years, the puppy-faced whitecoat harp seal had become one of the environmental movement's animal icons. Greenpeace and

other activists were alarmed by the harp seal's diminishing prospects for survival. And the whitecoat hunt itself—for which the Norwegians had invented the hakapik, a club brought down on the pup's head to spare the fur—seemed cruel and repellent to popular sensibilities.<sup>40</sup> Greenpeace and other activists staged protests on the sea ice during the whelping season and circulated graphic photographs of skinned pups scattered in pools of blood on the snow.<sup>41</sup>

Simultaneously, they lobbied governments to ban the seal trade. The United States obliged first, enacting a total ban on seal products in 1972.<sup>42</sup> The other major prize was Europe, the epicentre of the global fur market. After more than a decade of further campaigning, the European Economic Community finally prohibited the import of whitecoat pelts in 1983.<sup>43</sup> Canada eventually bowed to the pressure in 1987, and made the hunting of whitecoat pups illegal.<sup>44</sup>

Immediately, seal pelts plummeted in value.<sup>45</sup> The European ban in particular didn't apply to adult seals, and in fact exempted the Inuit hunt explicitly.<sup>46</sup> But in practice the exemption was worthless. The emotional and indiscriminating campaign to 'save the seals' had tainted anything to do with their harvest. Despite the pleas and efforts of Inuit to distinguish the whitecoat hunt from their own adult seal hunt, Greenpeace and other activists did little to correct media and public perceptions that all seals were whitecoats, and that all seal hunting meant bludgeoning newborns to death for nothing but their fur.<sup>47</sup> The whitecoat pup is still a symbol and a marketing tool for environmental activists today.<sup>48</sup>

Inuit communities were instantly impoverished. In 1983, before the ban came into effect, a single ringed seal pelt fetched enough money to pay for a full day of Inuit hunting by motorboat or snowmobile. By 1985, the same pelt barely covered the cost of bullets.<sup>49</sup> The Government of the Northwest Territories, which administered much of Canadian Inuit land at that time, estimated that 60 per cent of annual income in Inuit villages simply vanished.<sup>50</sup> In Greenland, the effect was similar, but unlike in Canada the newly autonomous and Inuit-led government attempted to prop up the hunt with a large subsidy. Unmarketable pelts stacked up.<sup>51</sup>

With employment still scarce in Inuit communities, poverty became endemic. Even today, in Canada's Inuit-majority territory of Nunavut, nearly half of the population depends on social assistance, and social housing makes up half of the total housing stock.<sup>52</sup> More appalling is evidence from Nunavut suggesting that the blow to Inuit culture—particularly to a masculine hunting identity—

contributed to an epidemic of mostly male suicide, which still claims lives at a rate thirteen times that of southern Canada.<sup>53</sup>

Greenpeace and other activists pursued the end of the seal hunt with remarkable single-mindedness. In 1977, Greenpeace even took a stand on principle against any killing of any seals anywhere, including by Inuit. Later, when the impact on Inuit communities started to become clear, they claimed never to have targeted the traditional Inuit hunt. Inuit, activists reasoned, were either unfortunate victims of collateral damage in a battle for the greater good, or fortunate refugees from historical victimisation in the colonial fur trade.<sup>54</sup>

Perhaps most galling to Inuit, Greenpeace and other activists reckoned that a hunt involving rifles, motorboats and snowmobiles, and generating money as well as food and clothing, didn't qualify as traditional in any case. Appropriating Inuit tradition from the Inuit themselves, they redefined it to agree with their own preconceptions of harpoons, kayaks and dog teams. By ruling out any necessary adaptations to contemporary colonial conditions, they implied that Inuit could only hunt seal justifiably in something like a pre-colonial manner.<sup>55</sup>

But since a return to pre-colonial times was impossible, Greenpeace and other activists could rationalise away the harm they had helped inflict on traditional Inuit culture. They simply denied that traditional Inuit culture continued to exist. With no sense of irony or humility, a Greenpeace official testifying before Canada's 1985 Royal Commission on sealing urged Inuit to 'accept a reality that is bigger than the both of us. A solution is that Inuit adopt a more traditional lifestyle'.<sup>56</sup>

### **Rainbow warriors or green colonialists?**

In 1984, Inuit from Greenland, Canada and Alaska met in Yellowknife, capital of Canada's Northwest Territories, to discuss the threat the environmental movement posed to their cultures. Having won the battle against the seal hunt, the environmental movement was now turning against fur trapping, a development that drew other northern indigenous peoples to the gathering as well.

Perhaps echoing the mood in the room, Stephen Kakfwi, then president of the Dene Nation and later Premier of the Northwest Territories, warned the assembly:

*This force is potentially far more dangerous than the threat to our lands posed by resource developers and far more oppressing than colonial governments.*<sup>57</sup>

Kakfwi's bold charge would eventually gain currency amongst critics of the burgeoning environmental movement. Within a decade, *eco-colonialism* had become a catchword amongst those who worried that environmentalism harboured within itself a tendency towards cultural or economic oppression.<sup>58</sup> Where yesterday's colonialists were extracting resources that belonged to colonised peoples, today's colonialists were cordoning them off.

Scholars of environmental ethics generally trace the intellectual history of this worry about eco-colonialism to the Indian thinker Ramachandra Guha. In a seminal article published in 1989—five years after Kakfwi's remarks—Guha developed what he called a 'third-world critique' of the radical environmental ethic known as *deep ecology*.<sup>59</sup>

For deep ecologists, the natural world enjoys an inherent value in its own right. They repudiate as 'shallow' and anthropocentric any environmentalism that relates the value of the natural world to the needs of human persons, with whom they place non-human forms of life and even nature itself on a moral par. From this 'ecocentric' perspective, the integrity of the environment can and often does rank before humans and their needs.<sup>60</sup>

Guha, however, believed that a peculiarly Western romantic fascination with 'unspoilt wilderness' lurked behind deep ecological thought. He suspected that Americans were particularly prone to it, with their vast, open and beautiful continent still largely unmarred by the Old World's millennia cultivating and altering the land. Inspired by a vision of nature without people, American deep ecologists could elevate the strict protection of wilderness into a categorical moral imperative.<sup>61</sup>

In poorer developing countries, however, this was a dangerous idea. Especially in densely populated areas, subordinating human needs to wilderness protection inevitably meant excluding or dislocating poor rural people from their lands and resources. Guha saw this eco-colonialist pressure at work in his native India, where peasants and livestock had been barred from traditional lands newly designated as tiger reserves.<sup>62</sup>

For Guha, deep ecology ultimately amounted to philosophical cover for the ‘imperialist yearnings’ of first-world environmentalists to dominate and control lands and resources in developing countries according to their own values and aims.<sup>63</sup> His analysis soon gained traction outside the academy. At an international environmental conference in 1992, Mostafa Tolba, then Executive Director of the UN Environmental Programme, admonished delegates:

*There are complaints—loud complaints—from a number of developing countries, that the rich are more interested in making the Third World into a natural history museum than they are in filling the bellies of its people. . . . These people cannot be denied the right to use their natural patrimony.*<sup>64</sup>

For our purposes here, it’s not necessary to subscribe wholesale to Guha’s ‘third-world critique’ of deep ecology. It’s enough to note the tension to which he points. For environmentalists, particularly those of an activist or radical stripe, the most pressing concern is to sequester nature from its use by people. For rural peoples, particularly those in developing countries, the most pressing concern is to use nature without destroying it to satisfy their needs.

Even in developed countries, this tension is apparent. By the mid-1980s, thanks in no small part to the work of Greenpeace and other environmentalists, the public had generally come to accept that the environment is a public good, and that it’s in the public interest to protect it even at some cost. But how much cost is too much, and who should pay the price, remain contentious today.

Greenpeace might have woken up to this tension in 1976, the year they threw their weight behind the campaign against the seal hunt. According to Patrick Moore, one of Greenpeace’s founding members, it wasn’t Inuit but rather poor sealing families in rural Newfoundland outports who sounded the alarm:

*For the first time Greenpeace was portrayed as the Goliath against poor Newfoundland sealers who needed to put bread on the table. The intelligentsia and media of central Canada tended to side with people over seals. We were no longer white knights in shining armor to everyone.*<sup>65</sup>

However, Moore and his Greenpeace colleagues were certain that they were still white knights in shining armour to the seals, and that was enough. Eventually, many people would come to agree with them.

A decade later, however, Moore resigned from Greenpeace after fifteen years in its top ranks. He was dismayed by Greenpeace’s increasing eagerness to adopt radical policies that reflected what he called an ‘antihuman bias’—an extreme deep ecological bias of the sort Guha criticised. In his view, this radicalism has only intensified within Greenpeace since, as well as across the environmental movement generally.<sup>66</sup> In this, Moore might agree with Aqqaluk Lynge, Kirt Ejesiak, Stephen Kakfwi and other indigenous critics that environmental activism conceals an existential threat to their cultures.

For indigenous peoples, the tension that Guha described takes on a special salience. Like rural peoples from majority cultures, indigenous people tend to relate to nature as a renewable source of resources they can use to meet their human needs. But as minority and colonised peoples, their foremost objective is to legalise access or title to traditional land and resources in order to secure them for their own benefit, and to prevent their continued exploitation by others.

Moreover, indigenous peoples characteristically identify closely with their land and traditional patterns of resource use. Their concern with nature cannot be separated from their concern with survival as distinct peoples, especially as peoples holding on to their identities under the assimilative pressure of colonisation. Remove indigenous peoples from their land or curtail their use of it, and they risk succumbing to cultural oblivion.

Seen in this light, Guha’s eco-colonialism oppresses indigenous people twice over. First, it denies them the benefits of their lands and resources—not by justifying exploitation by outsiders, but by preventing indigenous peoples themselves from using them profitably. Second, by interfering with the characteristic ways in which indigenous people occupy their land and use its resources, eco-colonialism erodes indigenous culture and endangers indigenous peoples’ survival.<sup>67</sup>

It’s worth noting that not all environmental activism entails eco-colonialism. During the heat of the anti-sealing campaign, some activist organisations ended their protest once the Canadian government imposed sustainable harvest quotas on harp seals, which had never been formally endangered. Future viability of the species was their goal, rather than a complete end to the hunt.<sup>68</sup> The most prominent of these activist organisations was the World Wildlife Fund, which continue to face harsh criticism from other activists for tolerating sealing.<sup>69</sup>

But eco-colonialism may be inadvertent to the point of negligence. Even if Greenpeace and other activists didn’t specifically aim to stop Inuit from

harvesting ringed seal, they undermined the economic basis of the Inuit harvest by thoroughly stigmatising seal fur. The end result was no less harmful: a people who'd already been forced by colonial governments to rely on money and modern kit to maintain their traditional hunt were now forced by a colonialist environmental movement to face losing their hunting culture altogether. The movement only patronised Inuit further by declaring that the need for money proved that Inuit hunting culture was already lost.

### **Save the Arctic!**

Thirty years later, Inuit leaders such as Aqqaluk Lynge and Kirt Ejesiak detect precisely the same patronising, eco-colonialist attitude in Greenpeace's contemporary campaign to 'save the Arctic' from oil drilling. Just as Greenpeace and other activists once failed to recognise how Inuit had adapted their culture to colonisation and money, they now seem to fail to recognise how Inuit are adapting their culture to decolonisation and oil.

Over the past few decades, Inuit have met colonial governments in court and across the negotiating table in a long struggle for their rights as indigenous people. But they weren't fighting to turn back the clock to an irretrievable past. Inuit realised that the adaptations that they had made under colonial rule—in some cases, within the space of a generation—were permanent. Any satisfactory enumeration of their rights would now have to reflect the full gamut of social and economic forces shaping their distinct culture and tradition today.<sup>70</sup>

With respect to rights over land and resources, this meant not only hunting grounds and wildlife, but also minerals, petroleum and a say in the pace and scope of resource development. Inuit would not be content to continue to watch resource companies tally up their profits in southern headquarters, and pay their royalties and taxes to southern governments. Rather, Inuit expected the right to decide where and when development would occur, and how to balance development with environmental concerns. And as befits landowners in their own land, they expected a share of the benefits.<sup>71</sup>

By and large, Inuit have achieved recognition of these rights. Between 1971 and 2009, they settled eight major claims covering all Inuit lands in North America—many of them groundbreaking in scope.<sup>72</sup> The 1993 Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, for example, between Canada and the Inuit of the central and eastern Canadian Arctic, made Inuit there Canada's largest landowners, and gave them title to valuable deposits of minerals.<sup>73</sup> And as we've seen, the 2009

Self Rule Agreement between Denmark and Greenland provided not only for the possibility of political independence for Greenlandic Inuit, but also a means to finance it through the export of valuable natural resources—not least, offshore oil.

In parallel with these developments, the international community also took up the cause of indigenous rights. In 2007, after a twenty-five year negotiating process, the United Nations unveiled a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. A core principle of the Declaration is that indigenous peoples have rights over both renewable and non-renewable natural resources in their traditional lands—including the right to ‘free, prior and informed consent’ to their use.<sup>74</sup>

Inuit aren’t blind to the responsibilities these rights entail. They realise the risks that oil drilling and fossil-fuel use pose to the arctic environment, and by extension to the culture they’ve fought to preserve.<sup>75</sup> We’ve already seen that Greenlandic leaders such as Aqqaluk Lynge take a circumspect view of oil development and its potential effects. Just across the border with Canada, the Inuit of Baffin Island also remain extremely wary of oil companies wishing to explore off their coasts.<sup>76</sup> The Inuvialuit of Canada’s western Arctic, who have long experience of onshore oil development, recognise the step change in risk with offshore drilling.<sup>77</sup> Even further to the west, in Alaska, Inupiat are deeply divided about offshore drilling, and Greenpeace is a valuable ally for those Inupiat who oppose it.<sup>78</sup>

All things considered, however, Inuit as a whole support oil drilling, even if cautiously and conditionally.<sup>79</sup> Together with mining, fishing and other resource industries in which Inuit now have a stake, oil drilling holds out the hope of a new self-reliance through employment, community development, and the financial wherewithal to help both repair the damage of colonisation and usher Inuit society into the future on their own terms.

Most importantly, Inuit insist that it will be they who make the decision. In their declaration on resource development on Inuit lands, the ICC stressed that Inuit must be consulted on plans for their resources as owners and primary beneficiaries—a strong version of the UN’s ‘free, prior and informed consent’ principle. And even more strongly, they cautioned governments, resource developers and environmentalists that:

*Inuit invite—and are entitled to expect—all those who have or seek a role in the governance, management, development, or use of the resources of Inuit Nunaat [Inuit lands and waters] to conduct themselves within the letter and spirit of this Declaration.<sup>80</sup>*

But despite this clear advice, both Aqqaluk Lynge and Kirt Ejesiak informed me that Greenpeace made no attempt to understand or accommodate the Inuit point of view before launching their campaign to ‘save the Arctic’.<sup>81</sup>

That’s why, when Kumi Naidoo boarded an oil rig off the coast of Greenland and accused international oil companies of shamelessly endangering a pristine wilderness just to turn a quick profit, Inuit heard his message very differently than the rest of Greenpeace’s worldwide audience did. By attempting to blockade oil exploration that an Inuit self-rule government had authorised under its own hard-won jurisdiction, Greenpeace essentially suggested to Inuit that in order to ‘save the Arctic’, it would have to save them from themselves.

Small wonder, then, that Inuit leaders have linked Greenpeace’s new campaign to ‘save the Arctic’ to their old campaign to ‘save the seals’. Perhaps Greenpeace have learned enough not to counsel Inuit to give up on oil and ‘adopt a more traditional lifestyle’, but the undercurrent of paternalism and eco-colonialism seems unmistakable. Reinforcing this impression is Greenpeace’s tendency—in keeping with Guha’s criticism of deep ecology—to treat the Arctic as though it were an empty wilderness devoid of people.

This past Christmas, for example, Greenpeace released a bleak video featuring a ragged and distraught Santa Claus wading through a flooded concrete cellar. Santa complains to the viewer that melting ice at the North Pole is threatening to sink his toy factory—indeed, his very home—and that soon there will be no more Christmas. The pitch: sign up to Greenpeace’s arctic campaign, rescue Christmas and ‘save Santa’s home’!<sup>82</sup> This may seem like clever marketing, but to anyone who’s lived in the Arctic—not to mention the Inuit who legitimately call the Arctic home—it can seem almost completely tone-deaf.

Less comically but no less tellingly, Greenpeace’s campaign to ‘save the Arctic’ rests on a dubious analogy between the Arctic and the Antarctic. A central demand of Greenpeace’s campaign is for an arctic version of the Antarctic Treaty System, an international regime purpose-built for a continent that’s home to no one. With no previous history of habitation, colonisation, or exploitation, and

only the barest of grounds for sovereign claims, Antarctica exemplifies the international legal principle of the ‘common heritage of humanity’.<sup>83</sup>

On the basis of this principle, the Antarctic Treaty System puts all claims on Antarctica into abeyance, and it bans resource development there to help preserve the Antarctic environment for science. In this way, Antarctica is like the Moon and outer space, which are also part of humanity’s common heritage, and which have similar treaties putting them beyond the exclusive possession and use of any state or corporation. The Arctic’s indigenous peoples might frown upon the idea that any part of their homeland should be someone else’s common heritage—and legally much the same as extraterrestrial space—but Greenpeace continue to promote the analogy.<sup>84</sup>

Even where Greenpeace do try to engage with arctic indigenous peoples, the results can seem ham-fisted. Recently, Greenpeace have touted a petition against arctic oil drilling supported by every arctic indigenous group.<sup>85</sup> When revealed, it had barely more than twenty signatures, which increased in a second version only to forty. Most were Russian indigenous people, whose government denies them their basic indigenous rights whilst giving resource companies a free hand. Others were indigenous people from groups outside the Arctic.<sup>86</sup> Terry Audla, President of the national Canadian Inuit organisation Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, shot back that Greenpeace had now stooped so low as to appropriate the indigenous voice.<sup>87</sup>

Even so, there are some small signs of hope that Greenpeace’s new rainbow warriors are beginning to shed their old green colonialism. Over recent months, a senior Greenpeace campaigner has been touring Greenland with little fanfare, speaking with students there about Greenpeace’s vision for the Arctic.<sup>88</sup> The tour seems to have been in preparation for last week’s publication of a third-party report, commissioned by Greenpeace, evaluating Greenland’s economic prospects without oil.<sup>89</sup> This decision to contribute constructively to the debate can only be welcome—and a welcome relief from Greenpeace’s damn-the-torpedoes approach to protest.

Nonetheless, a caveat remains: Greenpeace are still implacably opposed to oil drilling in the waters off Greenland, or anywhere else in the Arctic. They’re certainly right to point out the dangers of oil pollution there, and to help inform decision-making by researching and publicising the alternatives. But the best way for Greenpeace to prove their sincerity would be to demonstrate willingness to collaborate and compromise with Inuit—even if that means permitting some

rigorously monitored oil development. Only then could Greenpeace be sure to avoid the mistake they made thirty years ago, when they injured the Inuit to save the seals.

### **Coda: an apology and a warning**

Greenpeace finally did have second thoughts about their behaviour during the anti-sealing campaign. In 1985, they despatched delegates to tour Greenland and apologise for what they described as unintentional harm to Inuit.<sup>90</sup> Since then, they've refrained from criticising the Inuit seal hunt, and they've even gone so far as to give the hunt their powerful imprimatur.<sup>91</sup> For an indigenous industry floored once again in 2009, when the European Union expanded its ban on whitecoats to include all seal products, this is a helpful change in approach.<sup>92</sup>

Since their apology, Greenpeace seem to have become more open to traditional indigenous uses of nature. In recent years, for example, Greenpeace have worked with the Saami people of Finland to preserve old-growth forest critical to traditional Saami reindeer herding.<sup>93</sup> And in the face of their own storied history opposing whaling, they've publicly supported traditional whale hunts in Alaska and Washington State by Yupik and Makah peoples.

This support for indigenous whaling has cost Greenpeace the respect of other activist organisations.<sup>94</sup> Some are splinter groups formed by hard-line Greenpeace activists disgusted with Greenpeace for 'selling out', and for shying away from more radical positions and tactics. The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, for example, founded by early Greenpeace activist Paul Watson, rejects Greenpeace's accommodation with indigenous whalers and sealers, as well as their philosophy of non-violence.

Nevertheless, Greenlanders have not been so easily mollified. It was perhaps on one community visit during Greenpeace's apology tour that a banner reading 'Greenshit' was first unfurled. In 1991, the Greenlandic band Qarsoq turned the 'Greenshit' tag into a rock song, complete with a music video featuring lingering and melancholic black-and-white shots of Inuit elders and the seal harvest.<sup>95</sup>

It's not hard to understand Greenlanders' continued frustration with Greenpeace, and especially their sense that Greenpeace is wilfully blind to—or at least culpably ignorant of—contemporary Inuit life. As we've seen, this has much to do with Greenpeace's uncompromising opposition to oil drilling. But it's also worth pointing out that, despite acts of solidarity with indigenous peoples,

Greenpeace seem no less willing now than they were thirty years ago to reserve to themselves the right to define what counts as traditional indigenous practice.

Echoing their earlier appropriation of Inuit seal-hunting tradition, for example, Greenpeace made clear to the Makah that they supported a ‘subsistence’ whale hunt only. If the Makah were ever to earn money from hunting whales, Greenpeace would join Sea Shepherd and other organisations in actively opposing them.<sup>96</sup> The Makah have not yet sold whale meat or other products, but even so they’d have some reason to think that the difference between Greenpeace and Sea Shepherd is the same as the difference between good cop and bad cop.

In Greenland, where meat from the Inuit whale hunt is sold as a cultural delicacy to tourists and the public in grocery stores and restaurants, Greenpeace’s distinction between traditional whaling and commercial whaling seems muddle-headed.<sup>97</sup> Greenlanders might justifiably wonder if Greenpeace have learned nothing from the hardship Inuit endured after the collapse of the market for seal fur. What was their apology really worth?

Indeed, the Government of Greenland have asked this very question. In a 2012 report on sealing in Greenland, they did not hide their reservations:

*Even if it will not rectify the damages done, some environmental organizations have defended indigenous harvesting, and some others have retracted their positions opposing. One of them is Greenpeace, which expressed an official apology to the Inuit communities for the damages Greenpeace have caused with the anti-sealskin campaigns. However, later campaigns and activities by Greenpeace have shown a continued lack of understanding of Arctic living conditions.<sup>98</sup>*

In an earlier version of the paper, however, the government preferred not to mince words. Instead, they said straightforwardly that Greenpeace’s later campaigns and activities ‘have shown that the apology did not come from the heart’.<sup>99</sup>

## Notes

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- <sup>2</sup> This and the remainder of the story of Greenpeace’s 2013 action on the *Prirazlomnaya*, unless otherwise cited, from Greenpeace International, “LIVE – Latest updates from the Arctic Sunrise activists”, press release, 29 December 2013.
- <sup>3</sup> Greenpeace International, “Kumi Naidoo boards Arctic oil rig demanding Cairn’s oil spill response plan”, press release, 17 June 2011.
- <sup>4</sup> Bob Weber, “Greenpeace says it left Russian waters under threat of gunfire”, *The Globe and Mail*, 26 August 2013.
- <sup>5</sup> Shaun Walker, “Greenpeace activists could be charged with terrorism after ship stormed”, *The Guardian*, 20 September 2013.
- <sup>6</sup> From Arctic Sunrise Twitter feed, available at: [http://twitter.com/gp\\_sunrise/status/380127561423925248](http://twitter.com/gp_sunrise/status/380127561423925248).
- <sup>7</sup> Greenpeace International, “Piracy charge against Arctic activists ‘an assault on peaceful protest’ – Greenpeace”, press release, 2 October 2013.
- <sup>8</sup> Steve Robson, “Greenpeace Arctic 30: Eleven Nobel Peace Prize winners ask Russia to drop piracy charges”, *The Daily Mirror*, 17 October 2013. Archbishop Tutu’s letter is available at: <http://www.tutu.org.za/archbishop-tutus-letter-asking-russia-to-free-greenpeace-activists-16-october-2013/>.
- <sup>9</sup> Legal expert statement dated 11 October 2013 available at: <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/Global/international/briefings/other/Satement-of-concern.pdf>.
- <sup>10</sup> “Greenpeace charges are excessive, says David Cameron”, *BBC News*, 7 November 2013
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- <sup>14</sup> See Greenpeace’s campaign site at: <http://savethearctic.org/>, in particular the FAQs at: <http://www.savethearctic.org/en-GB/pages/faq/>; see also Anthony Specia, “Arctic savior complex”, *Northern Public Affairs*, 7 July 2012 and Anthony Specia, “A response to Greenpeace”, *Northern Public Affairs*, 11 September 2012.

- <sup>15</sup> Other locations included Shetland, Finland and New Zealand. See John Robertson, “Oil firm demands Greenpeace end ‘foolhardy’ and ‘reckless’ stunt on drilling ship”, *The Shetland Times*, 21 September 2010; “Activists protest Shell’s Finnish icebreaker rental”, *YLE Uutiset*, 16 March 2012; Alex DeMarban, “Xena’ actress Lucy Lawless, Greenpeace occupy Alaska-bound drilling ship”, *Alaska Dispatch*, 23 February 2012.
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- <sup>17</sup> Greenpeace International, “Kumi Naidoo boards Arctic oil rig demanding Cairn’s oil spill response plan”, press release, 17 June 2011.
- <sup>18</sup> “Greenshit tag hjem!”, *Sermitsiaq*, 20 August 2010; Jane George, “Greenland touted as billion-a-year oil beneficiary”, *Nunatsiaq News*, 24 August 2010.
- <sup>19</sup> Sylvia Pfeifer and Christopher Thompson, “The struggle for Greenland’s oil”, *Financial Times*, 26 August 2011.
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- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*
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- <sup>32</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Seals and Sealing in Canada*, Volume 2, 1986, pp 3-4 and 9.
- <sup>33</sup> George Wenzel, *Animal rights, human rights: Ecology, economy and ideology in the Canadian Arctic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp 44-45 and 50-51.
- <sup>34</sup> Natalia Loukacheva, *The arctic promise: Legal and political autonomy of Greenland and Nunavut* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp 27-28; *Qikiqtani Truth Commission final report: Achieving saimaqatigiiniq*, 2010, pp 11-14.
- <sup>35</sup> George Wenzel, *Animal rights, human rights: Ecology, economy and ideology in the Canadian Arctic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp 34, 94-96 and 164-66.
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- <sup>37</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Seals and Sealing in Canada*, Volume 2, 1986, pp 228-29.
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- <sup>39</sup> George Wenzel, *Animal rights, human rights: Ecology, economy and ideology in the Canadian Arctic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp 114-16.
- <sup>40</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Seals and Sealing in Canada*, Volume 2, 1986, p 184; Sheryl Fink, *An illustrated guide to the tools used to kill seals in Canada’s commercial seal hunt*, International Fund for Animal Welfare Technical Report 2007-2, 2007, p 2.
- <sup>41</sup> George Wenzel, *Animal rights, human rights: Ecology, economy and ideology in the Canadian Arctic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p 48; for a detailed narrative account of Greenpeace’s anti-sealing activities, see Patrick Moore, *Confessions of a Greenpeace dropout: The making of a sensible*

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- <sup>46</sup> *Council Directive 83/129/EEC*, preamble and article 3, available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31983L0129:EN:HTML>.
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- <sup>50</sup> Shelagh Jane Woods, “The wolf at the door: The anti-harvest campaign strikes at the heart of northern aboriginal economies”, *Northern Perspectives* 14(2), 1986, p 4.
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- <sup>53</sup> “Healing an industry, people”, *Northern News Service*, 6 December 1996; “Suicide numbers in Nunavut in 2013 a record high”, *CBC News*, 10 January 2014.

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- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, pp 149-151 and 164-166.
- <sup>56</sup> Cited in *ibid*, p 155.
- <sup>57</sup> Shelagh Jane Woods, “The wolf at the door: The anti-harvest campaign strikes at the heart of northern aboriginal economies”, *Northern Perspectives* 14(2), 1986, p 1.
- <sup>58</sup> Douglas Crowe and Jeff Shryer, “Eco-colonialism”, *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 23(1), 1995, p 26.
- <sup>59</sup> Ramachandra Guha, “Radical American environmentalism and wilderness preservation: A third-world critique”, *Environmental Ethics* 11(1), 1989, pp 71-83.
- <sup>60</sup> Bron Taylor and Michael Zimmerman, “Deep ecology”, in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed Bron Taylor (London: Continuum, 2005), pp 456-60.
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- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p 76.
- <sup>64</sup> Cited in Douglas Crowe and Jeff Shryer, “Eco-colonialism”, *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 23(1), 1995, p 26.
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- <sup>71</sup> Robert McPherson, *New owners in their own land: Minerals and Inuit land claims* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2003), pp 121-58.
- <sup>72</sup> In chronological order, these agreements are the Alaska Native Claims Settlement (1971), James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (1975), Greenland Home-Rule Agreement (1979), Inuvialuit Final Agreement (1984), Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (1993), Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement (2006), Nunavik Inuit Land Claims Agreement (2008) and Greenland Self-Rule Agreement (2009).
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