Cod and its oil, cuisine and its supplements: fish fragmentation, commodity connections and naturalising resources in Newfoundland

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By spotlighting cod liver oil as an example of a global fat and reflecting on the commercialisation of fish – from food source and medicine to dietary supplement – this article surveys cod's colonial history in Newfoundland alongside cultural imaginations of resources. The oil's popularity boomed in the early twentieth century with the discovery of vitamins, which gifted foods and their by-products new values. This article thus sketches out how fish, fat and commercial markets connect the history of cod liver oil in Newfoundland with the world. Prioritising three cultural artefacts – a folk song, a cookbook and a piece of prose – it introduces what I call 'fish fragmentation' and, in broad strokes, shows how this overlaps with the invention of cod as a commodity. To conclude, it considers what makes a resource 'natural' and, along the way, represents Newfoundland's history as a colony built by cod, which is to says its extractive relationship with the ocean.

keywords: *Newfoundland and Labrador, cod liver oil, vitamins, extraction, food*

abstract

Introduction: welcome to Farewell

A local history museum in Seldom Harbour on the largest offshore island of what is now the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador – the Fogo Island Marine Interpretation Centre – was first the Fisherman's Union Trading Company, formed in 1909. Opened as a branch store in 1913 and closed in 1978, 'F.U. Trading Co, Ltd.' still brands the white panels in burnt brown. The building's closest neighbour once housed a cod liver oil factory. After bringing in their catch, fishers would take the livers, stash them in drums and sell them to merchants. At the factory, the livers were boiled, rendering the oil so that the discard, the 'waste', would settle in the bottom. The oil was then stored in holding tanks and shipped to the United States.[1] During the two months I spent in Newfoundland studying what I call codscapes – how codfish shape

[1] The Town of Fogo Island, 'Seldom-Little Seldom: Fogo Island Marine Interpretation Centre', https://www.townoffogoisland.ca/home/42 (accessed 25 Nov. 2024).

cultures from Norway to the Mediterranean and from Newfoundland to the Caribbean – this museum was the closest I came to cod liver.[2] When I visited the processing floor of the Fogo Island Fish Co-operative, the cod that spilled out of ice-packed bins lined up to dump onto a conveyer belt to turn into food were already without their livers. They had been gutted at sea. This is to say that cod liver oil is part of Fogo's past, not its present. But, of course, the past never stays still and history, as a discipline, studies how it pokes out in the now. As Black studies scholar Christina Sharpe writes, 'In the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the

[2] Fogo Island has been the focus of academic studies, documentary films, and, most recently, luxury travel. Two projects fire this interest: *The Fogo Process* films of 1967 and The Fogo Island Inn, which opened in 2013 and is an example of what Michael James Carroll calls a 'total design project' that models the role of 'critical regionalism' in the production of place. See B.J. McCay, 'Women's rights, community survival, and the fisheries cooperative of Fogo Island', in Reginald Byron (ed.), *Retrenchment and Regeneration in Rural Newfoundland*, pp. 158–76 (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2003); R. Mellin, *Tilting: House Launching, Slide Hauling, Potato Trenching, And Other Tales from a Newfoundland Fishing Village* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003); André Tavares, *Architecture Follows Fish: An Amphibious History of the North Atlantic* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2024), p. 7; D. Banoub, 'Fogo Island arriving: An anti-essentialist reading', *Newfoundland Studies* **27** (1)(2012): 33–62; S. Crocker, 'Filmmaking and the politics of remoteness: The genesis of the Fogo process on Fogo Island, Newfoundland', *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures* **2** (1) (2008); S. Newhook, 'The godfathers of Fogo: Donald Snowden, Fred Earle and the roots of the Fogo Island Films, 1964–1967', *Newfoundland Studies* **24** (2) (2009); K. Knight and M. Connolly, *Strange And Familiar: Architecture On Fogo Island*, 2015, 52 min; M.J. Carroll, 'The Fogo Island experiment', in Urs Peter Flueckiger and Victoria McReynolds (eds), *Crossings Between the Proximate and Remote: ACSCA Fall Conference Proceedings*, pp. 87–92 (2017); M.I. Wilson, 'Smart and sustainable: Lessons from Fogo Island', in A. Stratigea, E. Kyriakides and C. Nicolaides (eds), *Smart Cities in the Mediterranean Coping with Sustainability Objectives in Small and Medium-sized Cities and Island Communities*, pp. 195–203 (New York: Springer, 2017); J. Rockett and D. Ramsey, 'Resident perceptions of rural tourism development: The case of Fogo Island and Change Islands, Newfoundland, Canada', *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* **15** (4) (2017): 299–318; B. Trelstad, W. Smith and N. Slawinski, 'Shorefast: A strange and familiar way to reimagine capitalism', *Harvard Business School Case 320-098* (April 2020).

present.'[3] In this article, the past appears in burnt brown paint and factories transformed into museums, and in cookbooks and song lyrics and prose.

Surveying cod's colonial history in Newfoundland in tandem with how this 'global fat' threads together places, my contribution to this special issue focuses on the fragmentation and commercialisation of codfish: from food source and medicine to dietary supplement. I draw from cultural and environmental history to spotlight narratives and imaginations of cod liver oil, an example of both an edible animal fat and a marine oil. The essay begins with cod and colonialism in Newfoundland and introduces what I call fish fragmentation.[4] The second section considers global commodity connections, as represented by the lyrics of the folk song 'Cod Liver Oil', and the shifting boundaries between food and medicine and supplements. Leading toward the conclusion's consideration of 'natural' resources, the third section unpacks the expression 'making the fish' via a piece of prose by Michael Crummey. A text this short cannot answer a question as big as 'what makes a resource natural' and yet by posing it I illuminate the connections between fish fragmentation and the invention of cod as a commodity, and between extraction and colonialism, cuisines and vitamins.

An island called New

Terra Nova. New Found Land. In *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*, the novelist and anthropologist Amitav Ghosh writes that 'In such acts of renaming, the adjective 'New' comes to be invested with an extraordinary semantic and symbolic violence. Not only does it create a *tabula rasa*, erasing the past, but it also invests a place with meanings derived from faraway places.'[5] The island

[3] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 19.

[4] I focus on Newfoundland and regrettably overlook Labrador.

[5] Amitav Ghosh, *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), p. 49.

of Newfoundland, however, doesn't quite follow this rule. It is not New Brunswick or New York or New Zealand. It is land, in general. But here, it was never about land. It was all about water. It was all about cod. Cod the fish may be plural – there are ten families and over 200 species – but to say cod is to usually mean *Gadus morhua*, and in Newfoundland to say fish is to mean cod.

Newfoundland is as old as it is young, meaning that it is Britain's oldest colony, yet Canada's youngest province, having joined Confederation only in 1949. It was because of fish that Britain claimed these lands and waters – an island the Mi'kmaw call *Ktaqmkuk*[6] – for its empire. Cod's commercial and extractive history in Newfoundland began in 1497. The year before, King Henry VII granted the Venetian Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot) permission to sail west toward Asia and claim non-Christian lands. His ship's arrival to the shores of what is now called Newfoundland and Labrador anchor Britain's claim to North America, where Cabot witnessed 'codfish so thick they slowed the progress of our ship'.[7] Following this voyage, Europeans exploited north-western Atlantic cod stocks. They cast their lines along Fogo Islands shores as early as the sixteenth century, but did not permanently settle the island, which the Beothuk regularly visited in the summer, until the eighteenth.

'We're all here because of fish', Zita Cobb, an eighth-generation Fogo Islander and the founder of Shorefast and the Fogo Island Inn, tells me. Atlantic cod built empires and fortunes and worlds. The European appetite for Atlantic cod also displaced peoples, redrew maps and devastated ecosystems.[8] The Dominion of Newfoundland was,

[6] In addition to the Mi'kmaw, the original inhabitants of what is now called Newfoundland included the Beothuk, who are believed to be extinct. See C.P. Aylward, *Beothuk: How Story Made a People (Almost) Disappear* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2024).

[7] I write about this in L.S. Gora, '*Baccalà* in Venice, cod in the world', in C. Baldacci, S. Bassi, L. de Capitani, and P.D. Omodeo (eds), *Venice and the Anthropocene: An Ecocritical Guide* (Venice: Wetlands, 2022), pp. 91–94.

[8] For the history of cod, see M. Kurlansky, *Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World* (London: Vintage, 1999 [1997]); E. Townsend, *Cod: A Global History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2022), G.A. Rose, *Cod: The Ecological History*

in other words, a colony built by cod. 'In Cod We Trust', reads a sign in Port Union, another outport and the country's only union built town, founded by fishermen. And in Cod They Trusted until the fishery collapsed on 2 July 1992 and the Fisheries and Oceans Ministry announced a two-year moratorium that was extended for an additional thirty years.[9] What STS scholar Max Liboiron calls 'colonial land relations', which cast extraction as a capitalist mode of production, turned Atlantic cod into an industrial fish, a commodity.[10]

Stories about fish are slippery. They splash and they slide. Recipes construct, represent and even resist the specificities of place, and quite often they say more about trade than they do about geography – how empires connect dots, construct routes and manifest markets. Recipes, in other words, double as maps and import-export records. Local foods shift based on the migration of people, plants and animals, and on shifts in spatial, cultural and culinary boundaries. As geographers Ian Cook and Philip Crang insist, foods are 'not only placed cultural artefacts'; foods 'dis-place materials and practices, inhabiting many times and spaces which … bleed into and mutually constitute each other'.[11] Therefore, foods are 'geographically constituted through processes of "*displacement*".'[12] This is to say that 'foods do not simply come from places … but also make places as symbolic constructs'.[13] It is because of this fluid relationship to place coupled with the entanglements between cuisine and colonialism

of the North Atlantic Fisheries (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 2007); L. Collingham, *The Hungry Empire: How Britain's Quest for Food Shaped the Modern World* (London: Vintage, 2007); and P. E. Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

[9] See D. Bavington, *Managed Annihilation: An Unnatural History of the Newfoundland Cod Collapse* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

[10] M. Liboiron, *Pollution is Colonialism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2021), p. 7.

[11] I. Cook and P. Crang, 'The world on a plate: Culinary culture, displacement and geographical knowledges', *Journal of Material Culture* **1** (2) (1996): 131–53, at 131.

[12] Ibid., 138.

[13] Ibid., 140.

that cod defines the culinary cultures of so many places, including many where the fish does not live, from Portugal to Nigeria and from Jamaica to Puerto Rico. A regional or even national food is not necessarily a local one.

In 2019, chef Jeremey Charles published the cookbook *Wildness: An Ode to Newfoundland and Labrador*, and its first chapter is, unsurprisingly, titled 'Cod'.[14] Rather than calling for a whole fish, the recipes call for salt cod (dried and salted fillets), sounds (the swim bladder), head, nape (the collar), tongues and liver. This remind me that, as a cultural historian, I mostly study fragments rather than wholes: geographical bits and pieces of fillets and cheeks, tongues and livers, bellies and roe.[15] This is what I call fish fragmentation, which is to say how food processing fractures a fish by turning it into parts that obscure its once-upon-a-time origin as a whole, as an animal. And this is what contemporary food production does: it transforms flora and fauna into products and by-products.

In contrast, I travelled to Newfoundland to understand the fish, first, on its own terms, and then how it becomes a fragmented 'product'. I followed fish and its colonial ghosts to study what became a post-industrial fish after the 1992 Moratorium, looking at how culinary cultures in Newfoundland entangle with resource extraction and industrialisation, followed by deindustrialisation. Cod still holds a mythic place in Newfoundland culture, a point fishery scientist George A. Rose makes, arguing that 'there is no stronger definition, no stronger attachment or symbolism than Newfoundland and Labrador with Atlantic cod'.[16] Not even the 1992 Moratorium loosened this tie, and absence can be as strong as presence.

[14] J. Charles and A.L. Gollner, *Wildness: An Ode to Newfoundland and Labrador* (London: Phaidon, 2019).

[15] I write about this in L.S. Gora, 'To steal a fish', in Enric Bou (ed.) *Stories Come To Matter: Water, Food, and Other Entanglements* (Venice: Biblioteca di Rassegna Iberistica, Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2025).

[16] G.A. Rose, *Cod: The Ecological History of the North Atlantic Fisheries* (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 2007), p. 13.

Cod and its oil

Unlike other fish, a cod's fat is concentrated in its liver, which contains omega-3 fatty acids, and the rest of its body is lean.[17] 'A foul-tasting, nourishing oil', its raw form comes from fermenting cod livers, historically in wooden barrels, which yields an oil that ranges from shy yellow to confident brown.[18] Much older than the colony of Newfoundland, cod liver oil from Vestfjord, Norway, together with stockfish – split and dried cod that has a shelf life long enough to keep up with the slowest of ships – was an important early commodity.[19] In Newfoundland barrel oil was called 'rotted'.[20] The global history of cod liver oil is long and its uses many: to illuminate lamps;[21] to produce paint and soap and as an ingredient in leather tanning;[22] to mix with clay and to paint wood to protect it against salt;[23] to flavour the Russian fish soup *ukha*;[24] to feed livestock, like poultry;[25] and as a remedy for aches and pains, a means to treat the likes of scurvy or rickets. By the twentieth century, its main use was as a dietary supplement.

What role does cod liver oil play in the relationship between Newfoundland and fish? From the capital of St John's – known simply as 'Town' – balladeer Johnny Burke (1851–1930) is credited as

[17] For an overview of fish oil, see H.B. Rice and A. Ismail, 'Fish oils in human nutrition: History and current status', in S.K. Raatz and D.M. Bibus (eds), *Fish and Fish Oil in Health and Disease Prevention* (London, San Diego, Cambridge, MA, and Oxford: Elsevier, 2016), pp. 75–84. For cod, see M. Jobling, O. Leknes, B.S. Sæther and E.Å. Bendiksen, 'Lipid and fatty acid dynamics in Atlantic cod, *Gadus morhua*, tissues: Influence of dietary lipid concentrations and feed oil sources', *Aquaculture* 281 (2008): 87–94.

[18] Townsend, *Cod*, p. 143.

[19] Ibid., p. 26.

[20] J.C. Drummond and T.P. Hilditch, *The Relative Values of Cod Liver Oils from Various Sources* (London: Empire Marketing Board, 1930), p. 120.

[21] Townsend, *Cod*, p. 65.

[22] Ibid., p. 143.

[23] Kurlansky, *Cod*, p. 124.

[24] Townsend, *Cod*, pp. 107–08.

[25] Kurlansky, *Cod*, pp. 146–47.

the author of 'Cod Liver Oil', matching his lyrics to the melody of an Irish sean-nós.[26] The sheet music was published in 1876 and, ever since, other voices, like Gordon Lightfoot, Great Big Sea and mummers, have kept the words alive.[27] The song's protagonist, 'a young married man' confesses that he's 'tired' of life because he recently married 'an ailing young wife' who does nothing but wish to die. A friend recommends buying 'her a bottle from Doctor De Jongh', promising that it will make her strong. What follows is one part chorus, one part advertisement:

> Oh doctor, oh doctor, oh doctor De Jongh,
> your cod liver oil is so pure and so strong.
> I'm afraid of my life I'll go down in the soil,
> if my wife don't stop drinking your cod liver oil.

Not only does this 'medicinal drink' heal her depression, but she becomes addicted, scoffing down bottle after bottle until their house 'resembles a big doctor's shop'. But her husband is not happy about her cod-liver oil fuelled comeback. These lyrics – as extreme as they are gendered – reflect cod liver oil's popularity and the faith that it could save the sick from death's grip. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the medical profession increasingly recommended it to treat the likes of scurvy and rickets and cod liver oil matured from something whipped up in a backyard barrel to a bottled product shipped and sold across the world.

The song memorialises Ludovicus Josephus de Jongh. In 1843, the Dutchman produced a chemical analysis of three grades of oil, claiming light-brown as the most therapeutic. In 1846 he travelled to Norway to procure oil and by the 1850s marketed his brand across

[26] Over time, there have been multiple versions of the song, obscuring its origin. See the University of Maine, 'Rumford, "Cod Liver Oil"': https://umaine.edu/folklife/what-we-do/programs-and-events/maine-song-and-story-sampler-map/places/rumford-cod-liver-oil/ (accessed 25 Nov. 2024).

[27] The Centre for Newfoundland Studies holds sheet music that was on sale at LSPU Hall in 1977 for 5 cents 'by the Mummers Troupe'. Mummering is a Newfoundland tradition of dressing in disguise and visiting homes over Christmas to perform a song, joke or dance.

Europe and exported it to North America.[28] Competition grew. In 1873, for example, Alfred B. Scott and Samuel W. Bowne produced 'a less nauseating' oil in New York. Three years later they launched Scott's Emulsion, using cod liver from the Lofoten Islands and, in 1890, adopted an image of a man with a fish draped across his back into the company's trademark. The portrait decorated boxes and bottles and starred in advertising trade cards and posters, becoming shorthand for a global product. On a trip to Norway, Scott spotted this fisherman 'with his record-breaking catch' and shuffled to find a photographer. 'The realistic image, a direct reference to the natural source of the medicine', explains historian Diane Wendt, 'served as a reassurance of quality in a marketplace of adulterated goods.'[29] In other words, the picture of a fresh fish as a whole was proof that Scott's Emulsion was 'natural'. This reveals anxieties over something being polluted, compromised or 'unnatural'.[30] It also introduces the tensions between parts and wholes and how marketing attempts to contextualise a fragmented part by projecting the whole from which it comes.

When a 'fifth substance in food in addition to proteins, fats, carbohydrates, and salts' was discovered in the early twentieth century, physicians could explain cod liver oil's popularity as a remedy.[31] Polish biochemist Casimir Funk named this substance 'vitamine' in 1912 and, in the following year, experiments with adding cod liver oil to rats' diets led to vitamin A's discovery.[32] Vitamins gifted foods new values. They also transformed food marketing, turning flora

[28] D. Wendt, 'The man with a fish on his back', *Science History Institute*, 2 April 2010: https://www.sciencehistory.org/stories/magazine/the-man-with-a-fish-on-his-back/ (accessed 15 May 2023).

[29] Ibid.

[30] Pollution has become an issue of increasing concern. See S.X. Sun et al, 'Tracking pollutants in dietary fish oil: From ocean to table', *Environmental Pollution* 240 (2018): 733–44.

[31] L.A. O'Hagan and G. Eriksson, 'Modern science, moral mothers, and mythical nature: A multimodal analysis of cod liver oil marketing in Sweden, 1920–1930', *Food and Foodways* **30** (4) (2022): 231–60, at 231–32.

[32] Ibid., 234.

and fauna into an alphabetised catalogue of nutrients. Vitamins even sparked a boom in cod liver oil advertisements. In their analysis of Swedish ads, for example, Lauren Alex O'Hagan and Göran Eriksson describe how the public 'was allured by the duality of vitamins: they were mystical and magical, yet also represented the epitome of modern science and rationality'.[33] The ads underlined that cod liver oil was 'natural' despite its production process.

In Charles' cookbook, cod liver is a food and in Burke's song its oil is a medicine. What distinguishes one from the other? The mouth is essential for digesting both, for chewing vittles and swallowing pills. 'The intersection between food and medicine is not an unchanging and self-evident spillover of one realm into another', points out historian Lisa Haushofer, 'but the result of a historically specific process of creation and management'.[34] In other words, this border is elastic, loose, porous. Vitamins push this further still. They transformed eating, exaggerating the 'use' value of a meal beyond energy and toward ticking the boxes of an alphabet of essentials. Eating becomes about collecting nutrients, absorbing vitamins, building strength, acquiring health, gaining power. But the growth of the supplement industry also suggests that food alone is not enough.

The discovery of vitamins further expanded Newfoundland's dependency on cod. Before Newfoundland commercially produced cod liver oil, the global majority came from Norway, but already by 1855 Newfoundland exported over 67,000 gallons.[35] Early studies of vitamins overlapped with World War One, from which Newfoundland's cod liver oil industry benefited. Norway sold much of its production to Germany, which increased demand and prices for

[33] Ibid., 231–32.

[34] L. Haushofer, 'Between food and medicine: Artificial digestion, sickness, and the case of Benger's food', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* **73** (2) (2018): 168–87, at 170. See also J.A. and L. Haushofer, 'Introduction: Food as medicine, medicine as food', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* **73** (2) (2018): 1–8.

[35] R. Butt, 'The Kettle is Singin' of Cod Liver Oil', The Proceedings of the 17th Annual History of Medicine Days, 7–8 March 2008, Health Sciences Centre, Calgary, p. 108.

Newfoundland producers.[36] Following the war, the British Medical Research Council funded a study investigating how production methods impacted vitamin potency, concluding that they have limited impact. Instead what made cod liver oil most potent was the fish themselves and biological, seasonal and dietary fluctuations.[37]

By the 1920s nearly all of Newfoundland used the direct steam process, meaning blowing steam onto a mass of livers, to manufacture oil, and the very little that was prepared by 'rotting the livers' was 'utilised for industrial purposes'.[38] Besides Norway, a 1923 report by two biochemists in London called Newfoundland 'the other great centre of cod liver oil production'.[39] Recognising how both geographies 'lend themselves to the production of cod liver oil owing to their shore fisheries, which afford the possibility of working up the livers soon after the fish is caught', the authors argue that 'Newfoundland has even a slight advantage over Norway' because here traps within a mile or so of the shore catch the fish, which are overhauled twice a day, meaning 'the oils are usually prepared a few hours after the fish has been taken from the water'.[40]

The Imperial Economic Committee continued such studies. Established in 1926 with the intention of increasing British consumption of imperial products, it launched the Empire Marketing Board.[41] A 1928 study concluded that oils 'from Newfoundland were found to be of richest vitamin potency'.[42] But then a 1933 *Nature* study demonstrated 'that vitamin A potency was function of the age, year

[36] D. Banoub, 'Buying vitamins: Newfoundland cod liver oil and the real subsumption of nature, 1919–1939', *Geoforum* 92 (2018): 1–8, at 4.

[37] Ibid., 3–4.

[38] S.S. Zilva and J.C. Drummond, 'The cod liver oil industry in Newfoundland', reprinted from the *Journal of the Society of Chemical Industry Transactions of May 4th, 1923*, pp. 6, 8.

[39] Ibid., p. 3.

[40] Ibid., p. 3.

[41] Banoub, 'Buying vitamins', 4. Its lifespan was short, running only until 1933, due to tariff reform and protectionist legislation. See Kaori O'Connor, 'The King's Christmas pudding: Globalization, recipes, and the commodities of Empire', *Journal of Global History* **4** (1) (2009): 127–55.

[42] Banoub, 'Buying vitamins', 4.

class, and growth rates of cod at particular locations', which 'compromised Newfoundland's claims to regional superiority in vitamin potency, and its competitive advantage in the political economy of cod liver oil'.[43] By the late 1930s, thanks to the emergence of mixed oils that optimised vitamin potency and artificially synthesised vitamins, Newfoundland's cod liver oil boom slowed down.[44]

Making fish

Cod liver oil is something that humans make, first by hand and then by machine. But so is cod itself. When I planned my trip to Newfoundland, I coordinated my dates with Timothy Charles, the Fogo Island Inn executive chef. On Zoom he told me that he would check with locals and let me know when would be best to visit. An email landed in my inbox a few days later. 'Making Fish', was the subject. 'The season for salting cod is from late August to early October', confirmed the chef. 'Making Fish?' I repeated, turning the email subject into a research question. What does it mean to make fish?

Unlike in Norway, in Newfoundland salt is an essential ingredient. The St John's-based novelist Michael Crummey has turned his books into homages that remember and celebrate Newfoundland outport culture. In his collection *Hard Light*, 'Making the Fish' messes with genre, blurring prose with instructions, mashing a poem with a recipe.[45] It starts with the catch; once you have it 'pitched up on the stage head, you got down to making the fish'.[46] Your 'Assembly line' consists of a cutting table, blades of knives and woollen gloves coloured red with guts. 'The cod passing through your hands', nar-

[43] Ibid., 4.

[44] Ibid., 6. Today, Norway, Iceland, Poland and Japan produce cod liver oil. Townsend, *Cod*, p. 143.

[45] Another way to say making fish is 'dressing' it. As Tavares details, 'dressing the fish' is the 'most time-sensitive, yet crucial stage of the process of cod' and 'is when the taste and nutritional qualities of the product are defined'. Tavares, *Architecture Follows Fish*, p. 11.

[46] M. Crummey, *Hard Light* (London, Ontario: Brick Books, 2015 [1998]), p. 22.

rates Crummey, 'like knots in an unbroken string as long as the sea is wide.' Subtitles structure the text, adding order and direction to a text stained with saltwater. Under the supervision of *Cut Throat*, you guide the knife along the belly 'like a Catholic crossing himself before a meal'.[47] *Header* goes for the guts and is where things get greasy, oily. After you take the head off clean, you grab the insides. 'The liver scalloped from the chest and pushed into the oil barrel, left there to ferment like fruit going bad.'[48] The guts are in the way, an obstacle to remove. 'Organs and offal dropped through a hole in the cutting table to the salt water beneath the stage.'[49] Outside seagulls scream.

In *Splitter*, two cuts contour the sound bone and shadow the spine, 'the cod splayed like a man about to be crucified'.[50] By now it's nine o'clock, your 'eyes as tender as skin soaked too long in salt water'.[51] *Salter* is the next step and calls for an empty wheelbarrow next to the puncheon tub and a 'hogshead of salt' thrown 'across the white insides of each fish before they're stacked'.[52] For *The Bawn* you must wait for a fine August day to clear a stretch of beach, patching grass with stones to keep it from spoiling the fish. 'The salt cod taken from the bins and washed by hand in puncheon tubs', details Crummey, 'front and back, like a child about to be presented to royalty.'[53] Now it's the sun's turn to labour. 'Two fine days would finish the job, a week and a half to cure the season's catch. The merchant's ship arriving in September, anchoring off in the Tickle; the cured cod loaded into the boat and ferried out.'[54] To end, the tense changes to past: *What It Made*. The Skipper took his share, paying summer wages and settling with the merchant. What was left was split three ways. '$130 for four months of work, it could cut the heart out of a man to think too much about what he was working for', writes

[47] Ibid., p. 23.
[48] Ibid., p. 23.
[49] Ibid., p. 23.
[50] Ibid., p. 23.
[51] Ibid., p. 23.
[52] Ibid., p. 24.
[53] Ibid., p. 24.
[54] Ibid., p. 24.

Crummey.[55] The last sentence echoes the beginning. *Cut Throat* becomes *Cut Heart* and the liver is still in the barrel, fermenting but not forgotten. In Crummey's account cod liver oil is a by-product. First comes the fish, and making it, then comes the liver, and fermenting it.

Cod liver oil was a family affair, meaning fishers produced it at their stages, splitting the fish, gutting the livers and tossing them into a wooden barrel to ferment. With the help of the summer weather, oil pooled at the top, which was drawn off, supplying kin and neighbours. In the mid-nineteenth century, cod liver oil factories opened, centralising production. Fish were still gutted at stages, their livers picked out and thrown into a barrel that was delivered to two-storey factories with steam boilers. From the factory, the oil travelled to a bottling plant, where it was further refined. A machine made what hands once did, exemplifying the industrialisation of cod liver oil and its history as a globalised product.

Conclusion: 'Naturalising' Newfoundland

After fish came oil, meaning two things. The first is that cod was commodity number one and its liver a by-product. The second is that, after the 1992 Moratorium, Newfoundland experienced another boom-and-bust story, this time a greasier and shorter affair with offshore oil.[56] 'Our relationship with the ocean is extractive', a Newfoundlander told me. Coffee in my hand, tea in hers, we both looked out the window to where St. John's port widens into endless waves. This recalls Ghosh's claim that

> We are today even *more* dependent on botanical matter than we were three hundred years (or five hundred, or even five millennia) ago, and not just for

[55] Ibid., p. 24.

[56] For the history of oil in Newfoundland, see G. Inglis, 'Offshore oil and the small community in Newfoundland', in D.D. Detomasi and J.W. Gartell (eds), *Resource Communities: A Decade of Disruption* (New York: Routledge, 1985), pp. 192–204.

> our food. Most contemporary humans are completely dependent on energy that comes from long-buried carbon – and what are coal, oil, and natural gas except fossilized forms of botanical matter?[57]

The ocean supplies the energy that transforms fish into dinner, that fires the oven and sparks the stove. Its waters and their worlds purvey both food and fuel.

The history of fish is also a history of geology and Newfoundland even goes by the nickname 'the Rock'. On a tour of Gros Morne National Park – a landscape that is half a billion years old – the guide tiptoes across the earth's mantle, calling glaciers carvers and comparing the ocean to a chisel that carves the land. The terminal moraine – the final mark a glacier leaves before melting – sculpted the region's shallow arches and is responsible for making the waters so fat with fish. The history of fish is therefore not just a history of water, the lifeforms it hosts and the people that angle and hunt them, but also a history of how cultures and societies and the governments they craft see water. In Newfoundland it is a history of extraction, of naturalising 'resources'.

The factory-turned-museum on Fogo Island is an example of cod liver oil's material legacy. In another part of the province, on the Northern Avalon Peninsula, a local committee considers cod liver oil part of its 'fishing heritage', narrating how 'Before the discovery of modern petroleum and how to refine it, Newfoundland fishermen extracted oil from the abundant codfish, and used it in many ingenious ways.'[58] In addition to questioning what makes a resource 'natural', cod liver oil bridges sea and shore, splashing land-based biases.

In the water cod is an animal and on land a commodity. The fish people eat as food come from the water – once upon a time via-a-via punts and stages and, today, processing plants – and the oil its liver makes comes from barrels and tanks. What nature means – and to whom – hangs on capitalisation: nature, small n., versus Nature, big N. In the colonial project of remaking and renaming the Americas,

[57] Ghosh, *The Nutmeg's Curse*, p. 18.

[58] Pouch Cove Heritage Committee, 'Cod liver oil: Part of the fishing heritage of Pouch Cove and the Northern Avalon Peninsula' (2015. n.p.)

Europeans, according to Ghosh, sharpened their understanding of 'Nature' as 'an inert repository of resources, which, in order to be "improved" needed to expropriated'.[59] This sets the scene for 'world-as-resource, in which landscapes (or planets) come to be regarded as factories and "Nature" is seen as subdued and cheap'.[60] Economic extraction is to see fish not as a food that sustains life, that shares and shapes worlds, but as a resource, a commodity, a product, by and by.

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[59] Ghosh, *The Nutmeg's Curse*, p. 37.

[60] Ibid., p. 73. Ghosh converses with J.W. Moore, 'The rise of cheap Nature', in J. Moore (ed.), *Anthropocene Or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and The Crisis of Capitalism* (Binghamton, New York: PM Press, 2016), pp. 78–115.