



FEM
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RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN COMMUNITIES; LOCAL WOMEN MATTER

Fact Sheet #5

DISPLACED FROM THE LAND

This fact sheet looks at when and why local Indigenous people were displaced from their lands in northern Labrador and Manitoba. It traces the many ways that Inuit people along the coast of Labrador were displaced due to colonial expansion, starting in the 1500s. But the biggest waves of displacement in Canada's Near North occurred from the 1940s into the 1960s as the military set up a base in Labrador, and as governments and industry looked north for resource extraction.



"Inuit in Front of their Skin Tent (Tupi), Okak, Labrador, 1896" from the Centre for Newfoundland Studies (1896)

Economic growth after World War II created a demand for iron ore and nickel to produce steel. Rich deposits of iron ore in western Labrador and nickel in Thompson, Manitoba led to mining there.

The history of displacement we outline here shows how colonial and capitalist activities have deeply affected peoples' lives. We discuss what this has meant for diverse local women, their families and communities.

Displacement in Labrador

Indigenous groups in Labrador are in a unique position because *The Indian Act* has never covered them. When Newfoundland and Labrador joined Canada in 1949, negotiators decided not to include *The Indian Act* in the terms of confederation for the new province.

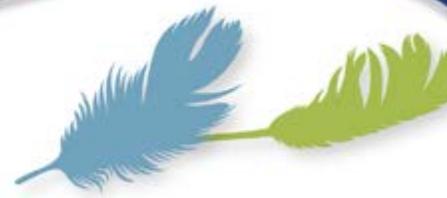
This is one in a series of ten fact sheets on women and resource development and extraction. All of the fact sheets are available at www.fnn.criaw-icref.ca and include additional resources on these topics.

CRIAW-ICREF acknowledges its presence and work on Indigenous Territories. We respectfully recognize the legacy of colonization upon Indigenous Peoples.

This publication was created by CRIAW's Feminist Northern Network. For the full list of contributors refer to our website.

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The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women – FemNorthNet
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As a result, no system of reserves, Indian agents and band councils was imposed on Indigenous peoples. They were citizens and could vote.

This also made it easier for the province to plan for resource development after World War II. It had the right to do what it wanted with all lands in the province because none was reserved for Indigenous people in Labrador or on the island of Newfoundland.

a) Displacement of the Labrador Inuit

People have been living for thousands of years in Labrador. The Inuit and earlier people lived along the entire coast of Labrador until intense whaling by Europeans in the 1500s drove them north. Inuit who did not move north stayed and married Europeans. They maintained their Inuit traditions and created a unique Inuit-Metis culture in southern Labrador.

Colonization

Inuit who had moved north felt the effects of colonization and then displacement in the late 1700s when the Moravians—Christian missionaries with Czech-German roots—set up missions in northern Labrador at Nain (1771), Okak (1776), Hopedale (1782), Hebron (1830) and Makkovik (1896).

The Moravians were interested in resource extraction, and they urged the Inuit to move further north to be away from the Europeans and the Innu. They wanted to buy furs and fish from the Inuit and to sell these natural resources in Europe to support their missionary work.

Over time the Inuit settled around the Moravian missions.

- In the late 1800s, a booming cod fishery and the fur trade lured the Inuit away from traditional hunting and fishing



Map of Labrador

- They became more dependent on food from the stores that operated in towns
- They moved from territory where they knew where to hunt, find berries, and fish to new territory where they did not have this knowledge
- Living in Moravian towns affected the Inuit's ability to sustain themselves.

1950s—Inuit displaced from Labrador's northern coast

In response to reports of poverty and poor conditions among the Inuit in northern Labrador, the province held a conference of white experts in 1956. No Indigenous people were invited. The province wanted to move the Inuit into jobs and open the land to more resource development. The conference decided that mining and jobs would replace traditional hunting and fishing in Labrador.



Shortly after this conference, the province closed its trade depot in the northern coastal town of Nutak. With little warning, 200 people—mostly Inuit and some settlers—had to move south. The government never told the Inuit of Nutak why they had to move.

The federal government also had a role in displacing the Inuit. It decided to only fund and support communities south of Nain. It built housing in Nain, saying it was a place where older Inuit from the north could live and where young people could leave for jobs in the south of Labrador. This displaced the Inuit again, by forcing them to live in Nain.

Closure of Hebron

The Inuit of Hebron, 150 kilometers north of Nain, were also affected. Hearing rumours their community would be closed, they wrote letters to the government saying they wanted to stay in their homes, and remain near hunting and fishing grounds. They described a fear of hardship if they were forced to leave. They asked for the right to participate in decision-making about this.

But in 1958 the Moravians decided to close their mission in Hebron, and the province said it would close its depot there. The Inuit heard about this in April 1959 when a public announcement was read aloud in a Hebron church, where they were used to being silent. Again the Inuit were given no reason for this displacement. Six months after the public announcement, the last Inuit families left Hebron.

The costs of these closures and forced relocations were high.

- Northern Inuit had a hard time adapting into southern communities where they did not know the environment and ecology
- The best hunting and fishing grounds were already taken
- There were not enough jobs, houses or services

- Communities that received the Inuit suffered, too, because they were not prepared to take new residents
- Suicide rates were high
- Violence against women in Nain, Hopedale and Makkovik was also high.

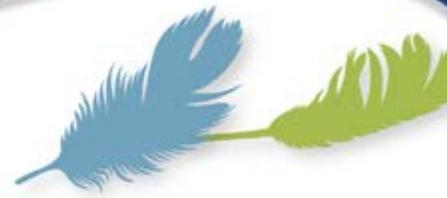
In 1999, 40 years after being displaced, a group of Hebron survivors asked for and got a formal apology from the Newfoundland and Labrador government. They also received some compensation.

Today, Hebron is a UNESCO World Heritage site. The government's apology to the displaced people appears on a plaque at the entrance to Torngat National Park.



“Inuit Children at Hebron, 1926” by L.T. Burwash (1926)

Displacement of northern Inuit people, and anger over the way they were treated helped to create the Labrador Inuit Association in 1973. This later became the Nunatsiavut government, which has negotiated one of the best land claims in Canada



based on government's and industry's desire to open the Voisey's Bay nickel mine north of Nain.

b) Displacement of the Labrador Innu

The Innu are a unique Indigenous group with a distinct language, traditions and culture. For generations, as hunters and fishers, they travelled across the interior of what is now Labrador and eastern Quebec. They moved between historic settlements on the northern shore of the St. Lawrence River into more northerly parts of Quebec and Labrador. The Innu and the Inuit had a shared relationship with the *Mista-shipu* (Churchill) River. They both had trap lines up the river and spent time on the land surrounding it.

1940s—Innu displaced by the military



"5 Wing Goose Bay" (aerial view of Goose Bay Canadian Forces Base) by J. C. Murphy
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In the 1940s, a section of traditional Innu land was carved out of south central Labrador. The idea was to create an airbase for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) after World War II. Called Goose Bay, it soon became the largest airfield in

the western hemisphere. Troops from Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and Italy were stationed there.

Happy Valley – Goose Bay

The local population, including Indigenous people, was not allowed to use or settle on land near the military base and landing strip. As a result, the town of Happy Valley grew up about 10 km away from Goose Bay, on the shore of Lake Melville.

Conflict over use of the land emerged in the late 1980s. NATO was testing low-level planes for its cruise missile operations over traditional Innu hunting grounds. The Innu, led mainly by women, protested the sudden appearance and deafening sound of these low-flying jets on the caribou and other animals, as well as themselves when they were on traditional camping and hunting land. These protests drew national attention and support, especially when Innu women went to jail for trying to block the jets from flying out of the military base.

1960s—Innu displaced from the river

The *Mista-shipu*, also called the Grand or Churchill River, was a main waterway for the Innu and greatly respected for many things, including a powerful waterfall that was part of Innu oral history. For generations, the mist rising from the falls could be seen from far away as Innu travelled this long river.

In 1967 Joey Smallwood, then premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, dammed the area around the waterfall to create hydroelectric power and a new source of funds for the province. Without any notice to the Innu people, the river was flooded. Traditional camps, equipment, canoes, burial sites and more were destroyed. The Churchill dam displaced people from their traditional camping, hunting and fishing places along the river. It changed the way they lived and survived on the land.

Muskrat Falls

Today, the Innu at Sheshashiu and other local people are being displaced from traditional use of the *Mista-shipu* by another large hydroelectric dam being built at Muskrat Falls, near Happy Valley-Goose Bay. This time, the Innu were able to negotiate an agreement with the province to get substantial benefits from construction of the dam on traditional territory.

Even so, dam construction is causing problems due to changes that affect nearby communities.

- The income gap between those with jobs and those without is growing.
- As more people move to the area, housing prices are high due to more demand and less availability.
- Local people, especially women with low incomes, and Indigenous families, are being displaced.

In 2012, 2013 and 2014 FemNorthNet supported meetings of a diverse group of local women in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. They expressed concerns over lost access to land for activities like berry picking and to the river for boating and fishing. These women felt their connection to the natural environment like the mountains, rivers, lakes, berries, was part of their identity, well-being and personal growth. Berry picking, hunting and fishing also helped to feed families on low incomes. The women said such food gave them healthier options than expensive food bought in stores.

1960s—Innu displaced by mining

In the early 1960s mines and towns appeared on land traditionally used by the Innu in western Labrador. Labrador City was founded in 1961 and the Iron Ore Company of Canada (IOC) opened its

Carol Lake mine in 1962. By 1967 the “twin town” of Wabush was established. The area is now called Labrador West.

Within five years the mining operations around Lab West replaced forests and mountains with two industrial towns with the most modern facilities of the day.

Many workers came to Lab West from declining communities in Newfoundland and from around the world. In the early days, a No Smoking sign on a town bus appeared in nine languages for miners who came from Spain, France, England, Ireland, Scotland, Portugal and many other countries. Few, if any, local Innu people had jobs in the mines.

The Innu were mostly displaced from land in and around Labrador West. In Canada’s 2006 census, only 16 per cent of the population in Lab West was Indigenous.

The Innu in Labrador have never received a share of the wealth from mining or been compensated for use of traditional territory by IOC (whose parent company is Rio Tinto), by Wabush Mines or by Vale, which now operates Voisey’s Bay mine.

Innu First Nations in nearby Quebec have filed a class action law suit against IOC. They are seeking \$900 million for rights’ violations that span nearly 60 years. They claim that mining operations in Schefferville, the railway running through traditional territory in Labrador and Quebec, and the IOC shipping port in Sept-Îles:

- happened without their consent
- ruined their environment



Map of Manitoba (Modified version; original map by NordNordWest, [CC BY-SA 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/), 2009)

- displaced Innu from traditional territory
- stopped Innu from practicing their traditional way of life, and
- opened up their territory to other destructive development projects, thanks to the 578-km railway between Schefferville and Sept-Îles.

IOC/Rio Tinto has tried to block the Innu’s class action suit, saying that the Innu should be suing the government, not the company. To date they have not been successful. In January 2015 the Quebec Court of Appeal confirmed the Quebec First Nations (Innu) right to proceed with the lawsuit against the mining giant.

Northern Manitoba

1960s—Mining displaces the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation

As in western Labrador, the local Indigenous population in northern Manitoba was displaced to make way for mining operations. In this case, the International Nickel Company of Canada (INCO) moved into Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation (NCN) territory, 740 km north of Winnipeg.

In December 1956, the province of Manitoba and INCO agreed to set up the Local Government District (LGD) of Mystery Lake and the site for the City of Thompson on land traditionally used by the NCN, which is part of Treaty 5.

- The agreement granted INCO mining rights on traditional NCN territory.
- It transferred rights to surface land to the Local Government District of Mystery Lake.
- Land that had been used by local Indigenous people was taken over to build houses, schools, hospitals and other services.

The new city and mining operations stopped local Indigenous people from using traditional land and accessing many resources, including land-based



“Vale INCO’s nickel mine operation in Thompson, Manitoba” by Timothy K. (2008, [CC BY-SA 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/))



“Spirit Wolf” by Teresa Healy (2010)

foods. FemNorthNet is now working with local partners in Thompson to capture the oral history of Indigenous life before INCO settled there.

In the deal that created the City of Thompson, INCO agreed to provide a voluntary grant instead of paying local taxes. This loss of taxes amounted to \$6.25 million per year from 2005–2012. When global mining giant Vale bought INCO, the Manitoba government passed the *Thompson Nickel Belt Sustainability Act* in 2011. It required Vale to

- make an annual \$6.25 million grant in lieu of taxes for 2010 and 2011 to the city and its school district, and
- establish the Thompson Nickel Belt Economic Development Fund to promote and stimulate economic development in the area.

This ground-breaking Aboriginal Accord aims to

- recognize the role and contributions of local Indigenous people

- strengthen relationships with Indigenous governments and peoples in the Thompson region, and
- adopt a statement of shared values and a commitment to make the city better for all residents and visitors.

The Accord contains goals, ongoing roles for those who signed and are partners to it, and progress reports. Over time, more community partners (18 in 2014) have signed on to the Accord and extended its scope. It is one of four main documents that inform operations and planning within the City of Thompson.

In recent years, the City of Thompson has recognized its location on Indigenous territory and its relationship with Indigenous people. In 2009, it was part of a strategy to develop the Thompson Aboriginal Accord through community consultation.

Today the NCN is based in Nelson House, Manitoba, about 80 km west of Thompson and 800 km north of Winnipeg. It has 4,600 members living in Nelson House, South Indian Lake, Leaf Rapids, Thompson, Brandon and Winnipeg. More than 60 per cent of its members are aged 13–30.

To date, the NCN has seen very few benefits from the wealth generated by the mine. Local Indigenous people did not have jobs at the mine in its early days. Even today, their employment in the mine and smelter is far below their representation in the local population.



What does displacement mean for resource development today?

In the past, governments gave companies access to land without any thought of talking to local people. Neither did colonial support for resource development consider how the wealth created through resource extraction would be shared with those who had lived on and used the land for generations.

Displacing Indigenous people from their land and from their deep connection to it has had negative impacts on identity, health and well-being.

Displacement for resource extraction was even worse than early displacements because it changed:

- people's relationship to the land, and
- the land itself.

Being out of touch with the natural environment weakens people's spiritual connection to it.

Excluding Indigenous people from local industry in the early days created social isolation and poverty. In recent years, Indigenous people have organized to demand, and sometimes gain, compensation for land that was taken from them, a share in the wealth that has been made from resource extraction, and ways to benefit in the future.

Impacts on Women and Communities

Uprooting traditional Indigenous communities from their land created tremendous change for women and their families. They lost knowledge about

- a particular ecosystem, and
- animals and plants that could be used for food and medicine.

People's roles were also disrupted when people lost access to their land. Patriarchal ideas about women's inferiority came to be accepted. Men and children also struggled with finding their roles through these changes.

It is important to find ways to bring diverse groups together in northern communities to talk and learn about

- what happened in the past,
- who gained and who lost due to that history, and
- how to work together in future.

Local women and their organizations need to be involved in making decisions about resource extraction in their communities and regions.

RESOURCES

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Note: Thanks to Gail Baikie, Indigenous FemNorthNet researcher from Labrador and Dalhousie University, for sharing analysis from her forthcoming PhD thesis for this fact sheet.

ABOUT FEMNORTHNET

Economic development centered around resource extraction is changing northern communities in Canada socially, economically, and culturally. FemNorthNet (or the Feminist Northern Network) documented and shared the experiences of diverse, northern women affected by these changes while supporting them in their work to strengthen and build resiliency within their communities. FemNorthNet was initiated by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAOW) and supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. This network engaged over 30 researchers and community activists across Canadian universities, colleges, and northern community organizations, with community partners in Thompson (Manitoba), Happy Valley – Goose Bay (Labrador), and Labrador West (Labrador). Learn more at www.fnn.criaw-icref.ca.



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