Introduction

"As Inuit, we don't have a choice as to whether we are part of the "Ice Economy" or the "Blue Economy". We are the Blue Economy", concluded Okalik Eegeesiak, former chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) in her contribution to the World Wild Fund for Nature (WWF) magazine "The Circle" in April 2018. "As coastal people – the contribution continues – Inuit have lived thousands of years an intimate connection with the ocean, developing a deep and unique knowledge, which came to shape and define culture, food, transportation, language, well-being, and livelihoods" [Eegeesiak, 2018]. In turn, and as a result of thousands of years of direct experience and being part of the Arctic Marine ecosystem, Inuit have developed a unique knowledge of the environment and wildlife inhabiting it, through which the ecosystem has been used and managed sustainably and responsibly for millennia [Eegesiak, 2018; ICC, 2021].

Despite the concept of "Blue Economy" having been recently introduced, namely at the "Rio+20" UN summit of 2012 [Eikeset et.al, 2018, Siddi, 2019], the notion has rapidly come to shape policies and programs of nation-states and organizations worldwide. Possibly, the term has now as many nuances as the policies endorsing it, in fact, a common definition has not been agreed upon [Eikeset et.al, 2018]. Nevertheless, the Centre for Blue Economy pinpoints "three related but distinct meanings" underlying the different existing definitions, namely "the overall contribution of the oceans to economies, the need to address the environmental and ecological sustainability of the oceans, and the ocean economy as a growth opportunity for both developed and developing countries" [Middlebury Institute of International Studies].

In May 2021, the European Union (EU), in line with its growing commitment and its growing international leading role in climate change policy, endorsed a more ambitious view for its "Blue Economy" and announced a shift from "blue growth" -endorsed in 2012- toward a "sustainable blue economy". The new framework, which shapes and will shape the economy of the EU for the decades to come, links together two major EU policies, namely the *European Green Deal*, a set of policies initiatives with the overarching aim of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, and the *Recovery Plan for Europe*, the EU long term economic recovery strategy. In doing so, the novel approach stresses the need to "mitigate the impacts on oceans and coasts to build a resilient economic model based on innovation, a

circular economy and a respectful attitude to the ocean" [European Commission: 2021].

This paper explores how key concepts now underlying the EU approach toward a Sustainable Blue economy have started entering the European legislation already four decades ago; concepts that were in fact learned by the representatives of the European institutions from the Greenlandic Government' and Inuit associations' narrative and arguments in support of Inuit seal hunting since the beginning of the seal- issue, namely in the 1980s. By analyzing one of the most controversial issues between Inuit and the EU, namely the development of the "EU Seal Regime", this paper argues that the core of the "Inuit exception", formally elaborated in 2009, was grounded on the long-standing acknowledgment (since the 1980s) that Inuit hunt, as *traditionally* – or historically-conducted by Inuit, endorsed a more complex economic approach to sustainability that surpasses the notion of simple "species conservation" to embrace concepts now ascribable to resource efficiency, community resilience, sustainable and responsible food production, and a respectful attitude to the ocean. Arguably, the cruelty and inhumanity found in the killing methodology – at the core of the moral opposition upon which the Seal regime is grounded upon – is intrinsically linked to the scope(s) of the killing: commercial products derived from animals taken only for their fur to be used in luxury goods are considered ethically indefensible [Lowe, 2018] and impossible to control and redeem, and as such prohibited on moral grounds. The same commercial "luxury" products, derived from animals harvested for efficient use, first and foremost for "subsistence"- or food production-, which consequently eliminated almost any waste, while contributing to the overall economic, spiritual and cultural wellbeing of the communities involved, as put forward by the Government of Greenland and Inuit associations since the inception of the issue, "do not raise the same public moral concerns as seal hunts conducted primarily for commercial reasons"[European Commission, 2016] and in fact, were and are allowed on the commercial market. Therefore, this paper argues that a vision that links the "Inuit exception" of 2009 to a simple upright and formal compliance by the European Union to Indigenous Peoples Rights, not only fail in fully understanding the historical and complex processes that led to the adoption of the Seal regime and the Inuit exception contained within but also fail in acknowledging the fundamental and proactive theoretical contributions Inuit brought in outlining a different and more complex approach to sustainability.

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