

Terra Nova

Mental Maps of the Northwest Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century

Jack Bouchard

*Before the name: what was the place
like before it was named?*¹

“Having prepared a fine ship ... to be sent to Terra Nova for cod-fishing, which was his most regular trade, he became wrapped up in the fantasy of going along on the voyage.”² In his collection of sea stories, published in 1599, Captain Bruneau de Rivedoux recounts the hapless mariner Pierre Houé’s mid-sixteenth-century voyage to the northwest Atlantic as a warning against the allure of dangerous trans-oceanic trips. But there is something about the phrase “his most regular trade” which captures the familiarity, the appeal, and the longevity of what we would today call the early Newfoundland fishery, an enterprise that even in Rivedoux’s time was several generations old.³ A major commercial fishery was organized around the

This article was first published in French as “Terra Nova. Cartes mentales de l’Atlantique du Nord-Ouest au XVI^e siècle,” *Annales HSS* 78, no. 2 (2023): 297–331.

1. Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (New York: Knopf, 1988), xiii.

2. “Icelui donc ayant fait batir un tres beau navire ... pour l’envoyer aux Terres-Neuves a la pecherie de la molue, qui etait son trafic le plus ordinaire, se mit en la fantasie d’y faire le voyage dedans.” Jean-Arnaud Bruneau de Rivedoux, *Histoire veritable de certains vorages perilleux & hazardeux sur la mer, ausquels reluit la justice de Dieu sur les uns, & sa misericorde sur les autres: tres-digne d’estre leu, pour les choses rares & admirables qui y sont contenues* (Paris: Thomas Portau, 1599), 108–109.

3. For the early historiography on the fishery, see Harold A. Innis, *The Cod Fisheries: The History of an International Economy* (New Haven/Toronto: Yale University Press/Ryerson Press, 1940); Michel Mollat, ed., *Histoire des pêches maritimes en France* (Toulouse: Privat, 1987); D. W. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial, and Foreign Records with Numerous Illustrations and Maps* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1895);

island of Newfoundland by various European mariners as early as 1505, less than a decade after the Italian Zuan Caboto's first encounters with the cod-filled waters off what contemporaries in England identified as "the new Isle."⁴ Tens of thousands of mariners followed in their wake, seeking fish to alleviate European food insecurity and for their own enrichment, forming a seasonal and cyclical transatlantic enterprise that would last for generations.⁵

Except that in the sixteenth century, Europeans did not go to Newfoundland to find fish—they went to a place they called Terra Nova.⁶ Certainly that is what

Charles de La Morandière, *Histoire de la pêche française de la morue dans l'Amérique septentrionale*, vol. 1, *Des origines à 1789* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1962); Georges Musset, *Les Rochelais à Terre-Neuve, 1500–1789* (La Rochelle: by the author, 1899); Édouard Gosselin and Charles de Beaufort, *Documents authentiques et inédits pour servir à l'histoire de la marine normande et du commerce rouennais pendant les XVI^e et XVII^e siècles* (Rouen: H. Boissel, 1876). For a representative sample of more recent work, see Peter E. Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Selma Huxley Barkham, "The Basque Whaling Establishments in Labrador 1536–1632—A Summary," *Arctic* 37, no. 4 (1984): 515–19; Michael M. Barkham, "La industria pesquera en el País Vasco peninsular al principio de la Edad Moderna: ¿una edad de oro?" *Itas Memoria. Revista de estudios marítimos del País Vasco* 3 (2000): 29–75; Brad Loewen and Vincent Delmas, "Les occupations basques dans le golfe du Saint-Laurent, 1530–1760. Périodisation, répartition géographique et culture matérielle," *Archéologiques* 24 (2011): 29–61; Laurier Turgeon, "Codfish, Consumption and Colonization: The Creation of the French Atlantic World during the Sixteenth Century," in *Bridging the Early Modern Atlantic World: People, Products, and Practices on the Move*, ed. Caroline A. Williams (London: Ashgate, 2009), 33–56; Jacques Bernard, *Navires et gens de mer à Bordeaux (vers 1400–vers 1550)* (Paris: SEVPEN, 1968); Darlene Abreu-Ferreira, "Terra Nova through the Iberian Looking Glass: The Portuguese-Newfoundland Cod Fishery in the Sixteenth Century," *Canadian Historical Review* 79, no. 1 (1998): 100–117; George A. Rose, *Cod: The Ecological History of the North Atlantic Fisheries* (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 2007).

4. Henry Percival Biggar, ed., *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497–1534: A Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1911), doc. 6, "Various Articles of the Privy Purse Expenses of Henry VII," pp. 12–23, here p. 12. The earliest record of fish being brought back from this region to Europe is by an English vessel in 1502, but surviving evidence points to a multi-communal commercial fishery coalescing between 1504 and 1508.

5. For an introduction to the sixteenth-century fishery, see Laurier Turgeon, *Une histoire de la Nouvelle France. Français et Amérindiens au XVI^e siècle* (Paris: Belin, 2019), chapter 1; W. Jeffrey Bolster, *The Mortal Sea: Fishing the Atlantic in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), chapters 1–2; Pope, *Fish into Wine*, 11–32; Innis, *The Cod Fisheries*, chapters 1–2.

6. This distinction is clearer in English than in Romance languages like French, since the modern English term "Newfoundland" is etymologically distinct from Terra Nova (on which more below). The English form "New Isle" appeared in 1498, and the more familiar Newfoundland in 1502, but these forms are limited to a few English-language sources throughout the century. Modern French does not mark this difference, and instead employs Terre-Neuve to signify the island of Newfoundland proper. I nevertheless argue that in the sixteenth century, Terre-Neuve had a different signification—the one that is explored in this article. At some point in the early seventeenth century, the broad meaning of Terre-Neuve in French was lost and the term was assigned to the

Rivedoux thought Houé was up to when he described his destinations as being *aux terres neuves*. Localized variations of the phrase Terra Nova are found in surviving European records across the sixteenth century and are the most consistent way that mariners described the places they visited in the waters of the northwest Atlantic. As we will see, how mariners used this term suggests that they thought about Terra Nova as an expansive and fluctuating space defined by movement and actions rather than fixed positions (fig. 1).

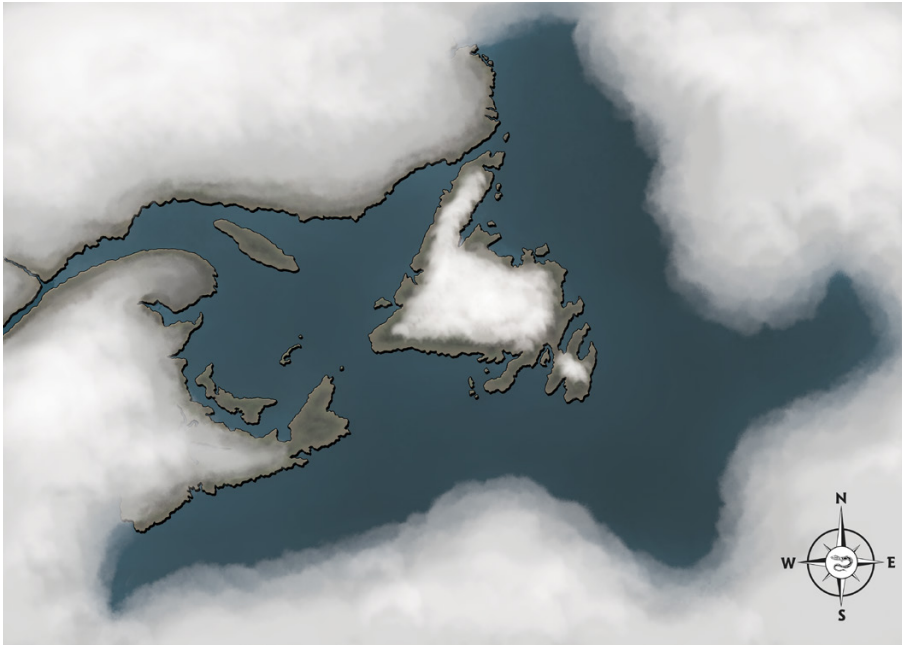
I take as a starting point that geography is as much a matter of mentally constructing worlds as it is of describing physical features on the earth's surface.⁷ These constructions, which we may call mental maps, correspond to the subjective geographies and experiences of place which all of us carry within our heads. Yet mental maps reflect not just personal but also collective experiences and shared knowledge, and this is what makes them such powerful tools for understanding the past.⁸ The words and images historical actors used to represent places like the northwest Atlantic reflect not an objective reality but the assemblage and translation of their mental maps, their subjective understanding of different spaces. To understand a historical space like Terra Nova, then, we must work our way up from the bottom, following the behaviors and actions of mariners to see how these shaped concepts of space, and how these mental maps in turn informed wider European understandings of place and geography in the northwest Atlantic.

island alone. A full explanation of this process will require further research, but it likely reflected the convergence of English settlement in the southeast of Newfoundland island, the emergence of the Petit Nord fishery (worked primarily by Bretons and so giving the French a permanent presence on the island), and the increased cartographic representation of the northwest Atlantic by mapmakers who tended to assign place-names based on landforms like islands. Around the same time, "Newfoundland" took on a narrower meaning in English for similar reasons. The question of Newfoundland *contra* Terra Nova therefore cuts across both linguistic and temporal boundaries.

7. For some examples of how historians have dealt with this problem, see Ernesto Bassi, *An Aqueous Territory: Sailor Geographies and New Granada's Transimperial Greater Caribbean World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Sharika D. Crawford, *The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean: Waterscapes of Labor, Conservation, and Boundary Making* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Eviatar Zerubavel, *Terra Cognita: The Mental Discovery of America* (1992; New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003); Edmundo O'Gorman, *The Invention of America: An Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of Its History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961); Ricardo Padrón, *The Spacious Word: Cartography, Literature, and Empire in Early Modern Spain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Paul Stock, "History and the Uses of Space," in *The Uses of Space in Early Modern History*, ed. Paul Stock (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1–18. See too the excellent discussion in Sandra Pannell, "Of Gods and Monsters: Indigenous Sea Cosmologies, Promiscuous Geographies and the Depths of Local Sovereignty," in *A World of Water: Rain, Rivers and Seas in Southeast Asian Histories*, ed. Peter Boomgaard (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 71–102.

8. For examples from the Pacific which point to this relationship, see Judith Binney, "Tuki's Universe," *New Zealand Journal of History* 38, no. 2 (2004): 215–32; Margaret Jolly, "Imagining Oceania: Indigenous and Foreign Representations of a Sea of Islands," *Contemporary Pacific* 19, no. 2 (2007): 508–45.

Figure 1. Approximate dimensions of Terra Nova in the mid-sixteenth century



Source: Map by SEH Mapping.

These mental maps are so important because historians need some way to describe the European project in the northwest Atlantic, especially during its formative decades. The approach to date has often been to apply later labels: Newfoundland, Canada, the British or French Empire. These nation-centric terms are ultimately teleological, spatially misleading, and reductive, and do not reflect the actual experience of fishwork in the sixteenth century.⁹ Instead, the expression Terra Nova conveyed a complex set of experiences and patterns of human labor, which in turn constituted a shared mental map of the northwest Atlantic charged with meaning for those who visited during this period. This meaning derived from two elements that will be explored in this article. First, the phrase Terra Nova was tied to the practice of fishwork, so that to go to Terra Nova was in effect to go fishing on a

9. I follow Jennifer Lee Johnson in using the terms “fishworker” and “fishwork” to describe those who harvest, process, and sell fish, and their activities. The notion of fishwork provides an essential contrast with subsistence fishing, stressing the commercial nature of their labor. See Johnson, “Eating and Existence on an Island in Southern Uganda,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37, no. 1 (2017): 2–23. Peter Pope has written on the gendered dimensions of the Newfoundland fishery, advocating for the use of “fisher man/men.” See Peter E. Pope, “Fisher Men at Work: The Material Culture of the Champ Paya Fishing Room as a Gendered Site,” in *Tu sais, mon vieux Jean-Pierre: Essays on the Archaeology and History of New France and Canadian Culture in Honour of Jean-Pierre Chrestien*, ed. John Willis (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2017), 43–62.

seasonal basis in the northwest Atlantic. It was not a label of possession like many other names bestowed in the sixteenth century—Terra Nova did not connote an aspiration to control in the way that “New France” did, for instance. Rather, it was a label of practice, a name created through movement and labor. Second, the phrase Terra Nova was sufficiently vague and malleable to be useful to mariners who wished to keep their movements hidden from outsiders (whether state or church officials or competitors), but who also might have to move their operations around as seasons and weather shifted in the tempestuous and ever-changing northwest Atlantic. Terra Nova, in short, had the virtue of expressing the lived experience of fishwork while also being practically useful to mariners. Although the popularity of the phrase has been acknowledged in some of the historical literature on the early fishery, the transnational use, origins, and meaning of Terra Nova to sixteenth-century Europeans have not received proper attention.¹⁰ When we pay close attention to the sources that mariners have left us, we can see that they were fully capable of vocalizing the mental maps they used to make sense of space.

This article, then, is a study of what it meant to go to Terra Nova in the sixteenth century, and of how historians and historical geographers should write about space and place in the early years of European expansion into the Atlantic basin. After briefly considering how we can study the mental maps of past mariners, I will examine the origin and use of the term Terra Nova, as well as its variations, by mariners in the sixteenth century. As will become clear, the phrase was employed early, broadly, and consistently to describe the northwest Atlantic by those who ventured there in search of fish. In its third section, the article will consider how Terra Nova worked as a shared mental map for mariners who participated in the fishery—where it was, what its boundaries might have been, and how Europeans thought about it. I hope to stress that Terra Nova was an idea as much as a place, which fluctuated according to environmental and economic realities at any given moment.

Ultimately, we will see that Terra Nova was a concept at once expansive, malleable, and confusingly imprecise, but which reflected the unique experiences of mariners in the sixteenth century. Insufficient attention has been paid in recent decades to the region in its earliest years of sustained European encounter or its multinational and transatlantic dimensions. Thinking with Terra Nova rather than Newfoundland is one way forward. Put simply, the phrase Terra Nova was employed by mariners to signify the places in the northwest Atlantic they went to

10. The use of Terra Nova, typically as *Terranova*, has increased in some parts of the scholarship as a substitute for Newfoundland, particularly among those who work on the participation of Spanish Basques in the fishery. Though it is good that researchers are employing the term, it has yet to be interrogated or considered as part of a wider European system of geographic thought. For examples, see Selma Barkham, “The Spanish Province of Terranova,” *Canadian Archivist* 2, no. 5 (1974): 73–83; Robert Grenier, Marc A. Bernier, and Willis Stevens, eds., *The Underwater Archaeology of Red Bay: Basque Shipbuilding and Whaling in the 16th Century*, vol. 1, *Archaeology Underwater: The Project* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 2007); Miren Egaña Goya, “A Permanent Place in Newfoundland: Seventeenth-Century Basque Tombstones in Placentia,” *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 33, no. 1 (2018): 172–99; Goya, “Basque Toponymy in Canada,” *Onomastica Canadiana* 74, no. 2 (1992): 53–74.

do fishwork—where one fished, that place became part of Terra Nova. At its heart was the practice and knowledge of mariners, not the geographic conceits of explorers or states. To reconstruct the mental maps underlying Terra Nova, we must thus pay attention to how sixteenth-century mariners lived and worked, and to how they spoke about space.

Mental Maps and Spatial Histories

The words our historical subjects used to describe space matter, and the choices record-keepers made in writing down descriptions of the northwest Atlantic can tell us much about how they thought about those places. The phrase Terra Nova appears most regularly in what might be termed bureaucratic writings, including notarial records, port registers, court cases, municipal council records, government interrogations, and royal edicts. Here, sailors or fishworkers stood before a notary to declare their intentions and experiences, creating textual records which were mediated but nonetheless reveal significant truths. When Juan de Betanços traveled to the city of Pontevedra to sign up for a fishing voyage in 1517, the notary who wrote out his contract had to record his destination as somewhere called “*la Tierra Nueva*,” proving that Galician ships had joined the growing fishery in the northwest Atlantic.¹¹ When in 1543 English corsairs raided the port of Le Havre in Normandy, and the brave ship *Catherine* sallied forth alone to drive them away, city officials had to reimburse its crew after they admitted that their plans to outfit a voyage to “*terre nefvée*” were ruined by the attack.¹² In both cases, the deployment of Terra Nova reflects important choices made by these crews: to exploit the geographic vagueness of the term in order to hide their precise destinations, to invoke a well-known mariners’ world and thereby make clear their intention to harvest fish, and to explicitly espouse a mental map shaped not by imperial claims of possession but by the open, common experience of fishwork.

Place-names exist not to describe space but to create it. Paul Carter and Yi-Fu Tuan have drawn attention to the importance of names in the construction of place.¹³ Names and descriptions reflect human activity and interactions with an environment, such that, in the words of Tim Ingold, “places do not have locations but histories.”¹⁴ This is especially true of places like the northwest Atlantic, which were visited year after year by Europeans from the very first decades of the sixteenth century, building a history of thought and action that was manifested in the

11. Caroline Ménard, *La pesca gallega en Terranova, siglos XVI–XVIII* (Seville: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas/Universidad de Sevilla/Diputación de Sevilla, 2008), 417.

12. Archives municipales du Havre, EE78, Armements navals, 1359–1669, “1543. La *Catherine* de Rouen affreté et armé pour le voyage de terre-neuve.”

13. Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*; Yi-Fu Tuan, “Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 81, no. 4 (1991): 684–96.

14. Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (2000; New York: Routledge, 2002), 219.

term Terra Nova. Hieu Phung has recently shown that bodies of water in particular can possess shifting names, identities, and geographies according to changing political, economic, and social contexts, and thereby serve as important lenses through which to view those changes.¹⁵ Historians of these places must therefore be careful in the words we choose, and consider whether or not they match the concepts of space deployed at a particular moment by a particular community.

To study space in the northwest Atlantic we must thus try to resurrect the perspective of those who worked the waves in the early sixteenth century, using the occasional glimpses afforded in the surviving records. Practical information about work at sea, from how to sail a ship to how to bait a line for cod, was transferred from generation to generation via word-of-mouth and hands-on experience. But practical information can itself be exceedingly complex.¹⁶ Charles O. Frake has made clear that medieval European seafarers were able to hold multiple, complex maps of time and space in their minds as they moved over the water. This was essential for navigation and survival at sea, even if it was rarely written down.¹⁷ It is also an indication that mariners were capable of crafting and articulating nuanced, multi-layered understandings of space, which they revealed only when compelled by adverse circumstances. Transmitted between generations and between groups of mariners, these abstract ideas about maritime space and the shape of the Atlantic were essential for the development of an Atlantic world. The use of a single appellation like Terra Nova across multiple languages suggests that maritime communities shared information and histories of place regardless of their geographic origin. Many mariners likely learned of Terra Nova from other fishworkers or sailors before they themselves had ever crossed the Atlantic. The widespread use of Terra Nova therefore indicates that these vernacular industries had an essential trans-communal, or transnational, dimension.

We can see the relationship between word use and mental maps in the masses of legal sources produced through fishwork. However, points of contention and alternative names emerge when we compare these texts to other written and cartographic evidence. The bulk of documentary sources on sixteenth-century Terra Nova share certain important features. They were typically produced in a handful

15. Hieu Phung, "Naming the Red River—Becoming a Vietnamese River," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 51, no. 4 (2020): 518–37.

16. As demonstrated by the archaeologist Peter Pope, who interprets the fishery as a vernacular industry, a loosely structured operation in which knowledge was developed and transmitted within closely knit communities of fishworkers. See Pope, *Fish into Wine*, 21–32. On the knowledge of fishwork more broadly, see James M. Acheson, "Anthropology of Fishing," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 10 (1981): 275–316; Bror Olsen and Trond Thuen, "Secret Places: On the Management of Knowledge and Information about Landscape and Yields in Northern Norway," *Human Ecology* 41, no. 2 (2013): 273–83; Brian M. Fagan, *Fishing: How the Sea Fed Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017); Gísli Pálsson, "Enskilment at Sea," *Man* 29, no. 4 (1994): 901–27; Thorolfur Thorlindsson, "Skipper Science: A Note on the Epistemology of Practice and the Nature of Expertise," *Sociological Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1994): 329–45.

17. Charles O. Frake, "Cognitive Maps of Time and Tide among Medieval Seafarers," *Man* 20, no. 2 (1985): 254–70.

of coastal cities in the kingdoms of France, Spain, Portugal, and England, and in general directly related to business practices and legal agreements; they were usually produced right at the start or end of a voyage by an official scribe recording the words of mariners and merchants. The majority consist of notarial contracts and city-council deliberations held in municipal archives, and court cases preserved in regional and national archives.¹⁸ Though it is tempting to take such sources at face value, they are notoriously tricky and subject to the biases and opaque practices of sixteenth-century notaries.¹⁹ If used judiciously, however, they provide something other sources do not: a breadth of information that extends across time, space, and social status.

These urban business records are supplemented by four broad groups of sources. The first are sixteenth-century maps, predominantly produced in Portugal, Spain, Italy, and northern France. The second are the printed writings of European navigators, geographers, colonial promoters, and natural scientists, including well-known authors and editors such as André Thevet, Jacques Cartier, Stephen Parmenius, Richard Hakluyt, and Giovanni Battista Ramusio. The third are archaeological reports by modern scholars working in eastern Canada, and the fourth what might be termed miscellaneous textual references: handwritten notes, drawings, letters, and the like preserved in archives scattered throughout Europe. No one group of sources can give us a complete insight into the mental world of sixteenth-century European mariners. Instead, it is through a broad, comparative approach that we can tease out patterns of thought and experience. The notarial records, for instance, offer a chance to see patterns in language use across a wide breadth of time and space, from Lisbon in 1506 to Amsterdam in the 1590s. It is telling that business documents are very consistent in their use of variations of *Terra Nova*. Yet we can learn much from moments when elite authors or navigators felt the need to explain terms like *Terra Nova*, Newfoundland, or *Bacalaos* (the Spanish/Portuguese term for salt-cod, frequently used as a geographic label) to their audiences. We can also glean information from maps that use place-names (*Corte-Real Land*, *Norumbega*) that rarely if ever show up in business contracts and court cases. Most tantalizing of all are snippets of thought—about birds, about festivities, about space—that

18. I am here relying on archival surveys by myself and other scholars of the sixteenth-century fishery. Much of the information mobilized in this study is drawn from notarial records held in the following archives: Archives départementales (hereafter “AD”) Charente-Maritime (La Rochelle), AD Seine-Maritime (Rouen, Le Havre, Jumièges, Fécamp, and Dieppe), AD Calvados (Honfleur), AD Loire-Atlantique (Le Croisic), AD Gironde, (Bordeaux); Stadsarchief Amsterdam; and Westvries Archief (Hoorn and Enkhuizen). It also uses material from the Archives municipales in Saint-Malo, Rouen, Le Havre, La Rochelle, Bayonne, Ciboure, Saint-Jean-de-Luz, and Biarritz; the British Library in London; and the Nationaal Archief of the Netherlands in the Hague.

19. As explored in the following works: Donna Merwick, *Death of a Notary: Conquest and Change in Colonial New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Bernard, *Navires et gens de mer à Bordeaux*; Laurier Turgeon, “Pour redécouvrir notre 16^e siècle: les pêches à Terre-Neuve d’après les archives notariales de Bordeaux,” *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française* 39, no. 4 (1986): 523–49; Sylvie Desachy and Archives départementales du Tarn, eds., *De la Ligurie au Languedoc. Le notaire à l’étude* (Albi: Un Autre Reg’art, 2012).

shine through in the miscellaneous accounts and notes that have come down to us. Through these patterns and comparisons, we may arrive at a better understanding of how mariners talked and thought about space and work in the sixteenth century.

The Origins of Terra Nova

In 1510 the vessel *Jacquette*, from the small Breton port of Dahouët, was sailing down the Seine when a serious altercation took place. A mariner, Guillaume Dobel, pushed a shipmate into the river, killing him. In 1513 a petition in Dobel's defense was submitted by his friends to a court in Nantes, recounting that the event took place in Normandy as the crew was "coming from the city of Rouen, where the aforementioned [ship owners] had sold the fish which they had sought and fished in the region of *la Terre-Neufve*."²⁰ This *Terre-Neufve* was the standard French variation of the phrase Terra Nova, here used to describe a place ("the region") linked to harvesting fish ("fished in ... *la Terre-Neufve*"). The petitioners gave no other details, perhaps assuming the meaning was clear to their fellow Bretons.

The use of *Terre-Neufve* by the crew of the *Jacquette* is an early surviving occurrence of the phrase Terra Nova to describe space in the northwest Atlantic. By definition Terra Nova could not be mapped neatly onto a coordinate chart, but it is nonetheless illuminating to try to visualize the scope and scale of this maritime space. In a broad sense, Terra Nova seems to have encompassed what is today the Grand Banks, the coast of the island of Newfoundland, southern Labrador, and the Gulf of St. Lawrence. It certainly included the whaling and cod-fishing grounds of southern Labrador and the Strait of Belle-Isle, known to Basques as La Gran Baya.²¹ By the end of the sixteenth century, Basque whalers going to Terra Nova may have ventured into the St. Lawrence River as far as the mouth of the Saguenay.²² And from the late sixteenth century, some notaries in Biscay and Normandy clarified where fishworkers were headed with an important precision, "Terra Nova on the Bank" (*terre neufve sur le banc*),²³ indicating that the space

20. "Venans de la ville de Rouan, où lesdits nommez avoint vendu du poysson qu'ilz avoint esté quartier et pescher és parties de la Terre-Neufve." Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier*, doc. 35, "Pardon to the Mate of a Newfoundland Fishing-Vessel," pp. 116–18, here p. 117. The original is held in AD Loire-Atlantique, B21, Courts and Jurisdictions, fols. 15r–16v, January 1513.

21. Selma de L. Barkham, "A Note on the Strait of Belle Isle during the Period of Basque Contact with Indians and Inuit," *Études Inuit Studies* 4, no. 1/2 (1980): 51–58; James A. Tuck and Robert Grenier, *Red Bay, Labrador: World Whaling Capital A.D. 1550–1600* (St. John's: Atlantic Archaeology, 1989); Brad Loewen and Claude Chapdelaine, eds., *Contact in the 16th Century: Networks among Fishers, Foragers, and Farmers* (Gatineau/Ottawa: Canadian Museum of History/University of Ottawa Press, 2016), 1.

22. Barkham, "The Basque Whaling Establishments in Labrador"; Denis Laborde and Laurier Turgeon, "Le parc de l'Aventure basque en Amérique," *Ethnologie française* 29, no. 3 (1999): 397–408.

23. For example, in March 1592 the vessel *Marie*, based in La Tremblade in Saintonge, departed La Rochelle for Terra Nova. It was to make "a voyage to Terra Nova to fish

included the vast offshore fishing grounds of the Grand Banks. In the early seventeenth century some contracts went even further, specifying that fishing would take place “on the Bank, Banquereau, or Sable Island” (*sur le banc, banquereau ou lisle de sable*).²⁴ Sable Island is a small, sandy islet 170 kilometers east of what is today Nova Scotia, while the Banquereau is an offshore coastal shelf near Cape Breton.²⁵ This implies that the concept of Terra Nova eventually stretched south and southeast to include a large part of the maritime provinces of modern Canada. Altogether, at its greatest extent Terra Nova could reach perhaps 2,000 kilometers west to east, and another 1,500 kilometers north to south. The distance from the easternmost tip of the Grand Banks to the Saguenay River (2,000 kilometers) was only slightly less than the distance from the outer Grand Banks to western Ireland (2,200 kilometers). This made Terra Nova a potentially vast region encompassing a substantial portion of the Atlantic basin, even if its boundaries fluctuated from year to year (fig. 2).

This is apparent in hindsight and when we look at our modern maps, but in 1513, when the crew of the *Jacquette* filed their petition, it was far from clear to most Europeans what the northwest Atlantic looked like. Between Zuan Caboto’s voyage of encounter in 1497 and the expeditions of Miguel Corte-Real and various Bristol-Azoreans around 1500, European navigators established that something, some combination of land and fish-rich sea, existed well to the west of the British Isles and Iceland.²⁶ To become a place, this agglomeration of experiences and sightings would need a name. A place can have many names over time, and many names at the same time. The northwest Atlantic could have been Terra Nova, or New Found Island, or Newfoundland, or Bacalaos, or Norumbega, or Corte-Real Land. At some point it was each of these things to someone, especially to various mapmakers who had never even visited. A well-off Londoner in 1502 would have sworn that he could invest in voyages to a place called “the New Found Ile Land,” not Newfoundland, while in the mid-sixteenth century Mediterranean cartographers seemed confused as to whether Bacalaos was just a small island or the entire

for cod on the bank” (*un voyage a la Terre Neufve a la pesche des mouluës sur le banc*). AD Charente-Maritime, 3 E 203, notaire Bigeard, fol. 89r, March 10, 1592. The ship returned to port that September.

24. See, for instance, AD Charente-Maritime, 3 E 221, notaire Cousseau, fol. 66v, April 18, 1620. On this date, the two ships the *Marie* and the *Jacques* from La Rochelle left for a voyage “de terre-neufve sur le banc banquereau ou lisle de sable.”

25. Marq de Villiers and Sheila Hirtle, *Sable Island: The Strange Origins and Curious History of a Dune Adrift in the Atlantic* (New York: Walker & Co., 2004).

26. The Bristol-Azorean voyages were a series of joint ventures organized by merchants from Bristol and the Azores settlements, often employing Azorean pilots and mariners. For the early voyages, see John L. Allen, “From Cabot to Cartier: The Early Exploration of Eastern North America, 1497–1543,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82, no. 3 (1992): 500–521; Bernard G. Hoffman, *Cabot to Cartier: Sources for a Historical Ethnography of Northeastern North America, 1497–1550* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961); Samuel Eliot Morison, *The European Discovery of America*, vol. 1, *The Northern Voyages A. D. 500–1600* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Peter E. Pope, *The Many Landfalls of John Cabot* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

Figure 2. Terra Nova in the mid-sixteenth century, places mentioned in the article



Source: Map by SEH Mapping.

Figure 3. Map of the northwest Atlantic included in an Italian edition of Ptolemy, showing Newfoundland island as an archipelago (1548)



Source: Giacomo Gastaldi, “Tierra Nueva,” in *La geografia di Claudio Ptolemeo Alessandrino, tradotta di Greco nell’idioma volgare italiano da Girolamo Russelli* (Venice: Giovanni Battista Pederzano, 1548). JCB Map Collection 08005-1. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Providence.

coast of the northwest Atlantic.²⁷ We tend to erase such complexity when we use Newfoundland as a term for this space, for it was not self-evident in the early sixteenth century that Newfoundland island would be the central point to describe the fishery. Indeed, for much of the sixteenth century it was unclear to Europeans whether Newfoundland was a single island or an archipelago. Many maps, like that of the Venetian Giacomo Gastaldi printed in the 1540s, showed the northwest Atlantic as a series of island clusters (fig. 3). Produced in Italy at a moment when fishing activity was expanding, this map reflects the conflicting reports filtering back to cartographers in the Mediterranean. To hedge their bets, some record-keepers pluralized Terra Nova to give *terres-neufves* or a different variant, sometimes even using several forms within the same text.²⁸ But mariners had little interaction with Newfoundland island itself beyond the shoreline, and most of the island's interior remained *terra incognita* until the nineteenth century.²⁹

Understanding the genesis and lineage of the phrase Terra Nova is an important step towards recognizing its distinct meaning and usage in the sixteenth century, as well as the key role played by mariners in defining and using this watery space. Terra Nova, written noun-adjective, appears in slightly different forms in a number of European languages. In the early sixteenth century many of these languages were still in flux, and spelling variations were rampant. Yet in this case the terminology is consistent enough to trace through the notarial archives. French *terre-neuve* (often spelled *terre neufve* or *terre neusfve*), Spanish *tierra nueva* or more commonly *terranova*, Gascon *terre nabe*, and Italian *terra nuova* were all current in the sixteenth century, and most are still used today. As they are all modified versions of the same phrase and etymologically identical, I treat them as interchangeable: *terre-neufve* is *tierra nueva* is *terra nova*. The fact that the term occurs with only slight variations across multiple languages is itself interesting and suggests that it spread rapidly from a common source. An alternate phrasing, Nova Terra, appears extremely infrequently in surviving records, and only at the start of the sixteenth century.³⁰

27. For the context in 1502, see David B. Quinn with Alison M. Quinn and Susan Hillier, eds., *New American World: A Documentary History of North America to 1612*, vol. 1, *America from Concept to Discovery: Early Exploration of North America* (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 110–19.

28. In January 1576, the two notaries Pierre Gonnyer and Jehan Champaigne in the Norman port of Honfleur recorded a contract for the ship *Jehan*, which was bound that spring for “the Terras Novas” (*des terres neufves*). In the next entry, on the bottom of the same page, they recorded that the ship *Esperance* was going “to Terra Nova” (*de terre neuve*): AD Calvados, 8E/6500, fols. 22r–22v.

29. Peter Pope, “Transformation of the Maritime Cultural Landscape of Atlantic Canada by Migratory European Fishermen, 1500–1800,” in *Beyond the Catch: Fisheries of the North Atlantic, the North Sea and the Baltic, 900–1850*, ed. Louis Sicking and Darlene Abreu-Ferreira (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 123–54, here p. 123.

30. In a recent article, two members of the “Cabot Project,” Margaret Condon and Evan Jones, revealed a new document relating to the explorer William Weston which refers to the region as “*nova terre*.” They date it to early 1501 and note the parallels to the phrase Terra Nova. They do not however explore the full meaning of the term Terra Nova,

The earliest documented voyages to the northwest Atlantic were by English and Portuguese mariners (including Azoreans), with Normans joining them briefly around 1506–1509.³¹ At some point before 1505, the term *Terra Nova* began to gain ground with mariners and notaries. Although *Terra Nova* could be both Latin and Portuguese (the forms are identical when written), there is circumstantial reason to believe it originated in Portugal. Between 1500 and 1502 the Azorean brothers Gaspar and Miguel Corte-Real explored the region, bringing useful information back to Lisbon, then a hub of geographic knowledge.³² The earliest known document to use the phrase *Terra Nova* was written in Portugal just after the turn of the sixteenth century, when in 1502 the Crown confirmed the discoveries made by Gaspar Corte-Real, describing them as “*Terra Nova*.”³³ The term seems to have been in regular use soon after: in 1506 a Portuguese decree relating to the taxation of fish evoked “the fisheries of *Terra Nova*.”³⁴ In general, *Terra Nova* appears more frequently in Portuguese than in Latin, and there was a clear connection between the northwest Atlantic and Portuguese mercantile activity during this crucial formative period. The phrase *Terra Nova* may have subsequently permeated across the porous inter-linguistic borders of western Europe.³⁵ *Terre neufve* appears in 1508 in the records of a Norman court case, and the same year *Terra Nova* appears on a map made by a northern European cartographer working in Rome.³⁶ We find *Tierra Nova* in a 1511 Aragonese document, quickly followed by *Terre Neufve* in Breton

though they acknowledge it as an “alternative” to Newfoundland. While *nova terre* is similar, the word order (*Terra Nova* is always written noun-adjective) and the fact that it is in Latin in a Latin document do distinguish it from the Portuguese phrase which became popular after 1501. We should thus be hesitant to treat it as more than an isolate. See Margaret M. Condon and Evan T. Jones, “William Weston: Early Voyager to the New World,” *Historical Research* 91, no. 254 (2018): 628–46, here p. 631.

31. On the Norman moment, see Michael Wintroub, *The Voyage of Thought: Navigating Knowledge across the Sixteenth-Century World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

32. See also Visconte Maggiolo’s 1511 map, cited in note 67 below. On Corte-Real, see Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier*, docs. 21–24a, pp. 59–70, and doc. 27, pp. 92–96; Morison, *The European Discovery of America*, vol. 1.

33. Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier*, doc. 24, “Royal Confirmation to Michael Corte Real of the Lands Granted to Him by His Brother Gaspar, 1502,” pp. 67–70, here p. 68.

34. *Ibid.*, doc. 28, “A Tax Laid on Newfoundland Cod in Portugal, 1506,” pp. 96–97, here p. 96.

35. Of particular importance may have been connections between Breton and Portuguese mariners. For this connection, see Henri Touchard, *Le commerce maritime breton à la fin du Moyen-Âge* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1967); A. H. de Oliveira Marques, “Bretonha e Portugal no século xv,” *Arquipélago-Revista da Universidade dos Açores* 1, no. 1 (1995): 21–28.

36. For the 1508 case, see Rouen, AD Seine-Maritime, series 001B, Parlement de Normandie, no. 324, October 21, 1508. For the map, dated 1507/1508, see Johannes Ruysch, *Universalior Cogniti Orbis Tabula Ex Recentibus Confecta Observationibus* (Rome: Bernardinus Venetus de Vitalibus, 1508), Providence, John Carter Brown Library, Map Collection, <https://jcb.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet/s/fnjc1m>; Gregory C. McIntosh, *The Johannes Ruysch and Martin Waldseemüller World Maps: The Interplay and Merging of Early Sixteenth Century New World Cartographies* (Long Beach: Plus Ultra, 2012).

records dated 1513–1514.³⁷ Basques were talking about *Terres Naves* in 1512, soon joined by Galicians sailing for *Terra Nueva* in 1517.³⁸ In the following decade even English sources often replaced the familiar “New-found-land” with “Newland,” a direct translation of *Terra Nova*, and from as early as 1520 preserved cod was widely known as “Newland fish” in England.³⁹ It is possible that mariners from Brittany were the main vector for the term’s adoption across northwest Europe. In 1511 the Aragonese Crown even made clear that if one wanted to travel to *Tierra Nueva*, it was best to have Bretons on board as pilots.⁴⁰ They may have learned the phrase from Portuguese mariners and then adopted it in the first decade of the sixteenth century as they themselves became the preeminent fishworkers.⁴¹ However it spread, from the 1520s *Terra Nova* was the most common way to describe the northwest Atlantic in all the surviving records. Even in Bristol, whose seafarers are credited with “discovering” what they called the “New-found-islands,” port records from 1516–1517 record two fish-carrying ships (one Breton, one Norman) arriving not from Newfoundland but from “*Terra Nova*.”⁴²

Why a New Land? Variants of New Island and New Land were used in the earliest records to describe Europeans’ encounters with land in the northwest Atlantic.⁴³ The original meaning was aspirational, and in royal documents it is used

37. For Aragon, see Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier*, doc. 32, “Warrant of Queen Joanna to Juan de Agramonte Covering the Agreement with King Ferdinand for a Voyage to Newfoundland,” p. 102–107, here p. 102. For Nantes, see AD Loire-Atlantique, B21, Courts and Jurisdictions, 15r–16v, January 1513. For Beauport, see Saint-Brieuc, AD Côtes-d’Armor, H 69, abbaye Notre-Dame de Beauport (1198–1790).

38. For Capbreton, see Archives municipales de Capbreton, CC 5. For Galicia, see Ménard, *La pesca gallega en Terranova*, 417.

39. A state document of 1520 makes reference to purchasing “200 Newland fishe” while outfitting two ships for a voyage to Ireland. See J. S. Brewer, ed., *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII: Preserved in the Public Record Office, the British Museum, and Elsewhere in England*, vol. 3, part 1, 1519–1521 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, & Roberts, 1867), no. 800, “Costs of Preparing the Two Galleys for Transporting the Earl of Surrey into Ireland,” p. 279.

40. Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier*, doc. 32, “Warrant of Queen Joanna to Juan de Agramonte Covering the Agreement with King Ferdinand for a Voyage to Newfoundland,” p. 102–107, here pp. 102–103.

41. On Breton-Portuguese connections see Touchard, *Le commerce maritime breton; de Oliveira Marques, “Bretanha e Portugal no século xv.”*

42. On October 1, 1516, the *Frances* of Saint-Brieuc offloaded fish in Bristol, as did the *Kateryn* of Honfleur on September 10, 1517. Both are recorded as coming from what the documents call “*Terra Nova*.” See Susan Flavin and Evan T. Jones, “Bristol ‘Particular’ Customs Account, 1516/17,” April 3, 2009, transcription and translation of the Exchequer “particular” controller’s account for Bristol for 1516–1517, Kew, National Archives, E122/21/2, <http://hdl.handle.net/1983/1297> (here rows 13–14 and 3515–16). In their published account of these records, the editors translate this as “New World.” As will be discussed below, this is a misleading interpretation, and the database preserves the original phrase *Terra Nova*. See Flavin and Jones, *Bristol’s Trade with Ireland and the Continent 1503–1601: The Evidence of the Exchequer Customs Accounts* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009).

43. For instance, Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier*, doc. 6, “new Isle” and “New Ilande,” p. 12; doc. 7, “ixole nove,” p. 13; and doc. 8, “insule nove,” p. 15.

to designate new islands and lands, both recently discovered and as yet unexplored, which might be seized and exploited. Perhaps intended as a placeholder until more sense could be made of the northwest Atlantic, New Land stuck. As Stephanie Pettigrew and Elizabeth Mancke have pointed out, variants of New Land would occasionally appear elsewhere in the Atlantic in the late sixteenth and seventeenth century, including Novaya Zemlya in the Arctic.⁴⁴ In none of these places, however, did it become entrenched in the way it did in the northwest Atlantic. Nor was it applied to maritime spaces, but rather to islands or continents. It is possible (though we are unlikely to ever know for sure) that New Land was even meant ironically in the northwest Atlantic context: once a shorthand phrase to mark the landlocked dreams of explorers, it was subsequently appropriated by mariners to describe familiar waters.

Because modern scholars take the meaning of Terra Nova at face value, with the stress on *nova*, they tend to over-emphasize the newness of this maritime space in the minds of European mariners. For decades historians have latched onto the extravagant descriptions of a handful of (mostly English) colonists, explorers, and promoters who portrayed the novelty and abundance of these territories.⁴⁵ In so doing, they consciously or unconsciously foreground the new—new world, new riches, new opportunities, new-found-lands.⁴⁶ In truth, most mariners were less than impressed with Terra Nova. It was a cold and dangerous place to be briefly visited during the warm months and then left for the rest of the year. The English, who were the first to report on the abundance of fish and to bring back catches, were in fact the last community to engage systematically with the sixteenth-century

44. Stephanie Pettigrew and Elizabeth Mancke, “European Expansion and the Contested North Atlantic,” *Terrae Incognitae* 50, no. 1 (2018): 15–34. The authors suggest that Spitsbergen/Svalbard was known as Nieuw Landt to the Dutch, but this seems to have been only briefly used and quickly replaced by its more familiar names. Novaya Zemlya is the modern Russian name, a literal translation of New Land.

45. W. Jeffrey Bolster has done so most explicitly, explaining in a section of *The Mortal Sea* entitled “Assessing Abundance” the European reaction to the quantity, variety, and quality of marine life in the northwest Atlantic. This is meant to contrast with the supposed paucity of European fish stocks: “The explorers’ voyages were thus journeys in space and journeys through time—ecological time; their accounts reflected not just American abundance, but the depletion of European coastal systems ... nothing else explains the astonishment of [early explorers]. ... The baselines they had taken for granted no longer made sense.” Bolster, *The Mortal Sea*, 34–48, citation p. 45. This has recently found echoes with a team of fisheries historians who associate the early reports from Caboto of abundant fish stocks with the start of a “Fish Revolution,” and use it to approach the sixteenth-century history of fishing from a quantitative perspective. See Poul Holm et al., “The North Atlantic Fish Revolution (ca. AD 1500),” *Quaternary Research* 108 (2022): 92–106.

46. Laurier Turgeon has gone so far as to suggest that “New Land [Terra Nova] evoked the mythic origins of a virgin territory, exempted from original sin. ... The term expressed the hope of attainment of the utopia of the terrestrial paradise ...” It is a wonderfully poetic image, in which the island and waters of Terra Nova rise out of the Atlantic like a gift from heaven, providing opportunity and easy riches to any who crossed the ocean. See Turgeon, “Codfish, Consumption, and Colonization,” 49.

fishery. Much to the frustration of advocates like Anthony Parkhurst, the English fishing fleet did not grow beyond a few dozen ships to become a serious competitor in Terra Nova until after the 1570s.⁴⁷ The *gran capitano* who wrote about visiting the fishery in Ramusio's famous collection of navigational essays gave a dry, practical description of Terra Nova which offered no image of novelty or abundance.⁴⁸ The navigator and author Jean Alfonse compared the region to Spain rather than Eden, commenting only that it had "many fisheries" (*force pescheries*).⁴⁹ The waters of the northwest Atlantic held vast stores of fish, it is true. But so did those around Iceland, the North Sea, and countless other corners of the ocean.⁵⁰ Off the Rio do Ouro in Saharan Africa, according to one Portuguese mariner, one could catch enough fish to fill a ship in only four hours of handlining.⁵¹ In his travelogue, the Venetian merchant Alessandro Magno marveled at how much fish was to be had along the coast of Spain in the 1560s, describing it in the glowing terms we normally associate with Newfoundland.⁵² The North Sea's herring fishery was known as the "Golden Mountain" to the Dutch by the 1570s.⁵³ The northwest Atlantic was not always as *nova* as modern historians assume.

Once it was adopted by mariners, Terra Nova was used consistently throughout the first century of the fishery. One of the earliest records to cite a ship sailing

47. Keith Matthews, "A History of the West of England-Newfoundland Fishery" (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1968); Gillian T. Cell, *English Enterprise in Newfoundland 1577–1660* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969); David H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate: Bristol and the Atlantic Economy, 1450–1700* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). On Parkhurst, see David B. Quinn with Alison M. Quinn and Susan Hillier, eds., *New American World: A Documentary History of North America to 1612*, vol. 4, *Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony: Northwest Passage Searches* (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 7.

48. Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Delle nauigationi et viaggi* [...], 3 vols. (Venice: Luca Antonio Giunti, 1550–1559), 3:423–34. For a partial transcription, see William Gilbert, "Beothuk-European Contact in the 16th Century: A Re-evaluation of the Documentary Evidence," *Acadiensis* 40, no. 1 (2011): 24–44.

49. Jean Alfonse, *Les voyages aventureux du capitaine Jan Alfonse*, ed. Mellin de Saint-Gelais (Poitou: J. de Marnef, 1559), 27.

50. Well into the mid-sixteenth century most Europeans still associated codfish with Iceland, Shetland, and Norway rather than Terra Nova. As late as the 1590s, an English military manual was recommending that soldiers be fed "shotland [Shetland] cod" to ensure they stayed strong and fit—nearly a century after the rise of the Terra Nova fishery. William Garrard, *The Arte of Warre: Being the Onely Rare Booke of Myllitarie Profession* [...] *Corrected and Finished by Captaine Hichcock* (London: [John Charlewood and William Howe?] for Roger Warde, 1591), 362.

51. Ramusio, *Delle nauigationi et viaggi*, 1:301.

52. Alessandro Magno, "Account of Alessandro Magno's journeys to Cyprus, Egypt, Spain, England, Flanders, Germany and Brescia, 1557–1565," Washington, DC, Folger Shakespeare Library, MS V.a.259.

53. The original quote comes from Adriaen Coenen's *Visboek*, written in the 1570s. On this text, see Christiaan van Bochove, "The 'Golden Mountain': An Economic Analysis of Holland's Early Modern Herring Fisheries," in Sicking and Abreu-Ferreira, *Beyond the Catch*, 209–43; Floris P. Bennema and Adriaan D. Rijnsdorp, "Fish Abundance, Fisheries, Fish Trade and Consumption in Sixteenth-Century Netherlands as Described by Adriaen Coenen," *Fisheries Research* 161 (2015): 384–99.

to the northwest Atlantic, a 1508 court case from Normandy involving a ship from Brittany, described a voyage “to Terra Nova” (*a la terre neufve*).⁵⁴ This was remarkably similar to how it would be used nearly a century later in the 1590s, when the formulation “a Terra Nova voyage” (*un voyage de la terre neufve*) was employed by notaries in La Rochelle and Honfleur.⁵⁵ In between we find thousands of cases in loan contracts, charter parties, court cases, sales agreements, tax records, and the like. Such texts reflect official statements made by merchants and seafarers regarding their operations in the Atlantic. The term was used, for instance, in the testimonies of Basque mariners during two official inquiries carried out in Guipúzcoa in 1542 and 1554. During the 1542 inquiry, the mariner Robert Lefant could confidently tell a scribe that he had been hired to “go to Terra Nova (*para Terra Noba*) to fish for cod.”⁵⁶ In 1554 notaries recorded the deposition of Martin de Hua of San Sebastian, who admitted attacking Breton fishworkers somewhere “in a port of Terra Nova (*de Tierrenueva*) ... in the North part of Terra Nova (*de la Parte de Norte de Tierrenueva*).”⁵⁷ It is telling that it is only in the 1590s, as Dutch merchants and mariners began to engage with the northwest Atlantic fish trade, that references to the region start to appear in Amsterdam’s notarial records. The Dutch were latecomers to the trade, jumping into a fishery that was almost a century old. When Amsterdam notaries had to record the name of the place where fishworkers were headed, in a city many leagues from Lisbon and at a moment far removed from the geographic confusion of the early sixteenth century, the scribes used the phrase *terre neufve* to describe the northwest Atlantic—the French name was sometimes reproduced verbatim.⁵⁸ This may indicate that Dutch merchants were learning of the region from French-speaking mariners, who of course used the term with which they were most familiar, Terra Nova.

Two records provide further evidence that the phrase Terra Nova was used not just by scribes but by the fishworkers themselves. In the 1540s an anonymous Norman mariner recorded a brief memorandum on the last page of a manuscript navigation guide.⁵⁹ In two short paragraphs, scratched out in a hasty script, the

54. Rouen, AD Seine-Maritime, series 001B, Parlement de Normandie, no. 324, October 21, 1508.

55. AD Charente-Maritime, 3 E 203, notaire Bigeard, 1592; AD Calvados, 8E/6510, notaires Pierre Debaonne and Jehan Robinet, 1598.

56. Henry Percival Biggar, *A Collection of Documents Relating to Jacques Cartier and the Sieur de Roberval* (Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada, 1930), doc. 212, “Examination of Newfoundland Sailors Regarding Cartier,” pp. 447–67.

57. A copy of the report on the 1554 raid can be found in the Vargas Ponce collection at the Madrid Naval Museum (Col. Vargas Ponce, book 1, no. 18). The original can be found in Oñati, Archivo histórico provincial de Guipúzcoa, JD IM/2/12/11. For this project I have used the transcript by the French historian Édouard Ducéré in his *Histoire maritime de Bayonne. Les corsaires sous l’Ancien Régime* (Bayonne: E. Hourquet, 1895), appendix 1, pp. 333–44.

58. See, for instance, Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 75/99–101, October 10, 1596, the ship *Zeeridder* bound for “Terra Neuf” to buy fish.

59. Anonymous, “Regyme pour congnoistre la latitude de la region et aussi la hauteur de la ligne equinotiale sur nostre orison,” Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France,

seafarer left himself a note “for Terra Nova” (*pour la terre-neufve*), recording the best ways to identify the offshore coastal shelf known then, as now, as the Grand Banks (look for the birds) and where he had left his ships from the last season (sunk underwater for safekeeping in Renew's Harbor). A decade later, in 1559, an unnamed Breton merchant jotted down in a small notebook reserved for his accounts “the names of the mariners for my ship for Terra Nova (*terre neufve*).”⁶⁰ Both of these documents were made by mariners familiar with the fishery and were meant for their own use, hastily-made notes that happen to have survived rather than official records.

Such uses may have prompted the explorer and geographer Thevet to describe in one of his many works “the country vulgarly known as Terra Nova (*Terre Neuve*), which from the time of its discovery until today has borne and still bears this name.”⁶¹ Thevet frequently insisted that his own writing was based on interviews with mariners, especially Bretons, and his use of “vulgarly” reflects mid-sixteenth-century ways of describing popular modes of speech and thought. In the 1570s Parkhurst described the fishery to his patron Richard Hakluyt as “the sundry navies that come to Newfoundland, or Terra nova, for fish,” implying that while geographers such as Hakluyt might know it as Newfoundland, most others would be more familiar with the term Terra Nova.⁶²

While textual records suggest the consistent use of Terra Nova by mariners, sixteenth-century cartographers did not employ the concept in the same way. The term appears on only a handful of maps, mainly by the Venetian mapmaker Gastaldi, with alternative labels and configurations of the space being the norm. Cartographers and geographers at that time generally organized and labeled the northwest Atlantic in one of two ways. The first was to designate different parts of the region with titles bestowed by officially sanctioned navigators, in particular to denote possession. In such cases, names were used to stake claims and circumscribe space within European zones of control—or at least to aspire to such claims and control. The voyages of Jacques Cartier and Giovanni da Verrazzano thus gave rise to two different place-names: New France would soon become fixed in the St. Lawrence valley, while the geography of the quasi-mythical realm of Norumbega

MS français 24269. This text was probably written in the mid-1540s, perhaps 1544, judging by the dates in the almanac. We do not know for sure who wrote it, though several possibilities including the merchant Jean Cordier have been suggested. On the Norman context, see Michel Mollat du Jourdin, *Le commerce maritime normand à la fin du Moyen Âge. Étude d'histoire économique et sociale* (Paris: Plon, 1952); Charles Bréard and Paul Bréard, *Documents relatifs à la marine normande et à ses armements aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles pour le Canada, l'Afrique, les Antilles, le Brésil et les Indes* (Rouen: A. Lestringant, 1889).

60. “Cest les noms des mariners de mon naffvire pour terre neufve.” AD Côtes-d'Armor, 1E, 1573–1606, 2783, fol. 35.

61. “Le pays que le vulgaire appelle Terre Neuve, qui dès le commencement qu'elle fut descouuerte iusques à ce iourd'hui, a porté et porte encore ce nom.” *André Thevet's North America: A Sixteenth-Century View*, ed. and trans. Roger Schlesinger and Arthur Stabler (1986; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 54 (translation modified).

62. Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony*, 7.

was always much vaguer.⁶³ The earliest maps of what is today Newfoundland label it variously as the “Land Discovered by the English,” the “Land of the King of Portugal,” or the “Land of Labrador.”⁶⁴ In contrast to the popularity of the phrase Terra Nova, the term Newfoundland, or indeed the use of the island itself as a marker for the fishery, was unknown outside of a few English writings and maps. Nor was the island always known under this name. Geographers, cartographers, and others made frequent references to the “Island of Cod,” the “Island of Bacalaos,” and even the mysterious “Island of Demons” well into the later parts of the century.⁶⁵ For much of the sixteenth century Europeans were uncertain whether Newfoundland was a single island or an archipelago.⁶⁶

These conflicting ways of portraying space could sometimes appear on the same map. In 1511 the celebrated Genoese cartographer Visconte Maggiolo completed a portolan atlas that encompassed the entire globe.⁶⁷ Drafted in Naples but based on his experience in Genoa, a city at the forefront of contemporary cartographic science, the map incorporated the latest information about the south Atlantic and the Americas.⁶⁸ In the northwest corner of the Atlantic, Maggiolo drew his viewer’s attention to the “Land of the English,” the “Land of Labrador of the King of Portugal,” the “Land of Corte-Real of the King of Portugal,” and the “Land of Fishery” (fig. 4). Four terms to describe what around the same time the shipmates of the Breton mariner Dobel would sum up in the phrase “*Terre-Neusfve*.” The descriptors used by Maggiolo were typical of how Mediterranean, German, Portuguese, Spanish, and French mapmakers came to identify land in the northwest Atlantic in the sixteenth century: a combination of names derived from exploration, royal territorial claims, and commodity production.⁶⁹

63. This strange and mythical place continued to feature on maps throughout much of the sixteenth century. Kirsten A Seaver, “Norumbega and Harmonia Mundi in Sixteenth-Century Cartography,” *Imago Mundi* 50, no. 1 (1998): 34–58.

64. Chet Van Duzer and Lauren Beck, *Canada before Confederation: Maps at the Exhibition* (Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2017); Derek Hayes, *America Discovered: A Historical Atlas of North American Exploration* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2004).

65. Alban Berson, “L’île aux démons: cartographie d’un mirage,” *Borealia: Early Canadian History*, October 2018, <https://earlycanadianhistory.ca/2018/10/24/lile-aux-demons-cartographie-dun-mirage/>; Van Duzer and Beck, *Canada before Confederation*; Schlesinger and Stabler, *André Thevet’s North America*.

66. Frank Lestringant, *Le livre des îles. Atlas et récits insulaires de la Genèse à Jules Verne* (Geneva: Droz, 2002), 151–77.

67. Visconte de Maggiolo, *[World Map]* (Naples, 1511), Providence, John Carter Brown Library, Map Collection, 3-Size Codex Z 2.

68. Gregory C. McIntosh, *The Vesconte Maggiolo World Map of 1504 in Fano, Italy* (Long Beach: Plus Ultra, 2013); Massimo Quaini, “Cartographic Activities in the Republic of Genoa, Corsica, and Sardinia in the Renaissance,” in *The History of Cartography*, vol. 3, *Cartography in the European Renaissance*, ed. David Woodward, part 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 854–73; McIntosh, *The Johannes Ruysch and Martin Waldseemüller World Maps*.

69. For a useful overview of the cartography of early Newfoundland and Canada, with several detailed examples, see the recent essay collection Van Duzer and Beck, *Canada before Confederation*; William Francis Ganong, *Crucial Maps in the Early Cartography and Place-Nomenclature of the Atlantic Coast of Canada*, ed. Theodore E. Layng (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964).

Figure 4. Detail of a 1511 map by Visconte Maggiolo, showing the northwest Atlantic



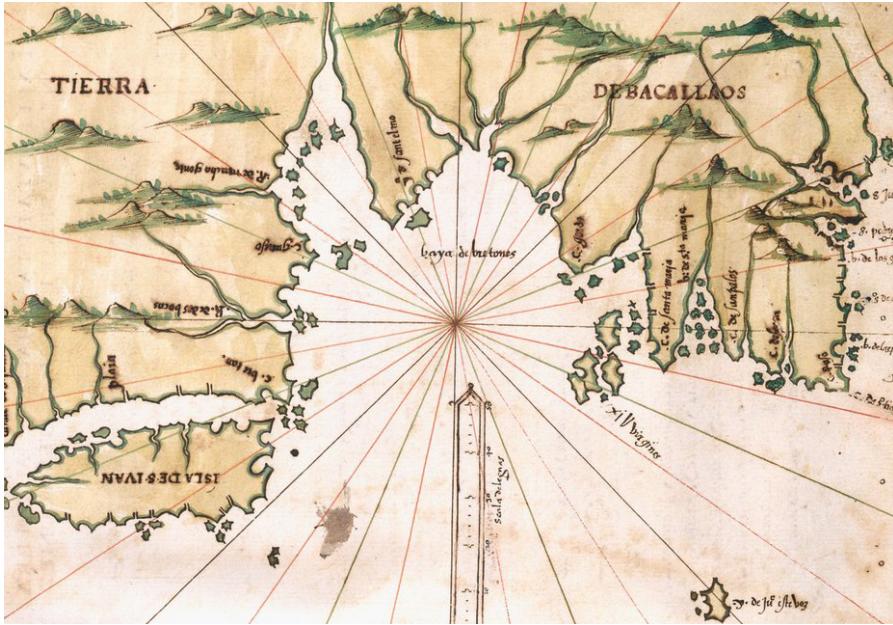
Source: Visconte Maggiolo, [World Map], in [Portolan Atlas], Naples, 1511. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Providence, 3-Size Codex Z 2.

The second approach, increasingly common as the century wore on, was simply to label the entirety of the northwest Atlantic according to its chief export, codfish. Most popular was the word *bacalaos* or *bacalhau*, the Spanish and Portuguese term for dry salt-cod, meaning that for many European and Mediterranean consumers, codfish came, quite literally, from a place called *salt-cod* on their maps. The name appears as early as 1508 on a map made by Johannes Ruysch, though later sources credited Sebastian Caboto, Zuan Caboto's son, with bestowing the name on the region around the same time.⁷⁰ *Bacalaos* originally designated an island, but for Spanish, Portuguese, and Mediterranean geographers it sometimes meant the entire coast of the northwest Atlantic, and sometimes a smaller part of the region.⁷¹ The atlas-maker Alonso de Santa Cruz, for instance, labeled the whole

70. McIntosh, *The Johannes Ruysch and Martin Waldseemüller World Maps*. For the use of the term in a 1512 letter to Caboto from the king of Spain, see Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier*, doc. 34, "Sebastian Cabot Consulted about Newfoundland," pp. 115–16.

71. For examples, see Van Duzer and Beck, *Canada before Confederation*, 36 and 68–69. See too the example of how Champlain uses *bacalao* in the early seventeenth century to denote a small island: Miren Egaña Goya, "Presencia de los pescadores vascos en Canadá s. XVII: Testimonio de las obras de Samuel de Champlain (1603–1633)," *Zainak. Cuadernos de Antropología-Etnografía* 33 (2010): 375–92, here p. 384.

Figure 5. Map of “Tierra de Bacallaos” by Alonso de Santa Cruz



Source: Alonso de Santa Cruz, *Islario general de todas las islas del mundo*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS Res. 38 (1539–1560), fol. 298r. Reproduced courtesy of the Library of Congress World Digital Library.

coast of the northwest Atlantic as “*Tierra de Bacallaos*” in his mid-sixteenth-century survey of islands (fig. 5).⁷² Naming such a large region after a single commodity may find a parallel only in Brazil, so called by the Portuguese after the dyewood. The term Bacalaos lived a kind of parallel life to Terra Nova, appearing on maps throughout the sixteenth century before fading from use in the seventeenth. Yet it was never as consistently used, nor as widely embraced. In any case, it was not clear whether Bacalaos described a coherent space in the way that Terra Nova did—cartographers and geographers tended to apply it haphazardly to different coasts and islands, and mainly to land rather than water. Importantly, the term rarely appeared in written accounts related to mariners, and it seems that few fishworkers thought of themselves as catching cod in Bacalaos. This is further evidence of the competing ways of thinking about new spaces that coexisted in the sixteenth century.⁷³

72. Alonso de Santa Cruz, *Islario general de todas las islas del mundo* (1539–1560), Madrid, Biblioteca nacional de España, MS Res. 38, fol. 298r.

73. For a good discussion of Bacalaos as a place-name, see Goya, “Basque Toponymy in Canada,” 55–57. This includes a number of examples of the use of Bacalaos on surviving maps and in geographic texts. On the etymology of the term, see Joan Coromines, *Diccionario crítico etimológico de la lengua castellana*, vol. 1, A–C (Bern: Editorial Francke, 1954), 358–59.

Beyond the world of mapmakers, few of these alternative names seem to have had the purchase achieved by Terra Nova. I would argue that this is because Terra Nova was not just a different way of naming the northwest Atlantic; it represented a different idea about what that space was. Cartographers wanted to assign labels to lands and islands, places that could be claimed, seized, and exploited. Mariners appear to have preferred a term that was malleable enough to apply to the kind of mobile, floating work they did in the northwest Atlantic. Terra Nova was a place for fishwork, not a fixed piece of land to be claimed, and this made it useful for mariners and less so for cartographers.

Terra Nova as Action and Experience

What did it mean to visit Terra Nova? The anonymous Norman mariner, writing in the 1540s, tells us that birds were the first sign one was nearing the region. As a ship approached the northwest Atlantic, after a month or more of sailing, the experienced seafarer should look for “great flocks of *faulqnetz* and also great flocks of a small bird called *marmyons*, then you are forty leagues from the bank.” When the birds disappeared, he advised, the ship had at last reached the Grand Banks and could drop a line to take soundings.⁷⁴ Parmenius, the Hungarian poet sent to Terra Nova in 1583 to record Sir Humphrey Gilbert’s voyage, likewise associated the region with animals, weather, and climate. You had reached Terra Nova when you found endless fog, rain, and fierce winds, when your fish scorched in the sun if you left it out too long to dry, and when you saw your first icebergs, even in May.⁷⁵ “Some of our company have reported,” he advised his English audience, “that in the month of May they were stuck for sixteen whole days on end in so much ice that some of the icebergs were sixty fathoms thick; and when their sides facing the sun melted, the entire mass was turned over, as it were on a sort of pivot, in such a way that what had previously been facing upwards was then facing down, to the great danger of any people at hand, as you can well imagine.”⁷⁶ But even as he complained about the weather and risks of the fishery, Parmenius summed up what made it all worthwhile: you had reached Terra Nova when you found “*piscium inexhausta copia*,” an inexhaustible supply of fish.

74. “Que trouveres grands bends de faulqnetz et aussi de grandes bends de petis oyselletz qui sappellent marmyons vous serez denyron a quarante lieues du banc.” Anonymous, “Regyme pour congnoistre la latitude.” *Faulqnetz* may be *faulconet*, a diminutive of falcon and here referring to terns or other seabirds. It is unknown what type of bird *marmyons* signifies. Though there have been speculations as to the identity of the author (a name is written on the last page of the book, amongst several sketches), there is no clear evidence as to who is responsible for these sections on Terra Nova.

75. Stephanus Parmenius, *The New Found Land of Stephen Parmenius: The Life and Writings of a Hungarian Poet, Drowned on a Voyage from Newfoundland, 1583*, ed. and trans. David B. Quinn and Neil M. Cheshire (1972; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981). Parmenius’s letter was published by Hakluyt in the 1580s, but I have chosen to use the more modern and refined translation by Quinn and Cheshire.

76. *Ibid.*, 70.

For other mariners it was the people who made Terra Nova. Alayn Moyne, a Breton pilot hired to guide the English adventurer Richard Hore's ships to Terra Nova in 1536, knew he had arrived when he found himself once more amongst his fellow countrymen. While the English crew spent their days in small boats offshore catching fish, Moyne left them to wander the beaches, where he "went on lande emongest the Bryttons his country men and made mery with them a day or ii."⁷⁷ Breton mariners could be found in Terra Nova every year from May to August without fail, a comfort to Moyne that nonetheless proved costly when he was charged with dereliction of duty back in London. Clemente de Odeliça, a Spanish Basque mariner who was in Terra Nova in 1542, and who testified before the inquiry in Guipúzcoa that same year, knew that he and his crew had arrived when they encountered Indigenous communities (likely the Innu of southern Labrador), for he reported "that many Indians came to his ship in Grand Bay (*Gran Baya*), and they ate and drank together, and were very friendly, and the Indians gave them deer and wolf skins in exchange for axes and knives and other trifles."⁷⁸ Lefant, testifying before the same court of inquiry, remarked casually that in Terra Nova "the people trade in marten skins and other skins, and those who go there take all kinds of ironware. And ... the Indians understand any language, French, English, and Gascon, and their own tongue."⁷⁹ After nearly four decades of European mariners visiting the region every summer, Terra Nova sounded a lot like home to Lefant. It was a place that mariners understood not just as a point on a map but as a series of experiences: certain birds, particularly unpleasant weather, one's fellow countrymen, and an ever-present Indigenous community. These experiences in turn shaped what could and could not be part of Terra Nova.

In the early sixteenth century, Terra Nova was something artificial, a space made through human actions and tied to the behavior of mariners. That is, after all, what a place is—an idea about space and spatial relationships that we create through our actions and words.⁸⁰ Terra Nova had to be made and imposed on the world, but in so doing fishworkers had created a reality which was useful and intelligible to other mariners. People, birds, coasts, fog, sea ice, memories, and experiences: these were the constituent elements by which Europeans constructed a sense of place. For Terra Nova was definitely a place, a discrete space on the mental map of many

77. Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *America from Concept to Discovery*, docs. 148–52, pp. 206–14.

78. "Dixo que en Gran Baya venian á su nabio muchos yndios y con ellos comian y benian y se trataban muy bien y les daban pieles de benados y de lobos a trueque de achas y cuchillos y otras cosas." Biggar, *A Collection of Documents*, doc. 212, "Examination of Newfoundland Sailors Regarding Cartier," pp. 446–67. For Odeliça's testimony, see pp. 459–64.

79. "É que su trato dellos es seto de pellejas de martas y otras pellejas y que los que van lleban toda cosa de hierro; y que los yndios entienden toda lengua, francesa y ynglesa y gascona é la lengue ellos hablan." Ibid. For Lefant's testimony, see pp. 448–54.

80. Here I follow Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*; Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*; Ricardo Padrón, "Mapping Plus Ultra: Cartography, Space, and Hispanic Modernity," *Representations* 79, no. 1 (2002): 28–60; Tuan, "Language and the Making of Place"; Pannell, "Of Gods and Monsters."

Europeans. It was a destination that could be visited, a fishery distinct from Iceland or Ireland or countless others. But places are subjective, shifting things. Terra Nova was not fixed, not a point or carefully bounded area on a coordinate map, but a term malleable enough to signify a vast swathe of the northwest Atlantic.

Even this does not fully account for how Terra Nova functioned, but with the aid of the scholarship on space we can take our interpretation further. The ways in which sixteenth-century mariners thought about Terra Nova correspond more broadly to how anthropologists and archaeologists understand the making of space and place by humans. A place is a thing to be created, and we create by doing—actions produce knowledge, which produces place. The unifying elements were movement and work. As Ingold has put it, “*we know as we go*, from place to place ... people’s knowledge of the environment undergoes continuous formation in the very course of their moving about in it.”⁸¹ Alfred Gell has deftly explored the differences between navigating by mental map and navigating by lived experience. He has also made clear that the two are inseparable: though we may generate navigable routes through experience, we must also be able to plot our position on mental maps as we move.⁸² We use our experiences, our memories of movement, to create concepts of place, and mental maps to navigate between and within those places. Sometimes these mental maps survive in written or cartographic form, but sometimes not. As Ricardo Padrón has shown, this experiential and itinerary-based approach to mapping and navigation was essential to how the Spanish understood colonial spaces in the Americas.⁸³ It can also, I would argue, help explain how Terra Nova functioned, as a mental map inseparable from what Gell has called the “image-based practical mastery” of mariners working the northwest Atlantic.⁸⁴

These mental images, forged by movement and actions, become a place. But how does movement become space which can then be articulated as a mental map? Here we can draw on theories of landscape, which can also be applied to watery spaces. María N. Zedeño has compellingly argued for seeing the world as landscapes composed of landmarks, the latter being particular points of human-natural interaction (trees, roads, beaches, mines, etc.). Landmarks are “the ‘pages’ in the history of land and resource use,” such that “*Landscape* may be defined as the web of interactions between people and landmarks.”⁸⁵ Although Zedeño’s language is terrestrial—*landscape*—the process she describes is that of experience (landmarks) shaping an image of space from which we in turn form our mental maps. This certainly reflects how Terra Nova functioned: as a maritime landscape composed of experiences, of landmarks like the beach at Caprouge or the birds of the Grand

81. Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, 229–30 (emphasis in original).

82. Alfred Gell, “How to Read a Map: Remarks on the Practical Logic of Navigation,” *Man* 20, no. 2 (1985): 271–86.

83. Padrón, “Mapping Plus Ultra.”

84. Gell, “How to Read a Map,” 282.

85. María Nieves Zedeño, “On What People Make of Places: A Behavioral Cartography,” in *Social Theory in Archaeology*, ed. Michael B Schiffer (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000), 97–112, here p. 107 (emphasis in original).

Banks. Zedeño's work complements Christer Westerdahl's pioneering proposal to understand maritime space as a "maritime cultural landscape" which "signifies *human utilization (economy) of maritime space by boat: settlement, fishing, hunting, shipping and its attendant subcultures.*"⁸⁶ In synthesizing material and cultural evidence into a comprehensive tool for archaeologists, especially underwater archaeologists, this concept offers a way to understand the spaces they study as an analogue and contrast to terrestrial landscapes. Like Zedeño's landscape, Westerdahl's maritime cultural landscape is composed of landmarks and memories, each tied to a maritime action. We may go one step further and suggest that such a landscape—a collection of maritime landmarks—was the foundation for the mental maps formed by sixteenth-century mariners in the northwest Atlantic.

The sites and experiences which comprised Terra Nova were all tied to fishwork. They were the harbors and banks, the shoals and islands, the beaches and cliffs, the birds' nests and freshwater streams observed and used by European mariners each summer. These sites were formed in many ways, for fishwork constituted many kinds of labor that required many kinds of space. Rocky areas were used to sun-dry salted cod, beaches were used to launch fishing boats, and camps were set up beyond the shoreline. For those who worked the Grand Banks in pursuit of *morue verte* (wet-salted cod made on board ships) the sea itself was the main site of fishwork, and crews might never set foot on shore.⁸⁷ Because of this close association between fishwork and the northwest Atlantic, throughout the sixteenth century the phrase Terra Nova was often paired with a variation of the verb "to fish." The most usual formulation in notarial records from French-speaking ports, for instance, invoked a journey "to Terra Nova to fish" (*voyage de terre neufve a la pesche*), "to Terra Nova in the fishery" (*aux terres neufves en la pescherie*), or some variant thereof.⁸⁸ As early as 1506, Portuguese records were referring to "the fisheries of Terra Nova" (*das pesquerias da Terra Nova*).⁸⁹ To declare "I am going to Terra Nova" was functionally equivalent to "I am going fishing." This linguistic pattern reflects an understanding that space could be mutable and determined by the ability to perform a certain action. Where there were fish that could be caught, there was Terra Nova. A harbor might become part of Terra Nova not because of where it was located, but because it was used for fishing.

86. Christer Westerdahl, "The Maritime Cultural Landscape," *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 21, no. 1 (1992): 5–14, here p. 5 (emphasis in original).

87. For descriptions of fishwork practices, see Charles de La Morandière, *La pêche française de la morue à Terre-Neuve du XVI^e siècle à nos jours. Son importance économique, sociale et politique* (Paris: École pratique des hautes études, 1967); Pope, "Transformation of the Maritime Cultural Landscape"; Olaf U. Janzen, "The Logic of English Saltcod: An Historiographical Revision," *The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord* 23, no. 2 (2013): 123–34.

88. This phrase was ubiquitous in the *obligation, avittaillement, and congé* contracts which form the bulk of records in the notarial and city council registers. On the language of notaries, see Turgeon, "Pour redécouvrir notre 16^e siècle"; Bernard, *Navires et gens de mer à Bordeaux*.

89. Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier*, doc. 28, "A Tax Laid on Newfoundland Cod in Portugal, 1506," pp. 96–97.

Terra Nova, then, was created by going to the northwest Atlantic and doing fishwork. Elements of this process have been identified before—not least by Peter Pope, who has drawn on both Westerdahl and Zedeño to argue that “between 1500 and 1800 European fishermen created distinct maritime cultural landscapes in Newfoundland and the Gulf of St Lawrence.”⁹⁰ Yet Pope’s approach falls short in ways which are important for understanding Terra Nova. He portrays a relative continuity from 1500 to 1800, whereas I would argue that the sixteenth century was distinct. He further suggests the fishing room (a shore-based fishing station) as the key constitutive element of the maritime cultural landscape in the northwest Atlantic. While the fishing room was a fixture of the seventeenth-century fishery, we have far less physical or written evidence for its use in the sixteenth, and it was only one of the landmarks through which Europeans interacted with the landscape. Focusing on the fishing room also emphasizes the shore over the water. Pope’s conception of the maritime cultural landscape of Newfoundland is thus ultimately bound to land, to specific spots on the map, both by his emphasis on these structures and by his use of the modern place-name Newfoundland. What of fishworkers who did not use rooms—such as the Normans who spent their summers on the Grand Banks, bobbing offshore and making *morue verte* without ever setting foot on the beach? What of the open seas where Basque whalers ran down their prey? What of the bird colonies European mariners raided for food, itself a kind of work necessary to the fishery’s basic functions? What about the bays and harbors and beaches where Innu, Mi’kmaq, and Inuit met to trade with fishworkers? It is necessary to think of sites of exploitation more broadly, on shore and at sea, as the landmarks that made up the cultural landscape, and ultimately the mental map, of Terra Nova. Fishing stages, whaling stations, offshore banks, bird colonies, ice flows, canoes, *chalupas*, ships great and small—all were part of how mariners understood the space. It was action, not a structure resembling a booth, that made landmarks and landscapes in the sixteenth-century northwest Atlantic.

Such a conception of space, so rooted in experience and work, could only be created by the European mariners who ventured to the northwest Atlantic every summer. Most fishworkers served in Terra Nova for multiple seasons, and entire families or even port towns could become tied to the seasonal fishery, allowing them to develop intimate understandings of the maritime spaces in which their relatives and neighbors worked. These were not yet the motley crews of proletarianized mariners we would later see in the Atlantic world.⁹¹ Fishing crews tended to be small, recruited locally and sometimes via family ties within coastal

90. Pope, “Transformation of the Maritime Cultural Landscape,” 124.

91. Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700–1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Rediker, *Outlaws of the Atlantic: Sailors, Pirates, and Motley Crews in the Age of Sail* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014); Paul C. van Royen, Jaap Bruijn, and Jan Lucassen, eds., *Those Emblems of Hell? European Sailors and the Maritime Labour Market, 1570–1870* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997). A better comparison might be found in Daniel Vickers and Vince Walsh, *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

communities.⁹² It was common for fishing ships to sail with a complement of *grumetes*, younger boys serving as apprentices to the older men already familiar with life at sea (most of whom were in their twenties to forties). These young boys may have served with fishworkers who had spent decades gaining an intimate knowledge of the coasts and seas of Terra Nova, which they could then pass on. In 1610 Samuel de Champlain encountered “old mariners” (*vieux mariniers*) at Tadoussac on the St. Lawrence River who marveled at weather conditions that “had not been seen for sixty years.”⁹³ Through such hands-on training, word-of-mouth, and the circulation of information within port towns, mariners could cultivate, transfer, and preserve knowledge of work and place in the northwest Atlantic.

Ecologist Fikret Berkes has argued that the kind of localized, detailed knowledge which comes from spending so much time working in a particular landscape forms a “sacred ecology” that allows communities to more effectively manage natural resources.⁹⁴ For European seafarers in the northwest Atlantic, this relationship was sometimes more than nominally sacred—as Miren Egaña Goya has shown, from the mid-sixteenth century Basque fishworkers were given the last rites and buried along the coasts of Terra Nova.⁹⁵ Such processes of familiarization, both ecological and sacral, were essential to the history of Terra Nova. In 1521 the Drapers’ guild in London stressed the importance of consulting mariners “having experience, and exercised in and about the forsaied Iland, aswele in knowlege of the land, the due courses of the see, thiderward & homeward, as in knowlege of the havenes, roodes, poortes, crekes, dayngers & sholdes there uppon that coste and there abowtes being.”⁹⁶ This was an appeal to minds that knew the subtle difference between a haven, a port, a road, and a creek, and could hold detailed information on the many rocky shoals and dangers of the northwest Atlantic. One such mind was that of the anonymous Norman mariner who in the 1540s wrote about the boats he had left in Terra Nova, specifying that they were in “the harbor of Jean Denys called Rangoust.”⁹⁷

92. See the surviving crew list in AD Côtes-d’Armor, 1 E, 1573–1606, 2783. See too Romain Grancher, “Fishermen’s Taverns: Public Houses and Maritime Labour in an Early Modern French Fishing Community,” *International Journal of Maritime History* 28, no. 4 (2016): 671–85.

93. “Le 26 du mois arrivames à Tadoussac, où il y avoit des vaisseaux qui y estoient arrivez dès le 18, ce qui ne s’esoit veu il y a plus de 60. ans, à ce que disoient les vieux mariniers qui voguent ordinairement audit pays.” *The Works of Samuel de Champlain*, vol. 2, 1608–1613, ed. H. P. Biggar, trans. John Squair and William F. Ganong (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1925), 117.

94. Fikret Berkes, *Sacred Ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management* (Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis, 1999).

95. Goya, “A Permanent Place in Newfoundland.” See too the evidence for Christian burial practices in Lori M. White, “The Saddle Island Cemetery: A Study of Whalers at a Sixteenth-Century Basque Whaling Station in Red Bay, Labrador” (MA diss., Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2015).

96. Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier*, doc. 61, “A Projected Voyage to Newfoundland,” pp. 134–142, here p. 136.

97. Anonymous, “Regyme pour congnoistre la latitude.” This is likely Renew’s harbor on the Avalon peninsula, named for a merchant-venturer from Normandy who visited the region around 1508.

The same mariner recorded leaving some boats in a “*cul-de-sac*” and others in an “*anse-a-main*” of the river which flowed into the harbor, both used to mean particular kinds of bends in the waterway. In his testimony at Guipúzcoa, Lefant stated confidently that he and other Basque sailors had visited Brest, a harbor on the south coast of Labrador, and Caprouge in the north of Newfoundland island, describing from memory the shoreline and harbors for the Castilian authorities.⁹⁸ Work brought familiarity, and familiarity shaped conceptions of space.

If it was created from experience and observation, Terra Nova was nonetheless entirely a product of European perspectives. The sites of fishwork it comprised were all places where Basque, Breton, Norman, Portuguese, and other mariners from across the sea labored. Instead of being at the center of how Europeans interacted with space, as was and would be the case in the Caribbean, Mesoamerica, North America, Brazil, and elsewhere, Indigenous communities in Terra Nova remained at the periphery of the European experience. The relationship was a complex one in which both parties carefully balanced a mutual interest in the exchange of goods (typically metalwork for furs) with the maintenance of a deliberate distance.⁹⁹ In general, First Nations (and later Inuit) appear haphazardly and often nebulously in our documents, while recent archaeological work has primarily focused on the period after 1580 (if sites can be dated at all).¹⁰⁰ Some Basque mariners spoke of open fraternization with Innu communities along La Gran Baya, while Bretons and Basques probably ran into Mi’kmaq seafarers on the islands between Cape Breton and Newfoundland every year.¹⁰¹ Only towards the end of

98. Biggar, *A Collection of Documents*, doc. 212, “Examination of Newfoundland Sailors Regarding Cartier,” pp. 448–54.

99. Recent archaeological work has shown the close material culture and commercial bonds between First Nations communities and fishworkers. Nonetheless, in the sixteenth century these exchanges had a limited influence in terms of patterns of behavior, knowledge diffusion, and social relationships between the two groups. See Jack Bouchard, “‘*Gens sauvages et estranges*’: Amerindians and the Early Fishery in the Sixteenth-Century Gulf of St. Lawrence,” in *The Greater Gulf: Essays on the Environmental History of the Gulf of St. Lawrence*, ed. Claire Campbell, Ed MacDonald, and Brian Payne (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2020), 35–68; Marcel Moussette, “A Universe under Strain: Amerindian Nations in North-Eastern North America in the 16th Century,” in “The Recent Archaeology of the Early Modern Period in Québec City,” special issue, *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 43, no. 1 (2009): 30–47.

100. For a good overview of the documentary problem, see Gilbert, “Beothuk-European Contact in the 16th Century.” Much of the best recent archaeological work can be found in Loewen and Chapdelaine, *Contact in the 16th Century*.

101. For fraternization, see the account of Lefant and de Odeliça in Biggar, *A Collection of Documents*, doc. 212, “Examination of Newfoundland Sailors Regarding Cartier,” pp. 448–64. See too Charles A. Martijn, “Early Mi’kmaq Presence in Southern Newfoundland: An Ethnohistorical Perspective, c. 1500–1763,” and Charles A. Martijn, Selma Barkham, and Michael M. Barkham, “Basques? Beothuk? Inuit? Innu? or St. Lawrence Iroquoians? The Whalers on the 1546 Desceliers Map, Seen through the Eyes of Different Beholders,” both in “The New Early Modern Newfoundland: Part 2,” special issue, *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 19, no. 1 (2003): 44–102 and 187–206; Peter Bakker, “The Language of the Coast Tribes is Half Basque”: A Basque-American

the sixteenth century would these informal relations begin to shift towards a fur trade in the full sense, drawing Mi'kmaq and Innu into the European commercial orbit while pushing away the Beothuk.¹⁰²

The geographic knowledge and territorial claims of the Beothuk, Mi'kmaq, Innu, and Inuit were all erased through the imposition of the worldview of European mariners. Even so, Zoe Todd has persuasively argued that Indigenous conceptions of space were fundamentally different from those employed by Europeans. If European mariners saw space as constructed through fishwork (human harvesting of a passive nature) and its landmarks, then Indigenous peoples tended to see “land and place as sets of relationships between human and nonhuman beings, co-constituting one another.”¹⁰³ Constructed in a different way, Indigenous mental maps gave rise to different names and geographies. In a rightfully scathing essay, Susan Manning has drawn attention to how seventeenth-century settler colonialism on Newfoundland island has utterly erased Indigenous place-names and concepts of place.¹⁰⁴ We can see the origins of this in the sixteenth century and the process by which mariners imposed the idea of Terra Nova on the region. If there could be no New France in Terra Nova, then neither could there be Ktaqmkuk or Akami-assi. The very language that First Nations and Inuit used to describe and label the northwest Atlantic was often lost or misrecorded, and relatively few place-names of Algonkian origin survive along the coast of present-day Newfoundland and Labrador.¹⁰⁵ Even as it competed with cartographic conceptions of the northwest Atlantic, the mariners' Terra Nova thus denied Indigenous conceptions of space.

The mariner's world of Terra Nova shaped the development of a permanent European presence in the northwest Atlantic and defined European mental maps for much of the sixteenth century. In the long run, however, Terra Nova would be subsumed

Indian Pidgin in Use between Europeans and Native Americans in North America, ca. 1540–ca. 1640,” *Anthropological Linguistics* 31, no. 3/4 (1989): 117–47.

102. Donald H. Holly Jr., Christopher Wolff, and John Erwin, “The Ties That Bind and Divide: Encounters with the Beothuk in Southeastern Newfoundland,” *Journal of the North Atlantic* 3 (2010): 31–44; Donald H. Holly Jr., “Social Aspects and Implications of ‘Running to the Hills’: The Case of the Beothuk Indians of Newfoundland,” *Journal of Island and Coastal Archaeology* 3, no. 2 (2008): 170–90; Denys Delâge, *Bitter Feast: Amerindians and Europeans in Northeastern North America, 1600–64* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1993).

103. Anja Kangieser and Zoe Todd, “From Environmental Case Study to Environmental Kin Study,” *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History* 59, no. 3 (2020): 385–93, here p 386. See too Zoe Todd, “Fish Pluralities: Human-Animal Relations and Sites of Engagement in Paulatuq, Arctic Canada,” in “Cultures inuit, gouvernance et cosmopolitiques/Inuit Cultures, Governance and Cosmopolitics,” ed. Frédéric Laugrand, special issue, *Études Inuit Studies* 38, no. 1/2 (2014): 217–38.

104. Susan M. Manning, “Contrasting Colonisations: (Re)Storying Newfoundland/Ktaqmkuk as Place,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 8, no. 3 (2018): 314–31.

105. This problem is discussed in the context of early cartography in Hoffman, *Cabot to Cartier*.

by alternative ways of viewing space. Significant structural changes to the fishery after 1580 brought a slow but steady flow of problems that undermined the key to Terra Nova: a shared experience of fishwork.¹⁰⁶ The scale and intensity of the fishery increased rapidly, even as English and Dutch ships drove out Spanish and Portuguese competitors while pioneering a new carrying trade to southern Europe and the Caribbean. Competition between fishworkers increased, violence and piracy became endemic, and divisions between communities hardened into separate fishing grounds. The Breton Petit Nord, Norman Grand Banks, and English Shore replaced a shared Terra Nova. At the same time, the growing appetite for furs shifted economic incentives away from the water towards trade and the mainland. Most importantly, a renewed push by the English and French Crowns to explore and settle the northwest Atlantic revived the idea of permanently inhabiting and controlling the region. Newfoundland island became an English colony, and a site of inter-imperial rivalry. As these economic and imperial shifts developed, the older ways in which mariners had described the northwest Atlantic faded from use and even from memory.

But this was long after the fishery was first established and should not be projected backward. We need to treat the sixteenth century as its own tumultuous and formative period, rather than subordinating it to an imperial and cartographic vision that was in fact only fitfully imposed at a later date. What I have suggested here is that the term Terra Nova reflected the nature of mobile, multi-communal fishwork detached from specific points on land and unique to the early sixteenth century. This can help to overcome the fractured way that historians have tended to study the early fishery, allowing us to think in terms of mental maps created through shared experience rather than bits of land and islands arbitrarily assigned to particular empires and nations.

More than anything, thinking with Terra Nova encourages us to move away from rigid conceptions of geography and to embrace more nebulous and dynamic (if confusing) frameworks that better reflect the lived experience of humans in the pre-modern world. The use of Terra Nova as an extension of fishwork allowed sixteenth-century mariners to connect the open ocean, coasts, and harbors into a single space through their actions. In certain ways, Terra Nova resembles the flexible, “aqueous” Greater Caribbean Ernesto Bassi has described for the eighteenth century, or the maritime Caribbean Sharika Crawford has traced in the twentieth.¹⁰⁷ Yet Terra

106. On post-1580s changes, see Cell, *English Enterprise in Newfoundland*; Gillian T. Cell, *Newfoundland Discovered: English Attempts at Colonisation, 1610–1630* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1982); Pope, *Fish into Wine*; Loewen and Delmas, “Les occupations basques dans le golfe du Saint-Laurent”; Maarten Heerlien, “Van Holland naar Cupidos Koe: Hollandse Newfoundlandhandel in de context van de internationale kabeljauwvisserij bij Newfoundland in de zestiende en de zeventiende eeuw” (MA diss., University of Groningen, 2005); Poul Holm et al., “Accelerated Extractions of North Atlantic Cod and Herring, 1520–1790,” *Fish and Fisheries* 23, no. 1 (2022): 54–72; Raymonde Litalien and Denis Vaugeois, eds., *Champlain. La naissance de l’Amérique française* (Sillery/Paris/La Rochelle: Septentrion/Nouveau monde/Conseil général de la Charente-Maritime, 2004).

107. Bassi, *An Aqueous Territory*; Crawford, *The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean*.

Nova was never defined by ports and routes—that is, by internal trade and movement—alone, nor was it an inter-imperial space like the Caribbean. Rather than being defined simply by physical spaces or the distinction between land and sea, Terra Nova was shaped by a complex tripartite relationship between the sea, marine life, and humans, and by the labor of maritime workers. It is also a strong reminder that European ideas about water in the sixteenth century were more complex than historians often acknowledge, for oceans could be more than just highways for those who drew their livelihoods from the depths of the sea.

Terra Nova itself was never static. It moved and changed with the seasons and years, an essential reality that highlights the importance of climate and ecology in shaping the early fishery. A cold summer season might mean a smaller Terra Nova, as ice and shrinking fish stocks constrained fishing boats, while a warmer one could expand their reach. By the late sixteenth century, whalers were hunting in the waters of the St. Lawrence River, whereas in the 1540s they had been concentrated off the south coast of Labrador. By the turn of the seventeenth century, more and more ships were operating on the Grand Banks, which had become a new center of gravity in Terra Nova. The crew of a fishing boat might visit different parts of the region in a single voyage, shifting from offshore “wet” fishing to drying their catch on a different stretch of beach, or visiting Indigenous communities in one or more harbors. Terra Nova was thus a region with highly fluid boundaries that could expand or contract according to the season, a given mariner’s perspective, relations with particular Indigenous communities, or the depletion of local fish stocks.

This instability, this vagueness, was ultimately an asset to mariners, enabling them to control access to and knowledge about space in the Atlantic basin. As Terra Nova was a nebulous term whose complexities were probably only understood by those who had actually visited, it could be useful when deployed in bureaucratic documents. In cases where mariners reported they were traveling to Terra Nova, they were often (though not always) careful to avoid describing exactly where they were going. This was quite deliberate, and reflects the practical considerations of fishwork. Anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians have long sought to come to grips with what some have called the “secrecy” of fishworkers, historically vague, dissembling, or reticent when describing their activity to others. To outsiders this can appear as caginess bordering on obsessive secrecy, but the key point is that control of information is essential to fishwork. As Thorolfur Thorlindsson has noted, “a skipper is in many ways like a researcher looking for patterns which may help him understand his environment and make him more successful in catching fish.”¹⁰⁸ To preserve an advantage, given the finite amount of marine biomass in any one fishery, that information can be withheld—from competitors, but also from state actors who would seek to tax and control fishwork. Global fishworkers have long practiced the art of concealing information about fishing grounds, much to the chagrin of historians wishing to reconstruct their voyages. To this might be added the tendency of most sixteenth-century European coastal populations to evade

108. Thorlindsson, “Skipper Science,” 343.

state inquiry and deliberately obscure their activities. One early record from 1514 involves an abbey in northern Brittany complaining about local fishworkers (called “wicked men,” or *homes malles*) visiting “*la Terre-Neuffve*” without paying their taxes.¹⁰⁹ The authorities at the abbey were clearly troubled not just by the fact that the voyages were taking place, but that they were so unregulated and unknowable. A phrase like Terra Nova was a useful tool in this careful dance between fishworkers and the state. It was descriptive enough to denote a real destination in the Atlantic basin, but vague enough to avoid giving away too much information.

As tempting as it may be to view the practical, malleable vision of space inherent in Terra Nova as a kind of also-ran in the long history of an Atlantic world, this is to minimize and overlook its success. In a century in which there was no shortage of opportunities for enterprising merchants, settlers, and state actors, the difficulty of establishing a permanent settlement in a place where marine life could be harvested for free made such an effort un compelling. Terra Nova captures the impermanent, open, and watery world where fishworkers performed their labor. This was their kingdom, where they exploited nature’s resources in pursuit of sustenance and profit. An understanding of the contemporary uses of the term Terra Nova highlights the expansive sense of place possessed by mariners in the northwest Atlantic. Ultimately, it gives credit to their capacity, in the sixteenth century, to define their own world and to challenge the assumptions of cartographers and explorers concerning spaces in the Atlantic and North America. Such an understanding of the earliest years of the fishery helps us better grasp not only the difficulties faced by mariners but also the degree to which their actions drove change in the Atlantic basin. This in turn reframes the boundaries of the early Atlantic, showing it to be a much more expansive, contested, and dynamic space than many historians have assumed.

Jack Bouchard
Rutgers University
 jack.bouchard@rutgers.edu



109. AD Côtes-d’Armor, H 69, abbey of Notre-Dame de Beauport, 1514. A transcript can be found in Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier*, doc. 36, “Agreement between the Monks of Beauport and the Inhabitants of the Island of Bréhat,” 118–23, here p. 119. In 1524 the residents of Saint-Waast in Normandy were brought before the Parlement in Rouen, where they argued that codfish from Terra Nova, which they had been catching for years, were not subject to the local taxes that had long gone unpaid. Rouen, AD Seine-Maritime, series 001B, Parlement de Normandie, no. 388, December 23, 1524.