

## **GENTLE GIANTS, BARBARIC BEASTS AND WHALE WARRIORS: Contentious Traditions, Eco-Political Discourse and Identity Politics**

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*Abstract* Traditions are usually enmeshed in cultural politics, especially if they are highly controversial and heavily contested. In this article, I will firstly go into the tradition of the Faroe Islands' *grindadráp*, a bloody pilot whale drive, which in Faroese eyes constitutes an inalienable part of their culture. It is strongly opposed by environmentalists and a wider audience. Secondly, I will examine the attempts of Makah Indians to revitalize their tradition of whale hunting in an effort to reinforce their identity. In this case, too, there was massive opposition, but the tribe nonetheless obtained permission to go whaling again. The eco-political discourse on Faroese and Makah whale hunting harbors a strong component of evaluating the merits and demerits of Faroese and Makah culture and the genuineness and legitimacy of the whaling traditions. The present article describes and analyses the debate, in particular as it relates to the issues of heritage and its contested authenticity. It argues that authenticity is not an ontological category but can only be produced in practice.

### **Introduction**

In the commonsensical perception, 'tradition' often rings a bell of repetitive continuity. The term derives from the Latin *traditio*: to hand over. It is commonly thought of as an inherited pattern of thought or action, a specific practice of long standing, that which is transmitted from generation to generation. Departing from a similar conception, the pioneers of folklore and anthropology often conflated tradition and culture. Traditions were (and are) often subject to culture and identity politics aimed at cherishing and supporting traditional phenomena, especially when they were believed to be in danger of disappearing. Since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, students of folklore, in particular, have been ardent

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supporters of maintaining and promoting 'folk' heritage that they believed to be authentic and a powerful source of quintessentially defining the nation. Anthropologists, too, attributed special significance to phenomena they designated as traditional: 'tradition implied appropriate age, and to call something traditional was to assert its cultural authenticity, often set against modernity. Its authenticity gave it authority; it became especially worthy of attention' (Barfield 1997:470). Hence the conviction of early folklore students and anthropologists that it was their duty to ethnographically 'salvage' traditions before they would disappear under the pressures of culture contact and modernization. These scholars perceived tradition in a naturalistic manner as an organism of immutable and bounded traits (Handler and Linnekin 1984).

More recently, however, there has been a tendency among scholars to debunk the 'traditional-ness' of traditions, to expose them as 'myths', 'inventions', 'constructions', 'fabrications', 'imagination' or even 'false consciousness' (confer, for example, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Anderson 1983; for a critique, see Briggs 1996). Sometimes this happened in a rather pejorative manner. Traditions came to be linked with mystification and manipulation, and this in turn thoroughly undermined any claim to authenticity. However, not all traditions are recent 'inventions' in the sense that cultural actors have purposefully produced and staged performances that refer to a make-belief past. There are those that *do* have a long history and are repetitive, although this does not mean that they are handed on completely unchanged. As Hobsbawm himself has noted: 'the strength and adaptability of genuine traditions is not to be confused with the "invention of tradition". Where the old ways are alive, traditions need be neither revived nor invented' (1983:7). Still, such a dichotomy between 'genuine' and 'spurious' traditions does not seem to be particularly helpful to understand the phenomenon. Tradition is neither genuine nor spurious because it is not handed down from the past as an object, but it is continually and creatively reinvented in an ongoing present through meaning-making processes. Tradition, then, is a continually changing and symbolically mediated interpretation of the past in the present embodying both continuity and discontinuity (Handler and Linnekin 1984:273-274, 287).

Traditions are usually enmeshed in and mobilized for cultural politics: 'any community's ability to persist, to innovate, to change on its own terms, is relative to structural power'. This is a matter 'of politics, not of essence, and thus subject to contestation and change' (Clifford 2004). Though 'roots' may be located in the past, they often continue to produce powerful cultural forms that are important in the arena of identity politics (Briggs 1996:440; Nadel-Klein 2003:173-174). But some traditions are heavily contested with strong pleas from outsiders to abandon them.

Whereas insiders believe that customary practices lend the right to continuity, critics from without argue that they are 'outmoded' and should be discontinued. Some traditions are obviously more controversial and contentious than others.

Take, for example, whaling. Although whaling has been perceived as a legitimate economic activity for a long time, over-harvesting brought about depletion of several whale species and extinction of some (Ellis 1991). Subsequent action of environmentalist organizations gradually focused the world's attention on the whale problem, and whaling became highly controversial. In the early 1960s, the industrial way of slaughtering marine mammals was still largely uncontested, but only two decades later a worldwide moratorium on whaling was in place. Exceptions to this no-take regime concerned, firstly, the traditional whaling activities of indigenous peoples who to a large extent depend on whale meat and whale blubber for subsistence; secondly, whaling for scientific purposes, and, thirdly, the pursuit of small cetaceans such as porpoises, dolphins and pilot whales. Though exempt from the whaling ban, these activities are subject to vigorous protests, as we shall see shortly. In present-day Western society, many people regard killing whales as an act of barbarism that is not traditional but anachronistic. Hence, in this view tradition is diametrically opposed to modernity, creating a false dichotomy between them as fixed and mutually exclusive states (Handler and Linnekin 1984:273; Clifford 2004).

In this article, I will present two extended case studies concerning whaling practices and the reactions they have aroused from opponents. I will first deal with the long-standing tradition of the *grindadráp* on the Faroe Islands, a non-commercial pilot whale hunt that the islanders believe to be an inalienable part of their culture. Since the 1980s, the *grindadráp* has met with considerable resistance even though the target species is not endangered. The eco-political discourse extends beyond the question of whether the killing of a marine mammal is morally or ethically justified and includes a strong component related to the rightfulness of tradition – the argument being that the practice is incommensurable with life in a modern welfare state. The second case is about the revitalization of the whale hunting tradition of the Makah Indian Tribe (USA) after a hiatus of seventy years. When in the mid-1990s the tribe expressed an interest to go whaling again for nutritional and cultural reasons, albeit on a very limited scale, vehement reactions followed. The Makah wished to reclaim their heritage, but their opponents launched an emotionally charged debate related to the notion of whales as special beings. In addition, the arguments focused on the authenticity of tradition, the merits and demerits of Makah culture and the genuineness and legitimacy of the tribe's wish to reconnect to its

tradition, mobilizing it for present and future use in identity politics. Thus, in both the Faroe and the Makah case the protestors' eco-political discourse revolved to a large extent on matters of tradition and authenticity, forcing the Faroese and the Makah to authenticate their whaling tradition *vis-à-vis* anti-whaling activists and the wider audience, and leading to a 'clash of essentialisms' in the contest over Faroese and Makah culture and identity.

The aim of this comparative article is to arrive at more general conclusions about the cultural politics of whaling, the interlinked controversies as regards the tenability of tradition and the ways in which these are framed in eco-political discourses. It will inventory and analyze the debates and deal in particular with the question of how the Faroese and the Makah represent their whaling heritage, how they legitimize its continuation in the one case and its revival in the other, and the ways in which their opponents attempt to undermine the legitimacy and genuineness of the whalers' claims. The case studies raise serious questions about the idea of authenticity in the sense of genuine, pure, pristine, untouched cultural heritage (confer Handler 1986, 2002; Handler and Linnekin 1984). Yet, the vulgar constructionist perspective is usually merely scratching the surface and does little to understand what quests for authenticity *mean for* and *do to* its seekers. The danger of simplified constructivism is that almost any tradition becomes charged with the taint of being inauthentic, making it an easy target for those seeking to undermine its legitimacy. Moreover, '[w]hen attributed to colonial "natives," or romantic "primitives," authenticity could be a straitjacket, making every engagement with modernity ...a contamination, a "loss" of true selfhood' (Clifford 2004). In going beyond the dichotomies of traditional/modern, pure/contaminated, genuine/ spurious or authentic/inauthentic, we may discover that the reasons to sustain, revitalize or invent traditions can be authentic enough. To grasp this, we have to focus on the 'why and 'how' aspects of continuing or revitalizing whale hunts and particularly on the experiences generated in doing so. Therefore, in addition to considering the discursive identity politics, this article will go into the Faroese and Makah experiential 'quest for a felt authentic grounding' (Lindholm 2002:337).

### ***Grindadráp*: A Contested Custom in the Faroe Islands**

In the Faroe Islands, an archipelago comprising eighteen islands situated midway between Scotland and Iceland with a population of 46,000, the inhabitants conduct a traditional pilot whale hunt when the occasion arises. Their tight social structure makes pilot whales vulnerable to herding, and

whalers take advantage of this trait in drive fisheries.<sup>1</sup> The pilot whale hunt, known in the vernacular as the *grindadráp*, usually takes place in the summer months and has changed little in style or substance since it began hundreds of years ago, although the introduction of modern boats and radios has made it easier to herd the whales. The kill of the cetaceans is not pre-planned; it depends on the spotting of a pod of pilot whales near the coast. The *grindadráp* consists of herding the pilot whales into the shallow bays with small boats, inserting steel gaffs into their blowpipes, hauling them ashore and then swiftly killing them using long knives. Regulations based on Old Norse laws deal with all aspects of the hunt and are under constant review and update. There are six whaling districts. Certain beaches or entire whaling districts can be closed if harvests are considered sufficient. The hunt is overseen by elected *grindformenn*, who are in turn supervised by the *sýslumaður*, or district sheriff, who also oversees the valuation and division of the catch, and is responsible for keeping records of the harvest (Wylie 1981; Bloch *et al.* 1990). Once the slaughter is complete, the whales are moved to a quay for counting, measuring and butchering (Gibson-Lonsdale 1990). The whales are cut up and the meat and blubber are distributed, free of charge, to the region's inhabitants with priority being given to those who actually participated in the hunt. The person who first spotted the whales is entitled to choose the largest whale or its equivalent in smaller whales; the whale foremen are each guaranteed one per cent of the meat.<sup>2</sup>

The *grindadráp* is a communal activity rather than a commercial venture, going back to the early days of Norse settlement in the Viking age (800-900). Pilot whales provided the islanders with an important part of their staple diet. The blubber was partly processed into oil, while other parts of the whale were also used. As early as 1298 a legal document outlined who had the rights to the whales, and there are almost continuous catch records dating back to 1584. The *grindadráp* continues to be important and involves entire communities, with local people sharing the whale meat. Employers even give staff time off to participate in the drive. The festivities surrounding the share are said to be instrumental in bringing communities together. The pilot whale hunt is still a living part of Faroese culture, and is celebrated by numerous paintings and public art on the islands. It has also become an important symbol of cultural identity and an integral part of Faroese nationhood (Wylie 1981; Joensen 1988). 'The *grindadráp* requires a concerted effort to make something Faroese, and entails a concentrated and heightened enactment of the norms of everyday life, and of those by which the Faroes' relations with the "outside" worlds of nature, foreign overlords, and the heroic past are adjusted' (Wylie 1981:124). It has turned into 'a mooring of self-conscious self-description' (Wylie 1981: 130). This

happened especially when in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century foreigners began to show an interest in the pilot whale hunt and regarded it 'as a picturesque element of a living folk culture on the periphery of modern society' (Nauerby 1996:146) and 'as something specifically Faroese' (Nauerby 1996:154). A danger was lurking here. To onlookers such as tourists, the *grindadráp* 'seems both dramatic and impressive ... and many find it discomfoting so that during the event one can hear voices calling for a ban against the whale kill. The methods employed certainly do seem bloodthirsty and murderous' (Joensen 1976:19). But the hunt, the kill and the subsequent distribution of whale meat are tightly regulated according to tradition with occasional changes of legislation when new situations required adjustments.

Since the 1980s, Faroese pilot whaling has received a great deal of international criticism (confer Joensen 1988; Sanderson 1994; Nauerby 1996). Graphic news stories, pictures and video footage of the *grindadráp*, which is always accompanied by a lot of blood, have shocked many people. Environmentalist groups have launched protests, attempted to disrupt the pilot whale hunt and made pleas to boycott fish exported by the Faroe Islands. Despite the fact that pilot whales are not an endangered species and as small cetaceans are not covered by the regulations of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), environmentalists and animal rights campaigners condemn the custom as being cruel and inhumane. They argue that the Faroese no longer need the whale meat to survive, as they are now a modern and affluent society with a high standard of living. They also claim that much of the meat is wasted. There is no 'subsistence need' to kill pilot whales. It is further said that the hunt is no longer 'traditional', since it involves using motorboats rather than the traditional rowing boats and modern means of communication, increasing efficiency. Take, for example, the following statement by the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS):

In consideration of any 'whaling tradition" it is important to bear in mind that such a tradition is the integrated body of a particular hunting gear, social organization, individual and collective skills, rules of capture, processing, distribution and utilization. If a fundamental part of this 'body' is replaced by new technology, by definition this will have profound consequences for the 'tradition' as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

Against the claim of Faroe Islanders that there is a need to sustain their cultural identity by whaling, the WDCS states that the inhabitants of Orkney and the Shetlands also had whaling traditions, but that 'these islanders have survived the cessation of these practices without detriment to their culture'.<sup>4</sup> The argument is that Faroese culture has evolved and

the islanders are firmly embedded in the global economy today, so that there is no need of self-sufficiency.

Militant environmentalist organizations are more straightforward in their judgment. For example, Cetacea Defense deems the *grindadráp* 'a cruel, barbaric indulgence by the Faroese. It is wholly unnecessary it has no place in this world and must end'.<sup>5</sup> The organization refers to 'islanders from hell' and 'bloody Faroese'. Paul Watson, founder and leader of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, has put up fierce fights against the pilot whale drive. His organization maintains that the hunt is conducted 'because of tradition and the absurd and ridiculous belief by the Faeroese that God gave the whales to the people to be slaughtered.'<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere, Watson writes:

[T]o any civilized observer from the outside, the Grind [*grindadráp*] is one of the bloodiest, most cruel, and most savage traditions in the world. ... the Grind is practically a religion. It is ritualized brutality and traditional torture, punctuated by public drunkenness. The ... pilot whale[s] ... are herded into bays, stabbed, speared, pelted with stones, slashed with outboard motor blades, and slowly and joyfully slaughtered. They die amidst the laughter of children and the drunken bellows of their hooligan fathers.

Each year, between 1,500 and 3,500 pilot whales die in scarlet agony on the beaches of the Faeroe Islands. Children rip the fetuses from the pregnant mothers and hold them up like trophies. Men hack through the necks of the struggling whales to sever the spinal cords, a process that can take ten minutes or more. The bays turn blood red, and the whale carcasses litter the shore, their purple-black guts spilling onto the sand.

Although the Faeroese do eat whale meat, the kill provides much more meat than can be consumed. Traditionally, the whales provided subsistence to a people far removed from the rest of the world, before imports and the emergence of their lucrative export market. Today, with no practical need to kill whales, the slaughter has intensified. This is because the Faeroese now enjoy a high standard of living and thus more leisure time – today they have more time to hunt whales for pleasure. Today it is a sport, big-game hunt, and an orgy of blood, providing entertainment and an outlet for aggression, an excuse to get together, drink, and indulge in a community festival.<sup>7</sup>

According to Watson, hunting pilot whales is thus done 'for fun, not survival'. He has compared it to 'the Roman gladiator games' for which 'there is no place ... in the modern world.'<sup>8</sup> Some other environmental organizations, including the Environmental Investigation Agency, have

also embraced the argument that the slaughter is merely recreational or refer to the supposed 'carnival atmosphere of entertainment'.<sup>9</sup>

Keywords that keep surfacing in anti-pilot whaling campaigns and public reactions as regards the killing are: 'senseless maiming', 'butchering', 'murder', 'murderous killing', 'massacring', 'mass slaughter', 'unbridled cruelty', 'wanton brutality', 'medieval cruelty and bloodshed', 'sickness' and 'blood-sport'. Such characterizations are often accompanied by epithets such as 'brutal', 'horrific', 'gruesome', 'inhumane', 'merciless', 'wasteful', 'repugnant' or 'satanic'. With respect to the whale hunters, it is said that they are 'the sick dogs of civilization', 'ignorant', 'bloodthirsty Vikings', 'ferocious', '(savage) barbarians', 'a brutal group', 'sadists' and that what they do amounts to 'shameful 'pseudo-traditions' that are 'obsolete, outdated and cruel', 'a relic from the islands' Viking past'.<sup>10</sup> On one website it reads: 'To the people of the Faroe Islands...I say, "STOP THIS SENSELESS MASSACRE!!!" Anyone who could bury a hook into the back of a whale, drag it to shore, slit its throat, and butcher it, deserves to die of mercury poisoning...or worse'.<sup>11</sup> Another anonymous message on the Internet states: 'The sadism and murderous brutality of the Faroese instigators of the Pilot whale slaughter is seen with disgust and horror by most of the world. It is unbelievable that the criminals who engage in this kind of wholesale torture and murder of a gentle species are supported by the government of the Faroe Islands who use their stupid and greedy pr campaigns to justify this wholesale slaughter.'<sup>12</sup> Kate Sanderson (1994:197) quotes one of the letters sent in 1990 to the Faroese authorities:

If it was left to *me* and *many more*, we would *drop a Very Large Bomb* on the lot of *you*, or pray for an *Earthquake* to *Destroy* every *Man Woman and Child* on your Godforsaken, wicked cruel islands. May *you* all *perish*, none of you are *fit to live* and should be *slaughtered* as you do these wonderful creatures that do you no Harm...

Another sample from the uk includes sentences like 'If the atomic bomb is dropped I hope it is on the Faroe Islands, the rest of the civilized world won't miss you. The worst of health may you all die soon' (Sanderson 1990:196). There is a steady stream of hate mail, directed not only at official institutions but also at ordinary citizens and even school children, some of whom received a newspaper clipping with remarks such as 'You should all be killed', 'You should be bombed' and 'Rot in hell' (Forrestal 2004).

What these remarks amount to is that the Faroe Islanders are dehumanized because they do not have the moral right to perform their traditional acts in contemporary society or – as the reference to Medieval

and Viking times imply – they are denied coevalness (Fabian 1983:30). In the binary opposition of good guys versus bad guys, it is crystal clear where the Faroese belong in the view of anti-whaling campaigners. The Faroese are ‘the most ruthless and barbaric whalers’ they ‘have ever encountered’.<sup>13</sup> This is also evident in a documentary entitled *Pity the Pilot Whale* (Minasian 1994), a Marine Mammal Fund production, that pits the ‘cruel’ practices of Faroese pilot whale hunters against the ‘noble’ deeds of New Zealanders who attempt to guide stranded pods of pilot whales back to the open ocean. The real protagonists, however, are the pilot whales themselves. Unlike the Faroe Islanders, the pilot whales are humanized. According to the video narrative, they communicate, interact and cooperate, are intelligent, establish tight communities and lifelong friendships, have complex lifestyles and social structures – and these are qualities ‘we should admire, embrace and emanate’.<sup>14</sup>

Several organizations have tried to negotiate or force an end to the hunts, to no avail, however. Nor have boycotts and e-mail campaigns been successful. It is the position of the Faroese authorities that the pilot whale drive is a legitimate activity. They maintain that pilot whales are not endangered (800,000 of them are in the North Atlantic of which the Faroese have taken on average 950 annually in the 1990s), that there is no sign of depletion, and that their method is the most humane way of killing whales. The harvest is sustainable and ‘it is one of the most ecological methods of producing meat at 62 degrees Northern latitude, and only one of several examples of sensible traditional utilisation of local resources’.<sup>15</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs states: ‘Both the meat and blubber of pilot whales have long been and continue to be a staple part of the national diet’.<sup>16</sup> Pilot whales still account for some fifteen per cent of the islanders’ meat consumption. The Ministry argues that many are appalled at the bloody sight because as urbanites they are not used to be in close contact with nature. The West Nordic Council (a joint parliamentary organization of Greenland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands) maintains that these Nordic islands have a tradition of hunting:

Eating meat from whales or seals is as natural to us as eating pork, beef or poultry is to others. Wearing a beautiful coat made of seal pelt comes as naturally as wearing clothes made from cow hide. Hunting is part of our cultural heritage. It has contributed to forming our traditional diet, our history and our identity. Through the ages, hunting has been part of the very basis of our existence. ... To many of us, even today, hunting constitutes a vital proportion of our livelihood and well-being. Hunting is a special event for us, connecting our past with the present. ... To the peoples of the west Nordic and arctic areas,

hunting is a question of survival as well as an ancient cultural heritage. We want to keep and preserve this tradition.<sup>17</sup>

Against the argument that Faroese society has evolved, the Chairman of the Faroese Pilot Whalers Association, Ólavur Sjúrdaberg, said to an assembly of the World Council of Whalers in September 2002: 'Our whaling practices are dynamic and change to accommodate the need of the growing communities they support. Despite our whaling being a centuries old tradition it sits comfortably within our modern society.'<sup>18</sup> But above all, most Faroese regard the environmentalists' attacks as 'offensive and untruthful and intended to besmirch [their] reputation' (Joensen 1988:18). While they eagerly appropriated the foreigners' view of the *grindadráp* being a unique tradition, they are on the defensive now, claiming that they are closer to nature than people living in Europe's metropolises and putting themselves on a par with indigenous peoples who seek the right to take whales for subsistence (Nauerby 1996:161). As said above, the environmentalists rebutted this stance by pointing out that Faroese society is far from traditional. But this has only worked to feed Faroese nationalism and to reinforce the role of the *grindadráp* as a symbolic identity marker vis-à-vis the outside world. Recent opinion polls show that ninety-five per cent of the Faroese support the hunt: 'The higher the wave of protest, the greater the value of the hunt and the consumption of whales will have in identity contexts; as boundary markers and as a cultural defense against influence from the Western metropolises' (Nauerby 1996:164).

Tradition has thus become the subject of and an instrument in an ideological battle. Whaling opponents contest the legitimacy of the *grindadráp* tradition on three counts. Firstly, they claim it is redundant because there is no subsistence-need to kill pilot whales in an affluent welfare society, relegating it to the realm of obsolete entertainment. Secondly, society and culture have evolved and traditions should evolve along with them. Thirdly, the pilot whale drive is no longer traditional because it involves the use of modern implements and new technology. This perception betrays a rather naturalistic approach to tradition as a bounded and static set of phenomena. On the other hand, the Faroese do not regard the pilot whale hunt 'as a static, immutable symbol of traditional Faroese culture' (Sanderson 1990:196), although the West Nordic Council would seem to subscribe to the naturalist view in that it wants to 'keep and preserve this tradition'. The Faroese regard the *grindadráp* as a dynamic tradition linking past, present and future and distinguishing them from the world from without. The fiercer the opposition, the stronger they want to defend, legitimise and continue it.

In the next case, we will come across some similar themes concerning traditional practices, identity politics, resistance and cultural authenticity.

### **The Makah and the Revival of Whale Hunting**

Approximately 1,100 enrolled members of the Makah Indian Nation live in a remote reservation in the extreme northwest of Washington (USA), adjacent to the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Most live in Neah Bay, a relatively poor coastal village facing high levels of unemployment and problems of substance abuse. For at least 1,500 years, one of the mainstays of the Makah economy had been the gray whale hunt that also was a focal point of their culture and social structure. Whalers occupied positions of high prestige in Makah society and they were politically powerful. The harpooner was the leader and captain of the hunt, and he usually was a village chief (Dougherty 2001). Only the male members of certain families were eligible to hunt whales and their elite status was reinforced by endogamous marriages (Firestone and Lilley 2004:10,768). Whalers had to undergo extensive physical and spiritual training, which included prayer, fasting, observance of certain taboos, sympathetic magic and ritual cleansing. Whaling families mounted their own hunts, with their own secret preparations and sacred songs and dances. The religious preparations were believed to be essential to success; they would open communication between the hunter and the whale and would lead the whaler to a whale willing to die for the benefit of the tribe. The villagers regarded the whale as a 'guest of honor'. In myths, stories, ceremonies, rituals, songs and dances, whales often took center stage. There is little doubt, then, that the Makah had 'an exuberant and vastly important cult of whaling' (Riley 1968:57).

The hunters used dugout canoes, multiple sealskin floats and hand harpoons, and lances. Once a whale was captured, the cutting up and the distribution of the meat and blubber followed strict rules. All villagers shared in the whale's resources. Parts were rendered for the production of whale oil, and whalebones were fashioned into a variety of tools and personal adornment. The Makah would often potlatch much of the whale meat and oil with neighboring tribes and after contact with Europeans began to trade these as commodities, bringing whaling families a handsome return in wealth and prestige. They were integrated in a market economy, acquired and used modern implements and continually altered their traditional whaling methods (confer Collins 1996:180ff.; Gaard 2001:5; Firestone and Lilley 2004:10768). But Europeans also brought diseases and hundreds of Makah succumbed to epidemics of influenza, smallpox and tuberculosis. So many family members were

lost, and the social dislocation was of such proportions, that many traditional life-ways were not passed down to successive generations. In 1855, the Makah signed a treaty with the United States (the Treaty of Neah Bay) in which they ceded title to thousands of acres of land in exchange for 'the right of taking fish and of whaling or sealing at usual and accustomed grounds and stations' (Waterman 1920:38ff; Kirk 1986:141, 207; Collins 1996). However, by the late 1920s the Makah gave up whaling, firstly, due to scarcity of gray whales that resulted from large-scale commercial exploitation and, secondly, as a consequence of deliberate government politics suppressing the Makah's maritime-oriented economy, and their language, culture and religion, as well (Collins 1996:180ff.; Erikson 1999:564; Reeves 2002:93).

Seventy years later, however, the Makah Tribal Council developed plans to revitalize the whaling tradition. In May 1995 it first cited its need to resume the whale hunt for purposes of spiritual and cultural revival. Referring to the Neah Bay treaty, the Makah claimed the right to take a small number of gray whales in a 'traditional' way (that is, using a canoe, paddles and a hand-thrown harpoon). But in the seventy years since the last Makah whale hunt, whaling had become an activity tightly regulated nationally and internationally. In 1937, the us government banned the hunting of gray whales and in 1969 it placed them on the Endangered Species List.<sup>19</sup> The protective measures led to such a remarkable recovery, that in 1994 gray whales – whose number was estimated at 23,000 – were removed from this list. However, under the aegis of the IWC, a worldwide moratorium on whaling was in force since 1986, excepting under stringent regulations 'aboriginal subsistence whaling'. The government – after consulting the National Marine Fisheries Service – and the IWC eventually granted the Makah permission to catch five whales annually over a five-year period with a maximum of twenty 'for ceremonial and subsistence purposes'. The Makah were instructed to set up a Whaling Commission and develop a detailed management plan that included rules on hunting areas and methods, humane killing procedures, product use and enforcement. In October 1998, the Makah could resume the hunt. Since then, they have been involved in several court battles to retain their whaling rights.

The Makah regarded the resumption of whaling as a way of achieving 'cultural revitalization' (Reeves 2002:93). The cultural self-awareness of the Makah had received a fillip after archeological excavations in the 1970s retrieved thousands of whaling artifacts. This sparked the tribe's interest in, and appreciation for, its heritage (Erikson 1999, 2003). But a part of the Makah's whaling tradition had been kept alive all along. Decades after they had given up whaling, its symbols continued to play an important role (confer Miller 1952; Colson 1953). Whaling was believed to

be 'an essential part of Makah social identity' (Moss 1999:5). The Makah Whaling Commission heralded similar views, pointing out that whaling and whales were and are central to Makah culture and social structure. This view was supported by a 'needs statement' to the IWC, written by anthropologist Ann Renker (1997). In addition, the Makah Tribal Council argued that the tribe's health problems originated in the loss of their traditional diet of seafood and sea mammal meat. Many tribal members further believed that the problems of young Makah (unemployment, substance abuse) stemmed from a lack of discipline and pride, and that the recuperation of whaling would restore that. Moreover, they wanted to fulfill the legacy of their forefathers, enact their treaty entitlements and resurrect a part of their culture that was taken from them (Reeves 1999:563). The Makah leaders were convinced that reviving its whaling tradition would help bring the tribe together and reaffirm its traditions and cultural identity (confer Gupta 1999:1749, n.84; Dougherty 2001).<sup>20</sup>

Since the whaling tradition had been lost for decades, the Makah had to recreate its interconnected skills, expertise and culture. Among other things, they had to learn how to construct and operate traditional whaling canoes and weapons, learning to maneuver harmoniously and how to throw the harpoon. The Makah received instruction from experienced Inuit whalers on how to butcher whales and process whale products. They even had to redevelop a taste for whale meat and blubber (Reeves 2002:94). It also implied learning about the right spiritual and ritual preparations before the actual hunt. Thus, the revitalization of tradition required quite a bit of effort and imagination.

The Makah also had to overcome intra-tribal rivalry. The upcoming whale hunt raised questions as to who was eligible to participate. Whaling once used to be the province of elite lineages, and not every Makah had the right to hunt. Historically, the captain was also the village chief and he had complete control over the crew. The problem was resolved by making the pursuit a community affair, involving all families. Eventually, there would be a pool of twenty-four men to fill out an eight-men whaling crew. Nonetheless, there continued to be tensions between crewmembers (Dougherty 2001; confer also Sullivan 2000). There was even greater animosity as to who was to be the captain of the whaling team. The honor fell on Wayne Johnson, but for various reasons the choice was highly controversial. Johnson would not be on the canoe, but on a support boat, while the Whaling Commission would select the crew. Its composition changed time and again. Eventually, a crew was picked with Theron Parker as harpooner (confer Dougherty 2001; Sullivan 2000). Not only did the whale hunters have to cope with internal rivalry; there was also opposition by a few vocal tribal elders, who did not see any cultural necessity to resume the hunt or doubted the extent to which it would be

traditional. Some dissenters faced harassment and hostility and 'were ostracized and denied services from the tribe' (Gaard 2001:16; confer also Peterson 2000:63ff; Hawkins 2001:290). But the fiercest contestations came from without.

Anti-whaling campaigners sharply opposed the plans to resume the hunt and were there in force when it was cleared to begin October 1, 1998. One of the fiercest opponents was Paul Watson, whom we have encountered in the Faroe case. The Sea Shepherd's and other protestors' vessels were a fixture in local waters for weeks. Their crews harassed the whaling crew who were practicing in their canoe, depicting them as a bunch of 'trigger-happy thugs', 'redneck hunters', 'machos', 'bloodthirsty gangsters', 'savages' or, alternatively, as 'cowards', 'whimps', and 'sissies'.<sup>21</sup> In turn, the Makah and their supporters dubbed the anti-whaling advocates 'eco-fascists', 'eco-colonialists', 'eco-terrorists', 'eco-bullies' or 'racists'.

With emotions running high, the US Coast Guard instituted a 500-yard exclusionary zone around the whaling canoe, in which entering without permission was declared illegal. Reporters crowded the place, covering every little detail of the controversy. This made the events very public. The plans to resume whaling had a profound effect on local life. Suddenly Neah Bay was the focus of media attention. However, the season ended without a whale having been caught and the news reporters and the protestors left Neah Bay, just to return in full force the next year. The presence of protestors probably united the Makah, who now had a common enemy, and made them determined to continue with their plans. Given the tensions and expectations, the hunt seemed inevitable.

Early in the morning of May 17, 1999, after several fruitless attempts that may have failed because of the protestors' intimidations, the Makah whaling crew succeeded in taking a juvenile gray whale. The whalers used traditional implements, and modern equipment as well (a point to which I shall return). A TV crew hovering over the scene with a helicopter covered the event live. The crewmembers prayed. Harpooner Theron Parker performed a ritual to release the soul of the whale to the sea, sprinkling the whale with eagle feathers. The Sea Shepherd crew blew their vessel's horn for half an hour in protest. The Makah and members from supporting tribes welcomed the whale and the whalers with prayers and sacred songs, an honor guard escort and ceremonies. 'This is about a great tradition. It's about calling out to our ancestors. It's all about who we are as a people,' Parker told a reporter.<sup>22</sup> Butchering the animal took hours. The whale meat was distributed according to the culturally based division of whaling labor. The Makah hosted a large *potlatch* celebration the next Saturday, inviting other tribes to participate and thus showing their prestige and status.

After the whale had been towed to the harbor, opponents of the hunt held a candlelight vigil organized by the Progressive Animal Welfare Society. Jake Conroy of the Sea Defense Alliance stated: 'We're obviously very upset that the Makah went ahead with killing an innocent, sentient creature in such a bloody and untraditional way.'<sup>23</sup> Paul Watson said: 'Today, with speed boats, military weaponry and the draconian assistance of the U.S. government in stifling all dissent, American whalers managed to blast a whale out of existence in American waters on the pretext of cultural privilege.' Emotions ran high. The whaling opponents had threatened to destroy whaling vessels and attempted to blockade Neah Bay harbor. The border of the Makah Indian reservation had been constantly guarded and clashes between protestors and the Makah had been common in the weeks leading up to the hunt.

The high-profile anti-whaling campaign against the Makah would appear to be disproportionate.<sup>24</sup> Why attack a small tribe that intends to take such a limited number of non-endangered gray whales? Some organizations argued that the Makah might be opening a 'Pandora's Box' on commercial whaling by the Norwegians and Japanese, who could also refer to their whaling traditions to claim a cultural right to resume the hunt. In addition, some groups feared that the tribe would eventually sell the whale meat and blubber on the market (Erikson 1999:562) and that their hunt would extend to include other whale species.<sup>25</sup> Anti-whaling advocates proclaimed that the Makah should conform to international law and respect the whaling moratorium. They further pointed out that the Makah were not unanimous about resuming the whale hunt, although eighty-five per cent of the Makah were in favor. Note that the anti-whaling movement refrained from using any un-sustainability allegation in their discrediting of the Makah whale hunt; it was clear that it would not endanger the gray whales species in any way. Therefore, the debate focused mainly on the theme of cultural rights versus animal rights.

A major bone of contention was the fact that the Makah, in addition to traditional implements, used a motor-powered support boat and a .50 caliber rifle (introduced on the advice of a veterinarian to kill a whale as quickly and humanely as possible after it had been harpooned). Whaling opponents did not regard the Makah whale hunt as a *tradition* but as an *anachronism*, an antiquated practice that was at odds with modernity, yet conducted with modern tools in a modern society (compare the Faroe case). They claimed that such traditions should either go along with a complete return to traditional tools and traditional values and beliefs or become extinct. In their view, reviving old traditions with the help of modern equipment amounted to 'cultural bastardization' (Vlessides 1998; confer also Hovelsrud-Broda 1997). In a televised interview, Paul Watson sneered: 'This is the most expensive whale hunt in history, and for what?'

Fun... We don't see any tradition in this' (quoted in Erikson 1999:563). Later, he called the Makah whale hunt 'a pathetic attempt to mimic [the tribe's] forebears'.<sup>26</sup> The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society vehemently combated the view that whales 'should be killed to allow the exercise of a cultural rite', 'a theatrical hunt meant to re-enact a historical necessity'.<sup>27</sup> It deeply believed in the inevitable outcome of socio-cultural evolution: 'A society can never evolve by adopting archaic or inhumane rituals. Progress affects everyone living in this new era of the Global Village. No legitimate argument can be made that the Makah, or any other ethnic group, can move their culture forward through ritual killing.'<sup>28</sup> The cultural right or 'necessity' to take whales was thus fiercely contested. Some opponents argued that the Makah should give up all comforts of modernity to return to their traditions.

The Makah Tribal Council countered the attacks: 'our opponents would have us abandon this [whaling] part of our culture and restrict it to a museum. To us this means a dead culture. We are trying to maintain a living culture. We can only hope that those whose opposition is most vicious will be able to recognize their ethnocentrism – subordinating our culture to theirs' (quoted in Erikson 1999:574; also see Sullivan 2000:23). It proved vain hope. Keith Johnson, President of the Makah Whaling Commission, simply called the environmentalists' arguments 'moral elitism'.<sup>29</sup> He further commented: 'If we wanted to abandon all cultural tradition, we would simply use a deck-mounted cannon firing a harpoon into the whale.'<sup>30</sup> Whaling captain Wayne Johnson said: 'I am so tired of non-Indians pushing their values on the Makah people and telling us how and how not to be Makah.'<sup>31</sup>

In the wake of the protests, Indian-bashing became popular. The Makah received heaps of hate mail, and even death threats. Internet forums regularly carried vehement anti-Makah or anti-Indian postings, equating the Indians with drunken welfare cheats. Local and regional newspapers and radio and tv stations were deluged with letters, phone calls, e-mails and faxes generally opposing the hunt. There was talk of the 'Makah's vicious, sick behavior', the 'senseless massacre of a beautiful, peaceful creature', the 'cold-blooded murder of a magnificent, gentle and trusting animal', 'barbaric activity', 'carnage', 'horrible ordeal', 'a thoroughly arcane and disgusting tradition' or simply 'evil'. Someone referred to the 'Makah whale killing atrocities'.<sup>32</sup> Many messages were laced with hateful, ethnocentric or racist remarks (Erikson 1999:560). A man wanted to apply for 'a license to kill Indians' so that he could restore his forefathers' tradition (Erikson 1999:563). Bumper stickers with the slogan 'Save a Whale, Kill an Indian' became popular. The discourse had turned ugly.

In Op-Ed contributions, many remarks were made as regards the validity of reviving tradition. Some dismissed it as 'pure bunk,' others made deriding comparisons. Someone said that 'any culture that regains its pride by killing is, at best, primitive'. Another wrote: "These peoples want to rekindle their traditional way of life by killing an animal that has twice the mental capacity they have. These idiots need to use what little brains they have to do something productive besides getting drunk and spending federal funds to live on" (quoted in Erikson 1999:563). A woman declared: "The white man used to kill Indians and give them smallpox-infected blankets. Is this a tradition we should return to?" "What does it matter if tradition is killing indigenous people in the name of white culture or killing whales in the name of Makah culture? The mind-set is the same, only the victims differ," wrote a woman.<sup>33</sup> On radio talk shows, statements like 'white people should renew their tradition of killing Indians' could be heard.<sup>34</sup> Examples of traditions that should not be revitalized abounded, including cannibalism, human sacrifice, widow burning, foot binding, genital mutilation, head hunting and scalping.

Besides the gray whale that was caught in 1999, no further whales were taken, despite several attempts to do so. From the very beginning, lawsuits have been filed against the Makah, challenging their right to take whales. In 2001, there was no whaling, while a court-ordered environmental assessment was underway. The litigation process in the new millennium has delayed the Makah whaling pursuits. In 2002, environmental associations filed a request for an injunction but a federal judge rejected their request because the rights of the Makah are clearly stated in the Neah Bay treaty. The plaintiffs filed a notice of appeal, and this time they were successful: early in 2003, the whale hunt was prohibited because the hunt violates the Marine Mammal Protection Act. The ruling has put the Makah whale hunt on hold for an indefinite period, even though the IWC granted the tribe a new quota of twenty whales through 2007.

The plans to resume whaling, the actual hunt and the controversy with the opponents and its aftermath have left a profound mark on the Makah. The tribe has been in the limelight for years, and families have been pitted against one another concerning such issues as to what extent the hunt actually lived up to all its traditional aspects (Peterson 2000:93) and who was entitled to be a member of the whaling crew (Sullivan 2000:138). While the first hunt was conducted as a communal affair, family crews undertook subsequent – unsuccessful – hunts. Now the Makah stand empty-handed again. Nonetheless, they held a community dinner in May 2004 to mark the fifth anniversary of the landing of the whale. Whaling captain Wayne Johnson said that after the successful hunt he witnessed the Makah finding 'deeper pride and meaning in being

Makah'. But today, 'we are again struggling without some of our key traditional practices'.<sup>35</sup> However, there has been a renewed interest in Makah language courses, in carving, canoe building and in Makah culture more generally. According to tribal chairman Greig Arnold, the successful 1999 hunt did give the Makah 'pride and a new understanding of who they are'.<sup>36</sup> But most of the outside world branded the Makah with the stigma of being savage whale killers, a stigma they share with the Faroese. A closer look at some of the underlying notions and symbolic dimensions is in order.

### **Seafood into Sacrosanct Symbol**

Whales have become potent symbols of environmentalism and turned into the poster child for conservation. The anti-whaling rhetoric is an important source of revenues: whales have become powerful fundraisers. They are invoked 'as a metaphor for all that is sublime in nature' (Gupta 1999:1742), making them 'a symbolic fixture in contemporary western society' (Stoett 1997:28). The environmental movement has totemized cetaceans. Though not all whale species are threatened with extinction, they are often lumped together as *the* endangered whale that needs human protection. Moreover, certain characteristics – including intelligence and sentience – are often attributed to this mystified 'super whale' (Kalland 1992, 1993, 1994) and supposedly make it akin to human animals. Some traits of different whale species are lumped together and projected onto this fictive marine mammal. Whales came to be regarded as 'pets' that could be gazed at and even touched on whale-watching tours. Individual whales were also given names. For example, several so-called 'resident' gray whales in the Strait of Juan de Fuca became known among activists as Buddy, Monica or Neah (Sullivan 2000:125). The assumption that several whales were 'resident' was in itself an important issue in contesting the whale hunt.

In short, environmentalists, animal rights campaigners and the public at large have come to see whales not as a source of food and other products for human consumption, but as sacrosanct gentle giants, representing a better kind of near-humanity. 'My family, *not* your dinner!' read the words on a banner protesting the Makah whale hunt. In the view of whaling opponents, home subsistence consumption of whale meat in a Western society is not only strongly condemned but is also inconceivable. Many would find the mere idea of having whale meat for dinner appalling. Whales are believed to be inherently special and therefore inappropriate for consumptive use by humans (Bridgewater 2003:556). Hence, whales have been diverted from the commodity path (Kalland

1992). Some even regard whales as being superior to human beings. For instance, an opponent of the Makah whale hunt wrote: 'Killing a whale is a more serious sin than killing a human because whales are superior beings to us. They have brains much larger than ours. They are simply better creatures. [...] Killing whales is more barbaric than cannibalism.'<sup>37</sup> Though this is a rather extreme example, many anti-whaling advocates believe that there is a very thin line that divides human beings from whales. Nature is thus incorporated into the cultural realm, and culture into the natural realm.

What we have at hand is a special case of speciesism (confer Dunayer 2004), the notional act of assigning different values or rights to beings on the basis of their biological species. Whales are believed to be at or near the apex of a symbolic hierarchy in the animal world. With a variation on Orwell's *Animal Farm*: animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others. The symbolic dimension is obviously important in classifying the pecking order of sea creatures. As Kate Sanderson argues, '[t]he reasons for the persistent and aggressive campaigning to stop Faroese whaling can be found in the nature of *grind* itself and the ambiguities it presents in relation to predominant cultural perceptions of nature and human society found in the urbanized western world' (1994:189).<sup>38</sup> Limiting myself to the latter argument, Sanderson points out that the slaughter of pilot whales is conducted in public by many slaughterers performing their work simultaneously. The *grindadráp* 'retains the characteristics of the precarious exploitation of an untamed environment of pre-modern times, as opposed to the controlled and industrialized exploitation of nature characteristic of modern Western societies today' (Sanderson 1994:195). Nonetheless, it happens in a modern and wealthy Western society, with modern tools, and it is highly regulated, making for ambiguity between the wild and the social. In the urban view of Europeans, 'the hunter is at one with the unspoiled wilderness in which he hunts and must not therefore display any of the incongruous trappings or influences of "modern civilization"' (Sanderson 1994:198). This argument would also seem to apply to the Makah whalers.

Nature is only partly incorporated into the cultural realm; in some respects, it is at the same time relegated a place outside it. The direct human relationship to nature has been repressed thoroughly (Nauerby 1996:158; also see Joensen 1988). Western urbanites are disconnected and alienated from the killing and butchering of animals (Vialles 1994). What goes on in abattoirs is meticulously kept from the public eye and the vacuum-sealed chunks of meat and fish sold in supermarkets are hardly recognizable as parts of once-live animals. The Faroese claim that they are still in close touch with nature, unlike many Western middle-class

urbanites. Not only do they slaughter the pilot whales; they also prepare, cook and eat them. Some Makah also explicitly refer to the disengagement of Western urbanites from food procurement and raised the question of whether killing a whale was worse than fattening calves, confining them in stalls, so that restaurants can offer a tender piece of veal.<sup>39</sup> Whaling captain Wayne Johnson told the protestors: 'Save the beef. ... Go stand in front of McDonald's' (Sullivan 2000:137). Like the Faroese, the Makah killed, butchered and prepared the gray whale themselves.

Interestingly, the fact that the Faroese and the Makah whale hunts are non-commercial has not worked to the advantage of their practitioners. The free sharing of whale meat and blubber is regarded as an 'unnecessary indulgence' (Sanderson 1994:198), irreconcilable with a cash-based economy. Whaling opponents do not see any practical or subsistence need for whale hunting in a modern society. Therefore, they depict the *grindadráp* as an obsolete leisure activity. Likewise, in their legal battle to keep the Makah from continuing their pursuit, environmentalists characterized the Makah hunt as recreation, discounting the tribe's claim that whaling is nutritionally and culturally important to them. The Makah are well aware of the manner in which their cultural claims are berated and do not acquiesce. For instance, when some environmental organizations depicted the whale hunt as a sport, Janine Bovechop said to a reporter: 'That's incredibly insulting and racist. ... For them to determine what it means to us brings us back to the last century when it was thought that Indians could not speak for themselves and determine what things mean to us.'<sup>40</sup>

Whereas whales are made human, whale hunters are demonized as barbaric beasts. The framing process is similar in the case of the Makah and the Faroese. Deriding comments are made referring to the savagery or barbarism of the whale hunters, depicting them as drunken brutes, criminals, welfare cheats, murderers, sadists and so on. At best, they are said to be uncivilized. The environmentalists and animal rights campaigners are the self-constituted and self-appointed protectors of the innocent gentle giants. (Note that many environmental organizations refer to themselves as police, army or warriors, vigilantes who defend sacrosanct cetaceans.) In their view, the whale hunters' culture and tradition should be banned from the planet.

### **Claiming Cultural Rights, Contesting Cultural Traditions**

A considerable part of the eco-political discourse relates to matters of tradition and authenticity, for example arguing that if a society has partly adapted culturally to modernity, it should give up all its traditional

aspects. Indeed, the whole idea of what the tradition *should be* was appropriated by some of the challengers of the Makah whale hunt. Paul Watson, for example, said after the Makah whale kill: 'People are dancing and cheering. That's a far cry from 150 years ago when their ancestors were more sad and somber after a whale hunt. ... They can celebrate and dance in the streets. We'll do what their ancestors did. We'll mourn for the whale.'<sup>41</sup> Keith Johnson, President of the Makah Whaling Commission, wrote that the Makah 'don't take kindly to other people trying to tell us what our culture should be. ... To us the implication that our culture is inferior if we believe in whaling is demeaning and racist.'<sup>42</sup>

Often whaling opponents refer to 'barbarism' and 'barbaric traditions', to some extent harking back to the dogmas of evolutionism (not a particularly modernist epistemology for that matter). For example, Peter Walker raises the question of 'whether killing whales is indispensable for revitalizing Makah culture, and whether this goal outweighs the moral and political costs' (1999:8). He clearly does not think so, alluding to the 'inevitability' of cultural change which 'calls into question the idea of an unbreakable, unchanging cosmological circle between whaling and Makah culture' (Walker 1999:9). But as Gupta relates, 'most critiques of "tradition" as an insufficient justification for sidestepping international norms ignore the importance of the way in which "barbaric" traditions are exercised' (1999:1755, n.72). Most societies have traditions that may be regarded as such, and it is problematic when 'traditions are forcefully quelled by an extraneous majority' (Gupta 1999: 1755).

Another aspect that has received much criticism is the use in part of contemporary tools, which in the view of environmentalists 'proves' that neither the *grindadráp* nor the gray whale hunt is traditional. The utilization of new technology – even though this may only be auxiliary – is considered a breach of tradition and undermines any claim to authenticity. Many think that cultural change – for example by adopting modern conveniences – has compromised the 'purity' of Faroese and Makah culture (confer Martello 2004:270). Traditions are thus trivialized and restricted to a toolkit, rather than associated with a complex of beliefs, symbolic meanings, social structures, and practices that are culturally significant. But is Thanksgiving no longer a tradition if one uses an electric knife to cut the turkey? Would Christmas be untraditional with electric lights in the tree? It is not the tools that count, but the goals pursued with the tradition. Exact replication is not a necessary condition to produce authenticity (Sepez 2002:153). Moreover, '[e]xpecting cultures to remain static and cling to traditional methods is both presumptuous (demeaning) and unrealistic' (Reeves 2002:98).

The normativism, cultural imperialism and ethnocentrism of some environmental organizations and animal rights activists capture the Faroese and Makah whalers in essentialized images of culture and tradition and puts pressure on them to conform to the formers' worldviews and standards. In the case of the Makah, there is the additional aspect of the environmentalists' romantic and neo-colonial notions of Indian-ness. American popular culture is replete with representations of what a 'real Indian' is and what authentic behavior should be (Erikson 1999:575). At the heart of the controversies vis-à-vis the Makah whale hunt are the processes of authenticating and discrediting identity: 'Who gets to control the expression of Makah identity – both its legitimacy and legality? Who gets to decide what is "cultural," "traditional," or "necessary?"' (Erikson 1999:564). From the very onset of the Makah's attempts to hunt whales, Watson disputed the authenticity of their pursuit, saying their ancestors hunted to survive not out of 'cultural or traditional impulse'. Without the survival issue, 'the hunt is an act of make-believe, an empty gesture toward a vanished past.'<sup>43</sup> Likewise, Watson and his compatriots disputed the current necessity of pilot whaling. They seemingly attempt to legitimate a moral stance ('killing whales is wrong') by invoking a moral image of how natives ought to behave according to their culture ('adapt to modernity completely or wholly return to your traditions').

The message conveyed seems to be that once you have assimilated, you have lost your right to maintaining or revitalizing a tradition. In the Makah case, the 'strategic projection of non-Indian stereotypes regarding indigenous lifeways' went along with 'deeply ethnocentric visions of what qualifies as authentic culture' (Sepez-Aradanas and Tweedie 1999:48). Alx Dark, who has studied the Makah whaling conflict in detail, states: 'This ideological framework allows whaling opponents to dismiss any Makah claim of cultural continuity by citing evidence of cultural change. ... whaling opponents have at times suggested that Makah cultural aspirations are "inauthentic", usually in the process of telling the Makah what their culture was, is or ought to be.'<sup>44</sup> The image of the 'ecological Indian', a culture hero ironically created to a large extent by the environmentalist movement, seems to have been replaced once more by an image of the not so noble savage. Makah Tribal Council Chairman Ben Johnson told a reporter: "'Liberals" seem always to want to fit Indians into a safe, acceptable ideal of the noble savage, and are uncomfortable when modern methods can be adopted to achieve ancient aims. ... Times change and we have to change with the times. ... They want us to be back in the primitive times. We just want to practice our culture.'<sup>45</sup> The criticism directed against the whale hunt became focused on the

authenticity of the Makah's way of reinventing tradition. Apparently, the Makah had to authenticate being 'genuine' Makah.

Here we enter the domain of identity politics and the politics of representation. Environmentalists see cultural heritage as something static, as a 'snapshot' version of culture at some point in time not as a dynamic force with multiple meanings. Faroese and Makah whalers regard some traditions worth pursuing not only as a source of protein but also as part of an articulated *bricolage* that is important in identity formation. Moreover, both the Faroe and the Makah whalers have always adapted and accommodated their culture to economic and political change. In addition, any contemporary culture is forged or manufactured to the extent that actors play with a reservoir of available sets of cultural repertoires, giving significance to and deriving meaning from the selected elements. To achieve this end, they can choose from a contingent and open field of symbols, objects, and experiences (Miller 1994:321-322). In the sense that any culture, identity or tradition is constructed, reconstructed, invented or reinvented, it is impossible to argue that there is such a thing as an authentic culture, identity or tradition (Turney 1999:424) – at least if we take authenticity to mean original, pure, uncorrupted, pristine, untouched, real, true (Handler 1986:2). Such a mistaken perception sees authenticity as fixed essence, persistent over time.

But it would be faulty to presume that only whaling opponents hold naturalistic and essentialist views of cultures. The Faroese and the Makah perceive their whale hunts as integral and inalienable parts of their cultures and they believe that without whaling they would not be the same. Appropriating and articulating this element of their cultures for identity politics is a form of 'strategic essentialism' (Gaard 2001:17). In the political struggle for self-determination in a postcolonial context, it has offered the Makah a charter for cultural resurrection or even cultural survival. The pilot whale hunt provides the Faroe islanders with an important source of protein and they argue that they are in close contact with nature whereas European urbanites have been removed from the process of killing and butchering animals and preparing and eating what nature has offered. For them, clinging to tradition does indeed have economic, social and symbolic significance. The *grindadráp* is about economic, social *and* cultural continuity, which is not necessarily repetitive but dynamic. As such, performing the pilot whale hunt is an important referent and a marker of local identity, just like the resumption of the gray whale hunt re-presented the Makah with their sense of selves. The fierce opposition from outsiders has brought about a strong belief among the Faroese and the Makah that they are entitled to exercising their traditional ways, simultaneously reinforcing their identity.

## Conclusions

Whale hunting traditions are obviously contentious. With such pursuits coming under increasing scrutiny from whaling opponents, and with the media exposure their campaigns received, public resistance to traditional ways of exploitation has been on the rise since the 1970s. In this article, I have presented two extended case studies to show how marine mammal hunting traditions have fared, how and to what extent outsiders have contested them and in which ways their practitioners have sought to legitimize them. In particular, I have focused on notions of tradition and authenticity as they emerged in the eco-political discourse and in the self-perceptions of Faroese and Makah whalers and their supporters. For a long time, the *grindadráp* has been regarded as a unique tradition that made the Faroese culturally distinct from other societies. Though it attracted some tourists, the graphic media reports, images and footage about the pilot whale drive led to reactions of disgust, fuelled by the actions of environmentalists seeking public support and funds. These activists regard the tradition as an anachronism that does not fit in a modern welfare society with a high standard of living. In the second case, I have presented the Makah's wish to resume their traditional whale hunt and the opposition they have met with. What makes the Makah case especially interesting is the manner in which debates concerning tradition and authenticity, cultural rights versus animal rights, and self-determination versus conformation and assimilation are embedded in the controversy. The opponents' judgments about the authenticity of the Makah whale hunt tradition soon ended up on the slippery slope of essentialism and ethnocentrism. Their image of the 'real Indian', whose ecological wisdom they believed to be beyond doubt, clearly did not fit the wish of the Makah to revitalize the traditional whale hunt. The whaling opponents berated the hunt as an inauthentic performance because they deemed some aspects irreconcilable with tradition.

Authenticity in this respect is a particular cultural construct of the modern Western world (Handler 1986). The activists' perception betrays a particular view of tradition that is static and essentialist. In their perception, tradition would seem to stand in opposition to modernity. The eco-political discourse juxtaposes images of past and present, rendering the two incommensurable by emphasizing the rifts and denying the links (confer Briggs 1996:449). The whaling opponents would seem to subscribe to a commonsensical and naturalistic understanding of tradition as an immutable 'objective deposit' (Handler and Linnekin 1984:275) handed down from the past, much the same way as folklore students and anthropologists of an earlier generation saw tradition as a set of given, discrete, bounded and ineluctable cultural phenomena. And

although contemporary scholars now would seem to agree that traditions are dynamic and ambiguous interpretations of the past, in the commonsensical view for traditions to be authentic, they should be shown to be ancient and immutable. However, any tradition entails mixing and matching, forgetting and remembering, adaptation and rejection, sustaining and transforming, overexposure and underexposure, articulation and disarticulation, continuity and change. It is 'not a wholesale return to past ways, but a practical selection and critical reweaving of roots' (Clifford 2004).

Traditions usually have ideological content. By referring to their treaty rights and the need for cultural revitalization, the Makah strategically positioned themselves so that opposition to the whale hunt would be 'tantamount to opposing Makah culture and cultural identity' (Gaard 2001:14). In claiming their right to self-determination, the Makah turned to a part of their cultural tradition that they deemed central to identity formation. In the process, they did not escape from essentialising their culture and hence the controversy over the whale hunt turned into a 'clash of essentialisms'. Of all possible options, the Makah selected whaling as the core tradition when in fact it was once the preserve of the Makah elite, not of commoners. Moreover, it was not the only tradition that could singularly define the Makah qua Makah. For Gaard, this has been an important reason to critique the Makah. She refers to Narayan, who argues that we should get rid of images of 'cultural contexts as sealed rooms, impervious to change, with a homogenous space "inside" them, inhabited by "authentic insiders" who all share a uniform and consistent account of their institutions and values' (Narayan 1997:33).

This may be so, but in the process of authenticating Makah tradition, a vast majority of the tribe chose to single out, mobilize and articulate what they perceived to be an essential cultural element. No less than ninety-four per cent of the respondents of a 2001 survey among Makah households believed that resuming the hunt had affected the tribe positively. The political process of 'strategic essentialism' provided an angle to restore cultural pride. To achieve this, Leviathan offered its life (at least, in the Makah perception), dividing-reuniting-dividing the tribal community, sending scorn from the world without on it, but also – for better or for worse – giving a blood-infusion to its culture. In this sense, a major objective the Makah had with recreating the whale hunt was realized against all odds, despite overwhelming opposition and largely on *their* terms. Of all possibilities, reclaiming and reenacting the cultural practice of the whale hunt could define the Makah much more saliently than, say, basket weaving, wood carving or most other 'native' activities that are far less controversial to the world without.

In the final analysis, the degree to which reinstating the tribal tradition of the whale hunt was authentic in the sense of a return to some genuine and pristine cultural stage is untenable and irrelevant because culture is complex, multiple, fluid and in flux (Munn 2000:352). The same goes for the Faroese *grindadráp* tradition, that did not need to be reinvented but was not static either. In this regard, authenticity is always symbolically mediated in the present and thus 'created out of fakery' (Miller 1994:321). 'Traditions', according to Handler and Linnekin (1984:288), 'are neither genuine nor spurious, for if genuine tradition refers to the pristine and immutable heritage of the past, then all genuine traditions are spurious. But if ...tradition is always defined in the present, then all spurious traditions are genuine. Genuine and spurious ...are inappropriate [terms] when applied to social phenomena which never exist apart from our interpretations of them' (Handler and Linnekin 1984:288). The origin of traditional practices is therefore largely irrelevant to *experiencing* them as authentic. When seeking authenticity in the immutable roots of tradition, one subscribes to the naturalistic paradigm and cannot comprehend what the performance of tradition does to its practitioners.

There is, however, another view of authenticity that does have a bearing in the present case. Authenticity is often regarded as a stance against the dominant cultural norms of mass society, the ordinary and everyday (Handler and Saxton 1988:243; Lindholm 2002:336). Thus, conformism is inherently inauthentic. Ultimately, being Makah or being Faroese is not an ontological state but is constituted through practice and experience. It does not really matter whether the Makah whale hunt as it was conducted in 1999 harks back in every detail to history, tradition or cultural 'fact' at a particular point in time. Nor is it relevant that the Faroese pilot whale drive has been recreated and changed over time. What does matter is that the Faroese and the Makah feel they live their perception of being Faroese and Makah through their actions: 'an authentic experience ...is one in which individuals feel themselves to be in touch both with a "real" world and with their "real" selves' (Handler and Saxton 1988:243). This is not a fixed reality that can be established once and for all, but it must be recreated over and over again. And it is here that authenticity and identity become intimately connected. As Handler argues, 'assertions of authenticity always have embedded within them assertions of identity' (2002:964). Consequently, authenticity refers to the recognition of difference (Fine 2003:155). *Authentic behavior is distinctive behavior.* In this regard, the act of killing one gray whale or slaughtering pods of pilot whales is authentic enough. By willfully transgressing a taboo of mainstream Western society, the Faroese and the Makah have shown the world without that they are 'different'. In doing so, they have found their 'true selves' and reinvented themselves as Faroese and Makah.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Long-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala melas*) enter Faroese waters mainly in July, August and September. They belong to the group of toothed whales. They eat cod, squid and octopus and can live as long as sixty years. Adults measure between four and six meters in length and weigh around eight hundred kilos. Pilot whales migrate in schools numbering from 50 to 1,000 or more (Sanderson 1994:189).
- <sup>2</sup> For fuller accounts, see Joensen (1976, 1988), Wylie (1981), Sanderson (1990, 1994), Nauerby (1996).
- <sup>3</sup> WDCS website:  
<http://www.wdcs.org/dan/publishing.nsf/allweb/6696D8208A0AB55D80256DAA0036629A>  
(Accessed July 21, 2004). See also Sanderson (1994).
- <sup>4</sup> <http://www.wdcs.org/dan/publishing.nsf/allweb/83FE72454D061D4E80256DAA0035F570>.  
Accessed July 21, 2004.
- <sup>5</sup> <http://www.cetaceadefence.org/index.php?option=news&task=viewarticle&sid=9>. Accessed July 21, 2004.
- <sup>6</sup> <http://www.seashepherd.org/editorials/editorial13.shtml#5>. Accessed October 5, 2004.
- <sup>7</sup> Watson, P. (2000) The Ferocious Isles. *Ocean Realm*.  
[http://www.seashepherd.org/essays/ocean\\_realm\\_sum00.html](http://www.seashepherd.org/essays/ocean_realm_sum00.html). Accessed September 1, 2004.
- <sup>8</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/2000/NATURE/09/11/faroe.islands.enm/>. Accessed September 8, 2004.
- <sup>9</sup> <http://www.faroes.org/>. Accessed October 5, 2004.
- <sup>10</sup> See, for example, <http://www.ecop.info/english/e-faroe.htm>;  
<http://whale.wheelock.edu/archives/info00/0032.html>; [http://www.uci-endingcaptivity.org/from\\_dr\\_ann\\_west.htm](http://www.uci-endingcaptivity.org/from_dr_ann_west.htm);  
<http://whale.wheelock.edu/archives/info00/0032.html>;  
[http://www.seashepherd.org/essays/ocean\\_realm\\_sum00.html](http://www.seashepherd.org/essays/ocean_realm_sum00.html). Accessed August 31, 2004.  
See also Joensen (1988:19), Kalland (1994), Sanderson (1990:196, 1994:197-198).
- <sup>11</sup> <http://www.inkokomo.com/dolphin/faroes.html>. Accessed July 22, 2004. High levels of heavy metals and other toxins are found in pilot whales. The Faroese government has urged the islanders not to eat too much *grind* and it has advised pregnant women and young children to refrain from consuming it at all.
- <sup>12</sup> [http://www.lysator.liu.se/nordic/scripts/feedback/new\\_database/\\_nordic\\_scn\\_faq361.txt](http://www.lysator.liu.se/nordic/scripts/feedback/new_database/_nordic_scn_faq361.txt).  
Accessed October 5, 2004.
- <sup>13</sup> Interview with Paul Watson, September 1, 2003.  
[http://www.canis.info/interviews/paul\\_watson\\_english.htm](http://www.canis.info/interviews/paul_watson_english.htm). Accessed October 5, 2004.

- <sup>14</sup> Another film, Brian Leith's *To Kill a Whale* (1991) takes a more distanced view and attempts to present an inside account of the pilot whale hunt from the perspective of the islanders.
- <sup>15</sup> [http://www.mst.dk/homepage/default.asp?Sub=http://www.mst.dk/udgiv/publications/2003/87-7972-477-9/html/kap06\\_eng.htm](http://www.mst.dk/homepage/default.asp?Sub=http://www.mst.dk/udgiv/publications/2003/87-7972-477-9/html/kap06_eng.htm). Accessed October 5, 2004.
- <sup>16</sup> <http://www.whaling fo/the pilot.htm>. Accessed July 21, 2004.
- <sup>17</sup> O. Lyng, 'How Can Anyone Kill a Seal? How Can Anyone Possibly Kill a Whale?' <http://www.maninnature.com/MMammals/Whales/Whales1b.html>. Accessed July 21, 2004.
- <sup>18</sup> <http://www.worldcouncilofwhalers.com/gen-assem-four-announcement.htm>. Accessed July 21, 2004.
- <sup>19</sup> Gray whales (*Eschrichtius robustus*) can be twelve to fifteen meters in length, weigh up to forty tons and live as long as fifty to eighty years. Gray whales are a migratory species. Pods of gray whales seasonally travel great distances from Baja California to the northern tip of Alaska and vice versa.
- <sup>20</sup> For anthropological accounts, see Erikson (1999), Sepez (2002), Sepez-Aradanas and Tweedie (1999), Martello (2004). On the legal aspects, see Beck (1996), Watters and Dugger (1997), Eichstaedt (1998), Jenkins and Romanzo (1998), Gupta (1999), Bradford (2000), Miller (2001), Firestone and Lilley (2004). On the ethical issues, see for example List (1999) and Gaard (2001).
- <sup>21</sup> [http://www.worldwhalepolice.org/articles/bltprf\\_canoe.htm](http://www.worldwhalepolice.org/articles/bltprf_canoe.htm);  
<http://www.animatedsoftware.com/cassini/nltrs/nltr0145.htm>. Accessed September 6, 2004. See also Sullivan (2000:136, 174), Martello (2004:278).
- <sup>22</sup> Verhovek, S.H. (1999) Reviving Tradition. *New York Times*, May 18, 1999.
- <sup>23</sup> <http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/whal181.shtml?searchpagefrom=23&searchdiff=1774>. Accessed September 9, 2004.
- <sup>24</sup> Not all environmentalist groups followed a hard line. Greenpeace, for instance, chose not to challenge indigenous rights secured by treaty (Erikson 1999:559).
- <sup>25</sup> Initially, some Makah did not exclude the possibility of commercial whaling. However, the National Marine Fisheries Service made it abundantly clear that it would not support this option.
- <sup>26</sup> *Seattle Times*, 13 April, 2002, op-ed page.
- <sup>27</sup> [http://www.seashepherd.org/news/media\\_release0004.html](http://www.seashepherd.org/news/media_release0004.html). Accessed July 23, 2004
- <sup>28</sup> Dark, A. (2000) Nature/Culture Discourse and Anti-Essentialism Theory. <http://home.earthlink.net/~alxdark/anthro/essentialism.html>. Accessed September 2, 2004.
- <sup>29</sup> Quoted in A. Dark (1999). The Makah Whale Hunt. <http://www.cnie.org/NAE/cases/makah/m6.html>. Accessed September 2, 2004.
- <sup>30</sup> Johnson, K. (1998) Op-Ed page, *Seattle Times*, August 23, 1998. <http://www.cnie.org/NAE/docs/makaheditorial.html>. Accessed September 14, 2004.

- <sup>31</sup> <http://www.earthfirstjournal.org/efj/feature.cfm?ID=31&issue=v19n4>. Accessed September 6, 2004.
- <sup>32</sup> [http://www.safepassing.org/wcca/19990524\\_1844.txt](http://www.safepassing.org/wcca/19990524_1844.txt). Accessed August 31, 2004.
- <sup>33</sup> See, respectively, [http://mailman.u.washington.edu/pipermail/nat\\_issues/1999-May/002870.html](http://mailman.u.washington.edu/pipermail/nat_issues/1999-May/002870.html). Accessed August 26, 2004;  
<http://www.geocities.com/anthropologyresistance/makah.html>. Accessed 23 July, 2004;  
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/greenvibrations/message/637>. Accessed September 1, 2004;  
<http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/whalehunt/whal32.html?searchpagefrom=30&searchdif f=1940>. Accessed September 13, 2004.
- <sup>34</sup> <http://www.mail-archive.com/nativenews@mlists.net/msg03482.html>. Accessed August 31, 2004.
- <sup>35</sup> <http://www.turtleisland.org/discussion/viewtopic.php?p=2942>. Accessed September 6, 2004.
- <sup>36</sup> Shukovsky, P., Public Hearing on Makah Whale Hunt Brings Out Opposition, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* February 2, 2001. <http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/maka021.shtml>. Accessed November 24, 2004.
- <sup>37</sup> <http://mindprod.com/feedback/animalsracist.html>. Accessed November 17, 2004.
- <sup>38</sup> As sea mammals, whales are ambiguous animals and as Edmund Leach would have it, 'it is the ambiguous categories that attract the maximum interest and the most intense feelings of taboo' (1964:39).
- <sup>39</sup> Blow, R. (1998) The Great American Whale Hunt. *The Mother Jones* September/October 1998 issue. <http://www.motherjones.com/news/feature/1998/09/blow.html>. Accessed September 7, 2004.
- <sup>40</sup> Schabner, D., Culture Clash. *ABC News*, May 29, 2002. <http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/DailyNews/makah020529.html>. Accessed August 26, 2004.
- <sup>41</sup> George, H.T., Protesters Blast Tribal Celebration. *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*, 18 May 1999, PM Cycle [http://mailman.u.washington.edu/pipermail/nat\\_issues/1999-May/002870.html](http://mailman.u.washington.edu/pipermail/nat_issues/1999-May/002870.html). Accessed August 26, 2004. For another example of a similar 'role reversal' where an activist says that 'The Makah are the cowboys ... and we're the Indians', see Martello (2004:271).
- <sup>42</sup> [www.cnie.org/NAE/docs/makaheditorial.html](http://www.cnie.org/NAE/docs/makaheditorial.html). Accessed July 19, 2004.
- <sup>43</sup> Dunagan, C. (1998) Activist: Hunt is 'Empty Gesture', *The Sun*, October 5, 1998. <http://www.thesunlink.com/packages/whalehunt/story14.html>. Accessed September 13, 2004.
- <sup>44</sup> Dark, A. (2000) Nature/Culture Discourse and Anti-Essentialism Theory. <http://home.earthlink.net/~alxdark/anthro/essentialism.html>. Accessed September 2, 2004. See also: Dark, A. (1999). The Makah Whale Hunt. <http://www.cnie.org/NAE/cases/makah/m6.html>. Accessed September 2, 2004;  
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<http://www.geocities.com/anthropologyresistance/makah.html>. Accessed 23 July, 2004.  
Compare Sepez-Aradanas and Tweedie (1999:53).

- <sup>45</sup> Barber, M. and P. Shukovsky (2000) Whaling Protest Ends in Injury, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, April 21, 2000.  
<http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/maka21.shtml?searchpagefrom=16&searchdiff=1602>. Accessed September 9, 2004.

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