

The Makah Whale Hunt and Leviathan's Death: Reinventing Tradition and Disputing Authenticity in the Age of Modernity

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ABSTRACT In 1995, the Makah Indian Tribe (USA) publicly announced that it wished to revitalize its tradition of whale hunting. The Makah had treaty rights to hunt whales dating back to 1855 but gave up whaling in the 1920s. Environmentalists and animal rights activists adamantly opposed the Makah's claim, but the tribe was successful in obtaining permission to go whaling again. Vehement reactions followed. The discourse on the Makah whale hunting rights soon shifted to discussing the merits and demerits of Makah culture and the genuineness and legitimacy of the tribe's wish to reconnect to its tradition. The present article describes and analyzes the debate, in particular as it relates to the issues of Makah heritage and its contested authenticity.

'Authenticity is created out of fakery'
– Daniel Miller, *Modernity*, 1994, p. 321

'Our way is not in the past. It's never really been dead. It's just tucked away'
– Theron Parker, Makah whale harpooner¹

Introduction

In present-day Western society, for many people killing whales amounts to conducting an act of barbarism. Though whaling has been perceived as a legitimate economic activity for a long time, over-harvesting brought about depletion of many whale species and extinction of some. Subsequent action of environmentalist groups 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. The only exception to this no-take regime concerned the whaling activities of indigenous peoples who to a large extent depended on whale meat and whale blubber for subsistence.

When in the mid-1990s the Makah Indian Tribe in the United States of America expressed an interest in revitalizing its tradition of whaling after a hiatus of seventy years, vehement reactions followed. Michelle Stewart succinctly summarizes the

controversy surrounding the Makah's intention to resume whaling: 'For many, the return to whaling was a significant reclamation of heritage, and indicative of the strength of the revitalization movement; for others, the issue of hunting whales is an emotionally-charged debate related to the notion of whales as sentient beings and significant ocean mammals.'² But what would seem to be a complex Catch 22 between human and cultural rights versus animal rights was complicated even further because the arguments in the debate over the Makah whale hunting rights focused on notions of the authenticity of tradition. Hence, the eco-political discourse was not limited to the question of whether the killing of a marine mammal was morally or ethically justified, but shifted to discussing 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.

This article attempts to inventory and analyze the debate, in particular as it relates to the issues of Makah tradition and its contested authenticity. The Makah whale hunt has been highly publicized and I have used a plethora of Internet sources – including websites of the Makah, environmentalist organizations, and regional newspapers – and published material, as well, to form an opinion about the contents and dynamics of the discussion. The article will deal in particular with the question of how the Makah represented their whaling heritage, how they legitimized its revival and the ways in which their opponents attempted to undermine the legitimacy and genuineness of the Makah's claims. As we shall see, mudslinging was an integral part of the heavily mediatized debate. It forced the Makah to authenticate the return to their whaling tradition *vis-à-vis* anti-whaling activists and the wider audience, who had entertained specific ideas about the 'real' Indian that were at odds with the Makah's intentions and actions. By extension, they had to 'prove' their practices were authentically Makah, leading to a 'clash of essentialisms' in the contest over Makah culture and identity.

The manner in which the debate evolved raises serious questions about the idea of authenticity in the sense of genuine, pure, pristine, untouched cultural heritage (cf. also Handler 1986, 2002). In the wake of the 1980s 'invention of tradition' scholarly debates (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), there seems to have developed a more general penchant for debunking many traditions as constructions, fabrications or even 'false consciousness'. However, such 'myth hunting' is usually merely scratching the surface. It does little to understand what quests for authenticity *mean for* and *do to* its seekers. The danger of simplified constructionist perceptions is that almost any tradition becomes charged with the taint of being inauthentic. Moreover, '[w]hen attributed to colonial "natives," or romantic "primitives," authenticity could be a straitjacket, making every engagement with modernity (religions, technologies, knowledges, markets or media) 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 invent or revitalize traditions can be authentic enough, albeit in a different sense than the simple deconstructionist one. To

grasp this, we have to focus on the 'why and 'how' aspects of revitalizing the whale hunt and particularly on the experiences generated in doing so. Therefore, in addition to considering the discursive identity politics, this article will go into the Makah's 'quest for a felt authentic grounding' (Lindholm 2002:337).

The Makah and the revival of whale hunting

Approximately 1,100 enrolled members of the Makah Indian Nation live in a remote 27,000-acre reservation that sprawls across Cape Flattery on Olympic Peninsula, tucked away in the extreme northwest of Washington (USA). Most members of the tribe live in the tiny coastal village of Neah Bay, adjacent to the Strait of Juan de Fuca. It is a relatively poor community, facing high levels of unemployment and problems including alcoholism and drug abuse. Prefab homes and trailers dominate Neah Bay, but there are also modern facilities and services, including a renowned museum and a new marina. The marina harbors over two hundred commercial and sport fishing vessels as well as pleasure craft, and accommodates numerous small businesses. In many respects, the inhabitants take part in 'the American way of life', including aspects of its mass culture. They wear blue jeans and Nikes, eat pizza, watch television, use cell phones, surf the Internet and play video games. But this, of course, does not define them as Makah. In search of who they are, some tribal members have turned to history and to the tribe's whaling history more specifically, to boost present and future identity.

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 captains were usually the chiefs in the five villages (Dougherty 2001). Only the male members of certain families were eligible to hunt whales. To organize and direct a whale hunt required considerable wealth. The oldest son of a whaler usually married the oldest daughter of another whaler, thus consolidating positions of importance within the community (Firestone and Lilley 2004:10768). Whalers had to undergo extensive physical and spiritual training, which included prayer, 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. Wives of whale hunters had to seclude themselves during the hunt, remain silent and motionless, and abstain from sleep and food. 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. The cultural importance of whales also comes to the fore in the custom to welcome newborns into the world by placing a sliver of whale meat in their mouth (Miller 1952:266). There



Neah Bay in 1905. Photo Edmond S. Meany. (University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, NA1277).

is little doubt, then, that the Makah had ‘an exuberant and vastly important cult of whaling’ (Riley 1968:57).

The traditional technique to catch gray whales involved 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. Community members who did not participate in the whale hunt would nonetheless share in the whale’s resources. Parts were rendered for the production of whale oil. 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.³ In the mid 19th century, the Makah were the major source of machine oil on the Pacific coast. They were integrated in a market economy, acquired and used modern implements and continually altered their traditional whaling methods. Commercially, they were quite successful (cf. Collins 1996:180ff.; Gaard 2001:5; Firestone and Lilley 2004:10768).

But Europeans also brought diseases and hundreds of Makah succumbed to epidemics



Makah whalers in their canoe, 1911. Photo Asahel Curtis. (University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, NA682).

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 federal government's protection of their ancient whaling traditions. Article 4 of the treaty secured the Makah 'the right of taking fish and of whaling or sealing at usual and accustomed grounds and stations'. By 1860, the Makah began to concentrate on commercial sealing. The development of cottonseed and rapeseed oils had pushed down the price of whale oil considerably. The Makah became middlemen for the Hudson Bay Company, supplying them with the pelts of fur seals. But three decades later, after serious depletion of the resource that led to the introduction of federal protective measures, they returned to fishing and whaling (Waterman 1920:38ff; Kirk 1986:141, 207; Collins 1996). However, by the late 1920s the Makah whaling tradition ceased, firstly, due to scarcity of gray whales that resulted from large-scale commercial exploitation and, secondly, as a consequence of deliberate politics aimed at Americanization. Indian agents, missionaries and teachers attempted to assimilate the Makah into mainstream American society through laws that suppressed their language, culture and religion (Collins 1996:180ff.; Erikson 1999:564; Reeves 2002:93).



Makah cutting up a whale, 1910. Photo Asahel Curtis. (University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, NA721).

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. In a letter to the State Department, tribal chairman Hubert Markishtum stated: 'Re-establishing a ceremonial and subsistence whale hunt would be a catalyst which would allow us to instill in our young people the traditional values which have held our people together over the centuries.'⁴ Referring to the Neah Bay treaty, the Makah claimed the right to take a very limited number of whales in a 'traditional' way (that is, using a canoe, paddles and a hand-thrown harpoon). In the seventy years since the last Makah whale hunt, however, whaling had become an activity tightly regulated internationally, through the International Whaling Commission (IWC), and nationally as well.

In 1937, the US government banned the hunting of gray whales and in 1969 it placed them on the Endangered Species List. 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. Besides humans, their natural enemy is the killer whale or orca. As said,

commercial exploitation had depleted the gray whale stock. But the protective measures led to such a remarkable recovery, that in 1994 gray whales – whose number was estimated at 23,000 – were removed from the Endangered Species List. A worldwide moratorium on whaling was in force since 1986, excepting under stringent regulations ‘aboriginal subsistence whaling’. The Clinton/Gore Administration – 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 should 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. Makah Tribal Council member Marcy Parker, who was on the US delegation to the IWC meeting in 1997 in Monaco where the right was granted, said:

We appreciate the support and dedication the United States government has shown the Makah Tribe in our request to resume our centuries-old whaling heritage. The Makah tribal members will now be able to again perform important whaling rituals and receive sustenance from this important and traditional marine resource. Today will mark one of the most significant events in our history with western civilization that will now be passed on through our oral traditions as a positive move toward cultural revival of vital missing links once thought lost to our people.⁵

In October 1998, the Makah could resume the hunt. Since then, they have been involved in several court battles to retain their ‘cultural 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 that was expressed in their whaling claims had received a fillip after archeological excavations in the 1970s retrieved thousands of whaling artifacts from the now uninhabited Ozette village that was covered by a mudslide centuries ago. This sparked the tribe’s interest in, and appreciation for, its heritage and led to the establishment of a Makah Cultural and Research Center in 1979 (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. Anthropologist Elizabeth Colson wrote in 1953: ‘Those born since 1910 have never seen any part of the whaling complex except for some of the costumes and songs displayed on Makah Day [an annual feast celebrating Makah culture] and the few whaling implements left in the village . . . Nevertheless, even children in their teens and some much younger know that the Makah were great whaling men, that whale meat was an important food’ (1953:176; cf. also Miller 1952). Another anthropologist remarked that when she conducted research in 1974, ‘Makah culture was not dead or dying. Makah youth were very proud of their heritage’ (Moss 1999:4). She stated that ‘whaling is an essential part of Makah social identity’ (ibid.: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), a resident of Neah Bay and married to a Makah.

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, petty crime, alcoholism and drug 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. Marcy Parker, the vice chairwoman of the Makah Tribal Council, explained: 'The hunt is the missing link, the thing that brings us full circle to our traditions'

(quoted in Gupta 1999:1749, n.84). Keith Johnson, then president of the Makah Whaling Commission, said: 'It's a link to the past, and it validates us, who we are as a people and a culture.'⁶ Janine Bowe chop, the director of the Makah Cultural and Research Center, opined: 'The real beauty of whaling is what surrounds a whale hunt rather than the actual hunt or tasting the whale. . . . The discipline involved, the requirements of the community and of the whaling crew, are what strengthens us and keeps us more alive' (quoted in Dougherty 2001).

Since the whaling tradition had been lost for decades, the Makah had to reinvent and recreate its interconnected expertise and culture. Among other things, they had to learn how to construct and operate traditional whaling boats and weapons. They had to build a new cedar canoe, make traditionally carved paddles, harpoons and so on.⁷ The physical training program entailed frequent paddling in an older canoe, picking up long lost skills, learning how to maneuver harmoniously in, often, rough weather conditions 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 develop 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. These included extended periods of fasting, ritual cleansing, praying, celibacy and abstinence from drugs and



Makah whaler Wilson Parker, 1915. Photo Edward S. Curtis. (University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, NA556).

alcohol. As mentioned, in olden days each whaling family had its own sacred and secret songs and rituals to procure the help of the spirits. Thus, the reinvention 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 entitled to participate in it and who not. Whaling once used to be the province of elite lineages, and not every Makah had the right to hunt. 'Many of the people living in Neah Bay were not directly related to whaling chiefs and had little to gain personally from the tribe conducting a whale hunt. Their family names, songs, and dances would not be directly embellished by a successful hunt' (Dougherty 2001). Historically, the captain was also the village chief and 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: 'The first Makah whaling crew in seven decades would be made up of descendants of whaling captains and village chiefs, some of whom despised each other' (Dougherty 2001; cf. 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 – who was a skilled carver, canoe paddler, and hunter – as harpooner. He and Johnson could not get along with each other, to put it mildly, but they finally worked out some kind of *modus vivendi* although the crew remained 'bitterly divided' (cf. Dougherty 2001; Sullivan 2000). Not only did the whale hunters have to cope with internal rivalry; there was also opposition from within 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'. These dissenters faced harassment and hostility and 'were ostracized and denied services from the tribe' (Gaard 2001:16; cf. also Peterson 2000:63ff; Hawkins 2001:290). But the fiercest contestations came from without.

Whaling opponents, tribal traditions and the war of words

Environmentalists and animal rights activists sharply opposed the plans to resume whaling and were there in force when the hunt was cleared to begin October 1, 1998. One of the fiercest opponents was self-proclaimed 'captain' Paul Watson, founder and leader of the militant Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. The organization's vessels – including a small submarine painted to resemble an orca to scare away gray whales – and a flotilla of other protestors were a fixture in local waters for weeks. They harassed the whaling crew who were practicing in their canoe, throwing things at them and depicting them as a bunch of 'trigger-happy thugs', 'redneck hunters', 'machos', 'bloodthirsty



Paul Watson aboard the Sirenian.

gangsters', 'savages' or, alternatively, as 'cowards', 'whimps', and 'sissies'.⁸ From his vessel the *Sirenian*, Paul Watson said through the loudspeaker system 'Just because you were born stupid doesn't mean you have to be stupid!'⁹ Alternatively, the Makah and their supporters dubbed the anti-whaling advocates 'eco-fascists', 'eco-colonialists', 'eco-terrorists', 'eco-bullies' or 'racists'. 'You're evil – evil as hell!' cried one protestor when members of the whaling crew spoke about their right to whaling.¹⁰ Wayne Johnson, captain of the whaling crew, replied 'Save the beef. . . . Go stand in front of McDonald's' (Sullivan 2000:137). This war of words would continue over the next few years. 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, bringing state-of-the-art equipment and 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 from around the world. However, the event that news reporters were waiting for did not materialize that year. They and the protestors left Neah Bay after the end of the 1998 season but returned full strength the next year. The presence of protestors probably united the Makah, who now had a common enemy, more than ever and made them determined to continue with their plans. Given the tensions and expectations, the hunt seemed inevitable.

Early in the morning of Monday May 17, 1999, after several fruitless attempts that

may have failed because of the intimidations of angry protestors who attempted to scare away the whales, the Makah whaling crew succeeded in taking a juvenile gray whale. The protestors were not there at the *moment suprême* because some were away refueling their vessels while others slept in after partying all night. The whalers knew there was a window of opportunity and the previous evening Makah elders had come to the whalers' camp and performed sacred ceremonies (Dougherty 2001). The whalers used a 32-foot cedar dugout canoe, called the *Hummingbird*, hand-carved paddles and a hand-held harpoon, 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, which was broadcast 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. He sang *his* family's sacred whaling song, which outraged captain Wayne Johnson (Dougherty 2001). The Sea Shepherd crew blew the *Sirenian's* horn for half an hour in protest. The Neah Bay community and members from supporting tribes welcomed the whale and the whalers with prayers and sacred songs, an honor guard escort and ceremonies. As tradition required, women whose husbands or sons were in the canoe had lain down whilst their beloved ones were at sea. 'This is about a great tradition. It's about calling out to our ancestors. It's all about who we are as a people,' Theron Parker told a reporter.¹¹ He added: 'We prepared for about a year. We prayed to our creator. Yesterday, was a pretty proud day for all the Makah nation.'¹² Butchering the animal took hours. The whale meat was distributed in the ancient Makah way, apportioning whale meat and parts according to their culturally based division of whaling labor. But it was not done in the exact traditional manner. Harpooner Parker – and not captain Wayne Johnson – received the first and choicest cut of the dorsal lump. The Makah hosted a large *potlatch* celebration the next Saturday, inviting other tribes to participate and thus showing their prestige and status.

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 whaling opponents had threatened to destroy whaling vessels and attempted to blockade Neah Bay harbor. After the dead whale had been towed to the harbor, opponents of the hunt held a candlelight vigil organized by the Progressive Animal Welfare Society. A woman left a wreath, a candle and a note on the spot where the whale was butchered. The note read: 'Baby, you didn't deserve this. We love you.'¹³ Paul Watson of the Sea Shepherds 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.' Outraged, he added that the Makah were 'baby killers. Big, brave Makah warriors killed a baby whale.'¹⁴ Jake Conroy of the anti-whaling group Sea Defense Alliance said: 'We're obviously very upset that the Makah went ahead with killing an innocent, sentient creature in such a bloody and untraditional way.'¹⁵



The Makah hunters hunted by the World Whale Police.

The high-profile anti-whaling campaign against the Makah of such organizations as the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, the Progressive Animal Welfare Society, the Sea Defense Alliance, Ocean Defense International, the West Coast Anti-Whaling Society and others would appear to be disproportionate.¹⁶ Why attack a small group that intends to take such a limited number of non-endangered gray whales to consume their treaty rights and to boost their cultural self-respect? 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. There have even been allegations that the Makah were pawns of the Japanese. In addition, some environmentalist organizations 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.¹⁷ 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 of resuming the gray whale hunt, some elders opposed it. One of them – septuagenarian Alberta Thompson – even became an ally of the Sea Shepherds (Doshi 2002:94). Note that the anti-whaling movement refrained from using any unsustainability 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 young Makah protesting the protestors.

A major bone of contention was the fact that the Makah used a traditionally carved dugout canoe and a hand-held harpoon, but that they in addition utilized motor-powered support boats 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). Animal rights campaigners and environmentalist hardliners did not regard the Makah whale hunt as a *tradition* but as an *anachronism*, an antiquated practice that was completely at odds with modernity, yet conducted with modern tools in a modern society. 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; for a similar case, see Hovelsrud-Broda 1997). Campaign Whale director Andy Ottaway said prior to a demonstration outside of the US Embassy in London in 1998: ‘The Makah would benefit more from whale-watching operations. They do not need to kill these whales. It is the revival of a long-lost tradition that belongs dead and buried.’¹⁸ Frank L. Hoffman of The Mary T. and Frank L. Hoffman Family Foundation, a small ‘Biblically based’ animal rights organization, wrote: ‘Why do people want to return to their own vomit, or to the sins of the past generations? . . . To me, they [the Makah]

have become no better than terrorists and serial killers of innocent victims.’¹⁹ A whale tour operator remarked: ‘If they are so hell bent on going back to their roots, why the hell do they insist on: driving cars, using internal combustion engines, fiberglass, aluminum, roads, shopping centers, all the other stuff that has improved their lives since the coming of the “White Man”.’²⁰ Journalists were quick to point out other seeming contradictions: ‘Everywhere, there were contrasts as this ancient ritual was performed by a modern people. Some tribal members chewed their blubber and washed it down with Diet Pepsi . . . Some wore cedar headbands and traditional button blankets along with baseball caps, blue jeans and basketball shoes’.²¹ Certainly at odds with tradition were the satellite trucks, helicopters, TV cameras and other contemporary paraphernalia of the media on the scene, and all the government regulations and monitoring that led one tribe member to remark: ‘Our sacred tradition is so wrapped up in red tape that we’re incarcerated’ (quoted in Sullivan 2000:56). Some opponents argued that the Makah should give up all comforts of modernity to return to their traditions. 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’.²²

Watson’s Sea Shepherd Conservation Society is among the most active organizations to oppose Makah whale hunting. It vehemently combats 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’.²³ It deeply believes 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.’²⁴ The cultural right or ‘necessity’ to take whales is thus fiercely contested. The controversy inspired Sea Defense Alliance’s ‘commander’ Athena McEntyre to write the following poem that circulated widely on the Internet:²⁵

I AM NOBLE MAKAH WHALER!
I LOOK UPON THE SEA
FONDLING MYSELF, I WONDER
WHAT THE JAPANESE HAVE FOR ME

I’LL HONOR NOBLE WHALE
BY DOING UP SOME SMACK
AND WHEN I FINISH THAT
I’LL DO A LITTLE CRACK!

I’L SNIFF A LITTLE METH
I’LL DRINK A KEG OF BEER
THIS A GREAT CULTURAL TRADITION
TIL A BABY WHALE GETS HERE

I'LL BEAT UP MY WIFE
LEAVE MY KIDDIES BEREFT
THIS IS MAKAH TRAINING!
AND TRADITION MUST NOT BE LEFT!

TERRORIZE OLD WOMAN
HER DEAD DOG LIES NEAR
GOT TO HAVE SOME FUN, BOYS
TIL' THE WHALE GETS HERE

O LOOK HERE COME WHITE RAVEN
SHE WRITING US A POEM
WE'LL SEE IF WHITEY BUYS THE JUNK
THAT COMES FROM THAT OLD CRONE.

SEE MY NOBLE RIFLE
50 CALIBER YOU HEAR.
I WISH THAT I COULD LICK IT
TIL THE WHALE GETS HERE.

HA HA I'LL TELL OLD WHITEY
A LOTTA "TRADITION" BUNK
BUT, HECK IF HE DON'T BUY IT
I'LL JUST GET PISSING DRUNK

HE JUST MIGHT BUY MY GARBAGE
YOU JUST CAN NEVER TELL!
IF HE DON'T, I'LL JUST SCREAM "RACIST"
WHEN I BLOW A WHALE TO HELL

I JUST CAN'T WAIT TO DO IT!
BLOOD AND GORE I LICK AND SUCK
HEY WON'T IT BE FUN BOYS
WHEN THE WHITEFOLK ALL UPCHUCK.

O GREAT CREATOR
SEND A WHALE, BUT HECK
I THINK WHILE I'M WAITING
I'LL PICK UP MY WELFARE CHECK!

There were also less 'poetic' forms of Indian-bashing. In an e-mail to Keith Hunter, a Choctaw Indian who supported the Makah whale hunt, Sea Shepherd activist Michael Kundu characterized their decision to kill a whale as 'devout loyalty to a cryptic and dying culture – fascinating! . . . like Paul [Watson] said, your arcane culture always seems to equate "advance" with some act of ritual or ceremonial killing'.²⁶ In a similar vein as his leader Watson, Kundu stated that 'all culture (including Makah) must eventually evolve' (1998:5). The subtitle of the article from which I quote here runs 'Tradition Refuses to Mature'.



Memorial for the whale taken in the May 1999 hunt.

The Makah Tribal Council countered the environmentalists' attacks that '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'.²⁷ 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. No, our canoe has been carved by traditional carvers and will be paddled by eight whalers who have sanctified themselves by rituals that are ancient and holy to us. The hunt is being conducted in a manner that is both traditional and modern.'²⁸ 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.'²⁹ A tribe member told a news reporter: 'The whole thing brought the tribe together. . . . We view this as having cultural significance and is in a way part of religious freedom. People who don't understand us call us savages. I call them extreme missionary zealots.'³⁰

The Makah received heaps of hate mail, harassments in restaurants and on ferries, 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 (for instance the *Peninsula Daily News*, the *Seattle Times*, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*) 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'.³¹ 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 (ibid.:563). The discourse had turned ugly. Bumper stickers with the slogan 'Save a Whale, Kill an Indian' became popular. One protestor carried a banner reading 'Save a Whale, Harpoon a Makah!' Whilst under siege of anti-whalers, a Makah carried a sign with the text 'Go Home Eco-Colonialists.' Responding to the commotion after the successful hunt, tribal council Chairman Ben Johnson said: 'We recognize that because of differences in cultural values and knowledge many people do not understand our need to continue with the tradition of whale hunting, thus creating a conflict between them and the Makah.'³²

In the wake of the environmental and animal rights groups' opinion, many remarks were made as regards the validity of reviving tradition, especially in the days following the successful hunt. 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'.³³ 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). In a letter to the editor of the *Seattle Times*, a woman declared: 'The white man used to kill Indians and give them smallpox-infected blankets. Is this a tradition we should return to?'³⁴ In the same newspaper, a couple stated 'Natives were often referred to as "savages," and it seems little has changed' (quoted in Dougherty 2001). '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 to the *Peninsula Daily News*.³⁵ A reader of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* sent a letter to the editor, reading: 'The excuse of "tradition" does not justify this act. Not all "traditions" are appropriate behavior. It is sad that a once proud group of people have lost so much heritage, pride and self-respect that they actually believe killing an intelligent, warm-blooded creature will somehow make them more "Indian."'³⁶ Another reader volunteered the following: 'If the Makah tribe wants to embrace their traditions, they should: give up welfare, (they got whale blubber – who needs money?); give up modern medicine (they got a tribal medicine man – forget the antibiotics and let him cure their tribe with chants!) and by all means, cut off their electricity and running water. Traditionally, they did not have these luxuries

[sic]. Also, take those Nikes off those Makah kids and put them back in their traditional moccasins [sic]!’³⁷ ‘Many traditions become antiquated, irresponsible and outright wrong,’ a woman submitted.³⁸ On radio talk shows, statements like ‘white people should renew their tradition of killing Indians’ could be heard.³⁹ Examples of traditions that should not be revitalized abounded, including cannibalism, human sacrifice, widow burning, foot binding, genital mutilation, head hunting and scalping. A typical example is from a letter to the editor of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, stating: ‘Indeed, an authentic cultural revival would require the resurrection of inter-tribal warfare, slavery and the occasional human sacrifice. So why do they insist on whaling, but not launching a return to these other practices that also defined them as a people? . . . It’s no wonder the Makah still feel justified in considering whales their property to sacrifice as they once did their slaves.’⁴⁰

Besides the gray whale that was caught in 1999, no further whales were taken, although a Makah family resumed the hunt in April 2000, pursued once more by protest boats and news helicopters. An Ocean Defense International protestor got injured when a Coast Guard boat ran over her jet ski whilst she was harassing the whaling canoe. Tactics of Ocean Defense International and the World Whale Police to interfere with the hunt at sea became increasingly aggressive and led to several arrests. Picketers waving signs beside the road leading to the Makah reservation became a common presence during the whaling season, and they occasionally blocked the road. 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 Fund for Animals, the Humane Society of the United States and other environmentalist groups have been waging a legal battle to keep the Makah from continuing their pursuit. They characterize the Makah hunt as sport or recreation and discount the tribe’s claim that whaling is culturally important to them. The litigation process in the new millennium has delayed the Makah whaling pursuits. In 2002, an affiliation of environmental associations that had filed a request for an injunction has failed in its attempt to stop the Makah tribe from hunting gray whales. 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. What was important in the ruling of the Court of Appeals was the fact that the IWC had made provisions for allowing whale hunting by aboriginal, indigenous or native peoples whose subsistence and cultural needs have been recognized, and providing that the whale products would be consumed locally and that there would be ‘a *continuing traditional dependence* on whaling and on the use of whales’.⁴¹ For the Court, the fact that Makah whaling had stopped in 1927 was important, although the main argument against the resumption of the Makah whale hunt was that it violates the Marine Mammal Protection Act because the National Marine Fisheries Service had not conducted a proper environmental review of the hunt. 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 environmentalists cried victory on their websites. But the Makah intend to continue going to court. 'Whatever we have been, and whatever we are now, whaling will be a part of our culture. It's what makes us Makah. I don't think the courts will ever stop us,' one of the canoe's crewmembers told in a recent interview.⁴² But the environmentalists and animal rights advocates are equally determined to continue litigation.



A member of the whaling crew tasting whale blubber.

The plans to resume whaling, the actual hunt and the controversy with the opponents and its aftermath left a mark on the Neah Bay community. It has been in the limelight for years,⁴³ and local 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: 'People disputed birthright and lineage and family trees, the right to hunt a whale, the right to speak for a family, for a village, for a tribe' (Sullivan 2000:138). While the first hunt was conducted as a communal affair, representing all the families in the tribe, subsequent – unsuccessful – hunts were conducted by family crews. In 2000, five crews were training for hunts. In 2002, the Makah Tribal Council decided to cut funding for whaling since traditionally, whaling families

furnished their own resources to conduct the hunt. The federal government had no intention of providing additional funding. Now the Makah stand empty-handed again while the resumption of the hunt cost the tribe (and their opponents, the media and taxpayers, as well) considerable sums of money. Nonetheless, the Makah 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. We are whaling people, and without whaling, we continue to suffer'.⁴⁴ He also said that he was 'sick and tired of being in court',⁴⁵ while he was deeply disappointed in the withdrawal of the Tribal Council's financial support: 'The hatred in this community is really deep, and the politics is too much to bear'.⁴⁶ Though the event initially brought most of the community closer together, it has gradually proved divisive rather than integrative due to village politics

and power struggles, while some Makah opponents of the hunt suffered social ostracism from the onset. Nonetheless, 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'.⁴⁷ But most of the outside world branded the Makah with the stigma of being savage whale killers. A closer look at some of the underlying notions is in order.

Gentle giants, bloodthirsty savages and whale warriors

Whales have become potent symbols of environmentalism as is evidenced by the successful 1970s 'Save the Whales' Greenpeace campaign. Whales turned into the poster child for conservation. The anti-whaling rhetoric of many environmentalist organizations is an important source of revenues. Whales are powerful fundraisers. They are invoked 'as a metaphor for all that is sublime in nature' (Gupta 1999:1742). Whales have increasingly become 'charismatic' or 'flagship' species (Kinan and Dalzell 2003). The environmental movement has totemized cetaceans that have come to represent the 'goodness' of nature. 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 that is believed to be at or near the apex of a symbolic hierarchy in the animal world. The iconic status of whales and dolphins that evolved out of the environmentalists' campaigns led to anthropomorphizing cetaceans. They were incorporated in human society first by keeping them in oceanariums, then by turning them into film and TV heroes (Flipper, Willy the killer whale) and stuffed toys. Whales became 'pets'. 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, whale-watchers, whale-huggers, and the public at large have come to see whales not as a source of food and other products, but as sacrosanct gentle giants, representing a better kind of near-humanity. 'My family, not your dinner!' were the words on a protest banner. Some even regard whales as being superior to human beings. For instance, an opponent of the Makah whale hunt, computer expert Roedy Green, wrote this on his Website: '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.'⁴⁸ Though this is a rather extreme example, many believe that there is a

very thin line that divides human beings from whales. Nature is thus incorporated into the cultural realm. What we have here is a special case of speciesism (cf. Dunayer 2004), the notional act of assigning different values or rights to beings on the basis of their biological species where usually human beings take top rank positions. The species that are imbued with special rights and moral values nowadays certainly include whales. With a variation on George Orwell's *Animal Farm*: animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.

But nature is only partly incorporated in 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. 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 life animals. For example, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* columnist Susan Paynter wrote: 'I felt queasy seeing self-righteous protesters – most of them non-Indian urbanites removed from nature and the process that results in Big Macs. Stern-lipped, they scolded the Makah to find another, less barbaric way to recapture their pride.'⁴⁹ Some Makah also referred 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.⁵⁰

Apart from the above-mentioned issues, a considerable part of the debate relates to matters of tradition and authenticity. Whereas whales were made human, whale hunters were demonized as savage brutes. Opponents of the whale hunt believe that traditional subsistence is at odds with modernity and should be restricted to people wholly dependent on it. They often 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, geographer 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' (ibid.:9). Others, however, think that cultural change – for example by adopting conveniences and gadgets from the outside world – has compromised the 'purity' of Makah culture (cf. Martello 2004:270). Another aspect that has received much criticism is the use of contemporary equipment and gadgets of modernity, which in the view of environmentalists 'prove' that the gray whale hunt is not traditional. The utilization of new technology – even though this may only be auxiliary – is considered a breach of tradition that deprives the Makah of still being 'true' Makah. 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. It is not the tools that count, but the goals pursued with the whale hunt.

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 environmentalists' perception is rooted in romantic notions of Indian-ness. 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). 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' (ibid.).

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 sport or recreation, Janine Bowe chop 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. I would not pretend to determine what something means to another culture.'⁵¹ Part of the opponents' argument is that if a society has partly adapted culturally to modernity, it should do so wholly and give up its traditional aspects. Indeed, the whole idea of what the tradition *should be* was appropriated by some of the contestants of the Makah whale hunt. Paul Watson, for example, said after the Makah killed the gray whale: '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.'⁵² 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 with only one component that will have a real, immediate meaning: The violent death of a living creature that has every right to be left alone.'⁵³ Watson and his compatriots 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.

Again, the Makah responded. 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.'⁵⁴ Tribal Council Chairman Ben Johnson got tired of the criticism that the hunt was not traditional and said to 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.’⁵⁵ The Makah received widespread support from other Indian tribes, and from the Coalition to End Racial Targeting of American Indian Nations (CERTAIN). For example, James Michael Craven of the Blackfoot Nation wrote: ‘Watson simply and summarily arrogates to himself the right to define and declare what cultures and practices are worth preserving, what treaties are worth respecting and defending, what Faustian bargains with the forces of evil are defensible and yes, even what forms of life are worth any sacrifice to protect. Apparently Indians are not on Watson’s “close-to-extinction” list.’⁵⁶

The normativism, cultural imperialism and ethnocentrism of some environmental organizations and animal rights activists capture the Makah whalers in essentialized images of culture and tradition and puts pressure on them to conform to the formers’ worldviews and standards. The image of the ‘ecological Indian’, a culture hero 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. The criticism directed against the whale hunt became focused on the authenticity of the Makah’s way of reinventing tradition: ‘Notions and essentialized theories on traditional Indian-ness became markers of authority; the non-Indian was deciding and valuing what it was to be an Indian.’⁵⁷ Apparently, the Makah had to authenticate themselves as ‘genuine’ Makah. In the American case, popular culture is replete with representations of what a ‘real Indian’ is and what ‘authentic’ behavior should be (Erikson 1999:575). Alx Dark, who has studied the Makah whaling conflict in detail, states that the comments of opponents of the hunt ‘have frequently drawn from general, romantic and neo-colonial ideologies about Native Americans’. He adds: ‘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.’⁵⁸ Dark further remarks: ‘[T]he Makah are told their modernity “proves” they are no longer “authentically” Makah.’ He takes the stance that ‘the Makah have a right to perpetuate their culture, adapting it to meet new needs. The Makah should not have to choose between putting their culture under glass, or abandoning it entirely in order to participate in American society and the world economy.’⁵⁹ But any contemporary culture is forged or manufactured to the extent that actors play with a reservoir of available sets of cultural repertoires, deriving meaning from the selected elements. To achieve this end, they can select 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 genuine, original, pure, uncorrupted, pristine, untouched, real,

true (Handler 1986:2). Such a mistaken perception sees authenticity as fixed essence, persistent over time.

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. This '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). Makah whalers regard some traditions worth pursuing or revitalizing as part of an articulated *bricolage* that is important in identity formation. Doshi argues that 'the Makah framed their whale hunt as an integral part of their culture – implying, then, that tribal culture is something static that must be recovered and restored for the psychic health of the community' (2002:95). To some extent, there is indeed an element of essentializing the cultural aspect by the Makah. However, she misses the point that it is an *element* of their culture that the Makah wish to articulate in their identity politics. It is a 'strategic essentialism' (Gaard 2001:17) in the political struggle for self-determination in a postcolonial context. Moreover, the Makah have always adapted and accommodated their culture to economic and political change. For instance, after contact with Europeans, the Makah traded their whale and seal products with them and incorporated new materials such as metal in their harpoons (Dougherty 2001). They even provided the oil to lubricate the machinery in industrializing west coast America. More to the point is Greta Gaard's criticism that 'the whale hunting practices of a certain elite group of men have been conflated with the practices and substituted for the identity of an entire culture' (Gaard 2001:17). Indeed, archeological evidence would seem to indicate that whaling was the preserve of 'big men' seeking prestige behavior.⁶⁰ But appropriation and articulation of this particular aspect of Makah history and culture would seem to have provided the tribe with a charter for cultural resurrection or even cultural survival.

Conclusions

Whale hunting traditions are obviously contentious. With such pursuits having come under increasing scrutiny from environmentalists and with the media exposure their campaigns received, public resistance to whale hunting has been on the rise since the 1970s. In this article, I have presented the wish of the Makah to resume their traditional whale hunt and the opposition they have met with. Leaving aside the legal aspects and the ethical and moral issues implied,⁶¹ what makes this case interesting is the way 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. In their eco-political discourse, the whaling opponents berated the hunt as an inauthentic performance because they deemed some aspects irreconcilable with tradition. Their perception betrays a particular view of tradition that would seem to stand in opposition to modernity. However, any tradition entails mixing and matching, forgetting and remembering, adaptation and rejection, sustaining and transforming, continuity and change. It is 'not a wholesale return to past ways, but a practical selection and critical reweaving of roots' (Clifford 2004) that involves specific articulations.

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 essentializing 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 and slaves. 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 always complex, multiple, fluid and in flux (Munn 2000:352). 'Authenticity' in this regard is a particular cultural construct of the modern Western world (Handler 1986). There is, however, another view of 'authenticity'

or 'being authentic' 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 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. What does matter is that the Makah feel they live their perception of being 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 produced 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 was authentic enough. By transgressing a taboo of mainstream Western society, the Makah showed the world without that they are 'different'. In doing so, they found their 'true selves' and reinvented themselves as Makah.

Acknowledgment

I am grateful to Jojada Verrips and the editors of *Etnofoor* for their comments on earlier versions of this article.

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Notes

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