

Culture, Conflict and Crises in the Icelandic Fisheries

ACTA UNIVERSITATIS UPSALIENSIS
Uppsala Studies in Cultural Anthropology no 48

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Culture, Conflict and Crises in the Icelandic Fisheries

An Anthropological Study of People, Policy and
Marine Resources in the North Atlantic Arctic



UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

Dissertation presented at Uppsala University to be publicly examined in Geijersalen, Engelska parken, Thunbergsv. 3H, Uppsala, Friday, April 8, 2011 at 13:00 for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The examination will be conducted in English.

Abstract

Einarsson, N. 2011. Culture, Conflict and Crises in the Icelandic Fisheries. An Anthropological Study of People, Policy and Marine Resources in the North Atlantic Arctic. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. *Uppsala Studies in Cultural Anthropology* 48. 152 pp. Uppsala. ISBN 978-91-554-8014-1.

This thesis is offered as a contribution to studies of social and cultural change in the Icelandic fisheries and fishing communities. Such changes may be seen as a result of the interplay of internal dynamics with both national and global forces and processes, not least with regard to the impacts of fisheries governance. These changes occur also in an international context of new environmental ideologies and perceptions of marine mammals, with consequences for social dynamics of local resource-use. Here it is argued that the conflicts over the harvesting or conservation of cetaceans can productively be understood from a cultural perspective. The thesis discusses the elevation of whales as symbols of particular value, and the metaphorical and cognitive aspects of, in particular, anthropomorphism, the projection of human motives and values onto animal behaviour, as a significant and effective part of conservation rhetoric and ideology.

Specifically, the thesis deals with issues concerning whaling and whale watching along with issues and debates concerning these alternative forms of exploiting marine mammals. It also discusses central questions regarding fisheries governance and rights to fishing with reference to social and economic viability in Icelandic fishing communities. The unifying themes of this thesis are: how marine-mammal issues and controversies and social impacts of fisheries governance form part of globalization processes; how environmental and economic paradigms influence change, particularly in terms of marine-mammal conservation campaigns and market liberalist resource policy; and how these external ideological forces call for responses at local and national levels. The adaptive actions of the human agents and communities involved are described as creative, cumulative and complex. The thesis also highlights the central transformative role of the new regime of private property rights introduced into Icelandic fisheries governance in the 1980s.

Keywords: environmental perceptions, fisheries governance, fishing culture, common property resources, economic crisis, human and animal rights, Iceland, marine-mammal conservation, privatization, whale watching

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ISSN 0348-5099

ISBN 978-91-554-8014-1

urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-146520 (<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-146520>)

Front cover illustration by Unnur Stella Nielsdóttir.

To Oddný Stella

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Preface

I began my anthropological voyage at the University of Iceland under the guiding light of Professors Gísli Pálsson, Haraldur Ólafsson, and a number of other outstanding teachers and scholars. At that time, in the 1980s, the anthropology department was small, and anthropology students needed to supplement their studies with courses in other social science disciplines such as sociology and political science. In retrospect I was very grateful for this as, in the years following, I found that this broad interdisciplinary background had provided me with a very useful foundation for my further studies and research.

My graduate studies were undertaken in Uppsala where the University's Department of Cultural Anthropology was situated at Trädgårdsgatan 18, not far from the river Fyris. When I first arrived I immediately felt welcomed by the staff and students and was invited and encouraged to participate in the department's various academic and social activities. The staff was a colourful collection of people who had ethnographic expertise in various parts and places of the globe, and some in more than one, and they were all eager and happy to share their experiences and ideas with a young and still wet-behind-the-ears colleague. The geographic focus was very much on African cultures, and the theoretical paradigm leaned towards symbolic cultural analysis and symbolic structuralism, although some mutinous researchers navigated differently. The department was skippered by the energetic and charming Professor and Africanist, Anita Jacobson-Widding. The crew under her charge was impressive, both as scholars and as individuals, and it was on this watch that I acquired some skills in the craft and art of anthropology. For this most fortunate apprenticeship I remain ever grateful. Looking back on those times, it is also heartbreaking to think of how many of my friends, companions and fellow students at the Department died at an early age. I treasure my memories of them.

During my studies in Uppsala I was allowed to travel for a year's academic *bildungsreise* in 1992-1993 to the University of Oxford Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology (ISCA) to study, but also to do field research. My wife and three children accompanied me. In England I

gained considerable experience and insight on issues such as animal rights, environmental matters, and, especially, the concerns of marine-mammal conservation groups, their activities and ideologies. I attended various meetings and events, and interviewed a wide and diverse range of people, engaged in everything from whale biology to campaigns for the abolition of angling and promotion of the rights of fish. A cetologist shared with me the story of how he abruptly lost his romantic view of whales when he got firmly stuck in a tonne of poo while scuba diving with a whale. A young woman from London, who wished to protect fish from the harmful ways of sport fishers, told me how, in her view, commercial fishing was not morally different from the Holocaust and its atrocities. The field experience during my stay in Oxford was an eye opener and cultural epiphany, which changed the way I conceptualized marine-mammal controversies, and indeed the way I think about fish. Some of this is reflected in the chapters of this thesis. I am grateful to all the people with whom I discussed these issues.

In Oxford I was supervised by Dr Robert H. Barnes, an expert on Indonesian whaling traditions. At the Institute I befriended a number of people, but must especially mention the remarkable human being Dr Darrell Addison Posey, who sadly died much too young, and Dr Mukulika Banerjee, who is very much alive and whom I thank for good company, delightful wit and friendship.

During my professional career working with contemporary Circumpolar issues of peoples and societies I have been fortunate to work with a large group of individuals from all walks of life and nooks of the region, including indigenous and other inhabitants of the North, government officials and diplomats, and researchers from most disciplines. However, I feel compelled to mention in particular my co-chair for the Arctic Human Development Report Steering Committee, Professor Oran R. Young, with whom I piloted that major international project through reefs of scientific, cultural, and political complexity.

Regarding the coastal communities I have worked in I am indebted to the many fishermen and other inhabitants I have interviewed and associated with during field research on issues such as whaling, whale conservation, whale watching, community survival, animal rights, human rights, policy, politics and people.

I have received support for my research from a number of sources which I much value. These are: Stiftelsen Smålands Museum's Gösta och Märta Moberg Fund, the Swedish Institute International Scholarships, the University of Uppsala Knut och Alice Wallenberg Fund, University of Uppsala Department of Cultural Anthropology Doctoral Candidate

Grants, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences Hierta Retzius Fund, the Swedish Research Council Man and the Biosphere Committee, the Nordic Environmental Research Programme, the Nordic Committee for Social Science Research, the Joint Committee of the Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities, the European Science Foundation BOREAS Programme, the US National Science Foundation NORSAGA and SYNICE Projects, the Icelandic Research Council, the Icelandic Ministry for the Environment, and the International Polar Year CAVIAR Project.

There is a long list of people who have provided me with various forms of support, encouragement, criticism, advice or inspiration. These include (listed here without their academic titles): Carl von Rosen; Rasmus Ole Rasmussen; Mark Nuttall; Andrew Gray; Milton M.R. Freeman; Kay Milton; Larissa Riabova; and many, many, more.

I am especially indebted to my colleagues and co-workers at the Stefansson Arctic Institute in Akureyri for intellectual company and understanding beyond my deserving. Thanks to them I have been able to remain reasonably sane and sound in my professional capacity. Here my colleague Dr Jón Haukur Ingimundarson deserves special recognition. Takk fyrir allt gamli. Dr Astrid E.J Ogilvie, another long-standing colleague and friend of the best sort also deserves my gratitude for everything. For his guidance and patience as my supervisor Professor Hugh Beach receives my most sincere thanks. His steadfastness and determination are a tribute to his fine character.

Finally I wish to thank my beloved wife, Oddný Stella, for being there for me in weather both fair and foul. She and our children Egill, Snorri, Hrefna and Unnur are the lights of my life.

Akureyri, February 2011

List of Papers

This thesis is based on the following papers, which are referred to in the text as Chapters.

Chapter One

Einarsson, N. (1990) Of Seals and Souls. Changes in the Position of Seals in the World View of Icelandic Small-Scale Fishermen. *Maritime Anthropological Studies*, 3(2):35-48

Chapter Two

Einarsson, N. (1993) All Animals are Equal but Some are Cetaceans. Conservation and Culture Conflict. In Kay Milton (ed.) *Environmentalism: The View From Anthropology*. London: Routledge:73-74

Chapter Three

Einarsson, N. (1993) Environmental Arguments and the Survival of Small-Scale Fishing in Iceland. In Gudrun Dahl (ed.) *Green Arguments and Local Subsistence*. Stockholm: Stockholm Studies in Social Anthropology, Stockholm University:117-128

Chapter Four

Einarsson, N. (1996) A Sea of Images: Fishers, Whalers, and Environmentalists. In Gísli Pálsson and E. Paul Durrenberger (eds.) *Images of Contemporary Iceland: Everyday Lives and Global Contexts*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press:45-59

Chapter Five

Einarsson, N. (2009) From Good to Eat to Good to Watch: Whale Watching, Adaptation and Change in Icelandic Fishing Communities. *Polar Research* 28(1):129-138

Chapter Six

Einarsson, N. Accepted for publication. Fisheries Governance and Social Discourse in Post-Crisis Iceland: Responses to the UN Human Rights

Committee's Views in Case 1306/2004. *The Yearbook of Polar Law* (Volume 3).

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Introduction

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This thesis is the product of two decades of research and may be described broadly as a contribution to Arctic environmental anthropology, more specifically, to studies of social and cultural change in Icelandic fishing and fishing communities. Such transitional changes may be seen as a result of the interplay of internal dynamics with both national and global forces and processes, not least with regard to the impacts of fisheries regulations, but also in an international context in terms of changing environmental ideologies and perceptions of marine mammals. This thesis also deals with wider concerns including the general social and environmental impacts of fisheries management, as well as issues concerning whale watching, whaling, and the conflicts and controversies surrounding these two alternative forms of exploiting marine mammals. This work also discusses central questions regarding resource use and rights to fishing with reference to community viability and resilience in Icelandic fishing communities.

The unifying themes of this thesis are: how marine-mammal issues and controversies and social impacts of fisheries governance form part of globalization processes: how environmental and economic ideologies or paradigms change, specifically in terms of marine-mammal conservation campaigns and neoliberal resource economics agendas; and how these outside forces call for social adaptations and responses at local and national levels. The adaptive actions of the human agents and communities involved are creative, cumulative and complex and are best studied from a diachronic perspective. The work presented here thus enjoys the benefit of considerable hindsight.

The thesis takes the form of a composite dissertation with published papers. The underlying material informing the descriptions and analyses presented here comes from a variety of sources, ranging from ethnographic fieldwork with structured and less-structured interviews and par-

ticipatory methods in fishing communities and among cetacean conservation groups, to the systematic monitoring of media coverage and internet communication of the cyberspaced global village, on fishing, marine policy, whaling, whale watching and other relevant subjects of this study. The discipline of anthropology is blessed with relative open mindedness when it comes to the data and methods used in order to retrieve, make sense of, and explain complex phenomena of social and cultural systems. One of the strengths of anthropology as a discipline is indeed the flexibility it allows in the gathering and use of information in order to produce contextualized knowledge useful in illuminating meaningful relationships between processes and forces that shape people's daily lives and the path society takes.

The complex whole which makes up people's lived reality has the disconcerting habit of tending to escape the shallow net of mono-disciplinary and reductionist paradigms. This also becomes critical and obvious when exposed to issues concerning humans and resource governance where theoretical models based on best assumed armchair experience have proved to be of limited policy value and become significantly problematic for community viability, human rights and sustainable human development. The papers that form this thesis all have in common the primary focus of linking and clarifying global and local issues in the pursuit of seeking to understand the complex couplings between people's everyday realities and the policies and processes that they are impacted by and that they have little ability to influence. However, this does not imply that human groups such as those in remote Arctic coastal communities are passive objects, as is often implied in natural science research models and methodologies. This is an aspect of an orientalist neo-colonial and patronizing ideological perspective that is not helpful for a holistic understanding of human-environmental relations. This contribution, on the other hand, involves elucidating the creative, frequently highly constructive, local responses, mediated by culture and personal worldviews that also inform and shape social and cultural adaptation to "stressors" with distant origins.

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During a discussion of the value, uniqueness and status of anthropology as a form and activity of knowledge production a friend who is a political scientist of international repute once said to me (shaking his head in disbelief): "Well Niels, anthropologists are people who spend *years* in *vil-*

lages”, as if this was in some way not a normal thing to do for any social scientist with the slightest sense of self-worth or good use of time. There is also still some stigma attached to social science finding it worthy, even necessary, for its practitioners to spend a long time learning about the lives of small groups of people and to attempt to see life through the eyes of the same people in order to share their experiences and thereby gain an understanding of how they function and how the social world gains meaning in everyday local life.

However, the ability to see things from “the native’s point of view” remains very much the linchpin of the anthropological project, and rather than being defensive or timid about this quite unique attribute of the discipline it should be extolled and explained. Anthropologists customarily start out from small places but in seeking to understand global cultural diversity and local predicaments they also strive to mesh their local research experience with larger issues involving global institutions, processes and systems in particular in terms of wider contexts such as political economies and global environmental change (Eriksen 2001). Clifford Geertz once remarked that: “Anthropologists don’t study villages; they study in villages.” (quoted by Amit and Mitchell in Hannerz 2010:vii).

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Biophysical definitions of the Arctic mostly embrace Iceland (see Nuttall 2005: 117), or at least northern parts of the island, as belonging to the region north of the southern line of permafrost and in terms of the 10 degrees Celsius July isotherm. More pertinent to an anthropological classification and discussion are criteria related to subsistence, culture and human ecology. Parts of the Icelandic population live in towns and cities and are relatively little engaged in subsistence activities such as fishing and farming. In this regard, the capital Reykjavík is in many ways similar to other North European small cities. However, small and remote Icelandic coastal communities do share such common predicaments with many other Arctic settlements such as resource dependence on living marine resources, vulnerability due to pollution risks, fluctuations in resource availability, climate sensitivity not least that relating to sea ice, exposure to inappropriate governance systems and loss of resource rights, pro-harvesting attitudes towards marine mammals, political marginalization, outmigration of young people and other threats to community viability and survival (AHDR 2004, Freeman 2000). Iceland, however, does not

share other arctic nations' ethnopolitical experience of majority relationships with an oppressed indigenous ethnic minority.

Iceland is an island of 103.000 square kilometers situated in the northern North Atlantic, to the east and roughly above the southern tip of Greenland. Further to the east lies Norway. The northern coast of Iceland lies just below the Arctic Circle that cuts through the small island of Grímsey which is the northernmost inhabited place in Iceland, a fishing settlement of nearly 90 people. Most of Iceland is uninhabitable and barren with a landscape covered by extensive areas of lava flows, sandy deserts, glacial outwash plains, highland regions with ice caps and mountain glaciers, and zones of active volcanism. Glaciers currently cover about 10.7 percent of the total area of Iceland, and are shrinking in size in response to a prolonged period of climate warming (Ogilvie 2005, 2010; Richard S. Williams, Jr.; and Oddur Sigurðsson, pers. commun., 2010). However, many productive farmsteads are located along river valleys, and on the coasts one sees villages scattered in locations that are favourable in terms of inshore fishing grounds and natural harbours. Year-round precipitation sustains a plentiful supply of unpolluted ground and surface water. Glacial rivers, where dammed with contended hydropower installations, generate vast amounts of electrical power for Icelanders and energy-intensive industries, such as aluminum-production plants (Karlisdóttir 2010, Ögmundardóttir 2011). As a result of rural exodus during the past century, and especially the more recent decades, half of the population (total number of Icelanders being 318.000 in December 2010) now lives in the capital Reykjavík and the surrounding towns.

In geological terms Iceland is quite young and it is also one of the world's most active volcanic regions. The islanders put the geological properties of their land to practical use and 90 percent of all housing in Iceland is heated with geothermal district heating. In spite of its northern location the changeable climate is relatively mild, due to the warming effect of the Gulf Stream, but the climate is also influenced by cold currents and sea ice from the Arctic Ocean (Ogilvie, 2005). According to the *Arctic Climate Impact Assessment* Iceland is expected to feel the regional impacts of the warming Arctic, resulting in vanishing glaciers, longer growing seasons for crops and vegetation in general and, perhaps most importantly for modern day Icelanders, increased uncertainty concerning the movements and locations of fish stock (ACIA 2005). Although higher sea temperatures lead to increased biological productivity and higher biomass, some fish stocks such as capelin and herring may well choose to move further north and away from traditional fishing grounds. In the case of herring, rapid environmental changes in the marine ecosystem leading

to the loss of the herring's food supply, combined with over fishing, resulted in serious repercussions for the economy of many Icelandic fishing communities in the late sixties when the fisheries collapsed. A well documented case is the village of Siglufjörður in north Iceland which was once called the "Herring Capital of the World" (Hamilton et al. 2004). However, a general attitude in Iceland is to see the prospects of higher temperatures and milder climate on the island as an opportunity rather than a threat (Brown 2009).

Icelanders are descendants from Norse settlers who came to the island in the 9th and 10th centuries, mostly from western Norway. However, results from research in anthropological genetics also show that even though most, but not all, men were of Norse origins (80.5 %) the majority of female settlers (62.5 %) had Gaelic roots in the Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands, Scotland and Ireland (Helgason 2004:55). Icelanders speak Icelandic which, like other Norse-Scandinavian languages, belongs to the Nordic group of Germanic languages. In the last three decades the population has become increasingly culturally diverse through immigration and this has been seen not least in the many fishing villages where immigrants have gradually provided an essential labour force in the fish processing industry (Skaptadóttir 2007).

Fishing has been the mainstay of the Icelandic national economy from the early twentieth century and continues to provide half of the export value in terms of products. Two thirds of the fish products are sold to the European Union (EU) (see Bjarnason 2010:203). After the short-lived boom of the financial sector in the 2000s and subsequent collapse in 2008, fishing has regained its role as the main economic activity of the nation, together with industrial aluminum smelters and tourism. Compared to its neighbours in Western Europe and the EU in general, of which Iceland is not a member, although with rights and responsibilities through the European Economic Area (EEA), the Icelandic economy is fundamentally different in that in Iceland fishing contributes with 6 % of the GDP, down from 10-12 % in the last decade, but in the EU on average it only provides 0.25 % or a diminutive part of the total economy. Iceland ranks among the 12 leading fishing nations in the world with a total catch of over a million tons of fish (Bjarnason 2010: 203-204). Iceland was at or on the top of the United Nations Human Development Index until 2008 but has now fallen down to the 17th seat on the list as reported in the 2010 UN Human Development Report.

In Icelandic waters climate change is affecting fish stocks in a dramatic way with new fish species becoming more prominent in Iceland fishing banks. This applies especially to north Atlantic mackerel (*Scomber scom-*

brus) which is seen as an aggressive predator consuming commercially important fish such as capelin but is also itself commercially valuable. A perceived negative aspect, however, is that the influx of mackerel is also causing unresolved international disputes on quota setting between Iceland and the European Union. There are strong nationalist undertones in the Icelandic position towards the mackerel controversy, clearly visible in the Icelandic Foreign Minister's October 2010 declaration of mackerel arriving into national waters as "Icelandic citizens". Less willing to grant passports to fish, an Icelandic parliamentarian in a radio interview referred to southwards moving mackerel as "sea rats" with reference to their predatory nature and potential harmful impact on the regional marine ecosystem. Calling a fish a rat may be mixing metaphors and this pejorative expression concerning mackerel by projecting rodent qualities on to it cannot be termed zoomorphism, unless we are dealing with sophisticated inter-species zoomorphism, which may make figurative sense. Clearly, climate change has unforeseen and unpredictable outcomes, mediated by social and cultural adaptation (Crate and Nuttall 2009) and the warming seas in the hard-won Icelandic Exclusive Economic Zone are potentially feeding an international conflict with the EU, with which Iceland is in membership negotiation, and may have vested long-term interests in joining (see Bjarnason 2010). This complex and multilevel aspect of climatic change, governance and governmentality is as yet unexplored by researchers, but there is an obvious opportunity for anthropologists and other social scientists to consider such issues.

Iceland is not new to international disputes regarding marine resources, with a history of three so-called Cod Wars (see Þór 1997) and the disputes over whaling in the 1980s, and again at the present time with the resumption of commercial whaling in 2009. However, the economic and social crisis which befell the nation in the autumn of 2008 has changed the social, cultural and economic landscape drastically. This change has bearing on cultural identity and the perception of how to relate to the outside world. The fisheries, and the fact that the nation bases its economic welfare to a great extent on income from selling fish products, has after 2008 increasingly moved into the spotlight of public and official political debate. This is critical for social issues in fisheries management but also for attitudes to marine mammals, and even for the ongoing political negotiations regarding Iceland joining the European Union. There the whaling issue, long of great symbolic content for Icelanders, both for nationalist sentiment and cultural identity, is increasingly and predictably becoming an obstacle and culturally-prepared red herring (see Brydon 1996, also Chapters 1-5 of this thesis). The central questions in

the resistance to EU membership revolve around the fisheries and agriculture, the fisheries carrying far more weight than agriculture in terms of the overall contribution to the GDP. In Iceland the fishing sector in general, and the present Left-Green Movement Minister of Fisheries, is strongly opposed to joining the EU. The fishing sector with its powerful political lobby is also pro-whaling, fully supporting and advocating the January 2009 controversial decision of the pre-collapse government to allow large-scale commercial whaling.

IV

This thesis consists of a compendium of six scholarly articles, in addition to this introduction and an epilogue. The papers have been published (except for the last one which has been accepted by an academic journal) over a span of nearly two decades. Apart from the contribution to social/cultural anthropology in general, geographically and thematically the collection of papers represented by this thesis may be seen more specifically as a contribution to Arctic and northern North Atlantic studies of coastal and resource-dependent societies and cultures. Finally, this thesis is a contribution to the growing body of anthropological studies with a focus on the lump of volcanic rock, together with the surrounding seas, in the northern North Atlantic that was, by a disappointed and disillusioned early visitor and Norwegian Viking, called Iceland.

The first paper, Chapter One of the thesis, bears the title *Of seals and souls: Changes in the position of seals in the world view of Icelandic small-scale fishermen*, published in what was then the journal *Maritime Anthropological Studies* (now *Maritime Studies*). The paper encompasses a description and explanation of changes taking place in the perception of Icelandic fishermen towards seals, an animal that they have a great deal to do with in their everyday lives out at sea on their boats and which occupies a significant position, not only in the ecosystem they share with fishers, but also in the economic and cultural history of coastal culture. The observations elucidated are based to a great degree on the author's experience as a participant in the fisheries from his early youth and also on a more systematic collection of ethnographic and other relevant information such as biological and historical accounts of seals and seal populations around Iceland and the North Atlantic. The goal of the research represented in this paper was to comprehend why, in a relatively short span of time, seals had become negatively associated, even to the extent of being referred to as pests or vermin. The explanation as presented in the paper is that such strong

feelings have their roots in the local realities of fishing, especially with regard to the fact that seals came to be seen as competing with fishers for scarce resources, but also that the marine mammals had assumed symbolic and metaphorical properties, also due to their liminal classificatory status, connected to their use as key symbols for Western animal rights and environmental causes and issues. In a sense seals became victims of their metaphorical and symbolic role. It was this blend of culture and practical reason (Sahlins 1976) that needed to be taken into account in order to clarify a change in attitudes that otherwise made little sense. This paper was an early exercise in the application of anthropological analysis of cultural elements of human and animal ecological relations.

The paper is also of interest because it provides one of the first anthropological accounts of international marine-mammal controversies, underlining the need to see such issues as ideological and worldview disputes or mismatches rather than mostly concerned with biological or economic factors, stock dynamics and sustainable yield. By this is meant the sometimes stigmatizing discourse, often involving derogatory name calling, with terms such as “savage brutes” and “alienated city dwellers” being used by the combatants in this “discussion”. It was such clashes between cultures and the varying fundamental perceptions of nature underlying the ferocity of the controversies that needed to be tackled with appropriate conceptual tools, both locally and at an international and global level. The theme of dynamic and creative local and global interactions, “externally induced yet indigenously orchestrated” (Sahlins 1985:viii) is a theme which runs through all the writings presented here.

The second paper or Chapter Two is also concerned with marine mammals, environmentalism and fishers but this time with whales and dolphins. The title is *All animals are equal but some are cetaceans: Conservation and culture conflict* and was published in 1993 in a volume of the British Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) edited by Kay Milton entitled *Environmentalism-The view for anthropology*. Kay Milton organized a conference in 1992 which resulted in the book. She, like many others, felt that the topic was receiving little attention from anthropologists, and the initiative therefore “represented a step into unknown territory” (Milton 1993:ix). The main concept for the meeting and the subsequent publication was that environmental issues in all their myriad forms could not be the sole prerogative of the natural sciences and that anthropology had a significant potential for contributions to widen and deepen perspectives on issues of humans and their environments. Today this is taken for granted but at that time the role of anthropology needed to be argued and promoted. Of course anthropology, with part of its agenda being a holis-

tic approach to human social existence, was no newcomer to the study of humans and their cultural ecology (see Dove and Carpenter 2008 for an extensive historical reader in environmental anthropology). However, with reference to the social movement called environmentalism, this relationship needed to be re-contextualized and redefined in terms of contemporary societies and issues.

The *All animals are equal* paper continues to probe the connection between the local and international spheres and the complex interconnections in between. A further emphasis of this paper is the whaling and whale-conservation controversy that had gained so much attention in Western media, but which was also of significant importance to local fishing communities in Iceland that saw the new ideologies of whale conservation as a threat to their livelihoods and cultural viability. The paper argues that the conflicts over the harvesting or conservation of whales should be seen through a cultural lens and most productively could be understood in such a perspective. It deals with the elevation of whales as symbols of particular value to environmental and animal rights or welfare groups and the metaphorical and cognitive aspects of, in particular, anthropomorphism, the projection of human motives and values onto animal behaviour, as significant and effective aspects of conservation rhetoric and ideology. The argument draws significantly on metaphor theory, in particular the version James Fernandez instilled in those who attended his course at the Department of Cultural Anthropology in Uppsala (Fernandez 1991) with such fluent expertise. I found it fascinating how metaphors could be used in the process of convincing people, as powerful tools of performance and persuasion. The paper also seeks to convey the cultural and economic significance of whaling for Icelandic minke whalers who had been forced to give up whaling in 1985 as a result of an international moratorium. The conclusion is that the debate on whaling could gain from some more consideration of the social dynamics of local-resource use, a criticism leveled at the more radical elements of the environmental movement which appears not to pay enough consideration to the consequences of their campaigns to protect certain animal species of high symbolic value.

In Chapter Three the investigation of the predicament of small-scale Icelandic fishing and its national and global context of environmental discourse continues. Here the focus is on the rhetoric of sustainability and small-scale, energy efficient, environmentally-benign harvesting, used strategically in favour of small versus large-scale fishing in the competition over limited catch quotas and changing fisheries policies, oriented towards “the almost universal idolatry of gigantism” (Schumacher 1973:66 quoted

in Netting 1993:332). The paper was a contribution to a book entitled *Green Arguments and Local Subsistence*, edited by Gudrun Dahl at the University of Stockholm. The title of the book refers to a topical issue at the time, and an important one for the understanding of the use of environmental images and ways of arguing for the viability of otherwise disadvantaged and economically peripheral small-scale subsistence societies. The contributions showed the creativity and local mobilization of environmentalism as a tool for empowerment for those otherwise powerless and vulnerable, indeed as an element of the weapons of the weak and politically and socially exposed (Scott 1985).

The paper describes the reception and local small-scale fisher's resistance to the then new Icelandic Fisheries Management Act of 1990 based on Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQs), a radical market-based policy leading to privatization of fishing rights in a formerly common-property regime. The small-scale fishers I was working with were in agreement that the giving of private fishing rights and enclosing commons was an alien and unnatural social arrangement, to be protested at all cost. Later, in 2007, their voices were supported by the views of the United Nations Human Rights Committee which found the Icelandic Fisheries Act and the gifting of property rights to a selected group to be discriminatory and in violation to universal human rights. In this regard it may be noted that the last paper of the thesis deals with the UN Human Rights Committee's ruling and its consequences for Icelandic society and fishing governance. The issue of small-scale fishing and whaling as phenomena of pre-modernity in a world with growing anti-harvesting perceptions of marine mammals and the consequences the dilemma has for the meaningful communication, or lack thereof, for human groups occupying different experiential and cultural worlds, is also discussed.

The fourth chapter is entitled: *A sea of images: Fishers, whalers and environmentalists*. This took the form of a contribution to a conference held at the University of Iowa on the anthropology of Iceland, later to materialize in a book with the title *Images of Iceland: Everyday Lives and Global Contexts*, edited by Gísli Pálsson and E. Paul Durrenberger. The article situates small-scale commercial fishing off the coasts of Iceland within a wider discourse on the rights of nature and the realities of fishing, attempting to couple local and global processes and systems of thought and action. The question is posited in this paper as to whether the international moratorium on whaling could be leading to the perception in Icelandic fishing communities of whales as vermin and how to make sense of this unfortunate shift. A perception of the environment from the practitioner's point of view (referring to Tim Ingold's discussion of the "ideal type" practitio-

ner) is contrasted with the spectator's point of view, based on different experiences and ways of relating to the environment (Ingold 1992). However, this paper presents a viewpoint that differs somewhat from Ingold's position in that the reasoning that cultural constructions and perceptions of the environment are merely afterthoughts or epilogues to human action and appropriation of nature are questioned. It is argued in this paper that, in spite of the appealing conceptual and pragmatic values of this kind of logic, a constrictive enskilment approach, referring to the primary construction of a meaningful environment through engagement and human use, can hardly account for the vicissitudes of cultural expression and images found in the world's cultures. In the contemporary world of the global village ideas arrive from a variety of sources and are not necessarily, for the greater part of the human population, based on much direct contact or productive activity in nature. The paper points out the need to grasp the often fundamental differences in environmental perceptions. Anthropologists may be of use in mediation and interpretation in situations of harvesting and conservation conflicts.

The fifth chapter is also occupied with the impact of globalization, this time with an anthropological study on the introduction of whale-watching operations and enterprises in a northern Icelandic coastal community. In this paper the interplay between traditional local attitudes and the receptiveness and adaptation to an alternative and commercialized way of appropriating marine resources, namely whales, is considered. The whale watching operating out of Húsavík, a small town in northeastern Iceland, the capital of such activities in Europe, according to the local slogan, is in many ways a success story, contributing to the community's economy and supporting livelihoods. Yet, this achievement is by no means to be taken for granted in a community which has traditionally, as other Icelandic fishing communities, viewed whales as marine resources, of consumptive rather than of visual and experiential value.

In this chapter the question of how the new image of whales has provided a prelude to the new industry is discussed, as well as how this development, combined with externalities of the Icelandic fisheries management system, have resulted in a process of creative, yet forced, adaptation and alternative use of the marine environment and its animals. The paper argues that the role of certain local individuals as cultural mediators, able to deal effectively with conflicting cultural perceptions and seascape constructions, was crucial in the initial introduction and continued viability of whale viewing in the community, a lesson to be taken further, not least with regard to wider but often problematic questions of resilience, adaptability, and constructive transformability in northern communities.

To the five already published papers a concluding chapter on current issues in Icelandic fisheries has been added. This is particularly concerned with the events and developments which are closely related to the drastic financial and social collapse in Iceland in the autumn of 2008, and the resulting change of government with the introduction of seemingly radical changes in fisheries governance policy. This chapter deals with the social discourse on resource rights, fisheries policy and human rights in Iceland, especially in light of the 2007 United Nations Human Rights Committee view that the Icelandic fisheries management system is in violation of basic principles of human rights. The Committee's ruling is discussed, together with the impacts on, and implications for, Icelandic fisheries policy and the discourse on resource rights and social justice it has evoked in Iceland. In this context, the relationship between fisheries management and the privatization of a former common property resource is discussed, in particular in the light of the 2008 economic and social meltdown in Iceland, generally referred to in Icelandic as the *Hrun*, which could be translated as the collapse, crash or downfall (see Loftsdóttir 2010). In Iceland, the natives have started to refer to the recent history of the nation in term of pre-downfall or post-downfall, an indication of the gravity of the events that peaked in October 2008.

In the Epilogue to the thesis I return to the discussion of the local and global interplay between different environmental ideologies but with an emphasis on the role of the new regime of private property rights introduced into Icelandic fisheries governance in the 1980s. There I argue that the new management system, guided by ideologies of market liberalism, has had pervasive repercussions for local and national interests when property rights in catch shares became transferable and acquired monetary value as commoditized collateral, not only within the country but also on the globalized financial market.

V

No research is done entirely in a social or historical vacuum, and the writing of culture is no different. In his 1930s research on the cattle-rearing Nuer people of southern Sudan the great Oxford anthropologist Evans-Pritchard, in spite of an overall depiction of a society in an ahistorical social equilibrium, was also aware that in the field he was working in a context of colonial political relations (Dove and Carpenter 2008:10). Indeed, it would be remiss not to address briefly the Icelandic economic collapse of October 2008, if only as an overall social and cultural context

for this thesis, especially with regard to social issues and fisheries governance, which are of course closely related to the collapse, as explained and developed in the final chapter of the thesis.

The period during, and immediately following, the collapse was one of figurative political and public performances and persuasions, which included strong and frequent reference to the nation's solid history of fishing as not only an economic activity but also as a base for cultural identity. It was a most interesting time and place for an anthropologist interested in the play of tropes in culture (Fernandez 1986), political rhetoric (Paine 1981), and the social production or construction of identity and authenticity (van Ginkel 2007:89). The briny metaphors, in which stressed and confused politicians swam for their lives, when the perfect economic storm hit and threatened to destroy the vessel, crew and its unfortunate officers, are still, two years after the first wave hit, at large and in daily use by the public during the heavy-weather sailing in the wake of the crisis. Using similar figurative speech as political figures, clinging to maritime metaphors to explain the incomprehensible disaster facing a shipwrecked nation in a Mayday situation of financial trouble, the Icelandic public and media continue to reach for the relatively tangible authenticity of a fishing and seafaring heritage to make meaningful sense of abstract economic and moral problems that threaten to sink future security and well being. The crisis has focused the spotlight on the fisheries and its issues, more so than in a long time. The realization that future prosperity would not be based on stock broking and turning the island's economy into a gigantic hedge fund, but on the productive capacity and use of marine resources, sharpened the discourse on cultural identity construction, equitable appropriation and marine property rights in this fisheries-dependent society.

Perhaps anachronistic to the cultural outsider, but hopefully less so when the papers in this thesis have been digested, whales and whaling, along with (other) fishing, have figured prominently in the future prospects of Icelandic economic and cultural recovery. Whaling is as unpopular as ever in most western societies and political fora, and it is extremely difficult to find international markets for Leviathan meat. It is indeed tempting and titillating, but beyond the scope of this introduction, to dive for the economic logic and political ecology behind commercial whaling in contemporary Iceland.

Shortly after the collapse of the Icelandic economy, the University of Akureyri, at the northern end of the island, and its partners in research, held an open house for the public where guests were encouraged to express themselves in terms of the future of Icelandic society. Which options

and opportunities did the public wish to identify to extricate society and the economy out of the foul soup Icelanders had been dropped into or perhaps thrown themselves in? A banner was mounted on one of the corridors and visitors wrote their solutions to the problem on the banner, ranging from eating more porridge, saving money, learning from mistakes, thinking critically, to, and significantly in the centre of the banner, hunting whales. Hunting whales, as a way of getting out of the deep crisis the nation found itself in, may sound odd, but to a large part of the island's population it does not. The scribble in support of whaling on the banner thus echoed a wider discussion in society for the need to hunt and otherwise manage whales as part of fisheries policy and economic activities in order to secure more jobs and sustain livelihoods.

In Iceland the social discourse of crisis and conflict is likely to continue to focus on marine resources, and whose right it is to define, harvest and declare them as property. The ontologies of Western detachment will also continue to challenge local ontologies of engagement and realities of fishing and its "little communities" (Ingold 2000:216). Cross culturally, fishing is an occupation which invokes drama, danger and sometimes death, strong feelings and fundamental emotions, romantic sentiments and heroic accounts (van Ginkel 2007, Acheson 1981, Pálsson 2001). Whales and seals are also subject of intense emotions and attachment (Kalland 2009, Kalland et al. 2005), amplified by the persuasive play and performative nature of tropes in culture and cognition. The meeting and mixing of such strong narratives gives rise to dynamism of sound and fury, of deep cultural and symbolic signification.

Finally, anthropologists are known for their foreign anecdotes and amazing tales and when they gather at a hotel bar they may, as perceptively noted by anthropologist Per Brandström, "release a torrent of stories about bizarre and remarkable happenings and experiences in exotic settings, and each anthropologist will try and top the others' wildest stories" (Brandström 1990: 7:1). But the scholar continues and points out that "When the laughter dies away and the entertainer is transformed into the scientist, a sudden change of scene has taken place. The anecdotes and the wild stories are stowed away. Now order is the rule of the day; facts and theories will be presented."

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