

## KILLING GIANTS OF THE SEA: CONTENTIOUS HERITAGE AND THE POLITICS OF CULTURE

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For many, tradition refers to a tangible or intangible cultural heritage that needs to be cherished and supported. But there are also traditions that are heavily contested with strong pleas from outsiders to abandon them. In both cases, traditions are usually enmeshed in cultural politics. This article will focus on the time-honoured Sicilian tuna catching procedure known as *la mattanza* and on the customary tradition of the *grindadráp* in the Faroe Islands, a pilot whale drive that is said to constitute an inalienable part of the islanders' culture. This whale drive has met with international resistance, while the *mattanza* has not aroused comparable opposition. Yet, both are bloody events, involving the killing of considerable numbers of giant sea creatures at close range with gaffs and knives. What is puzzling is that the one tradition—which is a communal activity aimed at slaughtering a non-endangered species for home consumption—should meet with strong criticism, whereas the other—which is commercial and aimed at an endangered species—is hardly contested. In addition to describing and analysing both traditions, the aim of the present article is to arrive at more general conclusions about the controversies and cultural politics of traditions, especially in connection with issues of identity, authenticity and modernity.

### Introduction

'Tradition' often rings a bell of harmonious and repetitive continuity. The term derives from the Latin *traditio*: to hand over. It is commonly thought of as an inherited pattern of thought or action, a specific practice of long standing, that which is transmitted (passed down, handed on from generation to generation). Webster's Dictionary (1913 edition) defines it as: 'The unwritten or oral delivery of information, opinions, doctrines, practices, rites, and customs, from father to son [sic], or from ancestors to posterity; the transmission of any knowledge, opinions, or practice, from forefathers to descendants by oral communication, without written materials'.<sup>1</sup> Departing from such a definition, the pioneering generation of modern anthropologists often conflated tradition and culture.

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Traditions were (and are) often subject to culture and identity politics aimed at cherishing and supporting traditional phenomena especially when they were believed to be in danger of disappearing. Since the late 18th century, students of folklore, in particular, have been ardent supporters of maintaining and promoting 'folk' heritage that they believed to be authentic and a powerful source of quintessentially defining the nation. Anthropologists also attributed special significance and value to phenomena they designated as traditional: 'tradition implied appropriate age, and to call something traditional was to assert its cultural authenticity, often set against modernity. Its authenticity gave it authority; it became especially worthy of attention' (Barfield 1997:470).

More recently, however, there has been a tendency among scholars to debunk the 'traditional-ness' of traditions, to expose them as 'myths', 'inventions', 'constructions', 'fabrications' or 'imaginings' (cf., e.g., Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Anderson 1983; for a critique, see Briggs 1996). Sometimes this happened in a rather pejorative manner. Traditions came to be linked with mystification and manipulation, and this in turn thoroughly undermined any claim to authenticity. Despite this scholarly myth hunting, we can observe a 'heritage boom' that is part of 'an international preoccupation with reclaiming, preserving and reconstituting the past' and a national and local 'quest for defining identity' (Nadel-Klein 2003: 173). Heritage productions would appear to be 'the quintessence of the particular and the local, a statement of uniqueness. In this sense, heritage selectively appropriates the past for the present, providing a legacy of tradition, invented or otherwise' (*ibid.*: 173–174).

But some traditions are heavily contested with strong pleas from outsiders to abandon them. Whereas insiders believe that customary practices lend the right to continuity, critics from without may say that they are 'outmoded' and should be discontinued. Some traditions are obviously more controversial and contentious than others. So there is nothing innately 'good' or 'bad' about traditions. They are usually enmeshed in and mobilised for cultural politics: 'any community's ability to persist, to innovate, to change on its own terms, is relative to structural power'. This is a matter 'of politics, not of essence, and thus subject to contestation and change' (Clifford 2004). Though 'roots' may be located in the past, they often continue to produce powerful cultural forms that are important in the arena of identity politics (Briggs 1996: 440). Not all traditions are recent 'inventions' in the sense that cultural actors have produced and staged performances that refer to a make-belief past. There are those that *do* have a long history and are repetitive, although this does not mean that they are handed on completely

unchanged. As Hobsbawm himself has noted: ‘the strength and adaptability of genuine traditions is not to be confused with the “invention of tradition”. Where the old ways are alive, traditions need be neither revived nor invented’ (1983: 7).

In this article, I will present two extended cases concerning living maritime traditions or ‘organic customs’ from Europe’s northern and southern fringes. More specifically, I will first deal with the time-honoured tuna fishery of Favignana (one of the Egadi Islands off Sicily’s west coast) and especially its concluding ritual of the *mattanza*; the killing of the tuna. Secondly, I will go into the tradition of the *grindadráp* in the Faroe Islands, a pilot whale drive that is said to constitute an inalienable part of the islanders’ culture. The Faroese whale drive has met with considerable resistance. In contemporary Western society, many people regard traditional whale kills as an act of ‘barbarism’ that are not traditional but anachronistic. Here, tradition is opposed to modernity (Clifford 2004). In contrast, Sicily’s traditional tuna fishery has not met with strong opposition, although there are several family resemblances between the *grindadráp* and the *mattanza*. Both involve the use of traditional implements, including gaffs and knives; both are rather bloody occasions in which scores of giant sea creatures are killed; both require the close cooperation of men who kill animals at close range and in public view, and both have a ritual character. But whereas the heavily contested *grindadráp* is aimed at the taking of non-endangered pilot whales for home consumption, the *mattanza* is commercial and the prey species, bluefin tuna, is under serious threat of depletion. Against this background, it is all the more puzzling why the one tradition should meet with such strong resistance, while the other does not.

Ever since I became acquainted with anthropological literature on the Faroese *grindadráp* in the mid-1980s, I have been interested in the debate about cultural versus animal rights that went along with the protests against the pilot whale drive that began at about the same time. The tone of the Faroese whalers’ opponents was unusually sharp and later I occasionally visited animal rights and environmentalist organisations’ websites to keep up-to-date with what was going on. When I recently read Theresa Maggio’s book *Mattanza* (Maggio 2000), I was struck by some structural similarities between the *grindadráp* and the *mattanza* and I wondered whether the Sicilian tuna fishermen face as much critique as the Faroese pilot whalers do. To my surprise, they do not. With my curiosity aroused, I decided to conduct more systematic research into the literature on both rituals and the contents of several relevant websites. The present article is the result of these inquiries. Its aim is to arrive at more general conclusions about the

cultural politics of these types of maritime heritage, the interlinked controversies and the ways in which these are framed in eco-political discourses, in particular as they revolve around notions of identity, authenticity and modernity.

### ***La Mattanza: Sicily's Tuna Killing Ritual***

Eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna (*thunnus thynnus* L.) are a migratory species, running in schools from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean to spawn. They follow the same migration routes and can live for more than thirty years, reach over three meters in length and weigh as much as 650 kilos or more. They are top predators that feed on fish, squids and crustaceans. Bluefin tuna are commercially highly valuable. Most tuna caught in the Mediterranean are packed in ice and flown directly to Tokyo's Tsukiji fish market, where individual giants may fetch extremely high prices of over US\$ 100,000. Consumer appetite for sushi and sashimi seems insatiable. Since the demand for bluefin tuna has increased in world markets, they have been hunted relentlessly with modern fishing techniques such as long lines and purse seines. Bluefin tuna are consequently diminishing in numbers and size and have been considered overexploited since 1982. Recent catches continue to exceed historical levels. The scarcity of bluefin tuna has prompted legal restrictions. The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) regulates the fishery (Block *et al.* 2001).<sup>2</sup> It has developed a management regime for the eastern bluefin tuna stock based on a Total Allowable Catch, with quotas being allocated on a state-by-state basis. This makes bluefin tuna the only fish resource in the Mediterranean managed through quota regulations. However, the efficiency of the bluefin tuna management regime is limited, mainly due to the lack of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) in the Mediterranean and the related problems of enforcing legislation in international waters. Today, tuna stocks are most threatened in the Mediterranean, where about twenty per cent of the world's dwindling supply is caught.

Throughout the Mediterranean, bluefin tuna have been caught for millennia using traps consisting of kilometres of netted walls designed and positioned to deflect tuna migrating along the coast (Pitcher 2001: 603–604; Ravier and Fromentin 2001). From an early stage onward, salted tuna became an important export product. Often, saltpans and tuna traps were constructed in each other's vicinity. Once a common tuna fishing method in Spain, France, Corsica, Malta, Italy, Sardinia, Sicily, Croatia, Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Libya, it has gradually almost completely disappeared

from the Mediterranean coasts due to dwindling catches. In Sicily alone, some eighty tuna traps were still operated in the early 20th century. One of the very few places where this passive method with fixed gear has so far survived is the tiny **island of Favignana** (3,200 inhabitants, 20 square kilometres) off Sicily's western point.<sup>3</sup> It is one of the three **Egadi Islands** and today it is a popular tourist resort, not least for its specific ways of tuna fishing which have been described, photographed and filmed numerous times. **Favignana** is often referred to as **La Farfalla** on account of its shape that has been likened to a butterfly a-flutter.

For hundreds of years, the local fishermen have been using dense stationary net constructions (*tonnara*) to capture bluefin tuna. **Arabs founded Favignana's tonnara in 807 A.D.**, though they may have found a trap already in place. Sicily's first King claimed the *tonnara* for the crown in the 11th century but often leased it to generate income (Maggio 2000: 57). 'Medieval tonnaro worked for a wage specified in a seasonal contract, as they do today, and took a percentage of the tuna and all the smaller fish inadvertently trapped' (ibid.:58). In Medieval times, the tuna traps of **Favignana** and elsewhere on Sicily contributed considerably to economic life (Collet 1987: 47). Catch records go back to as early as 1599. In the seventeenth century, **Favignana's tonnara** had a reputation of being the 'queen' of the Mediterranean tuna traps. Between 1634–1813 and 1878–1960, the median annual catch was 1,958 tuna, showing highs in the 1880 to 1930 period, when median catches per year amounted to 5,200 tuna (Ravier and Fromentin 2001: 1304, 1308).

Vincenzo Florio, who had made his wealth with the production and export of Marsala wine and in the world of finance, leased several *tonnara* as of 1827, including **Favignana's**. '**Florio** streamlined manoeuvres, redesigned the traps, and sometimes changed their placement at sea' (Maggio 2000: 60). His improvements led to growing catches. Nonetheless, Florio did not renew his lease in 1859, but in 1874, his son Ignazio Florio bought the **Egadi Islands**, including the *tonnara* of **Favignana**. Under his entrepreneurial guidance, the *tonnara* continued to flourish. Its record catch of 1878 was 10,159 tuna. Ignazio Florio established a large tuna cannery (like the netted walls called *tonnara*) on **Favignana**, providing work for the entire island community. He had a famous Sicilian architect design the building and a new wharf, the Camparia, as well. Tuna was bled, cooked and preserved in olive oil, canned and exported. When it was not tuna season, the cannery processed and packed sardines and other fish landed by Sicilian fishermen. Florio was an enlightened entrepreneur who established a nursery and a playground in his factory. The **Favignana** islanders loved their wealthy patron and raised a statue for him. The tuna fishery was the



mainstay of the local economy, and the money made with it would feed many fishermen's families for over half the year. But Ignazio's son, Vincenzo (named after his grandfather), had to sell the *tonnara* to their business partners, the Parodi family, in the late 1930s.

For a long period in the twentieth century, many locals—women included (they were involved in making and mending the nets)—continued to depend on work in the tuna factory, where the fish was preserved in olive oil. The fishermen worked for the *tonnara* factory, but due to diminishing catches, it was closed in 1981 and consequently many of the hundreds of workers became unemployed and the tuna killing tradition was endangered. The building still is testimony to the tuna fishery's important legacy. Despite the closure of the cannery, tuna fishing continued to be of considerable local importance. The Parodis managed the *tonnara* until 1985, when they leased it to Franco Castiglione, who owned the *tonnara* of Bonagía, for a nine-year period. The catch was henceforth transported to Castiglione's slaughterhouse in the nearby city of Tràpani to be counted, weighed and cut up. After this brief historical exposé, I will now turn to a description of the tuna drive proper.

The complex and ritual method of catching tuna fish follows—or rather used to follow—very precise rules, timings and strictly disciplined practices. Fishermen herd the tuna into a sophisticated trap system of nets (the *tonnara*) anchored parallel to the coast. The nets are gradually restricted in size and raised toward the surface. The *tonnara*'s two kilometres-long wings guide the tuna to the entrance of the trap. A series of six successive chambers with distinct names, each divided by a net gate, lead to the final seventh chamber, *la camera della morte*, 'the chamber of death'.<sup>4</sup> The concluding act of trapping the tuna is known as *la mattanza*.<sup>5</sup> The term *mattanza* (slaughter) comes from the Spanish word *matar* meaning 'to kill'.<sup>6</sup> Working towards the catharsis of *la mattanza* requires the team effort of scores of fishermen over a period of three months under the leadership of the *rais*, the head or chief fisherman.<sup>7</sup>

The *rais* is the undisputed leader of the whole operation. He coordinates and oversees the work of the gang (*ciurma*) of *tonnaroti* (the tuna fishers). He decides when, where and how to set and manage the tuna trap, and coordinates and oversees all subsequent activities. He is responsible for the outcome, and his position requires skill and expertise. In April, the *rais* directs the *ciurma* to deploy the *tonnara* in the waters approximately three kilometres from the western end of the island. The trap comprises kilometres of steel cable, more than four hundred iron anchors weighing from six-hundred to four-thousand pounds, more than 3,500 stone weights of forty

pounds each, and enormous nets of nylon or coconut fibre. Each boat has a skipper who directs a crew of eight. After construction of the *tonnara* is complete, the *rais* sets into the waters near the entrance of the trap, the *bocca di nassa*, a ten-foot wooden cross bearing pictures of the patron saints of Favignana, a bronze statue of Saint Peter, a plume of fresh palm fronds, blessed on Palm Thursday, and a bouquet of gladioli and white lilies. The *rais* prays for a good catch and the men respond: 'May God make it so'. At each stage of work, the *tonnaroti* sing a series of *scialome*, propitiatory and superstitious songs, passed down over so many generations that the meaning of many of the words they are singing has escaped them. After the trap has been set, the *tonnaroti* spend their days maintaining the nets, counting the tuna that have entered the net, and corralling them from one chamber to the next. They start work at seven in the morning when they gather outside the *Camparia*, the storehouse for the equipment. If the tuna do not appear, they plead to various Saints in prayer. There is a lot of anxiety as to whether the tuna will show up or not. Other uncertainties include inclement weather that may prevent setting the trap on schedule, unfavourable currents and passing ships that may damage the trap. When the *rais* decides the *tonnara* is full enough with tuna, he calls for a *mattanza*.

On the morning of the *mattanza*, the men of the *ciurma* surround the final chamber of the *tonnara* with their boats and close its gate. From his small boat called the *musciara*, the *rais* directs the work of the men in the other long flat-bottomed boats (*vascelli*). From these, the tuna will be gaffed. On the *rais*'s sign, the lifting of the tightly knitted floor net, *il coppo*, commences, bringing the tuna to the surface while the men sing in unison (cf. Maggio 2000: 29–31). The chants lend rhythm to the heaving of the nets, which is done with muscle-power. The *rais* sees to it that the net is raised evenly. On his command '*Spara a tunina!*' the tuna are hooked with gaffs (*crocchi*) and hauled into the boats by five teams of eight fishermen, accompanied by their shouting. One of the fishermen takes care of the killing of the fish by cutting two large arteries, whereupon the tuna die quickly. The whole procedure of lifting all the entrapped tuna aboard takes about an hour. Once the last tuna is caught, the *tonnaroti* praise the Lord. Because a *mattanza* is the catch of an entire school of fish, dozens of tuna may be captured. It is a spectacular scene with struggling men and fish and erupting seawater turning red from the tuna's blood. Over the remainder of the season, the *mattanza* is repeated, as many times as the *rais* deems necessary, depending on the quantity of tuna entering the trap. The season ends in the course of June, if possible by the feast day of St. Anthony on 13 June. Though the ritual takes place in May and June, preparations on the

fishing nets have been made for months ahead, while once the trap is in place, it requires much checking for holes that have to be repaired and entangled fish that must be removed lest they rot. Following the season there is still much work in deconstructing, repairing and storing the nets, floats and anchors.

The mode of production has a hierarchical social structure. The position of the *rais* is so coveted and prestigious that it used to be passed down from father to son through an extended apprenticeship based on obedience and experience. At one time he was also the head of the village. On the tombstones of deceased *raises*, their honourable title holds pride of place and many islanders still remember the names of *raises* who died decades ago. At local level, they were veritable culture heroes, charismatic characters who acted as the 'brains' of the *ciurma*, something of 'an interface between God and the elements'. He was 'not a tyrant'; 'he was not giving directions, but just looked or gestured slightly to get what he wanted from his men, and all paid passionate attention in order to be successful in reading his mind.'<sup>8</sup> Today only those who have demonstrated expertise, courage and leadership can become *rais*. He keeps his knowledge about the tuna trap setting and operation to himself, lending him a powerful position. He is a reputed and respected man, whose authority is usually unquestioned by his *ciurma*.<sup>9</sup> Though employed by the lessee of the *tonnara*, the *rais* enjoys complete autonomy in his decisions concerning the *tonnara* operations. However, with the Parodi family, relations were good and respectful. The *rais* has two 'lieutenants', *capoguardia*, with whom he may consult as regards certain decisions. They act as his confidants. Under them are the six boat captains who direct their own crews. Of the teams of eight that gaff and haul in the tuna, the two fishermen in the centre—the *arringatore*—hold important positions; they have to be the strongest and most experienced at gaffing the tuna. They have the shortest gaffs, the *speta*, and are closest to the struggling tuna (Maggio 2000: 104). There are also special positions for the SCUBA diver who inspects the chambers and the lead singer or *Prima Voce* of the *ciurma* who sings the verses of the traditional work songs. Generally, there is a highly specialised division of labour where every crewmember has his specific task.

The Favignana islanders live in a socially and traditionally close-knit community. The *tonnara* is an integral part of the fabric of local life. The *mattanza* calls on the entire community, not just on the *tonnaroti*. The arrival of the tuna is an event that is held in great anticipation not only by the fishermen and their families who depend on fishing as their main source of income and livelihood, but by the entire village as well.<sup>10</sup> The cultural



importance of *la mattanza* is shown in the ancient names, songs, ceremonies, rituals and prayers that accompany the work. It is a source of pride, a referent of identity and an activity shrouded in religious attention. The first tuna caught is offered to the Madonna. An outdoor altar construction of the Virgin Mary holding a tuna in her arms is facing the sea. Women gather daily at this Madonna of the Tonnaroti to pray for the success of the *mattanza* (Singer 1999: 64). The *tonnaroti* revere the Madonna del Rosario in the church of Sant' Anna. Before deploying the *tonnara*, a local priest blesses the boats that the fishermen have adorned with bouquets of flowers, and all the other equipment, the sea, the fish in it and the *rais* as well (Maggio 2000: 97). As we have already seen, religious worship accompanies all stages of the *tonnara* operation, making it not only a focal point of local economic, social and cultural life, but also of spiritual life. After all entrapped tuna are taken, the *tonnaroti* jump in the bloody water in a ritual act that, according to anthropologist Serge Collet (personal communication), is symbolic for regeneration and reproduction.

But the tradition is currently endangered. Over the past few decades, Favignana yields have been declining more and more, first amounting to hundreds instead of thousands and then to dozens rather than hundreds of specimens. The work force has been reduced from a hundred men to eighty, then to sixty-three and now to fifty. In the second half of the 1980s, there were still some good catches and the Japanese paid handsome prices for tuna. A new *rais*, Salvatore Spataro, could convince the lessee of the *tonnara*, Franco Castiglione, to invest in new nylon nets (the old ones were made of sisal and coconut fiber), plastic floats, new cables and chains and iron boats. At that time, the *tonnaroti* earned about US\$ 3.50 a day during the three-month season, plus a bonus of 30 cents per fish landed and extras if they were boat captains. There were already negotiations to obtain subsidies from the regional government to maintain the *tonnara* as cultural heritage. In 1996, Castiglione decided to call it a day and took the modern equipment he owned with him to his Bonagía *tonnara*. The Favignana *tonnaroti* feared for their livelihoods and proposed to *rais* Spataro to lease the rights themselves. He refused and a conflict was born. Spataro went with Castiglione to become Bonagía's *rais*. The men went ahead without him. To keep the *mattanza* alive, the *tonnaroti* formed a cooperative (*Cooperativa La Mattanza*) in 1997. They leased the *tonnaro* directly from its owner, Luigi Parodi, splitting the profits while they became financially responsible. Many put in their own savings to continue the tradition. With the help of the old fishermen and an old *rais*, they restored the nets and wooden boats that had been sitting idly in the Camparia for a long time.

They elected a new *rais* and head of the cooperative, Gioacchino Cataldo, an experienced *tonnaroto* who was educated by *rais* Giocchino Hernandez. Cataldo became a tireless promoter of his men's interests.

Nonetheless, the *mattanza* has to some extent turned into a subsidised tourist attraction, though the *tonnaroti* insist that it is work (Vialles 1998: 147). To earn extra income, the *tonnaroti* decided that tourists could buy tickets to watch the *mattanza* from boats. They desperately needed the additional revenues. When all expenses were paid for, little was left to pay for the men's wages. Many experienced men began to leave to find more secure jobs. Inexperienced youngsters took their places. Despite subsidies from the nation, provincial and local governments, the cooperative remained in debt. There was 'great disquiet and anxiety as to the future of Favignana' (Singer 1999: 65) and dissension as regards the role and management of the cooperative, as well. In 2003 and 2004, no tuna were caught. The failure to catch tuna with the traditional method of the *tonnara* is generally attributed to the use of modern fishing techniques by industrial fleets, mainly the Japanese and Korean. Consequently, *la mattanza* is a dying tradition. The fishermen are acutely aware of this fact. In a recent interview, *rais* Gioacchino Cataldo said: 'Maybe it's not over completely. . . . And maybe it is. Either way, this beautiful life has turned ugly' (Rosenblum 2004). The future for the *tonnaroti* looks bleak: 'Once celebrated as valiant holdouts of an ancient way of life, these men now survive on odd jobs and hang around the wharf exchanging tales of the good old days' (ibid.). It looks as if the Favignana *tonnara* and its *mattanza* ritual will end up like so many other Mediterranean tuna trap fisheries: relegated to the decontextualised realm of folklore and museums.

*La mattanza* has not met with widespread (international) opposition by environmentalist movements or the public at large. News reports usually paint a favourable picture of the event, emphasizing man's fight with nature and the antiquity of the accompanying rituals. Perhaps this is so because this type of fishery has been on the wane for a long time now. The spectacle has only sparked a very limited amount of protests, even though it is often described as being cruel. 'La mattanza è una pratica barbara' (the *mattanza* is a barbaric practice), says one commentator in an exchange about the *mattanza* in an e-mail discussion list.<sup>11</sup> In a news report on Favignana's *mattanza*, the Italy Daily website quotes Ennio Bonfanti of the Sicilian branch of the Lega Anti Vivisezione, who maintains: 'This exists only as a bloody performance for tourists. It's no longer something done for survival or even economic motives. They're not real fishermen. They're entertainers. It's like bull-fighting. Nothing more than a barbaric spectacle of cruelty.'

In the same report, *rais* Cataldo counters: 'We don't do this to put on a show. This is fishing.'<sup>12</sup> When he was not a *rais* yet, he had already confided to Theresa Maggio (2001: 18) that not the *mattanza* was barbaric, but the raising and fattening of calves to slaughter them. Likewise, experienced *tonnarote* Clemente Ventrone states that 'there is a lot of discussion and dissension about *la mattanza*, it looks like a cruel spectacle' but it is indiscriminate commercial tuna fishing that is destructive. The *mattanza* 'has ancient roots, belongs to our traditions, our history'.<sup>13</sup> Its appearance is violent, but it entails communication between the tuna and the *tonnaroti*, who show a deep respect for the tuna and sing to them.

The fact that there seems to have been little resistance to the *mattanza* is somewhat surprising, firstly, because bluefin tuna are under serious threat of depletion due to large-scale commercial harvesting. The World Wildlife Fund called for a moratorium on bluefin tuna fishing in the Mediterranean early in 2004. Secondly, as we have seen, the ritual makes for bloody scenes that could easily attract media attention and in its wake public outcries of disgust. In the following case, the bloody scenes of a non-commercial drive for small cetaceans, pilot whales, on the Faroe Islands has indeed led to strong protests even though the species is not endangered as such. Apparently, the one bloody tradition is not the other and this raises questions as to why this should be so.

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

Long-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala melas*) belong to the group of toothed whales. They feed on cod, squid and octopus and can live as long as 60 years. Adults measure between four and six meters in length and weigh around eight hundred kilos. Pilot whales migrate in schools numbering from 50 to 1,000 or more (Sanderson 1994: 189). Their tight social structure makes pilot whales vulnerable to herding, and whalers take advantage of this trait in drive fisheries.

On the Faroe Islands, an archipelago comprising eighteen islands situated midway between Scotland and Iceland with a population of 46,000, the inhabitants conduct a traditional pilot whale drive when the occasion arises. Pilot whales come into Faroese waters throughout the year, but mainly in July, August and September. The drive, known as the *grindadráp*, therefore usually takes place in the summer months and has changed little in style or substance since it began hundreds of years ago, although the introduction of modern boats and radios has made it easier to herd the whales. The kill of the cetaceans is not pre-planned, as it depends on the spotting of

a pod of pilot whales near the coast. The *grindadráp* consists of herding the pilot whales into the shallow bays with small boats, inserting steel gaffs into their blowpipes, hauling them ashore and then swiftly killing them using long knives (*grindaknivur*) with which the carotid artery and spinal cord are cut. Regulations based on old Norse laws deal with all aspects of the drive, including herding procedures, beaching, killing methods, valuation, distribution and beach cleanup. The regulations are under constant review and update. There are six whaling districts. Certain beaches or entire whaling districts can be closed when harvests are considered sufficient. The drive is overseen by elected *grindformenn*, who are in turn supervised by the *sýslumaður*, or district sheriff. The whalers are called *rakstrarmenn*. The *sýslumaður* also oversees the valuation and division of the catch, and is responsible for keeping records of the harvest (Wylie 1981; Bloch *et al.* 1990). Once the slaughter is complete, the whales are moved to a quay for counting, measuring and butchering (Gibson-Lonsdale 1990). The whales are cut up and the meat and blubber are distributed, free of charge, to the region's inhabitants with priority being given to those who actually participated in the drive. The person who first spotted the whales is entitled to choose the largest whale or its equivalent in smaller whales; the whale foremen are each guaranteed one per cent of the meat.<sup>14</sup>

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

It has turned into 'a mooring of self-conscious self-description' (*ibid.*: 130). This happened especially when in the late 19th century foreigners began to show an interest in the pilot whale drive and regarded it 'as a picturesque element of a living folk culture on the periphery of modern society' (Nauerby 1996: 146) and 'as something specifically Faroese' (*ibid.*: 154). But a danger was lurking here. To onlookers such as tourists, the *grindadráp* 'seems both dramatic and impressive . . . and many find it discomforting so that during the event one can hear voices calling for a ban against the whale kill. The methods employed certainly do seem bloodthirsty and murderous', wrote Faroese anthropologist Joan Pauli Joensen in the 1970s (Joensen 1976: 19). But the drive, the kill and the subsequent distribution of whale meat are tightly regulated according to tradition with occasional changes of legislation when new situations required adjustments.

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

In consideration of any 'whaling tradition' it is important to bear in mind that such a tradition is the integrated body of a particular hunting gear, social organization, individual and collective skills, rules of capture, processing, distribution and utilization. If a fundamental part of this 'body' is replaced by new technology, by definition this will have profound consequences for the 'tradition' as a whole.<sup>15</sup>

Against the claim of Faroe Islanders that there is a need to sustain their cultural identity by whaling, the WDCS states that the inhabitants of Orkney and the Shetlands also had whaling traditions, but that 'these islanders have

survived the cessation of these practices without detriment to their culture'.<sup>16</sup> The argument is that Faroese culture has evolved and the islanders are firmly embedded in the global economy today, so that there is no need of self-sufficiency.

Militant environmentalist organizations are more straightforward in their judgment. For example, Cetacea Defense deems the *grindadráp* 'a cruel, barbaric indulgence by the Faroese. It is wholly unnecessary it has no place in this world and must end'.<sup>17</sup> The organization refers to 'islanders from hell' and 'bloody Faroese'. Self-proclaimed 'Captain' Paul Watson, founder and head of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, has put up fierce fights against the pilot whale drive. His organization describes it as follows: 'The whales are stoned, speared, stabbed, slashed and clubbed by people in a festive atmosphere. The hunt is done because of tradition and the absurd and ridiculous belief by the Faeroese that God gave the whales to the people to be slaughtered.'<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere, Watson writes:

[T]o any civilized observer from the outside, the Grind is one of the bloodiest, most cruel, and most savage traditions in the world . . . the Grind is practically a religion. It is ritualized brutality and traditional torture, punctuated by public drunkenness. The victim is the defenseless pilot whale, whose migrations throughout the year, especially during the summer months, bring the pods into the waters near the Faeroes, where they are herded into bays, stabbed, speared, pelted with stones, slashed with outboard motor blades, and slowly and joyfully slaughtered. They die amidst the laughter of children and the drunken bellows of their hooligan fathers.

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

Although the Faeroese do eat whale meat, the kill provides much more meat than can be consumed. Traditionally, the whales provided subsistence to a people far removed from the rest of the world, before imports and the emergence of their lucrative export market. Today, with no practical need to kill whales, the slaughter has intensified. This is because the Faeroese now enjoy a high standard of living and thus more leisure time—today they have more time to hunt whales for pleasure. Today it is a sport, big-game hunt, and an orgy of blood, providing entertainment and an outlet for aggression, an excuse to get together, drink, and indulge in a community festival.<sup>19</sup>

According to Watson, hunting pilot whales is thus done 'for fun, not survival'. He has compared it to 'the Roman gladiator games' for which 'there is no place . . . in the modern world.'<sup>20</sup> Some other environmental organizations, including the Environmental Investigation Agency, have also embraced the argument that the slaughter is merely recreational or refer to the supposed 'carnival atmosphere of entertainment'.<sup>21</sup>

Keywords that keep surfacing in anti-pilot whaling campaigns and public reactions as regards the killing are: 'senseless maiming', 'butchering', 'murder', 'murderous killing', 'massacring', 'mass slaughter', 'unbridled cruelty', 'wanton brutality', 'medieval cruelty and bloodshed', 'sickness' and 'blood-sport'. Such characterizations are often accompanied by epithets such as 'brutal', 'horrific', 'gruesome', 'inhumane', 'merciless', 'wasteful', 'repugnant' or 'satanic'. With respect to the whale hunters, it is said that they are 'the sick dogs of civilization', 'ignorant', 'bloodthirsty Vikings', 'ferocious', '(savage) barbarians', 'a brutal group', 'sadists' and that what they do amounts to 'shameful' 'pseudo-traditions' that are 'obsolete, outdated and cruel', 'a relic from the islands' Viking past'.<sup>22</sup> On one website it reads: 'To the people of the Faroe Islands . . . I say, "STOP THIS SENSELESS MASSACRE!!!" Anyone who could bury a hook into the back of a whale, drag it to shore, slit its throat, and butcher it, deserves to die of mercury poisoning . . . or worse'.<sup>23</sup> Another anonymous message on the Internet states: 'The sadism and murderous brutality of the Faroese instigators of the Pilot whale slaughter is seen with disgust and horror by most of the world. It is unbelievable that the criminals who engage in this kind of wholesale torture and murder of a gentle species are supported by the government of the Faroe islands who use their stupid and greedy PR campaigns to justify this wholesale slaughter.'<sup>24</sup> Kate Sanderson (1994: 197) quotes one of the letters sent in 1990 to the Faroese authorities:

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

Another sample from the UK includes sentences like 'If the atomic bomb is dropped I hope it is on the Faroe Islands, the rest of the civilized world won't miss you. The worst of health may you all die soon' (Sanderson 1990: 196). A member of Irish Parliament asked her government to condemn the practice, which she deemed 'a cruel, uncivilised activity'.<sup>25</sup> The manner in which the pilot whale drive has been represented has led to a steady

stream of hate mail, directed not only at official institutions but also at ordinary citizens and even school children, some of whom received a newspaper clipping with remarks such as 'You should all be killed', 'You should be bombed' and 'Rot in hell' (Forrestal 2004).

What these remarks amount to is that the Faroese Islanders are dehumanised or—as the reference to Medieval and Viking times implicate—denied the moral right to perform traditional acts in contemporary society. In the binary opposition of good versus bad guys, it is crystal clear where the Faroese belong in the view of radical environmentalists. They are the self-proclaimed defenders of the peaceful, defenceless and innocent gentle giants versus 'the most ruthless and barbaric whalers' they 'have ever encountered'.<sup>26</sup> This is also evident in a documentary entitled *Pity the Pilot Whale* (Minasian 1994), a Marine Mammal Fund production, that pits the 'cruel' practices of Faroese pilot whale hunters against the 'noble' deeds of New Zealanders who attempt to guide stranded pods of pilot whales back to the open ocean. The real protagonists, however, are the pilot whales themselves. Unlike the Faroese Islanders, the pilot whales are humanised. According to the video narrative, they communicate, interact and cooperate, are intelligent, establish tight communities and lifelong friendships, have complex lifestyles and social structures—and these are qualities 'we should admire, embrace and emanate', tells the voice of the narrator, film actor James Coburn.<sup>27</sup>

Several organizations have tried to negotiate or force an end to the pilot whale drive, to no avail, however. Nor have boycotts and e-mail campaigns been successful. It is the position of the Faroese authorities that a sustainable harvest of pilot whales occurring in the waters around the Faroe Islands is a legitimate activity. They maintain that pilot whales are not endangered (800,000 of them are in the North Atlantic of which the Faroese have taken on average 950 annually in the 1990s), that there is no sign of depletion, and that their method is the most humane way of killing such huge creatures. The harvest is sustainable and 'it is one of the most ecological methods of producing meat at 62 degrees Northern latitude, and only one of several examples of sensible traditional utilisation of local resources'.<sup>28</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs states: 'Pilot whales are taken for food in the Faroe Islands. Both the meat and blubber of pilot whales have long been and continue to be a staple part of the national diet'.<sup>29</sup> Pilot whales still account for some fifteen per cent of the islanders' meat consumption. The Ministry argues that many are appalled at the bloody sight because they are urbanites who are not used to be in contact with nature. The West Nordic Council (a joint parliamentary organization of Greenland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands) states that these Nordic islands have a tradition of hunting:



Eating meat from whales or seals is as natural to us as eating pork, beef or poultry is to others. Wearing a beautiful coat made of seal pelt comes as naturally as wearing clothes made from cow hide. Hunting is part of our cultural heritage. It has contributed to forming our traditional diet, our history and our identity. Through the ages, hunting has been part of the very basis of our existence. Whenever hunting failed, the pots remained empty. To many of us, even today, hunting constitutes a vital proportion of our livelihood and well-being. Hunting is a special event for us, connecting our past with the present. . . . At the same time, hunting ties together the inhabitants of the small west Nordic communities into a unique cultural fellowship. . . . To the peoples of the west Nordic and arctic areas, hunting is a question of survival as well as an ancient cultural heritage. We want to keep and preserve this tradition. . . . The West Nordic Council has proclaimed 2001 to be the year of traditional hunting in the west Nordic areas. The Council will focus on the traditional west Nordic hunting culture and, in this way, contribute to wider knowledge and understanding of the countries' ancient tradition of sustainable utilisation of our natural resources. This is a tradition that is still alive today and will hopefully continue to be vital for generations to come. Certainly, we do kill seals, and we do kill whales—we live off nature. This is exactly why it is in our interest to preserve and protect our nature.<sup>30</sup>

Against the argument that Faroese society has evolved, the Chairman of the Faroese Pilot Whalers Association, Ólavur Sjørðaberg, said to an assembly of the World Council of Whalers in September 2002: 'Our whaling practices are dynamic and change to accommodate the need of the growing communities they support. Despite our whaling being a centuries old tradition it sits comfortably within our modern society.'<sup>31</sup> But above all, most Faroese regard the environmentalist attacks 'as offensive and untruthful and intended to besmirch [their] reputation' (Joensen 1988:18). While they eagerly appropriated the foreigners' view of the *grindadráp* being a unique tradition, they are on the defensive now, claiming that they are closer to nature than people living in Europe's metropolises and putting themselves on a par with indigenous peoples who seek the right to take whales for subsistence (Nauerby 1996:161). As said above, the environmentalists rebutted this stance by pointing out that Faroese society is far from traditional. But this has only worked to feed Faroese nationalism and to reinforce the role of the *grindadráp* as a symbolic identity marker vis-à-vis the outside world: 'The higher the wave of protest, the greater the value of the hunt and the consumption of whales will have in identity contexts; as boundary markers and as a cultural defence against influence from the Western metropolises' (Nauerby 1996: 164). However, this does not mean that they regard the hunt 'as a static, immutable symbol of traditional Faroese culture' (Sander-

son 1990: 196). Still, opinion polls show 95 per cent of the Faroese support the *grindadráp*.

### Claiming and Contesting Cultural Traditions

The fierce opposition from outsiders has brought about a strong belief among the Faroese that they are entitled to exercise their traditional ways, simultaneously reinforcing their national identity. **Favignana** tuna fishermen have not met with the kind of opposition that the Faroese have faced in recent times, at least not from environmental movements that operate internationally. However, the *mattanza* did and does attract onlookers from without and this 'tourist gaze' (Urry 1990) has no doubt played a role in strengthening the identity of the **Favignana** islanders and their pride in the tuna kill. As one tuna fisherman said: 'for the tourists we represent mythical characters' (quoted in Singer 1999: 65). Traditions may be commoditised (converted into currency) when enacted as a tourist performance, but some outsiders are likely to claim that by doing so, they have lost their authenticity (as has been the case for the *mattanza*).

In comparing the two cases, several puzzles and paradoxes surface. Although over-fishing of bluefin tuna has certainly aroused protests from environmentalist organizations, one may ask why there are no such organizations focusing their activities solely on tuna while there are plenty of groups specifically aimed at protecting whales and other cetaceans. Tuna have rapidly become an endangered species,<sup>32</sup> whereas many whale species—including pilot whales—are not endangered. Apparently, environmentalists classify tuna as an entirely different type of animal than (pilot) whales. In both cases, the ritual taking of the sea creatures is an act of violence at close range making for bloody scenes that can easily be observed by onlookers. The tuna and the pilot whales are gaffed and the killing involves close contact between man and animal. While blood is a powerful symbol that may arouse people's disgust *and* fascination, the tuna kill is said to be cruel yet does not arouse the kind of commotion that accompanies the taking of cetaceans. Why would this be so?

Whale hunting traditions are obviously more contentious than traditional ways of taking tuna. With whaling 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 as is evidenced by the successful Save the Whales campaign. Whales have become powerful symbols of environmentalism and have turned into the poster child for conservation.<sup>33</sup> 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) and 'a symbolic fixture in contemporary western society' (Stoett 1997: 28). The environmental movement has totemised cetaceans that have come to represent the 'goodness' of nature.<sup>34</sup> 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. 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'. 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. Whereas whales were made human, whale hunters were dehumanised into barbaric brutes.

By contrast, tuna are relegated a much lower 'moral' status than cetaceans. They are not ambiguous sea mammals but belong to the unambiguous category of fish. As Edmund Leach would have it, 'it is the ambiguous categories that attract the maximum interest and the most intense feelings of taboo' (1964: 39). Tuna cans have images indicating that they have been caught 'dolphin friendly', indicating that killing tuna is not a problem, but killing dolphins is. 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. Whales are believed to be at or near the apex of a symbolic hierarchy in the animal world. The species that are imbued with special rights and moral values nowadays certainly include whales but not tuna. With a variation on George Orwell's *Animal Farm*: animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others. And, one may add, some animals (tuna) are apparently good to eat whereas others (whales) are good to think.

The symbolic dimension is obviously important in human classifications of the pecking order of sea creatures. As Kate Sanderson argues, '[t]he reasons for the persistent and aggressive campaigning to stop Faroese whaling can be found in the nature of *grind* itself and the ambiguities it presents in

relation to predominant cultural perceptions of nature and human society found in the urbanized western world' (1994: 189). Limiting myself to the latter argument, Sanderson points out that the slaughter of pilot whales is conducted in public by many slaughterers performing their work simultaneously. The *grindadráp* 'retains the characteristics of the precarious exploitation of an untamed environment of pre-modern times, as opposed to the controlled and industrialized exploitation of nature characteristic of modern Western societies today' (*ibid.*: 195). Nonetheless, it takes place in a modern and wealthy Western society, with modern tools, and it is highly regulated, making for ambiguity between the wild and the social. In the urban view of Europeans, 'the hunter is at one with the unspoiled wilderness in which he hunts and must not therefore display any of the incongruous trappings or influences of "modern civilization"' (*ibid.*: 198).

Joensen (1988) also refers to the disconnection and alienation of Western urbanites from the killing and butchering of animals (more generally, see Vialles 1994). What goes on in abattoirs is meticulously kept from the public eye and the vacuum-sealed chunks of meat and fish sold in supermarkets are hardly recognizable as parts of once live animals: 'The actual relationship to nature has been well and truly repressed' (Nauerby 1996:158). The Faroese claim that they are still in close touch with nature, unlike many Western middle-class urbanites. They not only slaughter the pilot whales, but also prepare, cook and eat them. Likewise, the Favignanesse *tonnaroti* also claim to be in harmony with nature when catching tuna. They say the tuna die well but they are not killed but merely taken out of the water. The spilling of blood due to the gaffing does not change this:

le sang des thons est un épiphénomène qui ne peut égarer que les ignorants, la *mattanza* est bien une pêche, et les thons sont bien des poissons. Cela se résume en une phrase, d'une évidence totale pour les îliens: 'Le thon n'est pas un animal! C'est un poisson!' La catégorie "poissons" est donc expressément opposée à la catégorie des 'animaux'; et puisque la viande ne saurait provenir que des 'animaux', la chair du thon reste poisson, malgré la spectaculaire évidence du sang (Vialles 1998: 147).

Interestingly, the fact that the *grindadráp* is non-commercial has not worked to the Faroese advantage. The free sharing of whale meat and blubber is regarded as an 'unnecessary indulgence' (Sanderson 1994: 198), irreconcilable with a cash-based economy. Traditional subsistence take is believed to be at odds with modernity and should be restricted to people wholly dependent on it. One protestor, 'Annie', writes:

Things are no doubt complicated these days, but a culture either enters the 21st century or it doesn't. Perhaps I wouldn't take umbrage with the 'cultural' slaughtering of pilot whales if I hadn't read that the Faroese have indeed entered the 21st century, enabling themselves to have a standard of living equal to their neighbors by incorporating modern fishing methods. I feel that when a culture uses modern technology to change their culture, they give up the right to hold onto environmentally unsound tactics.<sup>35</sup>

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. Often reference is made to 'barbarism' and 'barbaric traditions', to some extent harking back to the dogmas of evolutionism (not a particularly modernist epistemology for that matter). Whaling opponents seemingly attempt to legitimate a moral stance ('killing whales is wrong') by invoking a moral image of how the Faroese ought to behave according to their culture ('adapt to modernity completely or wholly return to your traditions').

Another aspect that has received much criticism is the use in part of contemporary equipment and gadgets of modernity, which in the view of environmentalists 'prove' that the *grindadráp* is not traditional. The utilization of new technology is considered a breach of tradition. Traditions are thus trivialised and restricted to a toolkit, rather than associated with a complex of beliefs, symbolic meanings, social structures, and practices that are culturally significant. But is Thanksgiving no longer a tradition if one uses an electric knife to cut the turkey? The cultural imperialism and ethnocentrism of some environmental organizations and animal rights activists captures the Faroese whalers in essentialised images of culture and tradition and puts pressure on them to conform to the former's worldviews and standards. As Randall Reeves argues, 'Expecting cultures to remain static and cling to traditional methods is both presumptuous (demeaning) and unrealistic' (2002: 98).

The *mattanza*, on the other hand, is commercial and involves the use of time-honoured boats, nets, anchors and gaffs—although from the mid-1980s some minor technological modernisation, occurred. Perhaps the fact that tuna is marketed and that the *tonnara* equipment looks largely traditional is important for the lack of resistance the *mattanza*. Apparently, commoditisation does fit the environmentalists' perception of acceptable traditional resource exploitation but modernisation of implements does not, a somewhat puzzling and contradictory stance. In the view of environmentalists, providing foreign markets with tuna would seem preferable to home consumption of whale meat in a Western society. Killing whales 'for the pot' in Europe would seem to constitute an anomaly in their mode of thinking: matter out

of place, so to speak, and as we know from Mary Douglas' work (Douglas 1966), anomalous categories are the subject of strong taboos.

The environmental organizations even deny the fact that the whale drive may have a subsistence purpose and depict it as sport or recreation. Here we enter the domain of identity politics and the politics of representation. Environmentalists see cultural heritage as something static, as a 'snapshot' version of culture at some point in time not as a dynamic force with multiple meanings. Faroese whalers regard some traditions worth pursuing not only as a source of protein but also as part of a *bricolage* that is important in identity formation. Moreover, the Faroe whalers have always adapted and accommodated their culture to economic and political change. As for the *mattanza*, there are some signs that its reformation into a tourist spectacle has also brought about some resistance, in that animal right advocates now liken it to bullfighting. They argue that the tuna killing ritual has lost its economic functions. However, the *tonnaroti* contest this view and point out that the *mattanza* is not about putting up a show but about a way of life that has ancient roots and a deep symbolic meaning. The *mattanza* is not 'staged authenticity' (MacCannel 1973)—it is 'work, ritual, religion and finally identity for Favignana' (Singer 1999: 63).

## Conclusions

Many maritime fishing and hunting traditions are contentious. With such pursuits coming under increasing scrutiny from environmentalists and with the media exposure their campaigns get, public resistance to traditional ways of exploitation has been on the rise since the 1970s. In this article, I have presented two case studies to show how fishing and marine mammal hunting traditions have fared and how and to what extent outsiders have contested them. In the case of the *mattanza*, tuna are captured in traps and gaffed. The ritual involves considerable bloodshed, while the Mediterranean tuna have become an increasingly scarce resource. These facts notwithstanding, the tradition is not fiercely contested and has turned into a tourist event and a media spectacle that is generally described in favourable terms. It is perceived as an act that lends the Favignana islanders authenticity, a singular way of life on the verge of disappearing. However, since the survival of the tradition has become increasingly dependent on extra income furnished by paying spectators, some resistance has been launched against the *tonnaroti* for putting up a 'show' that has little to do with an 'authentic' tradition. But in the sense that any culture, identity or tradition is to some extent 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 something genuine, uncorrupted, pristine, untouched (Handler 1986: 2). Such a mistaken perception sees authenticity as fixed essence, persistent over time.

For a long time, the *grindadráp* has also been regarded as a unique tradition that made the Faroese culturally distinct from other societies. Though it has attracted some tourists, the graphic media reports, images and footage about the pilot whale drive have led to reactions of disgust, fuelled by the actions of environmentalists and animal rights campaigners seeking public support and funds. These activists regard the tradition as a superfluous anachronism that does not fit in a modern welfare society with a high standard of living. Their perception betrays a particular view of tradition that would seem to stand in opposition to modernity. This eco-political discourse juxtaposes images of past and present, rendering the two incommensurable by emphasizing the rifts and denying the links (cf. Briggs 1996: 449). 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. The pilot whale drive provides the Faroe islanders with an important source of protein and they argue that they are in close contact with nature whereas European urbanites have been removed from the process of killing and butchering animals and preparing and eating what nature has offered. For them, clinging to tradition does indeed have economic, social and symbolic significance. Both the *grindadráp* and the *mattanza* traditions are about economic, social *and* cultural continuity, which is not necessarily repetitive but dynamic. As such, performing both the *grindadráp* and the *mattanza* is an important referent and a marker of local identity.

## Notes

I owe a big thanks to anthropologist Serge Collet, who conducted research in Favignana between 1985 and 1987 and generously shared his knowledge of the *mattanza* with me. He also translated several documents in Italian for me.

1. <http://www.webster-dictionary.org/definition/tradition>. Last accessed August 25, 2004.
2. Among fisheries biologists, ICCAT’s nickname is ‘the International Conspiracy to Catch All Tuna’.

3. The tradition also exists in Bonagía, Sicily (cf. Ravazza 1999). Until recently, it was also extant in Portoscuso and Carloforte (Sardinia) and in Camogli (Northern Italy).
4. The barrier nets or wings also have distinct names: *la coda* and *la costa*. The names of the chambers are *levante*, *camera grande*, *bordonaia*, *bastardo*, *camera*, *bastardella*, and finally *camera della morte* (Maggio 2000: 129–130).
5. Theresa Maggio's popular book *Mattanza: Love and Death in the Sea of Sicily* (2000) has made the ritual world-famous and will be used here as an important source of information. Though not a scholarly work, it contains extensive descriptions of the *mattanza*. For anthropological accounts, see Collet (1987) and Singer (1999). For a brief overview and compelling photographs, see Stabile and Martorana (1999).
6. In turn, *matar* derives from the Latin *mactare*, meaning to slaughter, immolate or honour. *Mattanza* has found its way into the Italian vernacular as a synonym for 'massacre'. The French term for *mattanza*—or, more precisely, the tuna trap—is *madrague*, in Portuguese it is *marações*, in Spanish *almandrabas*. Serge Collet suggested to me that this is related to Arabic *al mazraba* and *zrb*, meaning closure.
7. The term *rais* is Arabic in origin. The *mattanza* technique became popular in the ninth century during the Arab domination of Sicily (although it is possibly much older).
8. <http://www.altratrapani.it/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=238>. Last accessed August 24, 2004.
9. When in the late 1960s unions gained a foothold in the *ciurma*, the acting *rais*, Salvatore Mercurio, quit his job (Maggio 2000: 106).
10. This also went for the *mattanza* in Sardinia's Portoscuso, where it was 'a true and proper ceremonial ritual made up of precise commands and gestures fixed in time and a popular festival in which the entire community participates' (<http://www.sardynianews.it/mese1/a3e.htm>. Last accessed 23 July, 2004). Stintino and Carloforte also had ritual celebrations for the arrival of tuna.
11. <http://forums.about.com/ab-italian/messages?lgnF=y&msg=2679.3>. Last accessed July 22, 2004.
12. [http://www.italydaily.it/Italian\\_life/Features/febbraio/mattanza.shtml](http://www.italydaily.it/Italian_life/Features/febbraio/mattanza.shtml). Last accessed August 18, 2004.
13. [http://www.mareinitaly.it/intervista\\_v.php?id=85](http://www.mareinitaly.it/intervista_v.php?id=85). Last accessed October 4, 2004.
14. This is a very concise description. For fuller ethnographic accounts, see Joensen (1976, 1988), Wylie (1981), Sanderson (1990, 1994), Nauerby (1996).
15. WDCS website: <http://www.wdcs.org/dan/publishing.nsf/allweb/6696D8208A0AB55D80256DAA0036629A> (Last accessed July 21, 2004). See also Sanderson (1994).
16. <http://www.wdcs.org/dan/publishing.nsf/allweb/83FE72454D061D4E80256DAA0035F570>. Last accessed July 21, 2004.
17. <http://www.cetaceadefence.org/index.php?option=news&task=viewarticle&sid=9>. Last accessed July 21, 2004.
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20. <http://www.cnn.com/2000/NATURE/09/11/faroe.islands.enn/>. Last accessed September 8, 2004.
21. <http://www.faroes.org/>. Last accessed October 5, 2004.
22. See, e.g., the website of the German-based European Community on Protection of Marine life (Ecop-marine) <http://www.ecop.info/english/e-faroe.htm>. See also <http://whale.wheelock.edu/archives/info00/0032.html>; [http://www.uci-endingcaptivity.org/from\\_dr\\_ann\\_west.htm](http://www.uci-endingcaptivity.org/from_dr_ann_west.htm); <http://whale.wheelock.edu/archives/info00/0032.html>; [http://www.seashepherd.org/essays/ocean\\_realm\\_sum00.html](http://www.seashepherd.org/essays/ocean_realm_sum00.html). Last accessed August 31, 2004. Some of these designations are from web pages that I accessed in 1999 but have meanwhile ceased to exist. See also Joensen (1988:19), Kalland (1994) and Sanderson (1990:196, 1994:197-198).
23. <http://www.inkokomo.com/dolphin/faroes.html>. Last accessed July 22, 2004. (The message was already up in 1999, when I also accessed the site.) The reference to mercury poisoning is related to the fact that high levels of heavy metals and other toxins are found in pilot whales. The Faroese government has consequently urged the islanders not to eat too much *grind* meat and blubber and it has advised pregnant women and young children to refrain from consuming it at all.
24. [http://www.lysator.liu.se/nordic/scripts/feedback/new\\_database/\\_nordic\\_scn\\_faq361.txt](http://www.lysator.liu.se/nordic/scripts/feedback/new_database/_nordic_scn_faq361.txt). Last accessed October 5, 2004.
25. <http://historical-debates.oireachtas.ie/S/0143/S.0143.199505240008.html>. Last accessed September 8, 2004.
26. Canis Interview with Paul Watson, September 1, 2003. [http://www.canis.info/interviews/paul\\_watson\\_english.htm](http://www.canis.info/interviews/paul_watson_english.htm). Last accessed October 5, 2004.
27. Another film, Brian Leith's *To Kill a Whale* (1991) takes a much more distanced view and attempts to present an inside account of the pilot whale hunt from the perspective of the islanders.
28. [http://www.mst.dk/homepage/default.asp?Sub=http://www.mst.dk/udgiv/publications/2003/87-7972-477-9/html/kap06\\_eng.htm](http://www.mst.dk/homepage/default.asp?Sub=http://www.mst.dk/udgiv/publications/2003/87-7972-477-9/html/kap06_eng.htm). Last accessed October 5, 2004.
29. <http://www.whaling.fo/thepilot.htm>. Last accessed July 21, 2004.
30. O. Lynge, 'How Can Anyone Kill a Seal? How Can Anyone Possibly Kill a Whale?' <http://www.maninnature.com/MMammals/Whales/Whales1b.html>. Last accessed July 21, 2004.
31. <http://www.worldcouncilofwhalers.com/gen-assem-four-announcement.htm>. Last accessed July 21, 2004.
32. To be sure, let me emphasise that I am not implying that the *tonnara* and the *tonnaroti* made a significant contribution to the depletion of bluefin tuna.
33. Whales are also powerful fundraisers for environmentalist organizations.
34. The clashing cultural views of and tensions between local natural resource users and environmentalists have been the topic of several recent anthropological studies (cf., e.g., Einarsson 1990, 1993; Wenzel 1991; Kalland 1993; Milton 1993; Hovelsrud-Broda 1997; Theodossopoulos 2003; Martello 2004; Nadasdy 2005). Although it would certainly be rewarding to analyse the confrontations described

in this article against the backdrop of this literature, it is my explicit aim here to go into the identity-authenticity-modernity issues in the eco-political discourse.

35. <http://whale.wheelock.edu/archives/whalenet94/0092.html>. Last accessed October 5, 2004.

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