

Whaling Futures: A Survey of Faroese and Vincentian Youth on the Topic of Artisanal Whaling

RUSSELL FIELDING

Department of Geography and the Environment, University of Denver,
Denver, Colorado, USA

This article presents the results of surveys with postsecondary students in the Faroe Islands in the North Atlantic and St. Vincent in the Caribbean on the topics of whaling and consumption of associated food products. Results are analyzed to predict future trends in whaling activities in both locations. Whaling faces both cultural and environmental challenges to its continuance. Perceptions and opinions of today's educated youth are arguably the best indicator of future trends in whaling nations—at least those trends that are within the control of culture and society. The results of this survey support a challenge to the conventional theory that whaling is a dying form of artisanal food production by showing that the food products obtained through whaling remain popular with the participants in both locations. These students exhibit varying degrees of familiarity with, and willingness to participate in, whaling activities.

Keywords Caribbean, conservation, dolphins, Faroe Islands, food systems, marine ecosystems, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, survey, whales, whaling

At that time [1988], St. Vincent and the Grenadines argued that no proactive measures to end whaling were necessary as “the phasing-out of whaling would take place naturally as the single harpooner was 67 years of age.” Moreover it claimed that “no young people [were] interested in continuing the tradition.” (Gillespie 2005, 222)

“I think it’s a matter of a couple of generations before they [the Faroese] drop the pilot whale hunt,” he [a representative of Greenpeace

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Address correspondence to Russell Fielding, Department of Geography and the Environment, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208, USA. E-mail: russell.fielding@du.edu

Denmark] said. “The younger generations are losing interest.” (Olsen 1991)

The last living harpooner wakes to the sound of the wind. (Junger 2001, 57)

World Whaling

In their magnificent chapter on the history and present status of whaling operations throughout the world, Randall Reeves and Tim Smith (2006, 82) summarize the spatial and temporal extent of their subject thus:

The scale of world whaling has been global, spanning bays and gulfs, continental and island shelves, and pelagic waters. Whaling began in antiquity . . . and continues into the present. Numerous maritime societies, from all inhabited continents and many oceanic islands, have been engaged in whaling at one time or another.

Despite the historical preponderance of the activity—and its persistence into the present—current public environmental opinion, especially in nations that do not themselves currently host commercial whaling operations, strongly aligns itself against whaling (Freeman and Kellert 1994; Lavigne, et al. 1999; Hamazaki and Tanno 2001; Parsons et al. 2010). Charlotte Epstein (2008) traces the development of the now-dominant environmental discourse, which holds that whaling belongs in a bygone era and is currently practiced on a commercial level by only a few “renegade” states, or that it is conducted solely for the purpose of “subsistence”—itself a nuanced, value-laden, and socially constructed concept (Moeren 1992; Kalland 1994; Reeves 2002)—by indigenous groups, primarily in the Arctic.

Contemporary whalers are portrayed by the popular media (e.g., Neufield 1973; Johnson 2000; Junger 2001; Heberley 2002) and within academic scholarship (e.g., Adams 1994; Dahl 2000; Kalland and Moeren 2011) as among the last anachronistic practitioners of their trade. Although these antiwhaling and “end-of-an-era” discourses remain dominant, the data on whaling and its cognate activity, dolphin hunting, indicate that both are in fact widespread practices, diverse in both method and spatiality, as Martin Robards and Randall Reeves (2011) have recently shown. However, far from being a static list, the roster of states hosting whaling operations is continuously in flux. While cases exist of nations resuming ceased whaling operations (e.g., Conrad and Bjørndal 1993; Barton 2000; Kalland 2009), the more common change has been the cessation of whaling.

Most commercial whaling, targeting baleen whales and sperm whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*) for oil, ended in 1986 when the International Whaling Commission (IWC) implemented its moratorium (Gambell 1993). Whaling operations that target cetacean species not covered by the IWC moratorium are regulated by the national governments of the territories in which they occur. Most of these operations are primarily for food production (Shoemaker 2005).

Individuals make personal food choices based upon a number of factors, including availability, cost, societal norms, and their own perceptions of health and food safety (Michela and Contento 1986; Neumark-Sztainer et al. 1999; Larson and Story 2009). This article addresses the individual perceptions of the health and safety of

food products, as well as the availability of those products, in two places where societal norms support ongoing consumption of marine mammals. Specifically, I explore whether perceptions about the health and safety of marine mammal products outweigh social norms supporting their continued use as food and the implications of these food choices for the continuation of local whaling operations.

Because the oceans are natural sinks for mercury and other environmental contaminants, these high trophic-level marine animals often present high concentrations of these contaminants (Dam and Bloch 2000; Gray 2002). In some cases, high concentrations of environmental contaminants have been found in whale and dolphin tissue, and have prompted a reduction in reliance upon these marine mammals as a food source (O'Hara and O'Shea 2005; Van Oostdam et al. 2005; Endo and Haraguchi 2010). However, owing to the lipophilic nature of many pollutants, differences exist between the contaminant concentrations found in the muscle tissue and those in the blubber (O'Hara and O'Shea 2005). Further, variations in preparation method can affect the contaminant load in the finished food product (Moses et al. 2009).

Even in cases where evidence of negative human health effects is strong, governments of nations in which whaling occurs are reluctant to ban outright the consumption of marine mammal-based food products, owing to the perceived unpopularity of such a ruling (O'Neil et al. 1997). If a whaling operation is economically profitable, is not being conducted at an unsustainable rate, and is not in violation of national law or international agreement, the decision to continue whaling is often based upon issues of cultural continuity and food security.

With this background in mind, let us turn to the purpose of this article, which is to investigate the cultural acceptance of, and participation in, the local whaling operations in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and the Faroe Islands. In each location, the pilot whale (*Globicephala* spp.) is the primary target of the whaling operation, with various other odontocetes also sought.

The surveys implemented in this study investigate trends in the consumption of food products derived from marine mammals, comprehension of the associated health risks, and familiarity with—and participation in—local whaling operations. Juxtaposed against the global scale implemented by Robards and Reeves (2011), this article takes a narrow focus, examining not the records of actual whaling by nations, but the perceptions, practices, and consumption habits of individuals. Focusing on the youth in each location, the survey attempts to serve a predictive purpose, to suggest future trends in the Atlantic's two most prolific whaling nations outside of the Arctic.

Study Areas and Context

St. Vincent

St. Vincent is the main island of the southern Caribbean nation St. Vincent and the Grenadines (Figure 1). According to the last official census, the 2005 population of the country was just over 100,000 people, 92% of whom live on St. Vincent (SVG 2005). On the leeward (west) side of the island, the town of Barrouallie (pronounced BARE-ah-lee) supports a small artisanal whaling and dolphin-hunting operation.

Vincentian whaling has been described occasionally in the academic literature (Adams 1973, 1994; Caldwell and Caldwell 1971; Romero and Cresswell 2005). Nearly every day, three-man crews set out in small, open motorboats to hunt whales and dolphins with harpoons, which are thrown by hand or fired from a modified

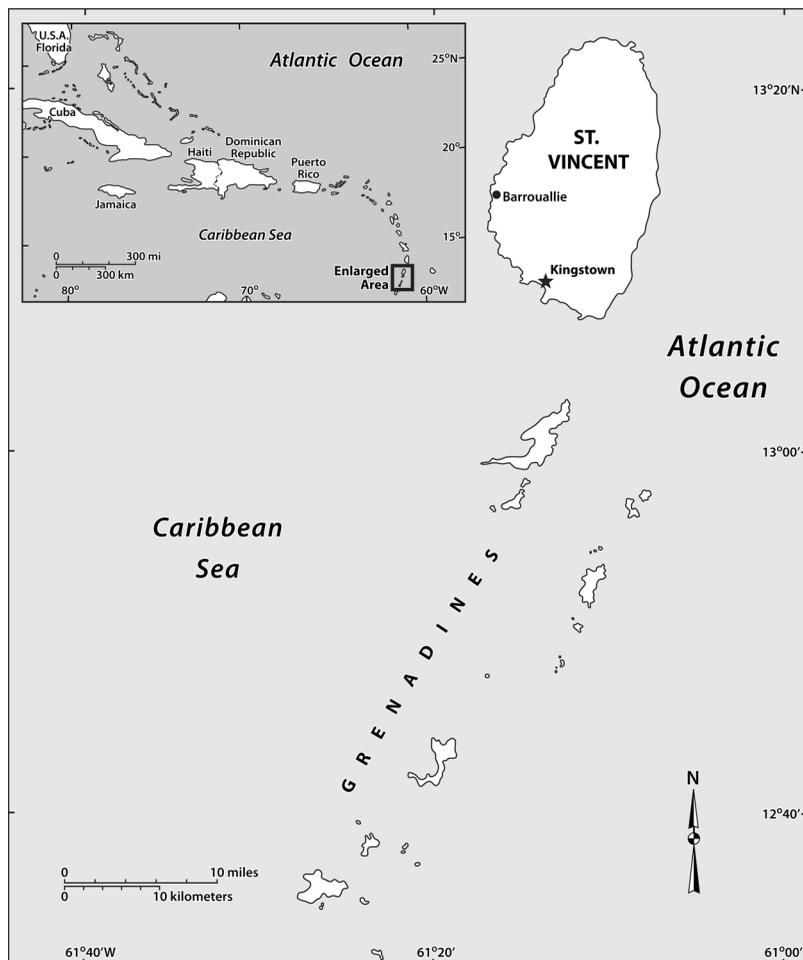


Figure 1. St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Cartography by C. Duplechin, Louisiana State University Department of Geography and Anthropology.

shotgun mounted on the bow. Boat owners employ about twelve crewmembers each, staffing their boats on a rotation. Thus, the four whaling boats currently active in Barrouallie—a number greatly reduced from the 16 that operated during the 1960s (Caldwell and Caldwell 1971; Scott 1995)—employ a workforce of about 50 on a part-time basis. Culturally this system works well, as Young (1993) describes the norm of multiple part-time jobs within Vincentian society. Barrouallie supplies nearly all of the nation's whale meat, blubber, and oil. These products can be prepared in a number of ways but the most common is for the meat to be sun-dried and the blubber to be cooked down. The cooking down, or “trying out,” of the blubber produces oil, which is used for cooking and as an oral or topical folk medicine. Small pieces of blubber, most of their oil having been tried out, are a popular food item known locally as “crisps.”

About 10 vendors compete to buy dolphin and whale carcasses whole from the boat crews at the end of each day. These vendors oversee processing crews consisting

of a dozen or more employees who flense the blubber, slice the meat, and handle the drying and cooking of these products. The vendors then distribute their wares throughout the archipelago, both at established market spaces and from mobile shops. Prices for whale and dolphin meat and blubber are generally lower than most other forms of animal protein available to Vincentians. The meat is popular among most of the population; however, two religious groups—Seventh Day Adventists and Rastafarians—forbid its consumption by their adherents.

Since 1962, the Vincentian operation has taken, on average, 141 pilot whales and 159 dolphins of various species annually (Fielding 2010). However, the actual impact of St. Vincent's whaling operation upon marine mammal populations in the Caribbean is hard to quantify, owing to the lack of any official estimate for the various species populations in the region. Reeves (2005, 5) notes that in the Caribbean region, "whaling results and sightings surveys are generally lacking, and therefore little is known about the occurrence, distribution and relative abundance of these species." This represents an area of research potential, both to address the population dynamics of Caribbean cetaceans and to assess whether hunting pressure in the region is sustainable.

The potential problem of marine contaminants has hardly been addressed in St. Vincent (Fernandez et al. 2007), either by the local governments or by foreign researchers. The few extant studies tangential to the issue—through their focus on either environmental contaminants on land (Grossman 1992) or the problem of marine contaminants and cetaceans, based on nearby islands (Gaskin et al. 1974)—are, in the main, dated and inaccessible to the average Vincentian. Still, Vincentians have not been wholly ignorant of the risks of pollutants in their waters. A 1992 college essay on file at the national archive discusses the hazard posed by a ship that had run aground and was thought to be leaking contaminants. The essayist summarized public concern over the situation by noting that "fishes and ultimately humans will be affected as the food chain becomes infected" (Dalton 1992, 43). However, beyond unpublished essays and the work of a few local journalists (e.g., Lewis 2012), information on the general level of understanding regarding the potential effects of marine pollutants on human health among Vincentians remains elusive. One purpose of this research is to better understand local knowledge of current environmental issues, particularly those related to whaling.

The Faroe Islands

The Faroe Islands are a semi-independent archipelagic territory of Denmark, located in the North Atlantic (Figure 2). Seventeen inhabited islands are home to 48,574 people (Hagstova Føroya 2011). For centuries the Faroese have conducted a drive-style whaling operation. This method involves the coordinated efforts of whalers in dozens of boats to surround and drive a pod of whales or dolphins into a bay where the cetaceans beach themselves or become stranded in the shallow water. Whalers on shore then wade out to the stranded whales, haul them toward the shore with ropes and hooks, and slaughter the whales with knives, either by exsanguination or by breaking the spinal cord. The entire process is known in Faroese as the *grindadráp* (pronounced GRINNED-ah-drop) and has been described in detail in ethnographic literature spanning several centuries (e.g., Debes 1676; Grossman 1896; Williamson 1948; Joensen 1976; Joensen 2009; Wylie 1981; Sanderson 1992; Kerins 2010).

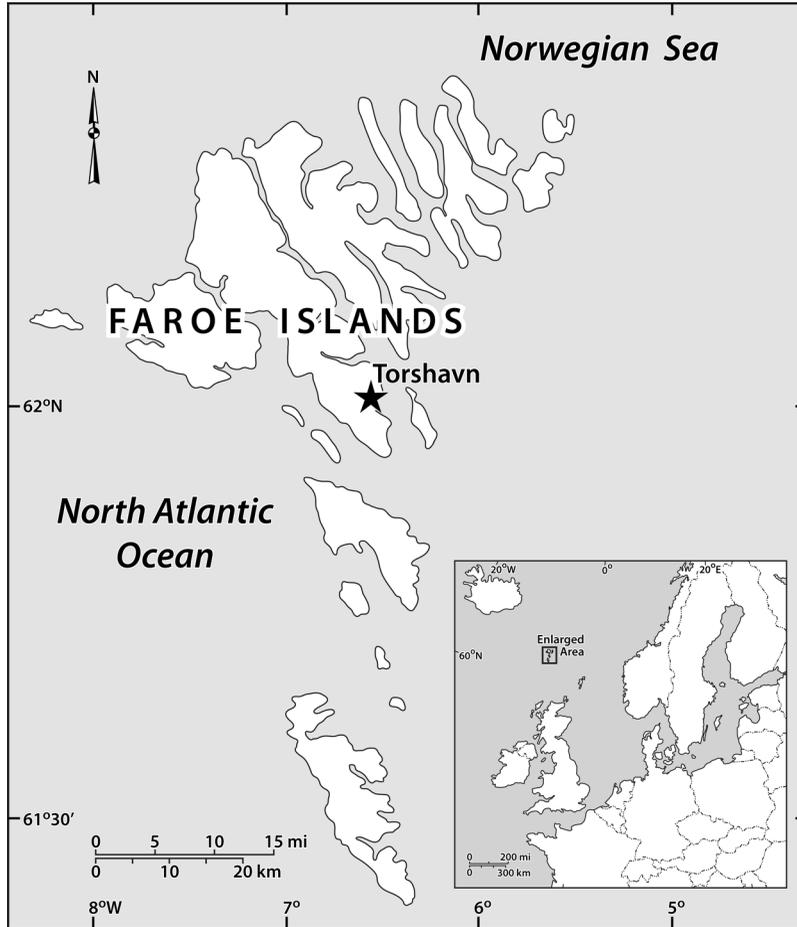


Figure 2. The Faroe Islands. Cartography by C. Duplechin, Louisiana State University Department of Geography and Anthropology.

Members of the local community where a grindadráp has taken place descend to the beach soon after the slaughter has ended and the catch has been tallied. Under the direction of the local authorities, community members butcher the whales or dolphins themselves, taking their allotted portions of meat and blubber home for processing. Most of the meat is hung to dry in the wind. Blubber is nearly always salted. Though some whale meat and blubber eventually finds its way to the supermarket, the general guideline is for the grindadráp to remain a noncommercial food system. Collective effort is required for a grindadráp to be successful and the reward is shared collectively.

Whaling is always an unplanned event in the Faroe Islands. Grindadráp occur whenever whales are sighted and oceanographic and weather conditions are right for the drive and beaching to proceed. However, grindadráp are only permitted to occur on 23 of the archipelago's many beaches, thus creating geographical limitations to the spaces in which whaling is legitimized (Joensen 2009). Since 1709—the beginning of continuous, annual whaling records—the grindadráp has

taken, on average, 838 pilot whales and 75 dolphins of various species annually (Fielding 2010).

The problem of mercury and other contaminants in the tissues of the whales is well known in the Faroe Islands and has been studied in depth (e.g., Debes et al. 2006; Grandjean et al. 2007; Petersen et al. 2008; Choi et al. 2009). In 2008 the Faroese Hospital System released a statement, addressed to the Prime Minister but available to the entire population (and translated into English for the benefit of foreign readers), which read,

Pilot whales today contain contaminants to a degree that neither meat nor blubber would comply with current limits for acceptable concentrations of toxic contaminants. . . . From the latest research results, the undersigned consider that the conclusion from a human health perspective must now be as follows: *It is recommended that pilot whale is no longer used for human consumption.* (Weihe and Joensen 2008, 3; emphasis in original)

The lasting effect that this recommendation will have on the practice of whaling in the Faroe Islands remains to be seen. In 2008, the year the recommendation was released, there were no grindadráp. However, from 2009 to 2011, there were an average 698 pilot whales and 63 dolphins killed annually—both figures slightly less than the long-term average, to be sure, but hardly indicative of a widespread abandonment of marine mammals as a food source.

Methods

The primary method used in this research was the administration of survey questionnaires to students at local postsecondary schools. I was granted access to the schools in both cases after meeting educators who supported the aims of my research. Students were told that their participation was completely voluntary and no record was kept of students who opted not to participate; thus, response rates are difficult to estimate. The age and gender distributions of the respondents generally represent those demographics of the overall student bodies. Surveys were administered to groups of students ranging in number from 10 to over 100, depending upon class size and whether classes were combined at the teachers' request. The decision to survey postsecondary students was based on the assumption that students within this age range comprise the next generation of decision makers with regard to many aspects of the whaling operations in their respective countries. Younger students would not be expected to know as much about the whaling operations and their dietary choices are certainly not as self-directed as students in the targeted age range. Nonstudents of the same age range as these participants were not surveyed in large numbers and the results from these surveys are not included in this analysis. It is assumed that future economic and political power to make market and policy decisions, respectively, related to whaling will rest primarily in the hands of citizens with higher levels of education. Thus, it was determined that the predictive information sought by this study would best be found by surveying current postsecondary students.

The specific questions asked were not identical in the two surveys, owing to the different nature of whaling activities. Specifically, whaling in St. Vincent is a career choice, employing fewer than 150 individuals as whalers and vendors (Fielding

2010), almost all in Barrouallie, while in the Faroe Islands whaling is a community activity involving many participants without specialized skills, working under the direction of community-appointed foremen whose experience is called upon to direct the activity. However, no one in the Faroe Islands is a professional or full-time whaler.

In the Faroe Islands, I surveyed 225 youths (average age 18.3 years, 67% male, 33% female) at two separate postsecondary schools: *Føroya Handilsskúli* (Faroe Islands Business College) and *Tekniski Skúlin í Tórshavn* (Technical College of Tórshavn). Both colleges are located in the capital area but draw students from across the Faroe Islands. The survey participants came from nine of the 17 inhabited Faroe Islands, representing villages with and without approved whaling bays.

In St. Vincent, I surveyed 211 students (average age 18.0 years, 33% male, 67% female) at two postsecondary schools: St. Vincent and the Grenadines Community College and St. Vincent and the Grenadines Technical College. As in the Faroe Islands, these colleges are located in the capital but draw students from throughout the country.

I compiled the results of these surveys and conducted analysis to elucidate trends and relations between demographics and responses, and to better understand the spatiality of participation, perception, and consumption, as they relate to the local whaling operations.

Results

Results for the Vincentian and Faroese surveys are presented in Table 1 and Table 2, respectively. The results are presented by gender and spatial and other categories for each survey. Total aggregate responses are presented in the rightmost columns. Following the tabular presentation of results is a brief elucidation of the findings.

Consumption and Frequency

Among Faroese and Vincentian students, cetacean meat and blubber are relatively popular foods. More students consume meat than blubber in both locations. Among Vincentian students, those who do consume blubber eat it more regularly than meat. This speaks to the popularity of crisps as an on-the-go snack, either distributed after a catch or sold in bags by vendors. In the Faroe Islands, it is rare to eat meat and blubber separately unless one is in the habit of abstaining from blubber. The Faroese generally do not use whale oil. Oil is not very popular among Vincentian students; however, those who do use oil use it quite regularly—more than once per week on average.

Males in both locations are more likely than females to eat cetacean meat. In the Faroe Islands, where, since at least 1998, women have been warned that they are more susceptible to the lipophilic contaminants (Weihe 1998), females are less likely to consume blubber. In St. Vincent, where no comparable public health advisory has existed, males and females are equally likely to consume blubber, though males tend to eat it more frequently.

Geographically, Vincentian students from the leeward side of the island (where Barrouallie is located) do not consume cetacean meat and blubber more frequently than their counterparts throughout the rest of the island. However, leeward students use oil much more frequently, primarily (77%) as a medicine. This likely reflects the

Table 1. Results from St. Vincent student survey, divided geographically and by gender, with undivided results in the right-most column

	Male	Female	Kingstown	Windward	Leeward	South	Total
Number of respondents in category	69	142	37	44	32	78	211
Percentage of sample	33	67	18	21	15	37	100
Consume meat? (% yes)	72	61	73	66	63	62	64
Meat frequency? (times/year)	24	25	21	32	34	22	25
Meat healthy? (% yes)	72	65	73	73	72	56	68
Consume blubber? (% yes)	55	54	54	64	59	53	55
Blubber frequency? (times/year)	38	25	19	25	35	38	36
Blubber healthy? (% yes)	46	44	46	48	63	36	45
Consume/use oil? (% yes)	23	15	22	25	25	10	18
Oil frequency? (times/year)	24	81	48	66	114	20	64
Oil healthy? (% yes)	54	47	49	48	53	49	49
Desire more availability? (% yes)	65	65	68	68	75	58	65
Seen processing facility? (% yes)	17	16	14	11	25	14	17
Seen live or dead whale/dolphin? (% yes)	35	23	41	23	38	17	27
Know a whaler? (% yes)	26	15	22	20	38	10	19
Know a vendor? (% yes)	33	45	54	50	50	29	41
Consider a career in whaling or vending? (% yes)	1	1	3	0	0	1	1
Will whaling continue? (% yes)	78	77	73	91	84	74	78

Table 2. Results from Faroe Islands student survey divided geographically, by gender, and by passport (DK, Danish; FO, Faroe Islands), with undivided results in the right-most column

	Male		Female		Torshavn		Other		Whale		Non-whale		DK		FO		Total
					villages	bays	bays	passport	passport	bays	bays	passport	passport				
Number of respondents in category	151	73	127	98	143	81	172	45	225								
Percentage of sample	67	32	56	44	64	36	76	20	100								
Consume meat? (% yes)	91	88	91	90	90	91	92	96	90								
Consume blubber? (% yes)	67	45	74	60	59	59	59	69	61								
Frequency? (times/year)	25	15	17	25	20	23	20	21	21								
Consume less since health recommendation released? (% yes)	17	19	18	16	17	23	26	13	19								
Understand science behind recommendations? (% yes)	54	66	59	57	57	62	60	58	66								
Participate in grindadráp? (% yes)	72	45	76	67	63	64	65	64	64								
Watch grindadráp (only)? (%yes)	11	30	15	19	20	12	18	17	17								
Actively participate (ride in boat, haul whales, kill, butcher)? (% yes)	50	12	38	38	42	32	40	38	38								
Enjoy grindadráp? (% yes)	66	23	54	49	54	47	51	62	63								
Know a foreman? (% yes)	23	38	15	45	31	24	31	28	31								
Will whaling continue? (% yes)	52	41	51	45	56	39	42	51	51								
Optimistic (% yes or "hopefully")	85	79	78	91	91	72	87	85	89								

centrality of Barrouallie within Vincentian whaling culture, indicating either a regionality in Vincentian cuisine and use of folk medicines, or a simple lack of availability of oil in certain areas. A majority of students from throughout St. Vincent wished for greater availability of cetacean products. This was especially true for students from the leeward side, where the products are ostensibly already most commonly available. This indicates that throughout St. Vincent, demand for these products exceeds the current supply.

In the Faroe Islands, there was less geographical differentiation apparent. One exception was that students from the villages consume both meat and blubber more frequently than those from Tórshavn. This difference in frequency is most likely due to the relatively cosmopolitan culture of Tórshavn (called by one 19th-century French traveler, “*le Paris de l’archipel*” [Labonne 1888, 345]) and the presence of several large supermarkets and smaller specialty food shops offering an extensive array of alternative foods. The variety of imported products is much higher in Tórshavn than in the rest of the Faroes. Additionally, since meat and blubber are divided freely among the residents of the community where a grindadráp has occurred, there is often more to go around in the villages than in Tórshavn, owing to the comparatively large population in the capital. For all but the largest grindadráp in Tórshavn, only a portion of residents are able to get a share, with the rest being content to know that their names have moved up on the priority list for next time.

Healthfulness

Students were asked whether the products obtained through whaling—meat, blubber, and oil, mentioned individually—are healthy. To answer these questions, students would need to balance their understanding of the foods’ inherent healthfulness with any knowledge they might have about the foods’ susceptibility to environmental contamination.

Echoing scientific findings regarding the lipophilic nature of many environmental contaminants (e.g., O’Hara and O’Shea 2005), most Vincentian students surveyed consider cetacean meat to be a healthy food, while reactions were mixed on the healthfulness of blubber. Predictably, those who report consuming or using the products are more likely to endorse their health benefits than those who do not. However, many of those who deem the products unhealthy (38%, 62%, and 11% for whale meat, blubber, and oil, respectively) continue to partake. Perhaps for these participants, these products constitute “guilty pleasures” or perhaps the participants simply do not have control over their own diets—a very likely scenario for students still living at home with parents, a common situation for this age range (Young 1993).

In the Faroe Islands, where much discourse has been conducted on the subject of whaling and public health, a majority of students claim to understand the scientific principles behind the 2008 dietary recommendations. However, this self-reported understanding has little effect upon actual dietary changes. Of those who report that they do understand the science, only 20% changed their dietary habits following the recommendations: a near-insignificant increase over the 18% of those who report that they do not understand the science, yet still changed their diets in compliance with the recommendations. It should be acknowledged that the latest health advisory regarding whale meat and blubber (Weihe and Joensen 2008) does not treat meat and blubber separately. A recommendation of complete abstention is offered for

both. This is a departure from previous recommendations (e.g., Weihe 1998), which did offer different recommended limits specific to the two food products.

Familiarity and Participation

Following the questions about consumption and use of the products, students were asked about their familiarity with, and participation in, their country's whaling operation. For example, Vincentian students were asked whether they knew any whalers and whether they had seen the procedure of butchering and processing the whales. Answers leaned strongly toward unfamiliarity. Vendors represent the element of the whaling operation most familiar to Vincentian students. This is likely due to the mobility of the vendors throughout the villages of the island, whereas witnessing other aspects of the operation would require a trip to Barrouallie.

The most uniform response of all is the near-consensus among Vincentian students that a career in the whaling operation—as either a whaler or a vendor—is not something to be considered. Only 1% of students indicated that they would consider such a career, while more than 97% answered in the negative. This overwhelming lack of desire to work in the whaling operation should be seen as indicative only of the perceptions of these survey participants. Most whalers and vendors do not attain the level of education that these students are currently on track to complete. Indeed, many do not have the education that these postsecondary students have already completed. To be sure, some whalers and vendors are educated, but neither whaling nor vending is a job that requires a high level of academic credentials.

This stands in stark contrast to the Faroe Islands, where a majority of students make an effort to attend and observe the grindadráp whenever possible. Further, half of the male respondents and a smaller percentage of females actively participate (with *active* participation defined as driving, hauling, killing, or butchering the whales).

In the Faroe Islands, an important demographic factor related to whaling is the participant's choice of passport. Every Faroese citizen is given the choice of whether to carry a red Danish (EU) or green Faroese passport. A red passport makes international travel easier owing to its higher level of recognizability. Thus, green passports primarily serve as a symbol of national identity and were carried by almost a quarter of the students in this study. The grindadráp has also been seen as a symbol of Faroese national identity (Sanderson 1992), and to a large degree remains so. It is interesting to examine how these two symbols coexist. The differences between holders of green and red passports in eating whale meat and participating in the grindadráp are insignificant. Greater distinction exists regarding blubber consumption and enjoyment of the grindadráp. Perhaps blubber, by its status as a unique and iconic food product, takes on a new meaning, transcending that of ordinary food, to become a symbol of Faroese solidarity. Similarly, the effects of societal pressure may turn participation in the grindadráp into a perceived "duty" of any able-bodied Faroese male, but enjoyment of the activity is certainly optional. Further, those with Danish passports were more likely to change their diets as a result of the 2008 health recommendations. Based upon the higher levels of blubber consumption, enjoyment of whaling, and unwillingness to reduce consumption levels among green passport holders, perhaps those who identify more strongly with their Faroese nationality, as their choice of passport attests, also express their nationalism through their association with the grindadráp.

The Future

The worldwide future of artisanal whaling is uncertain. As indicated earlier, whaling operations are ceasing for a number of reasons. However, the commercial nature of the operation in St. Vincent may allow for easier prediction than for the operation in the Faroe Islands. The Vincentian market for cetacean products is strong, although inequalities in demand are both geographic and demographic. When asked directly whether whaling will continue, the majority of survey participants in both countries expressed belief that it will. This was presented as an open question and received a more nuanced response in the Faroe Islands, with half of the students saying that it will and one-third “hopeful” but not fully confident. In St. Vincent, students were more definite in their responses, with more than two-thirds answering in the affirmative.

Discussion and Conclusions

Major differences exist between the whaling operations in St. Vincent and the Faroe Islands—specifically in the method of whaling employed, participation by the public in whaling activities, and the scientific approach to the problem of environmental contaminants. Important similarities exist as well. Investigating these differences and similarities can advance our understanding of whaling and our prediction of its future direction, as informed by the behaviors and perceptions of today’s educated youth.

Cultural acceptance of whaling and demand for the products that the activity produces are influential in the continuation of the whaling operations in both St. Vincent and the Faroe Islands. Whaling became important in both study areas initially because of its provision for the subsistence needs of the people. This basic and very real connection to whaling continues today, as evidenced by the daily whaling voyages and sales of cetacean products in St. Vincent, the ever-present possibility that a grindadráp could occur on any given day in the Faroe Islands,¹ and, in both locations, the popularity of the food products that whaling produces.

Human populations in both places are increasing and may result in a greater demand for these food products in the future, especially in St. Vincent where little is known about the risk of environmental contaminants. In the Faroe Islands, youth are increasingly informed of the risks involved in consuming contaminated cetacean tissues, possibly tempering demand that would be otherwise likely to increase. Overall, consumption levels in the Faroe Islands have decreased slightly since the 2008 health recommendations, although correlation between this decrease and the survey participants’ understanding of the scientific background of the recommendations appears negligible. Additionally, one-fifth of the students surveyed in the Faroe Islands eat whale meat and blubber only for “special occasions” rather than as an ordinary meal. This percentage will likely increase as more Faroese seek to resolve the tension between their respect for science and their cultural attachment to this traditional food.

The concept of toxicity in cetacean tissues allows a reframing of the issue of whaling, compared to its ordinary place in environmental discourse. Whaling is often seen, *prima facie*, as an assault upon the natural environment. Here, we see in whaling an indicator of larger scale patterns of ecological degradation. As knowledge

gained through the study of these whaling operations becomes further integrated alongside broader ecological theory, shifts in the discourses on whaling and larger scale environmental issues are likely to occur. For example, we already hear pleas issued by Vincentians (Lewis 2012) and Faroese (Weihe and Joensen 2008; see also Lam and Fang 2007) to citizens and governments of larger, industrial nations, urging the latter to make efforts toward the conservation of marine ecosystems, the reduction of environmental pollutants, and the increased study of the effects of those pollutants on food safety.

As the presence of environmental pollutants threatens to affect the patterns of traditional resource use in the Faroe Islands, today's educated youth—those most likely to be in decision-making positions in coming years—must negotiate a path forward that is both adaptive to environmental change and faithful to cultural traditions. If toxins are found to be present in Vincentian-caught cetaceans, the same balance will need to be negotiated there as well.

Looking toward the future, it is conceivable that whaling could decrease in regularity and intensity in the Faroe Islands, while increasing in St. Vincent, especially given the desire for greater product availability among Vincentian youth and the lack of research regarding marine contaminants in the Vincentian context. Additionally, in St. Vincent the government actively encourages, through grants and loans, the expansion of the whaling operation.² These possible trajectories, if realized, could affect the Faroe Islands culturally as the population searches for a way to accommodate the historical prominence of whaling and its associated food products in light of new scientific findings regarding the human health risks that regular consumption of these products present. The lack of knowledge in St. Vincent regarding the potential ecological crisis resulting from the increase in marine pollution should only be attributed to the lack of research in that context and not seen as an indication that all is well. While the presence of these contaminants in the Faroe Islands does not necessarily mean that they will be found in St. Vincent, it should serve to encourage ongoing research and the open exchange of ideas between researchers studying the human and natural environments in these places and in all remaining whaling cultures.

Notes

1. Until recent years in the Faroe Islands, a grindadráp has taken priority over nearly any other activity. This is still the case throughout much of the archipelago, outside of Tórshavn. Anecdotes abound of churches being emptied mid-sermon, barbers and their clients running—one aproned and the other half-shaven—from the shop to the whaling bay, and even of a surgeon leaving his patient on the table when word of the impending grindadráp arrived. (An obviously apocryphal, yet revealing, version of the latter tale [Millman 1990] has the patient rising from the operating table and joining the doctor at the beach!)
2. In his public address at the Fisherman's Day festivities in 2009, Vincentian Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves issued a plea to the island's illegal marijuana growers to "come down from the mountain." The term *the mountain* is used colloquially as a euphemism for the marijuana fields located in the island's rugged and roadless northwest. The prime minister urged these men to seek honest employment, specifically mentioning possibilities in the whaling profession, and including an offer of financial assistance from the government for training and provision of capital for these legitimate occupations. Thus, whaling has become a national issue in the context of its potential to provide legitimate work to impoverished Vincentians who may otherwise turn to illicit occupations.

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