

Quota disputes and subsistence whaling in Qeqertarsuaq, Greenland

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Received October 2013; first published online 27 May 2014

ABSTRACT. In Qeqertarsuaq (Disco Island), northwest Greenland, local disputes about the allocation of annual whaling quotas for beluga and narwhals feature as a source of conflict between state-imposed categories of occupational and non-occupational hunters. The national authorities' co-management regime for the regulation of whale quotas has triggered the creation of new socio-economic groupings and compartmentalised respective groups of hunters in the process. Although the rigid legal categories have impacted upon the social unity and conduct of whaling in Qeqertarsuaq, and remain difficult to navigate, local whalers and their families nevertheless improvise and mould their interests around the legal frameworks in everyday interpretations of national and municipal quota allocations. The article argues that, in the process of receiving and interpreting annual quota allocations, hunters and their families draw on locally varying environmental and ecological circumstances and that their negotiation of current regulations, in turn, suggests a further consideration of the social aspects as these inform local knowledge about whales and wider socio-economic circumstances governing whaling in Qeqertarsuaq. In reviewing local receptions of annual quota allocations, the article assesses how whaling regulations are not just about the management of whale stocks but also about the management of whalers and their families and how this then calls for increased recognition of the fact that issues of social sustainability are intricately tied to contemporary concerns for environmental sustainability in Arctic whaling.

Introduction

During a year in Qeqertarsuaq (Disco Island) I carried out research on everyday hunting and fishing practices as these relate to the seasonal harvesting round. It was focused around local knowledge, experiences and approaches to environmental (in this case sea ice) and weather related fluctuations and how these, in turn, relate to the presence of harvestable resources (Tejsner 2013). When it comes to studying sea ice usage, Qeqertarsuaq is ideally located since the coastal environment offers both shorefast ice, which is usually stable in early spring, and a wider bay area where the floe-edge environment is often prone to the elements and therefore more dynamic.

I realised that, if I was to gain a more precise understanding of observations such as 'it is windier nowadays', or that 'the ice is thinner now', I would actively have to engage in some of the everyday routines that, after all, informed their observations in the first place. In other words, I needed to experience the social context of informant statements first hand so as to establish a more concise framework for documenting local perceptions of environmental changes. The bulk of the data collected was based on joining hunters and fishers as they went harvesting along the coast, with a focus on examining how skills, in this case, on sea ice (see also Pálsson 1993, 1994), are composed of tasks that revolve around and 'constitute everyday acts of dwelling' (Ingold 2000: 195). I learned to handle dogs and sled, set the right bait and how to read weather and ice conditions for signs of changes and the presence of prey. This participatory aspect provided the context for homing in on more specific questions; and eventually a pattern, in which local considerations inform socio-environmental

relations, was identified. This data was supported through informal (semi-structured) interviews and conversations held while visiting informants, where the talk often revolves around socio-environmental and local ecological issues.

Qeqertarsuaq has always been a place of whaling. Since the arrival of the earliest hunter-gatherers some 4000 years ago, Greenlanders have relied on the coastline and wider bay waters for the harvest of whales, seals and a range of local renewable resources. The Disco Bay region includes the towns of Ilulissat, Aasiaat, Qasigiannuit and Qeqertarsuaq (located on Disco Island, Fig. 1) and a handful of settlements scattered around the smaller islands. Qeqertarsuarmit's (residents of Qeqertarsuaq) attentiveness towards environmental fluctuations and consequent resource related changes has often been, and continues to be, key to subsistence livelihoods on the island. The seasonal fluctuations in the availability of selected marine resources inform day-to-day decisions among hunters about where and which species to harvest and the mixed cash-subsistence economy is essentially based on a multispecies approach to the everyday harvest of the coastal environment (see also Caulfield 1997: 25; Tejsner 2012).

Conversations often turn to experiences with the sea and its animals. Some informants are like human libraries that reflect a life lived at sea while others simply enjoy taking relatives out to family campsites along the coast. The sea and its living resources continue to represent the life bread of many locals and it is perhaps not difficult to understand that Qeqertarsuarmit reserve a special place for the coastal environment in their hearts. The local hunting of seals, whales and a variety of other maritime



Fig. 1. Qeqertarsuaq and other nearby towns and settlements in the Disco Bay area.



Fig. 2. A catch site on the ice.

species provides the socio-economic mainstay of many coastal communities in Greenland, as elsewhere in the Arctic (Wenzel 1995; Hovelsrud-Broda 1999). Studies indicate that the consumption of sea mammals harnesses the nutritional value of the meat itself (Bjerregaard and others 2000, Barsh 2001) and that whaling remains vital to the production of Inuit culture and reflects aspects of local ideology through shared communal values (Dahl 2000; Wenzel 1991).

The migratory routes of both narwhal and beluga lie close to the Greenland west coast throughout autumn and spring migration. Adult whales have an average size of between 4 and 6 m and weigh between 400–1300 kg (Heide-Jørgensen 1994). As with other local marine foodstuffs, whale harvests are governed by seasonal conditions of the ice and weather, and so the earliest catch witnessed in the course of fieldwork was in early January. The period from January until early April is usually a busy time in the community since schools of whales pass close to shore while ice and weather conditions are experienced as sufficiently calm for whaling. The presence or absence of maritime resources such as whales has influenced social and economic developments and also continues to inform present-day discourses about the regulation of national fisheries among Greenlandic politicians, government resource managers and foreign stakeholders.

The significance of whaling in Greenland lies in the numerous contributions that the resource provides for the continuation of local ways of life and the overall cultural viability of small-scale fishing communities (Caulfield 1997). In this sense, whaling is not, as most westerners tend to think, merely about whales, but is about relations between coastal dwellers and their non-human counterparts. While locals eat the whale meat, it is often accompanied by the story of the hunt itself, where it was caught, and the state of ice and weather conditions at that place. Family members will recall their previous experiences while exchanging observations of environmental conditions in relation to the quality of the

meat. In this way connections are established, not only between the family and the animal, but moreover between family members and the place in which the animal was caught (Fig. 2). The sharing and subsequent consumption of country foods such as whale meat reveals an intimate connection between Qeqertarsuarmit and local animals but also reinforces a sense of belonging which people share with familiar places along the coast (Tejsner 2012).

Indigenous people in the Arctic currently conduct whaling operations under special permits granted periodically by the International Whaling Commission (IWC). Although regulations in these waters were initially aimed at regulating the harvest of minke whales (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) (see Caulfield 1997), other harvestable species, such as beluga (*Delphinapterus leucas*) and narwhals (*Monodon monoceros*) have also received increased attention in recent years (Sejersén 2001). What constitutes ‘proper’ aboriginal subsistence whaling has been discussed ever since the IWC was established in 1946 and this has (more recently) created an arbitrary distinction between what constitutes permissible (subsistence) and impermissible (industrial) whaling practice (see Young and others 1994: 119). This distinction came about following the historical reduction in industrial whaling which has, in turn, increased international awareness of subsistence whaling by the IWC and relevant environmental organisations concerned with whale conservation. This has led to increased regulation of subsistence whaling while the definition of what constitutes indigenous subsistence whaling, remains subject to legal scrutiny because terms such as ‘aboriginal’ are not defined by the convention (Nuttall 1998: 98; Kalland 1993).

Arctic whaling has always been an issue for social anthropologists because the very acts by which hunting and the subsequent sharing of the catch are performed shed light on aspects of social unity and local economic circumstances, which in turn, characterise Inuit social life. The study of Arctic whaling typically ranges from the functional, that is how hunting and sharing relate to

social life, practices and ecology, to the diachronic, in which issues of community change and the role of external pressures are analysed. Although these approaches entail differing research agendas most researchers working in Greenland continue to emphasise social unity (Dahl 2000; Sejersen 2001) but also a shared sense of connection with familiar animals and coastal environments when it comes to whaling and its role in everyday life (Kalland and Sejersen 2005; Tejsner 2012). It should be added that coastal dwellers often perceive social unity and human-environmental familiarity as two sides of the same coin, and this research also suggests that these concepts are invoked interchangeably in relation to local disputes over quota allocations.

The focus herein is on contemporary Qeqertarsuarmit responses to the national implementation of whaling regulations by the self rule authorities. More specifically, the article assesses the impacts of whaling regulations (introduced in the early 1990s) and the ensuing system of rights as these pertain to particular socio-economic groups, and how these rights are currently being received and negotiated amongst local whalers. In Qeqertarsuaq, as elsewhere along the west coast, catch entitlements are based on a complex set of legal definitions that specify user, access and distribution rights, which have sparked the emergence of socio-economic subgroups among otherwise commonly unified whalers. When it comes to local interpretations of the national framework for quota allocations, the category-based approach increasingly affects the way in which people negotiate their interests' *vis-à-vis* their categorical social counterparts (that is fellow hunters). In this process of compartmentalisation, it is not only whales that are being managed but also increasingly the whalers and their families, whenever disputes turn to the annual distribution of quotas.

Daily forays and aerial surveys

The contemporary method of hunting beluga and narwhal in Qeqertarsuaq is a collective drive hunt in which several boats often work in collaboration to catch a whale. In most near Qeqertarsuaq, an average of 5–30 skiffs will go out in a collective, often coordinated, effort to catch whales by encirclement. Ways of hunting and outcomes always vary according to local environmental conditions such as tidal cycles, degree of ice coverage and prevalent wind conditions. In periods of substantial ice coverage, when open water navigation is severely restricted, boats will take up positions equidistant from the near-shore ice, landing their boats on ice floes for a more balanced aim. Whaling can involve anything between a handful of occupational hunters (since they are not bound by jobs onshore and may therefore invest the significant amount of time) to around 30 boats. What often sets whaling apart from seal hunting or fishing (which is pursued individually) is that it involves a significant investment in time, money and people, the latter that situates both

questions of conduct and issues of practice in the public sphere and thus often involves the wider community.

A day of whaling in Qeqertarsuaq will begin with hunters assembled on the top of the high rocks near *Qaqqaliaq* (The Viewpoint) at the town's southernmost outcropping. Going there with the first light and imminent dawn is a good opportunity to assess the weather and hopefully catch a glimpse of a school of beluga or narwhal somewhere along the vast horizon of polynyas and partly open sea of ice. An area of darker clouds reveals spots of open water further out at sea around Imerigsoq (Kronprinsen's Eiland) while hazy southwesterly reaches suggest a possible onset of avannaq (the north wind) conditions, which could easily spoil hunting or ice-fishing.

Then observation and horizon scrutiny, defined not by the clock but by the rhythms of the returning sun over the ice, the manners of the marine mammals, and the ebb and flow of tides, to which hunters attune through watchful remarks. In nine out of ten whaling efforts, whalers return empty handed and so the better part of whaling is spent patiently waiting, constantly taking into account current ice and weather conditions while assessing these factors in relation to the presence, and abundance of whales, and the likelihood of catching one. An important aspect of this relates to the idea of patience and how it always underpins the air of silence observed among the whaling crews. One impatient or over-eager hunter who starts up his engine too early might easily spoil the element of surprise, which is, as many whalers relate, often key to a successful hunt.

Whaling among Qeqertarsuarmit is essentially characterised by openness and flexibility that is expressed by timely performance of relevant skills that mimic the rhythms of moving animals, sea ice and changing weather. A change in any of these factors prompts a change in the hunter and, conversely, a change in the hunter's attitude (such as impatience) might cause a change to factors that influence the outcome of the hunt. If a whale is spotted everyone makes for their skiffs. Patient waiting is instantly replaced by hectic hauling of boats into the sea and the sound of outboard engines starting up, driven by that single opportunity of partaking in the hunting, sharing and tasting of the priceless whale meat and *mattaq* (skin with blubber attached). There is no formal or informal leader signalling the go-ahead and since the collective whale hunt cannot be planned in advance, it remains a question of opportunity: of seizing the right weather, current and ice conditions, the movement of the whales and finally the collective anticipation and mood of the hunters.

The initial part of a whale hunt can perhaps be described as the 'tracking' phase, since it entails selecting and tiring a whale by chasing it and directing shots at its lungs whenever it surfaces. It is a question of homing in on a school or single whale, thereby bringing the boat(s) closer to the prey. In the case of denser or 'slushy' ice conditions, possible dive tracks consisting

of two centrally overlapping rings may provide useful cues concerning the whales' direction. This part of the hunt often sets experienced hunters apart from novices because it involves a substantial degree of local environmental familiarity and know-how based on knowledge of the seabed, immediate currents and tidal movements for assessing the whale's next surfacing area. Driven by concrete reasons for doing so, someone might take a leading role by providing directed encouragements to fellow crews in relation to a collectively oriented encirclement of the prey. But as one hunter told me about his role in successfully hunting a fast swimming fin whale, 'I got there a little late and saw the other boats in pursuit and so immediately I made for the right area to cut him off' (J. Lyberth, personal communication, 18 July 2008). Whaling is a question of collectively thinking-as-one, and since fast swimming whales frequently both outmanoeuvre and outsize individual boats, whalers must steer their vessels while continually paying heed to other boats so as not to enter the line of fire. This first part of the hunt is often the most uncertain and time consuming, but once the drive-hunt has gone on long enough, the whale gets tired and begins to surface more frequently.

When the whale no longer takes long (or deep) dive intervals the pursuit enters the catch stage in which boats move closer to the animal so as to get within harpooning range. Increasingly the whale appears near the surface to breathe and whenever it does so, shots are fired. Depending on the number of hunters partaking, this part of the hunt may become confused, since the number of boats involved and their position or intent in relation to one another can lead to decreased coordination. Because a collective drive hunt tends to involve many boats, subsequent debates often ensue after a catch is safely ashore. Ideally, as a whale hunt develops, the boats making up a given hunting party cooperate ever more closely, and this allows the vested interests of boats chasing a given whale to be identified. However, confusion sometimes ensues after the hunt is over, as individual hunters or boat-crews either join in the hunt later on or forsake one chase for another. This in turn gives rise to discussions concerning which (or how many) whales this or that boat is entitled to receive shares from. For example, a boat might be part of a group specifically tracking one whale, only to leave, if the opportunity arises, to contribute in the actual catching of another nearby whale, and in such situations elaborate and sometimes heated discussion and disagreement may arise later on at the flensing site.

Occupational hunters, who are out hunting and fishing more or less every day during the season, sometimes complain about the number of skiffs involved in whaling *vis-à-vis* the constraints that the new quota allocation scheme inevitably presents. Caulfield reports similarly that hunters would recount how 'Before the quotas, there would usually be six or eight or ten boats going out after one whale. Others knew that they'd have a chance later on. But now everyone goes out because maybe we can only get a few whales each year' (Caulfield

1997: 136). This last point should be kept in mind as I turn to discuss the negotiation of regulations today. As increasing numbers of people gained access to whaling, the 'role of the hunter' was gradually substituted by the idea of mere 'participation in the hunt', bringing about significant changes to the ways and manner in which the catch is divided in the Disco Bay region today. As Dahl's (2000) ethnographic study from Saqqaq shows, division rules are nowadays rooted in a 'boat-egalitarian' principle based on the idea that 'one boat equals one share', and a similar principle can be observed across the bay in Qeqertarsuaq. What sets whale hunting apart from other subsistence practices in Greenland is that whaling is an activity where 'collective ideas and representations are expressed, confirmed, negated, and revised' (Dahl 2000: 66), which moreover connects associated households throughout the community via distribution of meat and *mattaq* shares. Since whaling in particular often demands cooperation between many boats it remains a community-wide practice and can arguably be said to reflect collectively shared values and interests.

The introduction of motorboats and fibreglass skiffs fully equipped with outboard engines led to the demise of millennia-old meat sharing practices observed in the kayak hunting traditions. Ethnographic examples from the past frequently describe sharing practices in relation to whales caught using kayaks (Birket-Smith 1924; Thalbitzer 1941). The first hunter to successfully harpoon a whale was perceived as the principal hunter and the next person to throw a harpoon was considered second, third and so on. Usually around five or six so-called 'helpers' would be involved. The rules of division were based on the individual hunter's role in the hunt, in which both sequence of harpooning and proximity (such as touching the catch) would influence the subsequent division. This system of division based on the individual hunter's role in the hunt was common throughout most of Greenland (Dahl 2000; Sejersen 2001) and also practised extensively elsewhere in the Arctic region (Wenzel 1995: 55). As more and more hunters gained access to improved boats, skiffs and trawlers, the traditional rules of division, based on the individual hunter's knowledge, influence on and role in the hunt, were increasingly questioned and participants gradually began to demand larger shares of the catch.

One of the issues, which hunters and their families often touch upon, relates to the conduct of aerial surveys and the regulation recommendations associated with this method of research. In the early 1990s, the combination of improved boats (with increasingly powerful engines) and trawlers (that operate on wider ranges) resulted in increased hunting and should be considered in relation to the warning calls that followed. The warning echoed scientific estimates which found that 'the stock is substantially depleted and that present harvests are several times the sustainable yield [...] It is apparent that harvest must be reduced to about 100 animals per year to have any significant chance of stopping the

decline in the stock within the next 10 years' (NAMMCO 2000: 18). In response to growing international pressure the national authorities began implementing regulations although Greenlandic hunters were astounded by the recommendations and met the biologists' estimates with a measure of disbelief. The political discussions of whaling regulations became intense, because politicians were worried about taking an effective stance on the issue due to the substantial economic and cultural importance of whaling (Sejersen 2001: 438). In a sense, the government was 'stuck between a rock and a hard place', when both wanting to abide by internationally voiced concerns for the particular stock and keeping public opinion at home in check at the same time.

In response to concerns over a possible cut in beluga hunting, the authorities commissioned an investigation to document the knowledge of local hunters about the number of beluga whales in Greenland waters. The research, which turned out to be a questionnaire survey, showed a high degree of inconsistency and disagreement between respondents all along the coast (compare Thomsen 1993). But it also revealed that local hunters possessed much knowledge about migratory patterns, habitation sites and attributes such as health and behaviour of beluga whales. Despite the report's concern to apply a uniform methodology, and to organize the data in line with the vernacular of scientists and managers, it nevertheless created a lot of doubt and was subsequently rejected by home rule biologists on the grounds that it was neither useful nor 'scientifically speaking' correct. The authorities, despite local hunters' testimony to the contrary, followed the recommendations of the biologists and began to implement the first management regime for beluga whaling in Greenland. However, contrary to what could be viewed as the deliberate marginalisation of local hunters' knowledge and insights about beluga, the influential Greenland Hunters' and Fishermen's Association (*Kalaallit Nunaanni Aalisartut Piniartullu Kattuffiat*, KNAPK) was able to lobby for an outcome which would not restrict hunting activities too severely (Sejersen 1998: 39). Essentially, it was the lobbying strategy and political bargaining power of KNAPK, and not, for example, local hunters' experiences and insights concerning beluga, which would carry weight in the debate.

During that period, disagreements between local hunters, government biologists and the authorities concerning estimations of various stocks provided by biologists often revolved around the issue of how specific knowledge had been collected. Disagreements addressed such themes as knowledge about the size of the beluga population, knowledge about environmental factors that influence the presence of animals and finally knowledge about socio-cultural affairs (Sejersen 1998: 170). Since the late 1980s, biologists working for either the IWC or the Greenland government have made aerial surveys, conducted by two observers flying over a designated plot between 66°N and 70°N, employing a constant speed and

altitude, and for the sake of comparability, ideally repeating the measurement over the same period of time every year. This method has become the standard technique for estimating the size of different whale stocks in Greenland waters. The collected survey data revealed a decline in aerial sightings along the west Greenland coast at the rate of 5 per cent per year since 1981.

This way of collecting knowledge is criticised by Qeqertarsuarmiut hunters, who often question its validity by comparison to their everyday hunting. They often argue that the biologists are counting at the wrong time of year and in the wrong places and moreover, they disagree with the biologists' assumptions about beluga foraging behaviour in the ice (see also, Sejersen 2005: 49). As one hunter points out, after we have been out hunting all day, 'I doubt that those biologists flying in their airplanes high above the water encounter many whales [...] you know, just as well as I do, that they like to hide beneath the sea ice' (S. Zeeb, personal communication, 12 April 2008). Comments about the quality of aerial surveys and the validity of scientific advice are often heard along the west coast, as hunters argue along the lines that they see lots of beluga or 'yesterday I saw hundreds of them out in the ice' (Sejersen 1998: 108). The Greenland case is not unique since many of the debates between hunters and scientists in the Arctic centre around the inherently different cultural norms associated with the ways in which knowledge about the animal is collected and assessed (see Usher 2000; Nadasdy 2002; Berkes and others 2007). However, while the inherent differences governing knowledge about whales (and how best to integrate local views) address one aspect of the debate, the consequent social conditions, which inevitably follow the compartmentalisation of local hunters, should equally be taken into account in any appraisal of Arctic indigenous whaling today. Sejersen (2003) observes that, in most debates about sustainable resource use in Greenland, there is an inherent tendency to focus solely on the animal in question (that is have the biologists got the numbers right or, what are the limits in terms of sustainable whaling?). The exclusive focus on the state of different whale stocks means that the debate is dominated by biologists and scientific jargon, which consequently alienates and marginalises the local population whose livelihoods depend on whaling. Since the national debate is primarily focused on *environmental* sustainability this inevitably implies that any talk of *social* sustainability is not easily identified. In what follows, I focus on the social aspects of whaling as these underpin and inform quota debates in Qeqertarsuaq.

Hunting rights and local quota disputes

In Greenland, the IWC participates directly in quota management but the common procedure for the allocation of quotas to designated municipalities falls under the authority of the self rule government. The government issues whale quotas after consultation with marine biologists

who conduct the above aerial surveys of relevant stocks. Once the municipal licensing office has received its share of the annual quota allocation they are responsible for issuing permits to occupational and non-occupational hunters alike. At the time of fieldwork, there was one wildlife officer in the area charged with enforcing that annual quota allocations for the municipality are not exceeded and it is also his or her duty to report any violation of these to the local police officer.

Municipal authorities are responsible for informing the self rule authorities about the number of whales caught during the season and should report any infringements of the regulations. The authorities are responsible for reporting to the IWC concerning the overall annual whaling activities, which then informs the calculation of the following season's quota allocations. The KNAPK represents the interests of Greenland whalers to the outside world and it is not uncommon for the association to frequently challenge annual population estimates made by marine biologists and related scientific knowledge upon which the IWC relies when deciding on quota policies (Nuttall 1998: 107).

The annual allocation whaling quotas for Qeqertarsuaq hunters during my period of fieldwork was 16 narwhals and 15 beluga whales. In Qeqertarsuaq there were approximately 80 hunters with occupational hunting licences while around 230–250 residents held non-occupational hunting licences at the time of fieldwork (in 2007–2008).

On the ground in a small-scale fishing community such as Qeqertarsuaq it was customarily thought that access to the local territory and resources such as beluga was based on community membership and the individual hunter's influence in what essentially constituted the sphere of communal interest. But with the introduction of the management regime, the locus of control has been transferred beyond the customary communal boundaries and repositioned in the emergent nation's capital. The resulting power vacuum at the community level is the main cause of some of the tensions displayed today. As Dahl puts it, 'the heart of the matter', with regard to the introduction of the new regulations, is that 'social and territorial control as exerted by the local communities has been exchanged with centralized political control' (Dahl 1998: 77). This observation is based on the fact that the new management regime obscures the influence of local hunters in a trend that reflects increased marginalisation of small-scale fishing economies. The process began in the mid-1990s with the introduction of state-imposed hunting regulations, which substituted previous communal values such as the individual hunter's experience, social influence and territorial notions of belonging and ownership.

Since hunting regulations are nowadays based on an elaborate system of rights as these pertain to the individual hunters' socio-economic circumstances, local receptions and interpretations of relevant rights, they have created tensions between respective groups of occupa-

tional and non-occupational hunters. Whalers come from all walks of life in the socioeconomic landscape found in Qeqertarsuaq; however, with the introduction of occupational and non-occupational permits, hunters are now divided according to personal incomes. The occupational group of hunters is primarily composed of individuals whose incomes are derived solely from hunting and fishing, however, in cases where individuals can claim that 50% or more of their incomes are derived from hunting and fishing, they also qualify for occupational licences. Hunters who do not meet the income criteria may hold a non-occupational hunting licence, which is available to anyone who is in the national register. Any holder of a valid hunting licence (occupational or otherwise) is considered a hunter by the authorities and in practice this means that users range from school teachers to retired politicians who may hunt alongside occupational hunters.

The self rule government's basic platform for hunting regulations is a bureaucratic structure that supports the identification and consequent licensing of occupational and non-occupational hunters. The management regime is principally based on a differentiation of *user*, *access* and *disposition* rights as these correspond to different groups of hunters. *User rights* outline individual hunters' rights to use a resource, that is to participate as either occupational or non-occupational hunters. During the public debates held with regards to the implementation of whaling regulations many occupational hunters lobbied intensely for the exclusion of non-occupational hunters from whaling in the first place, arguing that their user rights as occupational hunters should take priority over those of non-occupational hunters, since hunting (and not waged employment) formed the economic mainstay of their trade. In this case, the authorities adhered to what is fundamentally an egalitarian notion of property, in which all Greenlanders have the right to natural resources.

Access rights designate the way in which hunters can harvest a resource, that is what type and size of boat is used during whaling and they originated in what was later dubbed 'the trawler debate'. Dahl has noted that the debate arose from the fact that coastal trawlers would often enter local community waters, thus competing directly with smaller local boats for access to beluga. In this sense, concerns voiced by local small-scale hunters were essentially based on the view that subsistence hunting should take priority over waged employment. The trawler debate reflected the fact that although the economic mainstay of trawler crews was based on shrimp fishing, and other deep sea activities, many vessels also engaged in the lucrative harvest of whales along the coast. As larger trawlers kept entering coastal waters, local hunters, who felt that their livelihoods were at odds with this unwelcome development, increasingly began to argue that this was somewhat unfair because it interfered with their immediate economic interests (Dahl 1998: 74). *Disposition rights* basically outline individual hunter's means of disposing of a catch, that is whether it may

solely be used for household consumption or also sold for a profit. Provisionally, these rights are restricted from the onset since no one has the right to dispose of the catch as they see fit. The basic difference is that occupational, as opposed to non-occupational hunters, are allowed to sell the catch to local people and public institutions.

The *access* regulations regarding vessel sizes imply that the boat, and not the user's status as either occupational or non-occupational hunter, becomes the defining criterion for deciding which rights apply. And despite all good intentions, these criteria have been received with some confusion among local hunters, which is hardly surprising. It is often the case that an occupational hunter, usually listed as the owner of a skiff or other small boat (that is under 25 Gross Registered Tons), goes from one boat to another, depending on seasonal job opportunities such as temporarily enlisting as a crewman on a trawler or joining the halibut fisheries around Illulissat in summer. In such cases, the rights do not relate to his status as an occupational hunter (whose livelihood depends on selling catch) but instead change with the size of the vessel. It is worth pointing out that the purpose of the governments' allocation of hunting rights was actually to empower *specialised* small-scale hunters on the grounds that those who rely on whaling for a living should be favoured over hunters on trawlers who are, after all, primarily engaged in waged employment while occasionally hunting whales should the opportunity arise. On the one hand, the Greenland whaling regulations remain exemplary when compared to other North Atlantic state fisheries policies, in which restrictions have often left small-scale fishermen with little or no option to continue their trade. But on the other hand, any hunter or fisherman who occasionally hunts to sustain his household during, for example, periods of unemployment is, by definition, *non-specialised* (that is a non-occupational hunter) according to the present legislation. This creates obstacles for those households who depend both on occasional waged employment and seasonal harvesting opportunities.

Sejersen has observed the deterioration of group coherence or a compartmentalisation of occupational and non-occupational hunters in Sisimiut (Sejersen 2001: 437). This is often marked by direct confrontations, which rest on the interpretation of those aspects of the new regulations that refer to *user* and *disposition* rights. A similar development can be observed in Qeqertarsuaq as conflicting opinions often boil down to a perceived division between respective groups of hunters based on the state-imposed categories of entitlement. The two groups are defined according to socio-economic criteria or simply: those who hunt for a living (occupational hunters) and those who either hunt for leisure or pursue whaling as an occasional means for landing additional incomes (that is non-occupational hunters). The ensuing 'either-or' rhetoric can be said to have triggered a divide between perceived socio-economic groups while regulations are often the subject of heated discussion at the onset of the whaling season.

In Qeqertarsuaq, one commentary voiced a growing concern regarding recent developments in disputes over the annual allocation of quotas for beluga and narwhals among occupational and non-occupational hunters. It argued that the local branch of the Hunters' and Fishermen's Association (*Aalisartut Piniartullu Peqatigiiffiat Qeqertarsuaq*, APPQ) continued to remain suspicious of the municipal council's recent decision to allocate the annual quota of 15 beluga and 16 narwhals to both occupational (that is members of the APPQ) and non-occupational hunters. In the newspaper article, the foreman of the APPQ stressed that 'the traditionally rich hunting of narwhal and beluga, resting on mutual respect between occupational and non-occupational hunters, is threatened because both the municipal council and non-occupational hunters no longer show any respect for the livelihoods of occupational hunters' (*Atuagagdliutit* (Nuuk) 6 November 2007). The foreman's appeal to mutual respect between occupational and non-occupational hunters was based on the observation that the season had been characterised by a particularly poor harvest due to the absence of incomes from seal and cod, which moreover combined with the fact that whale quotas had grown increasingly stringent in recent years. The main source of income for occupational hunters is often the sale of sealskin and cod but since sealskins were shedding while cod had not arrived at all, occupational hunters were left with only one option, namely to plea for exclusive *user* entitlements to the municipal whale quota.

The article reflects local interpretations of the rights regime from the point of view of occupational hunters, by indicating the austere conditions facing them, and seeks to question the user rights of non-occupational hunters. But as one non-occupational hunter also pointed out in relation to his group's assertion of user rights, 'it has become more difficult to provide meat and *mattaq* in recent years, mostly because occupational hunters rarely sell on their catch' (*Atuagagdliutit* (Nuuk) 6 November 2007). By stressing the fact that the otherwise cooperative nature of whaling between the two groups had been characterised by several conflicts, both during and after previous whaling seasons, the foreman sought to invoke aspects of the traditional respect commonly observed towards occupational hunters and their livelihoods. Following the publication of the newspaper article above, many of the discussions held, with occupational and non-occupational hunters alike, repeatedly drew attention to the fact that other harvesting opportunities had failed and that the harvest of beluga and narwhal therefore represented the last viable economic option that season.

A similar case was reported from nearby Saqqaq, where a letter forwarded to the regional office in Illulissat demanded that only occupational hunters should be allowed to hunt beluga. As the local foreman in Saqqaq points out, their pleas are never met on favourable terms since: 'All members of the municipal council only have red hunting licences [that is non-occupational certificates], so we probably never hear anything from

them' (Dahl 2000: 75). Across the bay waters, rumours circulated, one day in late autumn, prior to the onset of the whaling season. According to these rumours (I was never able to establish whether any formal notification was provided), whaling licences were to be picked up at the local office from 10 am onwards on a set date. When I arrived to observe this 'first come – first served' event, I noticed the disappointed expressions and angry voices of occupational hunters queuing alongside non-occupational hunters on their way to work. One influential occupational hunter simply sighed while surmising the conflict in the following way, 'our incomes vary with weather, winds and ice conditions and how these circumstances affect the presence and movement of animals, whereas they [the non-occupational hunters] will make a living no matter what' (Anonymous, Qeqertarsuaq 22 November 2007). But where conflicts arising over catch entitlements would once have been dealt with by influential hunters then and there, over a hot steaming whale body, many now feel a sense of disempowerment since entitlements are now decided elsewhere, beyond the sphere of communal influence. Another hunter simply stated, 'what good is our voice when those people in Nuuk never listen anyway' (F. Grønvold, Qeqertarsuaq, 3 December 2007). This perception of a 'distant centre', in which Nuuk is substituted for Copenhagen has been present ever since the implementation of quotas began (see Caulfield 1997: 137). It sums up the commonly shared view of many small-scale coastal economies and the idea that life on the periphery continues to be dictated by a distant capital, which continuously fails to acknowledge social dimensions of whaling in a place like Qeqertarsuaq.

While relating the main sources of the dispute, I have sought to convey the dilemma, which characterises Qeqertarsuarmit whalers' confrontation with bureaucratic reasoning. The no-win situation relates to their socio-economic opportunities as they seek to accommodate both the conflicting demands of regulatory frameworks and the rights of non-occupational hunters. Faced with this dilemma, how do Qeqertarsuarmit hunters (occupational and otherwise) then come to terms with, or better, navigate state-imposed regulations in the course of everyday life? Based on confrontations between local hunters and regulatory requirements, as set forth by the self rule authorities, Sejersen has argued that both 'management regulations, as well as local practices, reflect an increasing compartmentalisation of social groups' (2001: 432). If read as an all-encompassing national text, self-rule regulations can be said to discriminate by selectively compartmentalising the respective groups of hunters while simultaneously bypassing the communal sphere of influence (Dahl 1998). In Qeqertarsuaq this sense of compartmentalisation finds expression both on the streets and around the pier while also made evident in the case of regional newspaper coverage. The categorical impositions are increasingly internalised because discussions often revolve around interpretations of rights based on

local socio-economic and ecological circumstances and the individual hunter's position in society (that is his or her influence as either occupational or non-occupational hunter).

It could be argued that the ways in which local hunters choose to interpret and thus meet with increasingly stringent regulations, reflects the particularly flexible approach, which Qeqertarsuarmit always adopt when it comes to dealing with both social *and* environmental relations. One of the persistent hallmarks of Inuit culture remains the 'experimental lifestyle' people continue to bring to everyday interactions with kin relations, that is in the form of flexible kinship patterns (Bodenhorn 2000) and the always changeable quality of weather, ice and the wider coastal environment (on the concept of experimental lifestyle, see Briggs 1991). Qeqertarsuarmit hunting practices imply adhering to values or qualities such as flexibility, openness and patience that find their roots in knowledge and skills that are highly attuned to shifting weather conditions and the movement of animals (Tejsner 2012). As hunters engage with an environment that is 'full of surprises, flips, and multiequilibria' (Sejersen 2005: 46), they remind us of the wider experimental aspect of Inuit culture, which relies on the on-going revision of expectations towards relations with animals and coastal environmental forces.

For subsistence livelihoods to thrive, harvesting activities must continue to rely on an ever-flexible use and everyday awareness of familiar coastal waters. When Qeqertarsuarmit go fishing, a calculated affordability often pervades their activities and might readily give rise to a change of goal, quickly turning a fishing trip into a possible seal hunt or a seal hunt into a whaling effort. The mimicked flexibility with which hunters engage with the environment is revealed in enduring interactions with animals, weather and ice conditions and testifies to the implied understanding that if one is set to *receive*, then the environment essentially *gives* (compare Bird-David 1990, see also Nuttall 1992; Bodenhorn 1988). This entails not only a detailed understanding of oceanographic conditions such as winds, tides and currents but also an understanding of how these circumstances relate to the presence of harvestable species (Pollnac and Johnson 2005: 34). This observation resonates with the experiences of fishermen and whalers elsewhere in the North Atlantic region who typically exercise a multispecies approach by relying on the variation of locally obtained wildlife for household consumption and trade (Kalland 1993: 124). Many of the comments, which hunters provided in relation to increasingly stringent quotas, are rooted in a view of the world that is lived by 'keeping it going' through the use of knowledge and skills that are 'flexibly responsive to ever-variable environmental conditions' (Ingold 2000: 147). It comes as no surprise then that Qeqertarsuarmit whalers, faced with the inflexible character of legal frameworks, are merely attempting to incorporate annual quota allocations so as to meet the social aspects of whaling (that is

economic circumstances and environmental conditions) more amicably.

If we return to the rights of the respective groups of hunters and how these relate to the conflict at hand, it is worth highlighting the nature of the approach to the 'rights situation' which Qeqertarsuarmiut whalers sought to adopt. In a creative act of resistance, occupational hunters sought to invoke the interrelationship that exists between seasonal environmental and ecological constraints (that is the poor quality of seal skins that year and so on) and how these in turn affected their ability to exercise their disposition rights. In this sense, the occupational group of hunters had no choice but to question the user rights of non-occupational hunters on the grounds that their own socio-economically defined disposition rights, according to current regulations, no longer sufficed. Interviews hinted that the dispute reflects the same kind of flexibility, which Qeqertarsuarmiut always employ regardless of dealings with the vagaries of the natural environment, or for that matter, less flexible bureaucratic structures. My point is that while increased regulation and ensuing compartmentalisation have sparked significant divisions at the community level, local hunters nevertheless continue to interpret, even mould, relevant rights to better meet the reality of everyday life in a coastal economy.

Essentially, the regulations governing whale quotas in Qeqertarsuaq have inadvertently resulted in an increased regulation of the whalers themselves and this has caused a deterioration of the social unity and group cohesion otherwise evident in the community. The sometimes heated discussions amongst the respective groups reflect the fact that Qeqertarsuarmiut hunters, despite national pressures, are simply trying to maintain a sense of local influence through a creative moulding of relevant rights so as to meet the realities of social life in a small fishing community. Finally, in relating the dispute over quotas between whalers I have aimed at showing how the social dimension of whaling co-management can no longer afford to focus solely on the aspect of local knowledge about whales and that there is a growing need for a considered inclusion of the people themselves.

Conclusion

I have argued that differing and often conflicting views about whales and whaling inform many of the rudimentary differences found in contemporary wildlife management and that a more flexible, or more inclusive, method should be pursued in the course of acknowledging the social dimensions as these inform subsistence whaling today. Although rigid legal frameworks and ensuing divisions obstruct communal influence while defying more innovative interpretations, they nevertheless continue to be moulded and reworked when Qeqertarsuarmiut imply that coastal livelihoods are defined by the particular approach people maintain towards constantly changing

environmental conditions and how these then influence local socio-economic constraints and opportunities.

In a place like Qeqertarsuaq, environmental conditions continue to pervade the fabric of social life because fishermen live, work and move within a nexus of varyingly available resources (including whales) as these are encountered along the coast. Coastal dwellers interpret regulations according to both their particular socio-economic circumstances and wider environmental conditions, which conversely hints at the improvised form of resilience with which Qeqertarsuarmiut receive, negotiate and continue to rework said pressures. Their approach suggests a more flexible solution, which is grounded in a multispecies harvesting method whereby whales should increasingly be considered alongside other available resources, as opposed to being treated in isolation, as is often the case in contemporary management approaches to quota management.

In Greenland, the earliest laws on fisheries were implemented in 1925 and since local populations along the coast must live up to national expectations in order to qualify for group membership (and rights), the national hypothesis as to what constitutes the 'appropriate recipient' thus ends up constructing an actual local recipient. The state-imposed social categories are continuously subject to negotiation and reconstruction as people seek to mould and navigate, lobby and persuade fellow hunters and national authorities. The situation facing Qeqertarsuarmiut whalers often translates as conflicts over rights but may also, simultaneously, be read as improvised acts of resistance against bureaucratic constraints, where national regulations are constantly reworked to meet local socio-economic and environmental circumstances since these are lacking within the current management framework. Interpretations and common receptions of self rule regulations frequently become a means for repositioning external pressures to better meet local conditions and this suggests the need for a more considered inclusion of those social aspects, which hunters continue to emphasise when it comes to annual quota allocations.

Since 2007–2008, the national authorities' response to local disagreements about how to interpret given regulations have ranged from the proposition that only occupational hunters be allowed quotas, to a more recent programme aimed at pilot testing the use of locally-based monitoring of living resources as a tool for improving resource management (Greenland 2013). It remains to be seen whether the data collected will actually be acknowledged by the authorities and considered on par with biological research estimates.

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