

**The Wake of the Whale. Hunter Societies in the Caribbean and North Atlantic.** Russell Fielding. 2018. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 342 p, hardcover, illustrated. ISBN: 978-0-674-98637-4. €25.00.

Whaling. Up to this day, probably one of the most controversial topics in international resource governance. Images of the great white whale and Captain Ahab come to mind, from the “slaughter house” of Taiji (McNeill, 2007, p. 3) to the seemingly intrepid fight of the *Sea Shepherd* against Japanese whaling in the Southern Ocean. As Charlotte Epstein has impressively shown in her 2008 treatise *The Power of Words in International Relations* (Epstein, 2008), an anti-whaling discourse has taken substantively hold in particularly Western societies. Not surprisingly, it is especially these countries that are champions of strict no-use agendas at the world’s most important whaling organisation – the International Whaling Commission (IWC). Japan, who recently left the IWC to reopen commercial whaling in Japanese waters, is easily depicted as an outlaw, a lone wolf, so to speak, due to its ongoing whaling activities.

Enters Russell Fielding’s book *The Wake of the Whale*. For in this book, the reader gets to know the cultural side of whaling. Not in Japan, but rather in the Faroe Islands – a self-governing entity within the Kingdom of Denmark, which is a EU member – and in Bequia, St Vincent & the Grenadines. The whales that are hunted there, however, do not fall under the ambit of the IWC, which only deals with the “great whales,” baleen whales and the sperm whale. All toothed whales, or small cetaceans, are managed regionally and are not subject to a global regime (Sellheim, 2020, p. 113; see also p. 147 in this book). But be that as it may, Fielding takes the reader on a journey to remote islands in the Atlantic Ocean, at least from a central European perspective, and introduces her/him to a world, which has not been part and parcel of the public discourse on whaling. Namely, that even though one may find it abhorrent, it is deeply enshrined with the local cultures and histories and plays an important role in the socio-cultural fabric of local societies. For instance, Fielding briefly describes how precisely non-verbal communication occurs between the harpooner and the sternman of a small whaling boat in St Vincent. This hints towards the multidimensional impacts of whaling activities on coastal societies. Societies, which are shaped by the surrounding seas and the long-lasting history of human–whale interaction (cf. p. 58). Similarly, Fielding writes about the histories and relevance of the *grindadráp*, the pilot whale drive of the Faroe Islands. Indeed, it is bloody and appalling for outsiders, but for the Faroese this drive, which occurs only when pilot whales are in the area, is and has been a source of food, cultural life and coming together. One needs to bear in mind that the Faroe Islands are a small, isolated group of islands in the North Atlantic, which does not certainly not belong to the warmer latitudes of this globe.

While drawing from his fieldwork in these two locations, Fielding has also included substantial background information and has, for instance, dedicated two chapters on the history of whaling (for a detailed history, see Tønnessen & Johnsen, 1982) as well as the role and problems of the IWC. But beyond that, Fielding provides brief, but concise overviews of the Faroese and Vincentian laws regulating whales and whaling. And very much to my satisfaction, Fielding deals with the importance of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), which is “a major factor in the conservation of cetaceans through the establishment of culturally embedded conservation strategies” (p. 161).

Indeed, an entire chapter is dedicated to the way local authorities as well as the whalers themselves regulate whaling in order to avoid a “tragedy of the commons” and to maintain the sustainability of the whale stocks. However, this fact and the cultural role of whaling in these coastal societies do not prevent “Foreigners on the Beach in Black Hoodies” (p. 224) to demonstrate against whaling activities. In other words, Fielding also tackles the implications of the presence of non-governmental organisations, such as *Sea Shepherd* in the Faroe Islands, and furthermore explores the reasons for whaling to have endured in these societies with whalers enjoying high statuses: they are “providers and also lead to good community relations, social activity, and feelings of mutual aid and interdependence” (pp. 243–244).

Lastly, we learn of the dangers whale meat may hold. Apart, of course, from the dangers of interacting with a large, wild animal, whale meat contains rather high levels of mercury. Therefore, in the Faroe Islands as well as on St Vincent, whale meat consumption is limited in order to avoid negative health effects. Not surprisingly, the regional public becomes

increasingly wary of whale meat and increasingly consider it a health risk. As a consequence, whales may in fact endure, but it might be the whalers which go extinct.

With Fielding's book, the whaling literature has gained an extremely important work on the sociocultural side of whaling – research which is rather sparse. While providing important background information, the book takes the reader to the locations through Fielding's own eyes as he describes his informants, the environment(s), whaling activities and simple impressions through his own eyes. While himself not being a supporter of whaling, Fielding shows that his respect for and friendship with the whalers have made him also respect and appreciate whaling activities in the Faroes and St Vincent. Therefore, the book is not an academic book itself, but a book which can be used for academic purposes. It is suitable for different audiences: from the whaling enthusiast, via the whaling opponent, to the whale researcher. The pictures that accompany the written text throughout provide the necessary visual impressions that are needed to make the

locations, whaling and the cultures better accessible for the unknowing reader. This book, I must conclude, is highly recommendable for its style, its content and the way whalers, whaling and whaling cultures are being presented. (Nikolas Sellheim, Helsinki Institute of Sustainability Science, University of Helsinki, Yliopistonkatu 4, 00014 Helsinki, Finland ([nikolas.sellheim@helsinki.fi](mailto:nikolas.sellheim@helsinki.fi))).

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