THE ECOTONE

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Perspectives:

Makah Whaling

Editor's Note

ECOTONE: a transition zone between two adjacent ecological communities, such as forest and grassland. It has some of the characteristics of each bordering community and often contains species not found in the overlapping communities. An ecotone may exist along a broad belt or in a small pocket, such as a forest clearing, where two local communities blend together. The influence of the two bordering communities on each other is known as the edge effect. An ecotonal area often has a higher density of organisms and a greater number of species than are found in either flanking community.

This issue of ***THE ECOTONE*** analyzes the controversial killing of a 3-year-old female gray whale by the Makah Indian Tribe on May 18, 1999. The Makah, hunting in their "usual and customary" fishing grounds off the Olympic Penninsula of Washington State, sparked a worldwide debate over animal versus cultural rights. This hunt was controversial in itself - the Makah asserted their right to resume their ancient whaling tradition based on an 1855 treaty. After years of lobbying, the International Whaling Commission finally allowed up to 20 whales to be taken over five years. Meanwhile, the whale had become one of the most important "charismatic megafauna" of contemporary environmentalism an immense, intelligent and awe-inspiring species that has generated tremendous public opposition to commercial whaling. Adding fuel to the fire, the Makah hunt was televised live to a worldwide audience. Millions of people saw footage of the gray whale being harpooned and subsequently shot with a high-powered rifle. These images provoked a storm of protest and countervailing defense of native cultural rights.

In this issue, we examine this controversy from multiple perspectives. In his article, "Makahs and Gray Whales: Not Black and White" Professor Matthew Dennis examines the historical background of this issue. In her article, "Whale Hunt Honors Makah Way of Life," Professor Madonna Moss provides an anthropological perspective, based in part on field experience with the Makah. Professor Peter List then discusses the difficult ethical issues involved in "Animal Rights and Cultural Ethics in the Resumption of Makah Whaling." Professor Peter Walker then provides a political perspective in his article, "Makah Whaling is also a Political Issue" - situating this issue in the wider context of global whaling politics. Finally, reporter Alex Tizon of the Seattle Times reminds us that racism remains a potent and ugly reality in our society, often lurking below the surface until provoked. His article, "Makah Whale Hunt Spurs Racist Comments," should remind us all that environmental conflicts are rarely about nature alone. Together, these articles help us see some of the interwoven threads that make this (and every) environmental issue a Gordian knot of complexity and conflicting values.

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Makahs and Gray Whales: Not Black and White*

by Matthew Dennis, Associate Professor of History, University of Oregon

The Makah Indians live at the extreme edge of the North American continent, on the tip of the Olympic Peninsula, where the Pacific Ocean meets the Strait of Juan de Fuca. They have been there for at least 2,000 years. Marginalized by the United States and its citizens for over a hundred years, they find themselves today at the edge of a controversy pitting crusading newcomers, self-proclaimed protectors of whales, against Natives, who seek to cultivate tradition and insure their cultural survival.

The complex nature of the controversy bedevils easy explanation. We prefer stories in which the forces of good face the forces of evil. If all was black and white, solutions would be plainly obvious, and the difficult dilemmas we confront in the real world would dissolve into the happy endings of Hollywood. We all want to save whales; we all want to recognize and redeem the injustices which have victimized Indians. It's not so simple.

Gray whales are native to the Pacific Ocean, migrating annually between the Bering Sea and the waters off Baja California; they are majestic animals, weighing up to 40 tons and growing to lengths of 50 feet, inspiring awe and respect among virtually all who see them.

Makahs are a people whose history in the Northwest predates the arrival of Europeans in North America by well over a millennium. From time immemorial (that is, until the 1920s) they have subsisted — not just economically, but spiritually and culturally — through whale hunting.

Makahs' contact with European and United States explorers, traders, settlers, and officials has been devastating. Disease introduced by outsiders reduced their numbers by at least seventy-five percent within fifty years of Lewis and Clark's famous expedition to the Oregon Country. A treaty in 1855 shrunk their ancestral lands and created a reservation, but it also guaranteed their right to continue to hunt, fish, and gather, though this contractual pledge would often be honored only in the breech. Meanwhile, Makahs were encouraged to assimilate, adopting agriculture (though their lands were poorly suited to it), sending their children to local agency and distant boarding schools, and abandoning their traditions and Native identities. The Makah economy continued to focus on the sea, particularly on the whale hunting that defined them. By the 1920s, however, whale stocks were so depleted that Makah whaling ended voluntarily. Were Makahs the cause of the gray whale's near extinction? Hardly. Industrialized, unsustainable hunting by white whalers had taken its toll, threatening whale survival and undermining Makah subsistence and culture. U.S. government regulation and international agreements further limited Makahs' ability to provide for themselves through hunting and fishing for other species, and the heavy logging encouraged on the Makah reservation denuded the landscape without enriching the nation. Indian gaming — itself a controversial answer to Native poverty — is precluded by the reservation's remote location, some four hours by car from Seattle. Unemployment hovers about the fifty percent mark.

Throughout the Makahs' historical ordeal, the U.S. government has shown little sympathy or respect for Makah culture or rights. After the 1937 U.S. ban on whaling — a decade after Makahs themselves placed a moratorium on such hunting — armed federal marshals prevented Makahs from using even those drift whales that washed up on their beaches. This despite the fact that article 4 of the Treaty of Neah Bay promised them the continuous right to hunt, fish, and gather in their "usual and accustomed stations." By the 1970s, such contractual rights had been reaffirmed for the Makahs and other Northwest Indian peoples by the landmark ruling of Federal District Judge George Boldt, a decision upheld by the Supreme Court in 1979.

Makahs had waited a half century to return to whaling, yet they waited another 20 years before returning to the hunt, that is, until gray whale populations rebounded and until their modest hunts would not

**Reprint courtesy of the Eugene Register-Guard*

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imperil the mammal's survival. Today, an estimated 23,000 to 26,000 gray whales inhabit the Pacific. Although not required to do so, Makahs filed a formal request with the U.S. State Department and the International Whaling Commission, seeking approval of its ceremonial and subsistence hunt. In October of 1997, the commission formally sanctioned the hunt, permitting Makahs to take up to five whales per year, beginning in 1998. Still, the Makahs proceeded cautiously and responsibly, forming their own whaling commission, selecting an appropriate crew, drawing up physical and spiritual guidelines and training crew members, and cooperating with the National Marine Fisheries Service to draw up a management plan. It was a difficult process for Makahs as they sought to restore their traditions and accommodate them to modern realities. On May 18, 1999, their painstaking efforts culminated in the successful taking of a gray whale, a result bewailed by some fringe environmentalists (many environmentalists — Greenpeace, for example — do not oppose Makah whaling) and some unsympathetic or uniformed observers.

Makah whaling will have no impact on the survival of gray whales, but it's likely to benefit Makah culture substantially. Their fates are intertwined, not at odds. Historically, the Makahs have shown whales as much respect as any other American people. And they continue to act accordingly. Critics claim the hunt is not traditional because it employs modern equipment as well as handmade harpoons and a cedar canoe. Who are these critics to interpret Makah traditions for Makahs? And why must Makahs be relegated to fossil status? It is ethnocentric to hold Makahs to a different standard — all cultures and religions meld the old and new. If ministers, priests, and rabbis deliver sermons through microphones, or if we depend on electric ovens to prepare traditional, ritual meals at Easter or Passover, who's to say that Makahs cannot conduct sacred hunts in a similar, technologically-updated fashion? As Makah elder George Bowechop observed, "They want us in a museum. They'd rather we just said, 'Oh, the Makah were great whalers,' and leave it at that. They want us to have a dead culture. But it's been our way of life. We look at the ocean and we feel we not only have a legal right but a moral right to whale."

We might not understand the place of whales and whale hunting in Makah culture; we may not prefer to eat whale meat ourselves; we may prefer vegetarianism; and we may regret that any animals are killed, particularly such massive creatures as whales. But we should accept Makah whaling, based on our treaty obligations, our support for religious freedom, our commitment to pluralism, and our faith in the national and international scientific community's assurances that gray whales are not endangered by the practice.

Whale Hunt Honors Makah Way of Life*

by Madonna Moss, Associate Professor of Anthopology, University of Oregon

Twenty-five years ago, I had the privilege of working alongside Makah students on the excavation of the Ozette archaeological site, located on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington.

I had enrolled in the Washington State University field school, co-sponsored by the Makah tribe, one of the first collaborative efforts between an American Indian tribe and a university on an archaeological project. It was a pivotal experience, eventually leading me to a career in anthropology.

During that summer of 1974, I learned that Makah culture was not dead or dying. Makah youth were very proud of their heritage. They knew the songs of their kin groups. They knew the dances their elders had taught them, and they honored their grandparents. They knew the ecology of their home territory: the food, medicinal, and industrial uses of the plants and animals in their rain forests, on their beaches, and in the near-shore and offshore marine environments. They were incredibly patient and generous with outsiders such as me.

**Reprint courtesy of the Eugene Register-Guard*

Life on the reservation was not idyllic, with poverty, unemployment and substance abuse causing serious social distress. The work at Ozette, however, promised to uncover a different chapter of their history.

Ozette was a whaling village, its occupation dating back 2,000 years. It's a prime location for intercepting migrating gray whales, northern fur seals and Steller sea lions. The remains of the village were buried under a mudslide, preserving the tools and household furniture, as well as the houses themselves that normally disintegrate in the wet Northwest climate.

Contained in the deposit were numerous whale bones, many used to line an extensive drain system built around the large wood plankhouses.

Whale bones were used to make furniture and many other artifacts. We found the weapons used to hunt whales, harpoon point blades made of sharpened mussel shell, bone harpoon valves, cedar rope lanyards and parts of the sealskin floats used to drag the whale.

In one of the four houses excavated was a wood carving of a whale's dorsal fin, inlaid with more than 700 sea otter teeth. This item of great wealth was found in the back of the house, associated with the highest-status family at the site, probably that of the whaling captain. The artifacts recovered from Ozette can be seen at the Makah Cultural and Research Center, a world-class, Makah-run museum at Neah Bay.

Drawing from ethnographic, archaeological and ethnohistorical sources, we know that not every Makah was qualified to be a whaler. The prerogative to hunt whales was inherited, but it also had to be earned.

Young men apprenticed to experienced senior men to learn the technology and personal power necessary for whaling and seafaring. They prepared for the hunt by fasting, spiritual purification and rigorous physical training. Women played roles of equal importance; the wives of whalers had to undergo their own rites of purification and spiritual disciplines.

It was a great privilege to be involved in whaling, and the entire community depended on the success of the whaling party. The same is true today.

Non-natives have caricatured contemporary Makahs as red-neck hunters, out to enjoy the thrill of killing. This portrait easily fits that of the "savage" or "primitive" American Indian. This grossly ethnocentric misrepresentation of Makah technological sophistication also fails to acknowledge the religious importance of whaling. While many of us have grown up in a society that rigidly divides church and state, religion was not separated out of everyday Makah life, neither in the past nor today.

The Makah and their relatives on the west coast of Vancouver Island, the Nuu-chah-nulth, were the only northwest coast Indians who routinely hunted whales. The Makah have a special relationship with the gray whale, and whaling is an essential part of Makah social identity. This was never strictly an economic pursuit, as it incorporated spiritual practices Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists would call "prayer" and "meditation." Whaling was recognized as a dangerous activity, not only because of the whale's size and physical power, but also because of the volatility of ocean conditions. Whalers were confronting challenges of supernatural proportions, and their success required individual and community preparation.

Whaling demands comparable physical and spiritual provisions today; although, unfortunately, the whaling crew has faced intimidation and threats of violence by misguided radical environmentalists.

While the Ozette investigations were about documenting the past, Makah whaling today is about exercising treaty rights and reclaiming history. The Makah hunt was sanctioned by the International Whaling Commission because it did not pose a threat to the survival of gray whales. As indicated recently, biologist Bruce Mate, of the Hatfield Marine Science Center, has documented 65 gray whales found dead along the shorelines of Mexico, California and Oregon this past winter. Whatever has been killing these whales should be of

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far greater concern to us than the single whale taken by the Makah. If we are worried about the gray whales, we should support Mate and others in discovering the causes of these deaths.

We can rest assured that the Makah will use the products of their whale responsibly to nurture their bodies and souls, to honor their ancestors and to educate the rest of us about their unique culture.

Animal Rights and Cultural Ethics in the Resumption of Makah Whaling

by Peter List, Professor of Philosophy, Oregon State University

The heated debate about Makah whaling reveals some of the deepest and contrary attitudes and emotions in our society. While there are many cultural, legal and political questions involved, some believe that this is primarily a question of ethics and that the resolution of the propriety of hunting and killing whales should determine how these other questions should be answered. The key issue for them is whether it is ever morally right for anyone to deliberately take the life of an intelligent creature such as a gray whale. In the end, they imply, this is not a negotiable matter but can be settled, logically, by rational arguments about the intelligent nature of whales and the harm that results from killing them.

But, should these arguments be divorced so cleanly from the history of racist oppression of native Americans, treaty rights sanctioned by law, and long-standing cultural traditions that make whaling an important feature of some native American cultures? Shouldn't we be concerned about the imposition of ethical views on native American cultural groups when they do not share all of the same ideas about right and wrong? Isn't it reasonable to believe that the Makah are capable of defining their own responsibilities without outside intellectual interference? The ethical dimensions of this issue are more complicated than they may appear to some moralists.

The strongest arguments about the immorality of whale hunting are made by those who believe ardently in animal rights and the injustice of violating the rights of whales. The intellectual basis for these arguments was laid down some years ago by various thinkers, including Tom Regan, one of the most prominent animal rights philosophers in the United States. Regan concluded that the moral objections against whaling are convincing reasons to cease whaling altogether, and, though he was referring mostly to commercial whaling, anti-whaling protesters at Neah Bay have used arguments like his to buttress their case. Regan made two points to support his position: first, hunting and killing whales is morally reprehensible because of the painful methods used; and second, independent of whether this is true or not, killing whales is simply wrong because a harm is done to them.

With regard to the first idea, Regan stated that there is little doubt that whales can be caused significant pain by the technology used to kill them. He pointed out that whales are social mammals with considerable intelligence and well developed nervous systems and brains. This gives them sophisticated sensory powers, including the capacity to perceive and feel things similar to humans. Moreover their behavior indicates that they are able to both enjoy their lives and to suffer pain, physical and psychological. In short, they are "sentient" creatures. Thus some whaling methods, such as harpooning, obviously cause them significant pain, are cruel, and should be eliminated.

After Makah whalers killed the first gray whale in May this year, protesters argued that this was clearly agonizing to the whale because the whalers initially used harpoons that wounded the mammal and then, after approximately eight minutes or so, completed the killing with a .50-caliber rifle. At a minimum, they

asserted, the method of killing used should not deliberately cause pain to the mammal, and of course few would disagree. But suppose, Regan continued, that this first argument is set aside on grounds that whaling could be made "clean and efficient" and could be done so as to cause instant and painless death. Would the hunting and killing of whales still be morally right?

Regan concluded that it would not because of a second argument that he took to be even more convincing, namely, that because whales are intelligent, social creatures with well developed psychological powers, there are some things that are in their interest and others that are not. This means that what happens in their lives matters to them and makes a difference to the quality of their lives as experienced by them. Whales are the kinds of individual who can be benefited or harmed by what is done to them. Thus their death, for them, can be harmful; it can deprive them of their life's goods. Regan did not want to suggest that it is always wrong to take the life of another being, only that it is wrong to engage in any activity that kills sentient individuals when their legitimate interests are harmed by being killed. So even if whale hunters could kill whales painlessly, Regan concluded it would still be wrong. Whales have a right to life just as humans and other animals with interests do, and they have this right apart from any value they may have to humans.

On the face of it, Regan's two arguments are quite powerful and logical enough. They reflect evolving ethical traditions in our society about the proper treatment of animals and widespread human sympathies for the plight of whales and other marine mammals. We have come to learn a great deal about the behavior and habits of many of these wonderful creatures, and this has led us to revere them as fellow travelers in the earth's biotic journey and to treat them with more respect. Moreover, the human record of commercial whaling is indeed a sorry one that has pushed some whale species into extinction, endangered others, and threatened still others. The gray whale was on the brink of extinction earlier in this century because of rapacious and relentless industrial whaling operations. Only recently did its numbers recover enough for it to be declared healthy, after a long period of legal protection.

Despite all of this, I find myself of two minds about the resumption of Makah whaling, and I suspect that others do as well. It is because the animal rights position is powerful, yet does not address some other, important ethical aspects of Makah whaling, and these can not be so easily put on the backburner by strong commitments to the rights of animals.

One of the troublesome aspects lurking in the background is that the Makah were not responsible for endangering gray whales to begin with. In fact historic reports make it clear that they and the gray whales were able to thrive mutually even though traditional Makah culture revolved around gray whale hunts. Instead this evil was perpetrated on gray whales by non-Indian, commercial whalers from many "advanced" countries some years ago, and the number of whales taken by the Makah annually was apparently well within the ecological threshhold for the maintenance of a healthy population of California grays. The Makah then do not share the guilt that falls upon those historic persons who committed these environmental crimes, and they should not be held responsible for them today. The "dominant" culture destroyed this essential element of Makah culture and should answer for it — not the Makah. Should we now complain about their efforts to restore at least some features of their former whaling culture, after representatives of our industrial nations were responsible for decimating their way of life?

Another important point is that the Makah have treaty rights that allow them to whale. These rights were agreed to nearly 145 years ago by our government, and the Makah have never given up these rights. Before they stopped whaling in the 1920s because of the scarcity of gray whales, the Makah continued to hunt gray whales and would probably still be hunting them today if others had not been responsible for pillaging the gray whale population. So the fact that they lost their major means of subsistence and cultural identity and had to resort to other means of survival, does not mean that they have given up their right to hunt gray whales. As citizens who are indirect parties

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to these treaties and collective inheritors of the sins of our forebears, we ought to respect the rights of the Makah and make sure that their rights can be exercised, just as we have ethical obligations to respect other kinds of legal agreements.

I would also be wary of the "dominant" culture imposing its ethical attitudes and its will onto the Makah, acting then as if the Makah should not be able to determine for themselves what is a viable route to restore pride in their traditional culture and to maintain that culture, as best they can, on their own terms. The Makah are justifiably sensitive about the assumption that other ethical values and attitudes are superior to their own and should restrict their cultural choices. This kind of ethical ethnocentrism, subordinating the values of Indian cultures to non-Indian values, is an old and painful story in North America, and it would be a mistake to repeat it in this case. No one should tolerate heinous practices in the name of cultural self-determination; we have sufficient experience in this century to know that this is not ethically acceptable. But I have enough faith in the Makah as a people to believe that this is not what is happening in this situation.

So, at this stage in the history of relations between the United States and native American cultures, and our disgraceful record of "helping" integrate them into what "we think" is good for them, I am inclined to place my trust in the Makah to make their own way. The Makah themselves may have some differences of opinion about the resumption of whaling; perhaps they will eventually turn away from whaling altogether. But they are responsible people and are capable of working these matters out internally. At the same time we should be wary of claims that human management can necessarily sustain a population of ocean mammals for any period of time. While the success of gray whale protection efforts should be acknowledged, it is not inevitable that a healthy, recovered species will stay that way indefinitely, given the continuing, negative impacts of humans on the Pacific ocean environment. Though the current Makah gray whale allotment is too insignificant to pose a threat to the species as a whole, coupled with the strength of animal rights arguments and the possibility that other cultural groups and countries may resume gray whaling, the ethical proprieties could change dramatically in the future.

Makah Whaling is also a Political Issue

by Peter Walker, Assistant Professor of Geography and Environmental Studies, University of Oregon

In the debate over the recent killing of a gray whale by the Makah Nation of Washington State, both animal rights advocates and defenders of Native American culture present strong moral arguments. But the debate has largely ignored the important political implications of the hunt. Specifically, will the Makah hunt be used as a wedge to break international protections against whaling? And what does the Makah hunt say about the role of 'tradition' and culture in our social choices?

No reasonable person denies that the Makah have suffered deep cultural losses, nor that the whale is an important part of their culture. The question is whether killing whales is indispensable for revitalizing Makah culture, and whether this goal outweighs the moral and political costs.

There is much more at stake than the five whales per year that the Makah have permission to kill. Makah whaling provides a powerful tool for Japanese, Norwegian, Icelandic, and Russian whalers who want to expand whaling globally. At the annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission that took place shortly after the first Makah kill in more than 70 years, Japan accused the U.S. Government of hypocrisy for

endorsing the Makah hunt and even subsidizing it with a $310,000 grant while rejecting Japan's petition to allow 'traditional' Japanese whaling.

The two are not the same: the Makah have a responsible management plan based on cultural needs, whereas Japan barely disguises its commercial motives. But these distinctions are lost in the global politics of whaling. The Makah hunt plays perfectly into the hands of the Japanese and other whaling countries who use loopholes such as 'scientific research' to continue commercial hunting. The whaling nations believe the Makah case will add 'cultural need' to the list of loopholes they can exploit. That's why the Japanese offered financial support for the Makah hunt (which the Makah, mindful of being perceived as pawns of the Japanese, declined).

Moreover, the Makah hunt is being used by the Japanese and others as evidence that whale populations globally are strong enough to end the ban on commercial whaling (scientists disagree). Japan and others have lobbied hard for 'managed' commercial whaling. These management plans send shivers down the spines of those who have seen the same kind of 'management' contribute to the decimation of Atlantic cod and Pacific salmon populations.

In addition to this political fallout, another question raised by the Makah case is how 'tradition' should shape our public choices. Proponents suggest that the cultural needs and traditions of the Makah outweigh political and/or moral objections.

But traditions and political rights have always had an uneasy relationship, and for good reasons. Europeans had a long tradition of slavery, until society declared it unacceptable. The Chinese bound and crippled women's feet. Some African societies practice female genital mutilation. These are practices that our society condemns, regardless of their being traditional.

Many people believe that whales are such intelligent, social beings that their killing cannot be justified by tradition. Indeed, many believe that the killing of whales or other highly intelligent animals is a moral wrong comparable to the murder of human beings, and that the time for whaling, like these other traditions, has passed.

Defenders of Makah whaling will reject the comparisons, but they should not dismiss the fact that killing whales is profoundly offensive to many decent people who have no animosity toward the Makah. Those who oppose Makah whaling have become easy targets for charges of racism and neocolonialism. Sadly, some anti-whaling activists have behaved atrociously, turning their anger against whaling into personal or even racial attacks against the Makah.

Most opponents of Makah whaling, however, are opposed to whaling, not to the Makah. Many are deeply troubled at the painful tradeoff the Makah case poses between cultural rights and animal rights. Their opposition is motivated by respect for the whale, not by disrespect for the Makah. The disrespectful -- even racist -- behavior of a small number of anti-whaling activists should not be used to devalue the deeply-held values of the millions of Americans who respect both whales and Native American culture.

Traditional culture is important to preserve, but it can - and always has - changed with new circumstances. The passionate defense of Makah 'tradition' by some non-Makah is naive and even demeaning to the Makah themselves. All cultures change. The Makah have not actively whaled since the turn of the century. Pre-European Makah culture cannot be re-created, nor is that necessarily desirable. The Makah themselves take offense at those who want to make them into "museum pieces" to fit a romanticized vision of the Native American. The past does not dictate the future - culture is shaped as much by new circumstances and the choices we make today as it is by tradition.

Recognizing that cultural change is inevitable calls into question the idea of an unbreakable, unchanging cosmological circle between whaling and Makah culture. Some Makah, including many of the tribe's elders, believe that times have changed and that there are better ways to revitalize Makah culture. These Makah elders can hardly be called racists -- they simply envision a different future for their people.

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Recognizing that cultural change is possible and possibly desirable does not give non-Makah the right to tell the Makah what to do. The Makah have unambiguous rights under the 1855 Treaty of Neah Bay which guarantees them the right to kill whales. There is a long tradition in the U.S. of breaking treaties with Native Americans - a tradition that should be ended.

But non-Makah can hope and respectfully ask the Makah to recognize that today they are key players in the global politics of whaling. Gray whale populations are strong, but others are not. A voluntary suspension of Makah whaling would be a powerful blow against those who will surely exploit Makah tradition for their own profit, and would bolster the precarious international sanctions that stand between whales and extinction.

The Makah should have faith that they can be a proud culture without killing whales. The whales, on the other hand, may not survive without help from the Makah.

Makah Whale Hunt Spurs Racist Comments*

by Alex Tizon, Seattle Times Reporter

If words were harpoons, the Makah Tribe of the Olympic Peninsula might well suffer the same fate as the young gray whale killed on national television early last week.

So hostile has been the protest to the hunt that Makah tribe members have put their reservation, inundated with death threats, in a state of war-time alert. Bomb threats have evacuated Indian schools. Airwaves and editorial pages across Western Washington have carried anti-Indian vitriol not heard or seen since the Boldt Decision a quarter century ago.

The Makahs have been called savages, drunkards and laggards. Protesters have entreated people to "Save a whale, harpoon a Makah." Calls for a return to killing Indians like in the Old Wild West have appeared in Internet chat rooms and in newsletters.

"The hatred surprises me," says Ann Renker, an anthropologist specializing in Makah culture who is married to a Makah. "I was thinking there would be more 'Poor whale.' The violence being expressed toward the human beings involved in the hunt -- 'Shoot an Indian, bomb them, harpoon them!' -- this absolutely surprises me."

The Times has received hundreds of letters and phone calls. By one count, protesters outnumbered Makah supporters 10-to-1. They ranged from well-articulated objections to visceral outrage. Protesters fell into three broad categories: those who decried the killing of the whale, those who disapproved of how the whale was killed, and those who seemed to harbor a resentment, even hatred, toward the Makahs in particular and Indians in general.

Most respondents fit into the first two categories. The third group was small, but big enough to warrant attention. Their letters are the kind seldom printed, partly because of an assumption they don't represent a large number of people. That assumption, many would argue, is wrong.

At the same time, it's often impossible in heated conflicts involving race and culture to distinguish racist language from simple rage. When are rage and racism the same thing? When does protest become oppression?

The lines between these can be fuzzy to begin with. When you throw into the core of the conflict a creature of exalted status such as a whale, then stir things up with fight-to-the-death conviction on all sides, the result is a complex and incendiary stew.

Blood has spilled, and a door has opened to all manner of incivilities. The public discussion has become a free-for-all. Political correctness, for better or worse, has gone out the window.

**Reprint courtesy of the Seattle Times*

Here are some samples of the third category. You judge whether they are racist.

Ernie Denney, Everett: "(To the Makahs) Maybe you can try just as hard at getting an education as you did training for the kill. Why don't you start a new tradition: take pride in yourselves . . . and work for a living instead of finding your courage in the death of a defenseless mammal or at the bottom of a bottle."

Mark Morin, Redmond: "I have a very real hatred for Native Americans now. It's embarrassing, but I would be lying if I said it wasn't the truth. What do you think will be my private thoughts deep inside my brain when a Native American drops off an application for a job with me?"

Steve Grimwood: "These people want to rekindle their traditional way of life by killing an animal that has probably twice the mental capacity they have. These idiots need to use what little brains they have to do something productive besides getting drunk and spending federal funds to live on."

Wendy and Erica (mother and daughter): "Hey, I think we should also be able to take their land if they can take our whales. Publish this article but don't use our last names. We wouldn't want to lose our scalps."

John and Edna Zawyrucha: "Natives were often referred to as 'savages,' and it seems little has changed. God Bless America and all those members of the Makah tribe who once again were successful in resurrecting latent feelings of racial hatreds!"

Dave Ferguson, Bremerton: "If the Makahs are so stuck in the past . . . perhaps we should allow them to stay in the past and take all modern conveniences and luxuries away from them and see how long they last."

Phillips Wylly, Pebble Beach, Calif.,: "I am anxious to know where I may apply for a license to kill Indians. My forefathers helped settle the west and it was their tradition to kill every Redskin they saw. 'The only good Indian is a dead Indian,' they believed. I also want to keep faith with my ancestors."

Michael Christophersen, Seattle: "They are a modernized welfare race. I personally hate the Makah Tribe. I hope and pray for a terrible end to the Makah Tribe, very slow and very painful."

Dave Wellman, a research sociologist at the University of California at Berkeley and author of "Portraits of White Racism" (Cambridge University Press), said he wasn't surprised by the violent reaction to the hunt. He had no hesitation in calling some of the reactions blatantly racist.

"When you start hearing language that it's time to hunt Indians again, you have to realize that's the language of genocide," Wellman said. A necessary presupposition is that Indians are subhuman, "huntable" like animals. "You don't hear people saying it's time to hunt white people when a couple of white men drag a black man behind a truck in Texas."

Violent racism is almost never recognized as racism while it's happening; it's called something else, Wellman said. The Nazi campaign to exterminate Jews was called The Final Solution. The Indian wars of the 1800's were called Manifest Destiny or White Man's Burden or Winning the West. The Indians were savages, and whites were bringing Christianity to save them. Decades passed before portions of society realized what was done to the Indians was genocide.

Racism is built in to the foundation of this country and it has never gone away, Wellman said. It simply doesn't get articulated during periods of quiet when there's no conflict. "It's in moments like this when the racism comes out into the open. But it was always there."

One of the most vocal and articulate opponents of the Makah hunt, Will Anderson of the Progressive Animal Welfare Society, agreed that racism has surfaced -- "It's a reflection of a certain percentage of our society that we all know exist" -- but he cautioned against labeling as racist all anger toward the hunt.

"People are in shock. They're in a stage of unfocused anger," he said. "When there's such an emotional

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issue at stake, and so much work is at stake, it pushes people to the edge, and that's what we're seeing."

Anderson said most of the organized protesters he knows have tried hard to separate the deed from the doer, have acknowledged the wrongs done to natives in the past. But the Makah Tribe, like any other political entity, "and like the Constitution and state and federal laws, are fair targets for challenge."

Many supporters of the Makahs tolerate no criticism toward the tribe, are convinced any protest against any aboriginal group must be racist, he said.

I've been called racist many times. It's a knee-jerk reaction. It's a form of hiding instead of dealing with the true nature of the issue, and I reject it."

Much of the reaction has come as a result of the whale's very public death on television, said Tom Colonnese, director of the American Indian Studies Center at the University of Washington, and a member of the Santee Tribe of the Dakota Sioux Nation. The television image of the whale being harpooned and shot twice with a large-caliber rifle stirred up strong emotions.

"If people watched a film of someone killing an elk, or someone at a meat-packing plant slaughtering a steer or a lamb or a calf, they would be similarly appalled," Colonnese said.

Media-savvy anti-whaling activists, such as Paul Watson of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, have said all along the best strategy against the Makah hunt would be to let the world see the actual killing. Whatever people believed intellectually would be overpowered by the sheer drama of a public slaughter.

Some who wrote inflammatory letters to The Times, when challenged, denied any racist bent but admitted writing out of pure emotion. Steve Grimwood, who made derogatory remarks on the intelligence of Indians, later wrote: "I can see I was out of line. I was angry and reactionary. My apology for that. But they (the Makahs) need to be stopped. It sickens me to hear of this practice."

Jerry Rasmussen who wrote that he might don a U.S. Cavalry uniform to hunt Indians, later said, "I responded quite emotionally and without much thought."

Others, like Mark Morin of Redmond, however, said: "Yes, my comments are racist. But when the entire race of Indians support the killing of a whale, I guess anybody who opposes the hunt . . suddenly finds themselves being a racist. I guess being a racist is not that bad when I consider the alternative."

And one writer who identified himself only as Tony said: "While it would bother me to be termed a racist, it bothers me more that whaling has resumed in the Pacific Northwest. If the Makah wish to label me a racist then I guess most of the country is racist against them."

Ted Kerasote, author of "Bloodties: Nature, Culture and the Hunt" (Random House), said the reaction to the Makah hunt reveals a particular hypocrisy in American culture. Many Americans publicly espouse diversity and multiculturalism, and even mouth support for the renaissance of indigenous cultures. But the moment a native community does something that "doesn't fit into our preconceived notions of who we want aboriginals to be," we threaten our wrath the wrath of the majority.

One way to show wrath is by using stereotypes as a weapon of ridicule or rebuke. References to scalping and loincloths and tomahawks have gone unchecked in many public forums.

"Certainly some of the negative reactions have been expressed in terms that reveal the speakers' or writer's stereotypes of Indians, which are the foundation of racism," said Alexandra Harmon, assistant professor at the UW American Indian Studies Center. "There is an astonishing degree of insensitivity and ethnocentrism in one critic's claim that any culture that regains its pride by killing this way is displaying bloodthirsty savagery.

"Again and again in American history," said Harmon, "non-Indian Americans have demanded that Indians act or live in some way other than Indians have chosen. The current Makah story is a lesson about how hard it is to recognize and resist that same ethnocentric impulse today."

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