

Book Review

Kalland, Arne. *Unveiling the Whale: Discourses on Whales and Whaling*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2012. 253 pp. \$34.95 (paper). ISBN 978-0-85745-158-3.

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Whaling represents one of the most internationally controversial and highly polarized environmental issues of recent times. Arne Kalland, in *Unveiling the Whale: Discourses on Whales and Whaling*, examines the whaling issue from the perspective of a pro-whaling country with an emphasis on analysis of discourse in international arenas, primarily the International Whaling Commission (IWC). The excellent and fine-grained analysis focuses on the ways that different groups think and communicate about whales and the processes that have led to extreme polarization in international whale conservation.

Kalland tells the story of how the IWC, originally formed to regulate sustainable whaling, has come to be dominated by nonwhaling countries and has become a forum for opposition to whaling. Kalland argues that anti-whaling forces have drawn on a diverse set of traits that are individually found in specific cetacean species to create an image of a “superwhale” that is the largest animal (blue whale); has the largest brain (sperm whale), largest brain–body ratio (bottlenose dolphin), and pleasant and varied vocalizations (humpback whale); and is also friendly (gray whale) and endangered (bowhead and blue whales). Whales have come to be seen as the “humans of the seas,” and to serve as metonyms for all that is wrong with the human relationship with nature. The book carefully traces out the development of discourses about whales and whaling concurrent with the rise of the environmental movement in the 1960s and 1970s, and the ways in which different members of environmental and animal rights organizations have influenced these discourses and acted against whaling in the IWC specifically and in national and international arenas in general. Kalland argues that corporations and countries with no stake in whaling have joined or supported the anti-whaling movement as a low-cost way to burnish their green credentials.

Ultimately, the representation of the “superwhale” and the ways that this has been deployed through social actions in international arenas by the anti-whaling movement have transformed the whaling issue (and discussion in the IWC) from one of scientific management and sustainable use to one of cultural issues around whaling. Whaling has been cast as a barbaric act, far worse than other hunting and domestic meat production, because this discourse sees whales as special and seeks to move them from the edible to the inedible category. Pro-whaling organizations and countries have demonstrated the ability of some cetacean species to withstand a sustainable harvest and introduced more humane killing methods, believing these actions would address concerns under the original framework of the IWC. But the strong protectionist discourse of environmental and animal rights advocates,

as opposed to the sustainable use discourse of whaling advocates, has won out in the international arena. Although anti-whaling countries have carved out exceptions for whaling by indigenous people, they, too, have at times also come under fire. The hegemony of the anti-whaling discourse has also deprived nonindigenous coastal peoples of important economic and cultural resources. The result makes a powerful case for the ways in which speech and global discourses can bring about material changes affecting local people.

Kalland continues by showing how pro-whaling people and countries, after trying to accommodate their adversaries with a scientific and economic discourse and management regime, have turned to a cultural discourse in which they, having been belittled and demonized as uncivilized by the anti-whaling groups, contest their adversaries' views in a variety of ways. On one level, they have negatively portrayed anti-whaling groups as young and frivolous and have also reinvigorated their consumption of whale meat as a symbolic eating of the opposition's totemic animal. At another level, they have deployed other important global discourses of cultural diversity and sustainability, finding support in international reports such as *Our Common Future*, *Caring for the Earth*, and *Agenda 21*. The result is an escalation of rhetoric and a process of differentiation that polarizes the conflict. Kalland labels this process schismogenesis, with each side hardening their position in competition for support among their own partisans. Even though substantial common ground exists on which to base a dialogue, each side seeks to delegitimize the other's access to shared values and to discredit their position.

Embedded in this larger story is a very interesting analysis of why aboriginal subsistence whaling (ASW) has been legitimized (even for highly endangered species such as bowhead) by the IWC but other peoples are denied opportunities to whale. Specifically, whaling has not been permitted by the IWC for nonindigenous whalers from small coastal communities for whom whaling is of long-standing cultural importance and represents an important component of their livelihood strategy. These users are portrayed differently linguistically. ASW "takes" whales, whereas nonindigenous coastal communities "kill" whales; also, indigenous people, but not Japanese or Norwegians, have claims to culture and identity through whale harvest that are recognized, while these same claims made by other groups are denied. Kalland suggests that environmentalists view indigenous people romantically, as a part of nature, and thus are more willing to accept indigenous whaling (this is, however, less true of the animal rights-based anti-whaling movement). Kalland argues that this is a double-edged sword for indigenous people. Although they have been granted rights to harvest whales of a number of different species, because the discourse is based in notions of the noble savage and primitive harmony with nature, support for indigenous whaling quickly deteriorates when they use modern technology or enter the modern economy.

The detailed discussion of the ways in which symbols as diverse as the noble savage, a planet overrun with humans, cultural diversity, and sustainability are invoked in environmental conflicts provides insights into how the rise of global environmentalism can crowd out a more diverse set of cultural/environmental values. What is particularly interesting is the way this process has produced a line demarcating acceptable and unacceptable whaling that could have been drawn someplace else, thus illustrating how environmentalism is socially constructed through a combination of discourse and social action.

Kalland's book is an important addition to the literature on how global environmental narratives and the representation of resources as a common heritage of humankind that belong to everyone can be culturally hegemonic and, when these result in changes to international trade patterns or national laws, can deprive local populations of culturally important subsistence resources that are closely tied to their identity. In this way, it is similar to the case of tropical rain forests and to elephant conservation in Africa, but with important differences in the balance of international and local power, importance to identity, and economics that make cross-case comparison fruitful and interesting. Whales are potent symbols, most whaling occurs in international waters, and whales and whaling have been subject to strong international supervision under the International Commission for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW). The whaling case makes issues of environmental discourse and cultural hegemony exceptionally vivid.

This book will be extremely useful to those interested in global environmentalism in general, as well as the specific issue of whales and whaling. Readers from countries where the specialness of whales and opposition to all whaling have become normalized may find this book particularly interesting because it is rooted in a different cultural perspective. For this reason, this book could be exceptionally useful in promoting deeper thought and discussion in environmental studies classes. The analysis in the book will also be useful in stimulating thinking and discussion on the relationship between science and culture in natural resource management.

In spite of the high quality and importance of this book, it has some shortcomings. Kalland concludes by placing much of the story under a theoretical framework of schismogenesis, in which internal competition among opposing groups for status drives polarization. This is a simplification that does not fully capture the detailed and nuanced story that the book tells. Furthermore, Kalland ascribes too much of anti-whaling groups' behavior to a lowly quest for influence, fame, status, and money, disrespecting the ethical basis for the opposition to whaling (even if there are contradictions in its implementation). Although the author is admirably open about his pro-whaling bias, at times he seems unable to resist exaggerations, selective omissions, and the throwing in of odd and extreme examples to bolster his case. This includes undue attention to fringe, New Age elements (e.g., p. 93), overemphasis on greenwashing by corporations and governments (e.g., pp. 103, 119), and selective presentation of facts (regarding whether Alaska Inuit share or throw out old whale meat when the new whaling season starts; see pp. 146 and 154). In the end, these leave a slight taint of bias.