



Barrouallie, St. Vincent's Blackfish Town

The small museum inside Fort Charlotte, perched on a hill above Kingstown, St. Vincent, contains a series of paintings by American artist William Linzee Prescott, depicting a shipwreck that occurred in 1675 on the shores of Bequia, the northernmost of the Grenadine islands.¹ This shipwreck is one of the more significant events in the history of the archipelago because it brought together two cultures that would be foundational to the development of today's Vincen-tian nation. Aboard the ship was a cargo of enslaved Africans, destined for various island plantations in the Lesser Antilles and Bahamas. The caption below one of the paintings describes the survivors of the shipwreck as having “made their way to St. Vincent, where they were welcomed and accepted by Carib Indians living there.” These African castaways assimilated into the indigenous Carib culture, adopting such traits as dress, diet, burial traditions, and the flattening of their infants' foreheads. The descendants of the Africans and Caribs came to be known as the “Black Caribs.” They gained a reputation for the tenacity with which they defended their

land from the incoming colonizers, in this case the English and the French.²

The history of an island being fought over by two or more European colonial powers is common throughout the Caribbean. Julianne Maher, an American linguist and historian, coined the term “history’s shuttlecock” to describe the back-and-forth transfer of colonial rule experienced by tiny St. Barthélemy, but the term could apply equally well to any number of other colonized places.³ On St. Vincent, however—arguably more than anywhere else in the insular Caribbean—the main threat to European settlement was seen as coming from the island’s indigenous inhabitants rather than pirates or competing colonizing nations. The Black Caribs were no doubt aided in their struggle to protect their land by the land itself. St. Vincent’s interior landscape—rugged, mountainous, forested, and lushly provisioned with both food and water resources—provided ample opportunity to establish hidden settlements and to execute surprise offensives. To this day, the cannons at Fort Charlotte point inland rather than out to sea, a reminder of how the British prioritized threats to their colonial possession.

In 1796, the British defeated the Black Caribs and deported the remnant survivors to Roatán, an island off the Caribbean coast of



Cannons at Fort Charlotte, pointing inland

Honduras. From Roatán, these deportees—the Garifuna, as they came to be known—crossed to the Honduran mainland and spread along the Caribbean coast of Central America, where their descendants live today.⁴ St. Vincent, the Garifuna’s place of origin, maintains a strong connection to its Carib heritage despite only a small percentage of the population claiming direct Carib ancestry.

After their violent and forcible removal of the native population, the British were able to bring St. Vincent fully under colonization and cultivation. As was the case on most of their Caribbean colonies, sugar was the primary crop, though on St. Vincent it thrived only in the coastal areas, not on the wetter upland slopes. Experimentation with other crops—especially cotton and arrowroot—ensued, with varying degrees of success, until finally bananas emerged as the largest export for the island, booming in the 1980s as a result of preferential pricing arrangements in Europe, and then declining as prices dropped amid foreign market shifts to Latin American bananas.⁵ Today, bananas still account for the majority of St. Vincent’s official agricultural production, with illicit marijuana cultivation supplementing legal agriculture to a large degree. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) estimates that some 1,500 Vincentian farmers are involved in marijuana cultivation.⁶

In his public address at the Fisherman’s Day festivities in 2009, Vincentian prime minister Ralph Gonsalves issued a plea to the marijuana growers to “come down from the mountain.” The term “the mountain” is used colloquially as a euphemism for the marijuana fields located in the island’s rugged and roadless northwest. By contrast, the island’s most prominent mountain, La Soufrière, is more often referred to as “the volcano.” The prime minister urged the marijuana growers to seek honest employment, specifically mentioning possibilities in the whaling operation at Barrouallie. He offered government assistance in training and provision of capital for the establishing new trades—including funds for boats and whaling equipment. Thus, whaling has become a national issue in the context of its potential to provide legitimate, legal work to impoverished

Vincentians who might otherwise turn to illicit occupations. This may strike the non-Vincentian reader as odd, considering that whaling itself is often thought of as a marginalized activity—not something that would replace marijuana cultivation, but something that would, itself, need to be replaced. A look at the history of whaling in the Caribbean helps to explain the context of the prime minister's remarks.

Yankee Whalers

The existence of Vincentian whaling today traces its origin to the high historical status of fishermen in the Caribbean. The geographer Bonham Richardson, in his exploration of the transition from slavery to free societies throughout the region, acknowledged this status when he called fishing “an occupation to which many aspire, possibly because of its relative prestige as much as the financial rewards.”⁷ During the plantation era, when a select group of the enslaved were developed as fishermen, Richardson notes that “fishing . . . would have been attractive to the slaves, since it meant periodic physical removal from the islands and even chances for escape.”⁸ Anthropologist Richard Price called the enslaved fishermen “a privileged slave subgroup within the plantation system” and noted that “their special socioeconomic role permitted a particularly smooth transformation to a life as free fishermen.”⁹ Both Price and Richardson also mention the unique and valued skill set that these enslaved fishermen would have obtained through their trade, skills that stayed with these individuals after emancipation and allowed for a level of prosperity that other freed slaves may not have been able to access.

Beginning in the early eighteenth century, ships based mainly in New England began visiting the islands of the Lesser Antilles in search of whales.¹⁰ The primary target species of these so-called Yankee whalers were the humpback and the sperm whale, but they often took short-finned pilot whales and other small cetaceans for

meat to feed the crews and to give novice harpooners a chance to practice their skills.¹¹ As was the case throughout the whaling grounds of the world, the history of whaling in the Caribbean evolved gradually from abundance during the eighteenth century to declining takes in the late nineteenth century, due primarily to the unsustainable rates at which whales were removed from the oceans.¹²

St. Vincent was among the later-visited islands in the region. The multidisciplinary scholar Aldemaro Romero found archival records of twenty-five whaling voyages from New England to St. Vincent & the Grenadines, beginning in 1864 and ending in 1886.¹³ Forty whales were killed in Vincentian waters during this twenty-two-year period. Despite the relative paucity of Yankee whaling in St. Vincent—by contrast, Romero counts ten times as many whaling voyages to Barbados—both the practical legacy and cultural influence of whaling have remained stronger in St. Vincent and Bequia than any of the other Caribbean islands.

A hundred years after American whalers began exploiting Caribbean cetacean populations, the decline was seen not only biologically, but economically as well. Whaling, like fishing, usually pays its workers a share of the total catch rather than a set hourly or daily wage. After 1870, with catches declining, American seamen increasingly began to turn down crew positions aboard Caribbean-bound whaling ships, owing to the reduced profitability of the voyages. Captains filled these vacancies by hiring local men, “half castes from all parts of the West Indies,” in the words of one early twentieth-century economist.¹⁴ The Caribbean whalers accepted lower pay than their New England counterparts, which helped to offset the losses of the increasingly unproductive voyages. Of course, those locals with skills in fishing and experience as seamen were the first to be selected by the Yankee whaler captains.

These familial and occupational descendants of the original enslaved fishermen augmented their fishing skills with the specialized knowledge required for whaling. When their employment with the Yankee whalers ended, some sought ways to continue putting their

newfound skills to work. The rise in locally run whaling operations coincided with the continued decline and eventual collapse of American whaling in the Caribbean. Over time, Caribbean whaling came to be dominated by local labor and management.

One of the Caribbean seamen who joined a Yankee whaling crew was William Thomas Wallace Jr., of Bequia. After participating in whaling voyages within the Caribbean and abroad, Wallace returned to Bequia having learned the skills necessary to start his own whaling operation.¹⁵

Wallace began whaling out of Friendship Bay, Bequia, to fill the niche left by the decreasing presence of the Yankee whalers. While humpback takes had not been sufficiently profitable to justify the long, costly voyages that the Americans had been undertaking, enough whales did remain to support a local operation. The geographer John Adams mentions the coincidence of the rise of locally managed whaling opportunities with the decline of cash-crop agriculture, indicating increased incentive for local subsistence populations to turn to the sea for their livelihoods.¹⁶ In the mid-1880s, Wallace joined with another Bequian, Joseph Ollivierre, to expand their island's whaling operation. These two families—the Wallaces and the Ollivierres—would come to dominate the entire history of Bequia whaling, first as partners and later as rivals.¹⁷ Athneal Ollivierre, the famous Bequia harpooner, was a descendent of the latter whaling family.

Locally directed whaling began to spread from Bequia throughout the Eastern Caribbean as the occupation proved profitable. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, local Caribbean whalers established many more stations throughout the Lesser Antilles. Bequia was the entrepôt through which local whaling entered the region, and thus the source of knowledge, technique, design, and culture for most of the subsequent Caribbean whaling operations, including the blackfish operation at Barrouallie. During the peak period of Caribbean whaling, between 1870 and 1925, tiny Bequia boasted at least five whaling stations. Within the southeastern Ca-

ribbean, Bequia-influenced whaling stations were established on at least eleven other islands.¹⁸

The Caribbean tradition of hunting large baleen whales, introduced by the Yankee whalers, survives today only on Bequia. Because of the humpback whaling operation based at Bequia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines was given an International Whaling Commission (IWC)–sanctioned quota of two humpback whales per year, since increased to four—the only aboriginal subsistence whaling quota given to a tropical country by the IWC. Two whales is of course a maximum allotment and not a guarantee. As Raymond Ryan, St. Vincent & the Grenadines’ chief fisheries officer at the time, explained to me in 2009, “Sometimes we don’t get two. Sometimes we get none.”

The Last Whalers

The journalist Sebastian Junger began his article on Bequia whaling by introducing Athneal Ollivierre with this provocative sentence: “The last living harpooner wakes to the sound of the wind.”¹⁹ Junger’s poetic license notwithstanding, the motif of the current generation of Caribbean whalers—and to a greater extent, artisanal whalers globally, including the Faroese—as “the last” in the world has been circulating for so long as to become self-contradictory. For example, in 1994 John Adams described the pilot whalers of Barrouallie as the “last of the Caribbean whalemens.”²⁰ Another, more recent use of the phrase can be found in the subtitle of the 2014 documentary about whaling in Bequia, *The Wind That Blows*, by director Tom Weston, which identifies the film as “a portrait of the last Yankee whalers.”²¹

As the continued practice of whaling in both St. Vincent and in Bequia would indicate, though, Junger’s, Adams’s, and Weston’s subjects by no means constituted the last practitioners of their trade. These premature eulogizations can even happen from within. During

the late 1980s and into the 1990s, the Vincentian government made the case to the IWC that whaling for humpbacks on Bequia was a soon-to-be extinct phenomenon. According to one legal scholar of whaling, “St. Vincent and the Grenadines argued that no proactive measures to end whaling were necessary as ‘the phasing-out of whaling would take place naturally as the single harpooner was 67 years of age.’ Moreover it claimed that ‘no young people [were] interested in continuing the tradition.’”²²

Other whaling cultures also have been held up as the last of their kind. An operation targeting sperm whales off the Azores until the late 1980s was memorialized in a 1973 documentary, *The Last Whalers*.²³ Another operation, also pursuing sperm whales, based in Indonesia, was described in a 2000 article titled “The Last Whale Hunters.”²⁴ Despite the nearly antipodal settings of the subjects of these works, the titles are almost identical and the sentiment is exactly the same.

Similarly, the end of the Faroese grindadráp has been predicted for some time now. A representative of Greenpeace Denmark was quoted in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1991 saying, “I think it’s a matter of a couple of generations before they drop the pilot whale hunt. . . . The younger generations are losing interest.”²⁵ While “a couple of generations” have not quite passed since that statement was made, the evidence that young people are not interested in the grindadráp is yet to be shown, except perhaps to some degree within Tórshavn.

Although these “end of an era” discourses remain dominant, the data indicate that whaling does, in fact, comprise a widespread set of contemporary practices, diverse in both method and spatiality, as marine mammalogists Martin Robards and Randall Reeves showed in their wide-ranging and amply sourced 2011 paper that tallied all known marine mammal takes since 1970.²⁶ Robards and Reeves’s findings, coupled with the active participation by young people in both the blackfish operation in St. Vincent and the grindadráp in the Faroe Islands (along with myriad other marine-mammal-focused operations around the world), suggest that whaling isn’t going away anytime soon. It would seem, then, that like the premature reports of Mark

Twain's death in 1897, current predictions that the end of whaling is imminent are probably "exaggerated."²⁷

Today's whalers in St. Vincent and the Faroe Islands are most likely not the last whalers in the world. They may not even be the last Vincentian or Faroese whalers. Athneal Ollivierre woke to the sound of the wind for the last time on July 4, 2000—he died that afternoon—but another living harpooner took his place. When I first visited Bequia in 2008, I paid five Eastern Caribbean dollars (about US\$1.85) to a young girl named Nyoka, one of Athneal's granddaughters, for a tour of the small "museum," really just a shrine, dedicated to her grandfather's legendary whaling. Among the artifacts, I saw a painting of Athneal, standing erect in the bow of his whaleboat, the *Why Ask*, thrusting a harpoon into a surfacing humpback. Instead of a canvas, the artist had used a humpback's scapula.



A painting on a whale scapula, depicting Athneal Ollivierre harpooning a humpback from the *Why Ask* (signed, "Obby 2005")

I asked Nyoka where the *Why Ask* was docked or beached now. She looked down sadly and told me in her Bequian brogue that “him mash up”—meaning that the whaleboat had been smashed on the rocks. But despite the loss of both their famous harpooner and his boat, Bequians still hunt humpbacks. Vincentians and Faroese still hunt pilot whales and dolphins. When I returned to Bequia in 2015, the *Why Ask* lay prominently on the beach at Port Elizabeth—lovingly restored and repainted from its unfortunate “mash-up.” Whaling traditions, especially when conducted for food, have the resilience to endure such setbacks.

From Humpbacks to Blackfish

By the early twentieth century, at the same time that humpback takes were declining throughout the local whaling operations of the southern Caribbean region, fishermen from the leeward villages of Barrouallie, on St. Vincent, and Castries, on nearby St. Lucia, had begun to hunt pilot whales and a variety of dolphin species, which were still abundant.²⁸ The connection between the whaling communities on St. Vincent and St. Lucia goes beyond mere coincidence of timing. Whalers from Barrouallie often take whales from within St. Lucia's territorial waters. This fact first appears in the scientific literature in the early 1970s and I confirmed that it was still true as recently as 2009 with GPS tracking.²⁹ Additionally, pilot whale meat and blubber from St. Vincent is exported to be sold in St. Lucia, though any international sales of cetacean products that take place without a permit are in violation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).³⁰

Until the early 1930s, Barrouallie whaling was primarily opportunistic, meaning that cetaceans were not the main target but fishermen would take them if the opportunity arose. It was then that Griffin Arrindell, a local fisherman, purchased two Bequia-built whaling boats, themselves modeled after the Yankee whaleboats from the

nineteenth century (recall Junger’s words: “Take the guys from Melville’s *Moby-Dick* and put them in Athneal’s boat, and they’d know exactly what to do”), and began regularly and directly hunting small cetaceans. Adams cites Arrindell’s mentors as “some old-timers at Barrouallie and Saint Lucia who had periodically hunted dolphins.”³¹ Over time, the village of Barrouallie became known for its unique food products. Since pilot whales—“blackfish”—were the most commonly sought species, if not always the most commonly caught, Barrouallie earned the nickname “Blackfish Town.”

Guns and Boats

From the 1930s until today there have been two major technological innovations in Vincentian whaling: the harpoon gun and the motorboat. From the beginning of the operation, whaling crews set out each morning in oar- and sail-powered vessels. When a whale or dolphin was sighted, a hand harpoon virtually identical to the ones used by Yankee whalers was thrown—or in some cases, skipped across the water surface—at the targeted cetacean as it rose to breathe.³² The introduction of motorboats and harpoon guns greatly extended the range at which whalers could hunt. Hand harpoons can, in theory, be thrown several meters or more, but in practice I only ever observed them being thrust nearly straight down into a whale or dolphin that had risen just next to the boat. Sailboats, even when their propulsion is supplemented with rowing, are limited in the speed at which they can approach cetaceans, and if a chosen spot proves to be unproductive, they are slow to reach another potential whaling area.

In addition to simply extending the whalers’ range, the introduction of the harpoon gun allowed whalers to target what they termed “wild” whales and dolphins. Among Barrouallie whalers, pilot whales and dolphins are considered either “wild” or “tame” depending upon their behavior. The local usage of these terms is slightly different from their standard definitions and requires some explanation. Tame ce-



A harpooned spinner dolphin, brought alongside the whaling boat.

Photo © Andy Fielding

taceans are ones from pods that have not been hunted before and do not yet avoid boats and humans. They will often approach the boats quite closely and can sometimes be seen swimming in the bow wake. These are the easiest targets. They can be struck easily with the hand harpoon. Wild whales and dolphins have been hunted before, avoid humans, and flee boats. They are difficult to hunt and must usually be taken with a gun harpoon. When whalers are recounting the day's events to friends on shore in the evening and they mention sighting a pod of whales or dolphins, the first question asked is often, "Were they wild or tame?" The answer to this question often foretells the rest of the story.

During the mid-twentieth century, the whaling operation at Barrouallie witnessed a gradual shift from hand harpoons to gun harpoons. One reason that the gun was introduced gradually, rather than as an overnight innovation, is the permit. St. Vincent, having no equivalent to the United States' Second Amendment, regulates gun ownership tightly. A license to keep a firearm is difficult to

acquire in St. Vincent and must be held by any whaler wishing to use a harpoon gun. The license itself costs 250 Eastern Caribbean dollars (US\$93) per gun per year and is given only to whalers who have completed the appropriate paperwork, have clean criminal records, and, according to a Vincentian police officer with whom I spoke, are deemed to be “of good character.”

During the same time period that Barrouallie whalers were adopting the harpoon gun, they were also shifting from sail power to engine power in their boats.³³ At the time of John Adams’s 1964 fieldwork, “dramatic and costly plans were being made to install in-board and outboard engines” but the boats were still powered solely by sails.³⁴ Then in the early 1980s, another researcher, William Price, found the boats to be “sail powered with auxiliary [inboard] diesel or outboard [gasoline] engines.”³⁵ By the early 1990s, all of the boats were equipped with outboard gasoline engines, as they still are today.³⁶ It is interesting to note that the humpback whalers from Bequia continue to use sailboats to approach and harpoon whales.³⁷ This was explained to me as essential to maintain the quota given by the IWC for aboriginal and subsistence whaling. The IWC does not actually require aboriginal subsistence whalers to refrain from using engine-powered vessels, but the whalers of Bequia perceive this lack of technological advancement as working to their advantage in keeping their quota year after year.

Shanties and Societies

In addition to the technological changes, two main areas of cultural change have taken place with regard to whaling in Barrouallie over the last half century as well. The first of these is the decline of shanty singing, and the second is the establishment and tumultuous history of a cooperative fisherman’s society in Barrouallie. Both the shanties and the cooperative were formerly very important to the whaling operation. Today the shanties have vanished in their original form but

have seen renewed interest as a piece of folk cultural heritage. The current iteration of the cooperative society struggles against debt and negative perceptions among the whaling and fishing communities.

Shanties are working songs sung by seamen and serve two primary purposes aboard ships: they provide a rhythm by which men could synchronize their physical labor—actions such as rowing, raising sails, or hauling anchors that require timed collaboration—and they offer a pleasant diversion from the tedium of shipboard life.³⁸ The American folklorist Roger Abrahams described songs that were associated with specific events aboard a whaling boat: the harpoon strike, hauling in a whale, rowing home.³⁹ Abrahams also cited certain prescribed periods of silence, such as when a whale had been harpooned and was hauled close to the boat, enforced in order to keep from frightening the whale and causing it to dive. On shore the whalers would sing shanties extolling their own strength in dealing with the perils of whaling, or parodying or calling out the boat owners, vendors, and public for their stinginess in haggling over the price of their wares.⁴⁰

Many shanties followed a call-and-response structure by which the leader, called the shantyman, would sing a line, followed by the sailors who sang a line in response or a repetitive chorus. In the context of Barrouallie whaling, shanties served one additional purpose besides those mentioned above: by singing as they approached shore at the end of the day, whalers could alert community members onshore of a successful catch and request their help in the hauling and processing work that would soon follow.⁴¹ Many of the shanties used in Barrouallie follow the same geographical line of transmission as whaling practices themselves: from New England to Bequia to Barrouallie.⁴² Of course, some of the songs were adapted along the way. As such, the shanties often contain lyrics about places that were known to Yankee whalers but would have seemed exotic to the whalers from Barrouallie—Alabama, Baltimore, Bermuda, Calais, and Dover—as well as some that would have been more familiar, such as the neighboring villages of Rose Bank and Wallilabou, and the

Grenadine islands of Bequia, where they learned the whaling skills, and Mayreau, where they bought their salt.

During the 1960s and 1970s, changes both cultural and technological led to the decline and eventual abandonment of the shantying tradition in Barrouallie. As boat owners began to replace their oars and sails with inboard and outboard engines, crews grew smaller and the need for the crewmembers to work in rhythm with each other disappeared. Along with the need for keeping time, so went the time-keeping shanties. The other practical use for shanties—to alert community members on shore that a catch had been made and help would soon be needed—declined as the shanties proved perhaps too effective. Specifically, crowds larger than necessary began to arrive at the shore where whaling crews unloaded their catch, offering to help and demanding to be compensated. At first, whalers incorporated new shanties into their repertoire that spoke directly to the excessive and demanding crowds that had been turning up at the beach for a free share. This social commentary is reminiscent of that other great Caribbean musical tradition, calypso.⁴³ Consider, for example, the following lines from the shanty “Bear Away Yankee”: “Who na been off, / Na come a bay. / If you want de liver you have to buy. / If you want de guts you have to buy.” Vincent Reid and folklorist Daniel Lanier cite these lyrics along with their translation to standard English (“whoever hasn’t gone out [whaling], don’t come to the bay”) and note “that the whalers expected payment for even the most undesirable parts of the catch.”⁴⁴ These new, critical shanties were not sufficiently effective against the demanding crowds, and the whalers soon abandoned the notion of broadcasting news of their catch. Coupled with the transition from sails to motors, this led to the practical abandonment of shanties altogether.

In 2001, St. Vincent witnessed a small renaissance of interest in the Barrouallie whaling shanties. That year, under the leadership of Vincent Reid, a group of eight former whalers formed a singing group called the Barrouallie Whalers. This group began performing locally in 2002 and later internationally. Through this group, the tradition

of shantying remains alive on St. Vincent despite no longer being used in the whaling operation.

The future of the tradition is uncertain, however, owing to the fact that few, if any, of Barrouallie's youth have taken an interest in the shanties. I stood on the pier in Barrouallie one afternoon in 2016, enjoying a private, spontaneous concert performed by Vincent Reid and George "Tall Twelve" Frederick, a former whaler and member of the Barrouallie Whalers singing group. Standing with me were two of my students, a colleague from St. Kitts, and a young man from Barrouallie named Diallo Boyea. While Vincent and Tall Twelve harmonized, I looked over at Diallo, who was smiling and shaking his head. When the singers finished, Diallo told me—confessed, really—"I've lived in Barrouallie my whole life and I've never heard these songs before."

If only the youth of St. Vincent could be motivated to embrace this aspect of their heritage. In Atlantic Canada, for example, I've sat in living rooms with Newfoundlanders, Nova Scotians, and Prince Edward Islanders, all of us under the age of thirty, singing authentic old sea shanties and modern ones, written and arranged by regional artists such as Stan Rogers, Ron Hynes, and Great Big Sea in a style that honors their roots. Perhaps Vincent Reid will someday be to Kingstown what Stan Rogers was to Halifax. Tall Twelve could bring the pride to Barrouallie that Ron Hynes brought to St. John's, Newfoundland. Great Big Sea will most likely never tour the Lesser Antilles, but the Barrouallie Whalers might—if audiences want to hear these history-imbued songs of yesteryear's adventures.

The presence of a cooperative society for the fishermen and whalers of Barrouallie has a history not unlike that of the shanties: a period of utility, a decline, and a final—perhaps symbolic—renaissance. The first iteration of a fisherman's cooperative in Barrouallie began in 1952 as the Barrouallie Fisherman's Cooperative Society with the main focus being the support of the pilot whaling operation. The Cooperative Society had a period of functionality, utility, and profit from its beginning in 1952 until the early 1970s when its decline began.



George "Tall Twelve" Frederick

Between 1972 and 1973 the society's profits decreased by an order of magnitude.⁴⁵ The timing of this decrease is directly related to the passage of the United States' Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, which forbade the import of whale oil into the United States, previously an important source of income for the Barrouallie whalers who exported the product, primarily for use in lubrication of small mechanical instruments.⁴⁶ In the early 1980s, both the productivity of the whaling operation and the morale at the Cooperative Society were low. Attempting to increase both, the society began several projects that were intended to stimulate the industry but which, in hindsight, led to the closure of the Cooperative Society itself.

One of the major projects that the Cooperative Society took on was the construction of more modern, more hygienic facilities for the processing and storage of whale meat, blubber, and oil. Unfortunately, this project was not completed satisfactorily, despite the contractual oversight and funding from international agencies including

the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It is interesting that USAID contributed funds directly toward the development of the whaling operation at Barrouallie in 1984—six years after the establishment of the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Apparently not all U.S. agencies were against the promotion of whaling in Barrouallie.

A Norwegian consultant oversaw the construction of the processing facility and the USAID funds covered the construction of a whaling boat.⁴⁷ Neither project went smoothly. The facility was built at Wallilabou, the next village north along the leeward coast from Barrouallie and a place without a whaling history. Traditionally, Barrouallie has always been the center of St. Vincent pilot whaling.⁴⁸ To construct a whale and dolphin processing center at another village was a misguided and culturally uninformed venture. The structure was never used for its intended purpose. It was used as a place to do laundry rather than as a whale and dolphin processing facility. Similarly, the whaling boat was built amid controversy as to both its cost and its seaworthiness. The boat was launched in 1989 and did well but only lasted until 1993, when it, along with the Barrouallie Fisherman's Cooperative Society as a whole, was put out of commission.⁴⁹

The next attempt at a cooperative society in Barrouallie began humbly: according to an archived 2000 memorandum, one of the early meetings of the steering committee was to be held “under the almond tree next to the fishery center.” In 2003, the steering committee for the new society registered the Barrouallie Fisheries Development Cooperative (note the slight name change from the previous incarnation) with the Vincentian national government. The cooperative—which exists still today—was not officially launched, though, until January 2005. The reliance upon international funding for the whaling operation continues. The building that the cooperative currently occupies, called the Barrouallie Fisheries Centre, was built with Japanese funds in 1999. This, to some conservationists, is problematic, owing to the well-supported link between Japanese foreign aid to small-island developing states and

the voting records of those aid recipients in decisions related to the international whaling regulation.⁵⁰

So pervasive is the connection between Japan and the pro-whaling stance at the IWC that the mere mention of the country can be enough to call into question one's conservation credentials. Personally, I am by no means pro-whaling. As an academic researcher, I do my best to withhold value judgments and instead emphasize the importance of three data-centric questions when assessing a particular whaling operation. The questions I use are: Are the cetacean populations being hunted able to withstand the current hunting pressure? Are the whales and dolphins that are taken being used efficiently? And finally, do the hunting methods employed strive for a quick and respectful death for the animals? These are my criteria. You're entitled to your own.

Once, however, I applied for a fellowship at the Harvard Center for the Environment with the intention of studying the relationship between Japanese foreign aid and small island states' voting records on whaling policy. I planned to work under the supervision of Ted Bestor, a renowned anthropologist and East Asia scholar. This would have been the first time my research touched on Japan directly. In the end, I was not awarded the fellowship, but just the proposal was enough to raise questions about my motives among the research community in the Caribbean. I received a cryptic message from a colleague on Bequia, mentioning that she had been "hearing some crazy rumors about your Japanese connections." The lesson learned is this: to maintain the impression of scientific objectivity when conducting whaling research, steer clear of Japan.

In addition to the questions raised by Japanese involvement, today's Fisheries Cooperative experiences its share of local controversy within St. Vincent as well. Of the four pilot whaling boat owners in Barrouallie, only one is a member of the cooperative. While the benefits of membership would seem appealing to local fishermen and whalers—credit for fuel and gear purchases, access to cold storage

facilities, and a guaranteed wholesale market—many fishermen and most whalers see the board of directors as not prioritizing their interests.

How well the cooperative is now functioning is a matter of debate. The cooperative's president, Vibert Pierre, "boast[s] of success," and its members agree that its establishment was "a good move."⁵¹ Patterson Homer, chief inspector at the ministry that oversees cooperatives, is more ambivalent. In a 2009 interview he told me that "there are two functioning [fisheries] co-ops: Kingstown and Calliaqua. There are several that are non-functioning, including Chateaubelair and Bequia." When I asked him to evaluate the cooperative at Barrouallie, the one about which I had originally asked him directly and which he had strategically avoided mentioning, he said, "Barrouallie is doing okay. They have a Fish Fest from time to time."

By most accounts, the Hairoun Bagga Fish Fest was the major accomplishment of the Cooperative. Hairoun is the local beer, named after the Carib name for the island of St. Vincent, and the festival's major sponsor. Bagga is a nickname for Barrouallie. For about three years, beginning in February 2007, the cooperative held a seafood-themed festival in the center of Barrouallie on the first Friday of every month. The Fish Fest attracted people from all over the island, who came for the live music, the festivities, and the fish and whale dishes that were sold. The Fish Fest was advertised on St. Vincent radio with the slogan "Remember, nobody can cook blackfish like Bagga people!"

As indicated by the success of the Fish Fest, the major accomplishment of the cooperative may be different from its primary stated purpose—service to the whalers and fishermen of Barrouallie. Like the shanties sung by the Barrouallie Whalers, the cooperative has the potential to be a positive representation of Barrouallie fishing and especially whaling to the Vincentian community at large. If the cooperative is to survive, it must find new and innovative ways to resume and continue this representation. Perhaps community outreach

efforts to better understand the needs of the local fishers and whalers, increased sponsorship and promotion of cultural institutions such as the shanty singers, a minimization of the role of Japanese aid, and better and more transparent financial accountability could help this iteration of the cooperative, and with it, the Caribbean's foremost "Blackfish Town."