

7 Burning Down the Whaling Station

The raid on the Same-ura whaling station near Hachinohe on 1 November 1911, was a turning point for the Japanese whaling history. Unlike the fishermen in Ayukawa, the fishing communities around Hachinohe did not give up the cetosphere without a fight. The battle, as described in the Introduction, was bloody and laid open all the social rifts and injustices that had been brewing in the communities for decades. At the same time, however, the raid also stands symbolically for the end of the Ebisu whale culture and the integration of Japan's Northeast into the Japanese whaling empire.

The Same-ura Incident has been widely discussed in the Japanese literature, but so far only one chapter, written by Watanabe Hiroyuki, has been published in English about the topic. While Watanabe's discussion of the socio-economic background of the rioting fishermen was instrumental for this research, my own contribution is to include the larger ecological circumstances of the conflict and show how the riot would become the last stand of Japanese fishermen to defend the cetosphere. The outbreak of violence in Hachinohe represented the failure of the elite to engage with the economic, social, and ecological concerns raised by the local population. As I will argue in this chapter, the elite used scientific knowledge to discredit the ecological knowledge of the coastal communities, thereby, inadvertently, also showing the limitations and uncertainties of the scientific method. In the end, it was the whaling industry itself that provided a compromise with the rioters, offering jobs and relative prosperity in turn for giving up the cetosphere.

While we have relatively little knowledge of anti-whaling protests in other regions, the dispute in Hachinohe is well documented. One reason for this is that the major political factions in Hachinohe were drawn into the conflict. On the pro-whaling side stood the Doyōkai faction, which represented former samurai families and farmers. The Ōnanha faction, which was supported by merchants and the working class, took initially an anti-whaling position. Disputes were not only held in local parliaments and town offices but also in two regional newspapers: *Hachinohe*, which

was associated with the Doyōkai and its rival the *Ōnan Shimpō*. For this chapter, I analysed over eighty newspaper articles regarding the anti-whaling protests in Same-ura published in the *Ōnan Shimpō* between April 1909 and October 1912, while also looking at the rival *Hachinohe* and the more neutral *Tōō Shimpō* newspapers. Local historians have also collected additional primary sources and conducted interviews with survivors, which will also be taken into account.¹

Hard Times in Hachinohe

Even though the whaling issue was discussed among all social groups, most people who actively participated in the riot were part of the fishing industry in one way or another. The anti-whaling protests were concentrated in the four fishing communities Minato, Shirogane, Konakano, and Same-ura, all situated east of the Hachinohe city centre and today part of the city (Figure 7.1). After the Meiji Restoration, Hachinohe had lost its status as an independent domain and became part of the newly founded Aomori Prefecture. Over 16,000 people lived in Hachinohe city in 1908, which was centred around sardine fishing and fertiliser production. Many fishermen living in Hachinohe and the surrounding villages

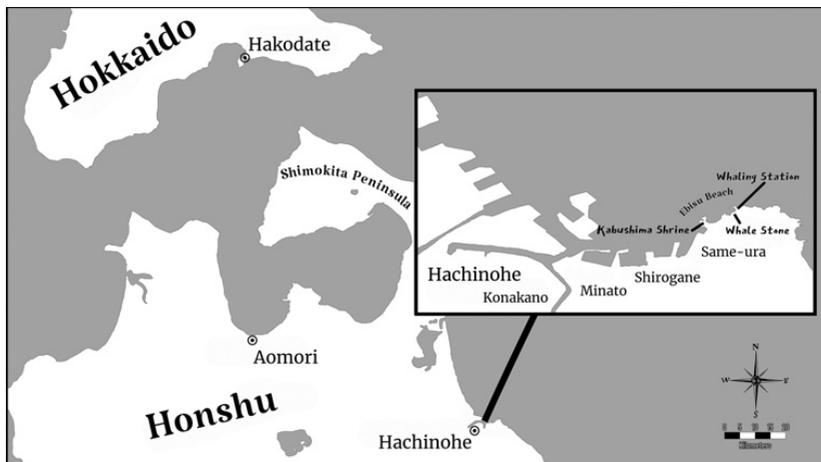


Figure 7.1 Map of the Hachinohe region (ca. 1912)

¹ See Iwaori, *Hachinohe-ura 'kujira jiken' to gyomin*; Satō, *Kujira kaisha yakiuchi jiken*; Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*; Watanabe, *Japan's Whaling*.

were part-time farmers and worked either in a small-scale fishing family enterprise or as wage labourers for fish fertiliser producers around Hachinohe. Until the decline in the 1920s, around 2,000 to 4,000 local farmers and fishermen travelled to Hokkaido, Karafuto (Sakhalin), and Russia every year during the summer months as *dekasegi* to participate in the herring runs, earning around thirty to forty yen per season.²

Similar to Ayukawa, coastal fishing was in deep decline, when industrial whaling appeared on the scene. In 1880, half of the revenue generated from fishing in Aomori Prefecture came from sardine fishing, but ten years later, this percentage had declined to only 16 per cent. This massive drop can be explained by the disappearance of the sardine stocks, probably caused by a mixture of overfishing and natural regime change. The northern parts of Aomori Prefecture could compensate for the loss of sardines with herring fishing as the catch increased threefold after the introduction of new fishing nets in 1876. Herring was, however, uncommon around Hachinohe and the fishing communities remained dependent on sardines. Despite having the highest concentration of fishermen, the Hachinohe region contributed only 9 per cent of the prefecture's fish catches in 1900, whereas ten years prior it had been 18 per cent.³

In order to combat the declining fish catches, the local governments encouraged the introduction of more efficient fishing techniques. Furthermore, in 1894, a new train line was opened that connected the port of Hachinohe with the rest of Japan, allowing fishery products to be transported as far as Tokyo. Before this, fish had been sold locally or transported on horses or ships to nearby provinces, which made the selling of fresh marine products during the summer months difficult. The new railway raised the prices of fresh fish products by about 20 per cent.⁴

Even more important than government-funded schemes, however, were private initiatives that tackled the problem of declining fish stocks. In the first decades of the Meiji period, small-scale fishing was conducted with the beach seine (*jibikiami*) or fixed shore nets (*teichiami*), both techniques relied on sardines and other small fish coming close to the shore. The entrepreneur Hasegawa Tōjirō (1855–1933) set out to change this situation. Noticing the increasing demand for fish fertiliser in his home prefecture of Mie, he migrated to Hachinohe in 1886 to open his own fish fertiliser business. He was integral in developing a round haul net

² Hachinohe shishi hensan iinkai, *Shinpen Hachinohe shishi: Tsūshūhen Kingendai*, 3:87. Older literature estimated that every year more than 10,000 people from the Hachinohe region participated in the herring run, see Hachinohe shakai keizaishi kenkyūkai, *Gaisetsu Hachinohe no rekishi*, 1:203. See also, Howell, *Capitalism from Within*.

³ Yamane, *Hachinohe no gyogyō*, 12–14. ⁴ Yamane, *Hachinohe no gyogyō*, 26–7.

(*aguriami*), which entrapped schools of sardines in a bag-like net between two fishing boats. This new fishing technique, which was, after 1897, used across Japan and made Hasegawa a wealthy man, allowed not only to catch hundreds of sardines in a single haul but also shifted fishing operations farther offshore.⁵

Hasegawa's round haul net further accelerated the social division among fishermen. While industrial fishing companies invested in the new technology and expanded their activities to new fishing grounds offshore, self-employed fishermen still relied on the old techniques. For them, the drop in sardine catches was even more dramatic as the sardines were now fished offshore before they could reach the coast. Facing rising protests from locals, Hasegawa had to withdraw his round haul net operation from Kushiro in Hokkaido, while also being exposed to threats and physical attacks from fishermen in the Hachinohe region. Another problem Hasegawa faced was the price erosion of sardine fertiliser in Tokyo and other places. Especially as after the Sino-Japanese War, cheap soybean fertiliser from Manchuria poured into Japan.⁶ Hasegawa therefore looked into alternatives to fish fertilisers and in 1908 became involved in a scheme to introduce industrial whaling to the region.

Hasegawa's Whale Fertiliser Scheme

The exact circumstances of how industrial whaling came to the Hachinohe region remain somewhat obscure. Since the end of the Russo-Japanese War, building a whaling station near Hachinohe had been of great strategic interest to the whaling industry. As the Norwegian-style whaling ships had a range of around 100 nautical miles, the industrial whaling companies strived to establish a whaling station every seventy to eighty miles to cover the whole Sanriku Coast. From Ayukawa, the next whaling station was in Ryōishi near Kamaishi, but from there was a gap if the whalers wanted to connect Hokkaido to the rest of the coastal network. The Hachinohe region was the logical spot for this last whaling station.

In April 1909, the *Ōnan Shimpō* reported of secret meetings between Hasegawa and a representative of the whaling company Dai-Nihon Hogeï. According to the newspaper, Hasegawa urged the whaling company to build their next whaling station in Same-ura, where Hasegawa possessed land. After some negotiations, Hasegawa invited the four union

⁵ Hachinohe shiritsu toshokan, *Hachinohe Nanbu shikō*, 180–2; Hachinohe shakai keizaishi kenkyūkai, *Gaisetsu Hachinohe no rekishi*, 1:201–3.

⁶ Ishinomaki shishi hensan iinkai, *Ishinomaki no rekishi: Sangyō Kōtsūhen*, 5:282.

heads of Shirogane, Minato, Konakano, and Same-ura to Ishida Tako's guesthouse, who was a close friend of Hasegawa and a supporter of whaling. The newspaper alleged that the union heads were 'bribed' (*kōhaku*) with a large feast and promised exclusive deals with the whalers if they wrote a recommendation letter to the governor. For the *Ōnan Shimpō*, these secret dealings made Hasegawa a 'bitter enemy of the fishermen'.⁷ A few days later, Dai-Nihon Hogeï officially announced its plans to build a whaling station in Same-ura at Ebisu Beach near the famous Kabushima Shrine, a small island dedicated to the Goddess Benzaiten. Shortly after this news broke, over 200 fishermen from Minato marched to the mayor office to submit an official petition against these plans. The *Ōnan Shimpō* immediately took the side of the fishermen, writing that a permission for a whaling station would 'completely wipe out coastal seaweed and shells in the surrounding area'.⁸ This would drive 'thousands of fishermen into famine'.⁹

While the whalers did not need the approval of the fishing unions to conduct whaling, as such a permission was granted by the prefectural government, it was common to arrange an agreement with all interested stakeholders beforehand to promote group harmony and prevent strife. This process, which the *Ōnan Shimpō* branded as 'bribery' of the union heads, is called *nemawashi*, a form of interpersonal consensus building conducted prior to formal decisions, which is an integral part of the Japanese political process.¹⁰ The problem in this case was that as the fishing unions' heads were promised personal benefits from the whaling company, such as exclusive deals for receiving fertiliser from the station, their interests did not align with the subaltern fishermen, which they allegedly represented. Indeed, during a crisis meeting of the Minato fishing union, its head Kanda Shigeo was accused of having illegally given the consent for the establishment of the whaling station in the name of the union without the approval of its members. Kanda had to resign and his successor, Yoshida Keizō (1877–1968), a young fertiliser producer and rival of Hasegawa took a decisive stance against whaling. Only a short while later, the fishing unions of Shirogane and Same-ura also gave in to the pressure and supported the anti-whaling protests. On April 12, the prefectural government declined the request of Dai-Nihon Hogeï to build a whaling station in Same-ura.¹¹

⁷ *Ōnan Shimpō*, 'Dai-Nihon hogeï kaisha no kikaku'.

⁸ *Ōnan Shimpō*, 'Gyomin no chinjō shotei shutsu'.

⁹ *Ōnan Shimpō*, 'Gyomin no chinjō shotei shutsu'. ¹⁰ Saito, 'Nemawashi'.

¹¹ Iwaori, *Hachinohe-ura 'kujira jiken' to gyomin*, 35–6, 88–93.

The 'Superstition' of the Fishermen

The initial failure to establish a whaling station was a bitter setback for the pro-whaling faction in Hachinohe. In their eyes, the fears and worries of the opposition were completely unfounded and irrational. For example, Hasegawa considered the arguments of the anti-whaling faction to be based on the 'superstitions of fishermen'.¹² But how did the locals justify their anti-whaling position? Unlike in Ayukawa and at other sites of anti-whaling protests, many newspaper articles written by fishermen have survived in Hachinohe, giving us the rare opportunity to better understand their concerns. For example, one fisherman, who opposed the planned whaling station, wrote in the *Ōnan Shimpō*:

I am but a simple and mostly illiterate fisherman and even without any scientific knowledge on how whaling works, I have some opinions [in regard to the whaling question] which are based on what my father has told me and what I have experienced myself. . . . To begin with, because whales chase sardines to eat them, sardines fear whales just as a sparrow fears the falcon. When sardines see a whale on the open sea they crowd together and try to escape the whale by swimming towards the shore. In this way, it becomes easy for us fishermen to catch [the sardines]. If no whales are around, sardines disperse throughout the open sea, which makes it extremely inconvenient to catch them; it is a lot of work with little reward, so we have to give up.¹³

As we can see, the arguments presented here are strikingly similar to the concerns expressed two centuries earlier during the 1677 whaling dispute on the Oshika Peninsula. The author of the article reiterated the old belief that whales were instrumental to the success of coastal fishing as they brought sardines towards the shore. He further explained that conducting whaling would result in damaging the livelihoods of hundreds of fishermen, while only a handful of outside whalers would profit from the new industry.¹⁴

The second theme discussed in these newspaper articles was the fear of environmental pollution caused by whaling, a topic that had also come up during the 1677 petition and only a few years earlier in Ayukawa. Interestingly, the whale pollution was discussed as a religious, ecological and scientific problem all at once, as the following newspaper article shows:

According to an ancient saying, a whale coming to shore brings seven years of bad fish catch. Moreover, both from a scientific and experimental standpoint, it is a fact that whale oil and blood have an effect on sardine and bonito catches. It will

¹² Iwaori, *Hachinohe-ura 'kujira jiken' to gyomin*, 333.

¹³ Ōnan Shimpō, 'Hogei mondai ni tsuite'. ¹⁴ Ōnan Shimpō, 'Hogei mondai ni tsuite'.

also hinder the growth of seaweed and *konbu* and *norī* will become extinct. If seaweed withers, abalone, sea urchin and other seafood will likewise die.¹⁵

The ancient saying cited here is an inversion of the popular Edo period saying, ‘one whale brings fortune to seven villages’. However, in this version, the arrival of the whale brings seven years of bad catch. The wording makes it unclear if the saying refers to beached or hunted whales. Local folktales, such as the Sameuratarō story discussed in previous chapters, would indicate that the latter is meant. This ancient wisdom is, according to the fishermen, backed up by scientific and experimental (i.e., observational) evidence, thus indicating that the ecological knowledge of the locals is more than just superstition. The reader is, however, not given more details about which scientific research is referenced here. Instead, the cascading effects whale oil and blood have on a coastal ecosystem are further explained. Recognising that the direct link between whaling and coastal pollution is not universally accepted, the article further states:

Even if we would make the assumption that whale oil and blood have no impact on the fishing industry, Hinode Beach [Ebisu Beach] at Kabushima is an inexhaustible reservoir of sardines. If a whaling station is established, it will become impossible to engage in fishing here. Kabushima is also a breeding ground for seagulls, which is the only place where fishermen can detect the arrival of schools of fish and has been declared a no-fishing zone by the fishermen. The establishment of a whale flensing station will prevent the arrival of seagulls and cause trouble (*fuben meiwaku*) for the fishermen.¹⁶

This paragraph further shows the intimate understanding of the fishermen regarding the coastal ecosystem and its feedback loops. In order to protect spawning sardines and the breeding of seagulls, the fishing communities have long restricted the access to the waters around Kabushima Shrine and Ebisu Beach. The seagulls are given here a similar role as whales, as their presence indicates, where schools of sardines can be found on the open water. Protecting the breeding grounds of the seagulls is therefore also an essential part of the consideration of the locals. Even today, one can find hundreds of seagulls breeding on the rocks near Kabushima. Finally, in the last paragraph, the article deals with the effects of air pollution:

When whale meat is boiled, it emits a fierce stench that is harmful to the health and which, depending on the direction of the wind, is transported not only to Same-ura and Shirogane but also Konakano and Hachinohe. Same-ura has

¹⁵ Ōnan Shimpō, ‘Dai-Nihon hōgei kaisha no kikaku’.

¹⁶ Ōnan Shimpō, ‘Dai-Nihon hōgei kaisha no kikaku’.

recently been gaining fame as a scenic spot in the Northeast, but the stench from the whaling station will be so foul that tourists will no longer come. Also, Kabushima is a sacred place where Itsukushima Shrine resides. [We] fear that the impurity will pollute the sanctity of the place.¹⁷

The issue of air pollution has been largely disregarded and ridiculed by the pro-whaling faction. For example, Ishida Tako, the guesthouse owner, claimed that the fishermen had ‘the superstition that burned whale oil would kill all the cattle and horses’.¹⁸ Air pollution was an emotional topic as already twenty years earlier, in 1891, the Ōnanha faction had successfully delayed the construction of the new train line to Hachinohe with the argument that the smoke of the steam trains would destroy crops and bring diseases, while the opposing Doyōkai faction had stressed the importance of the train line for the economic development of the region. Diseases like cholera were indeed rampant after the construction of the train line, but this was caused by the accelerated contact with the outside world and not by the smoke.¹⁹ With the construction of the whaling station, the question of air quality and public hygiene was again discussed. Ironically, the anti-whaling faction claimed that the air pollution would destroy the emerging tourist industry which had only recently gained momentum due to the establishment of the railway. Interestingly, none of the newspaper articles are referencing the local Ebisu belief directly but this article ends with a reference to the Shinto belief of impurity. The fishermen seemed to fear that whale blood near Kabushima Shrine would cause the sacred space to become impure. The main issue the locals had with the whaling stations seems to have been the danger of pollution and what this would mean for the local ecosystem and economy.

This brings us to the question of how we categorise whaling pollution in the context of the Japanese political discourse of the time. The most famous Meiji-period industrial pollution case is the Ashio Copper Mine Incident. In the 1880s and 1890s, the reckless extraction of copper released previously contained toxins into the nearby river. These toxins caused massive environmental pollution downstream: silkworms used for sericulture died by eating poisoned mulberry leaves; dead fish drifted on the river; forests withered and died; almost 250,000 acres of paddy land was contaminated; and the health of the local population deteriorated. In 1897, over 4,000 farmers marched on Tokyo demanding an end to the pollution and the Meiji government responded with the *Third Mine*

¹⁷ Ōnan Shimpō, ‘Dai-Nihon hōgei kaisha no kikaku’.

¹⁸ Memoirs of Ishida Tako, cited after: Satō, *Kujira kaisha yakiuchi jiken*, 55.

¹⁹ Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*, 229–31.

Pollution Prevention Order, which forced the operator of the mine to install filter beds and sediment basins and to reforest the nearby forests to prevent the toxins from reaching the river.²⁰ Less well known are the cases of air pollution caused by copper refineries in Ehime Prefecture around 1900. Here, sulfur dioxide was released into the air by the Niihama and Shisakajima refineries, which damaged the crops of nearby fields. After a series of violent protests, the national government organised compensation talks between the operator and the locals and in 1909, the company conceded and agreed to develop new technologies to remove the sulfur dioxide from the emissions, compensate the victims, and alter the production schedule during the agricultural season.²¹

Indeed, one further reason for the declining fish catches was industrial pollution caused by the sewerage of cities and waste of factories.²² The latter was certainly true also for whaling stations, which are described in almost every source as large contributor to coastal pollution. Unlike chemical waste products from factories, the expected pollution in Sameura was caused by something the fishermen had been familiar with for centuries from beached whale incidents: whale blood and grease. The whaling companies claimed that whaling would bring prosperity to the villages as whale blood, grease, and oil leaking into the ocean from the stations would sink to the bottom of the ocean after a few hours where it would work as a fertiliser for the marine flora and fauna. This would help marine life prosper and new fish stocks therefore came to the region.²³

However, according to Kondō Isao, a former whaler, the discarding of unprocessed whale waste into the oceans led to the clumping of whale blood, which would settle on the seafloor like three-meter-deep mud. The flora and fauna in the affected areas would then die due to a lack of oxygen.²⁴ Therefore, whale waste is best understood as part of the industrial pollution issues of the time. While whale pollution had already been a major issue in the Edo period, industrial whaling amplified the problem. Before, the flensing of a whale had taken a whole day, whereas it was now possible to not only hunt many more animals but to also flense them back-to-back, producing much more waste more quickly than proto-industrial whaling. In the same way as whales have become an industrial

²⁰ For literature on the Ashio Copper Mine Incident, see Pitteloud, 'L'affaire d'Ashio (extraction minière, Japon)'; Stolz, *Bad Water*; Walker, *Toxic Archipelago*, Chap. 3; Ui, *Industrial Pollution in Japan*; Notehelfer, 'Japan's First Pollution Incident'.

²¹ Watanabe, 'Talking Sulfur Dioxide'. For more on pollution issues and environmental movements in the post-war period, see Avenell, *Transnational Japan in the Global Environmental Movement*; George, *Minamata*.

²² The Journal of the Fisheries Society of Japan, 'The Decrease of Fish and Its Prevention'.

²³ Akashi, *Honpō no noruē-shiki hōgeishi*, 243–4.

²⁴ Watanabe, *Japan's Whaling*, 64–5; Kondō, *Nihon engan hōgei no kōbō*, 291–4.

commodity, their discarded carcasses rose similarly to an industrial waste product that threatened the well-being of the local ecosystem.

The Role of Imperial Science

Despite the fierce opposition, Hasegawa and other members of the pro-whaling faction, pushed forward with the plans of a whaling station and organised a secret trial flensing. In late April 1909, they bought a fin whale caught by the *Olga* for 350 yen. Protected by six policemen they dismembered the whale at a provisional site at Ebisu Beach and transported the meat and bones to a fertiliser plant at the mouth of the Minato River. While Hasegawa made a profit of 30 yen from this trial run, the dumb-founded fishermen were left with a tremendous amount of whale blood and stinky oil contaminating not only Ebisu Beach but also the Minato River, leaving behind dead fish, seaweed and crabs.²⁵ Hasegawa's intent had probably been to demonstrate that local entrepreneurs could make a profit by buying the waste products from the whalers to produce fertiliser, a method that he had probably copied from Ayukawa, but all he did in the eyes of the fishermen was to confirm their suspicions that the external costs of whaling would have to be paid by the ecosystem and ultimately them.

Eventually, the news of the growing conflict between the whaling and anti-whaling faction also reached the Aomori prefectural government. To verify or disprove the accusations of the fishermen, the government requested a scientific inquiry from Professor Kishinouye Kamakichi (1867–1929) from Tokyo Imperial University, who had in the past conducted similar studies in cases of fisheries disputes. Kishinouye arrived in Same-ura in June 1909 and stayed at the guesthouse of Ishida Tako. He gathered fish and shellfish who had died close to the provisional whaling site and conducted several autopsies to determine if an unknown 'whale poison' had been the cause of death. After the end of the investigation, he initially refused to disclose his results to the public; instead, an engineer working for the government asserted that whale blood had been found to have no effect on fish and other sea life.²⁶ Finally, Kishinouye agreed to give a short presentation at the Minato Fisheries School with an audience of around 300 people in a tense atmosphere. Kishinouye lectured mostly about the benefits that industrialisation would bring to the region and he recommended to invest more capital in buying new fishing equipment. When pressed by a journalist, he confirmed that in his opinion whaling could be harmful to coastal fisheries. However, his own scientific

²⁵ Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*, 240–2. ²⁶ Ōnan Shimpō, 'Maihama gyōmin no daigekikō'.

inquiries were unable to determine which role – if any – whale blood and oil played on the death of the fish he had autopsied. As there was no established theory yet that could conclusively explain these deaths, the experience of the fishermen should be taken into account more in the future.²⁷ Kishinouye's response left many fishermen unsatisfied and one commentator in the *Ōnan Shimpō* asked whether science was even the right tool to solve the whaling pollution crisis:

The scientific principle [*gakuri*] is still under research. The fact [*jijitsu*], on the other hand, is a thousands-of-years-old definitive unchangeable thing. The scientific principle is still very immature. . . . We have to respect science, but only so few of the scientific principles are known, and they do not have satisfying explanations for countless phenomena. It is a fact that all marine creatures have died just at the place where the blood and oil of the flensed whales have poured into the ocean. It is said that it is difficult to know if the cause of the deaths is linked to weather, currents, shortage of nutrients or indeed some poison of the whales, but it can't be helped that the reason can't be specified as science is still immature today.²⁸

No one disputed the fact that there were dead fish in the water, but the factions debated over the right epistemology to determine if there was a causal connection to industrial whaling. Pro-whaling advocates did not acknowledge the ecological knowledge of the locals, as they believed it to be based on religious superstitions. In their eyes, the only form of 'legitimate knowledge' could be produced by the new scientific fields such as fisheries science or marine biology. Kishinouye's inability to provide concrete evidence that fish had died because of a 'whale poison' was seen as proof that whaling was unrelated to environmental pollution.²⁹ This claim was refuted by the anti-whaling faction. According to the commentator in the *Ōnan Shimpō*, that fish died where whale waste was let into the ocean was an ontological reality and took precedence over the question of whether fisheries science can establish a link between the two. As the livelihoods and survival of thousands of fishermen depended on the question, an inconclusive answer, such as provided by Kishinouye, was simply too high a risk to allow whaling to continue.³⁰ For the anti-

²⁷ Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*, 246–8.

²⁸ *Ōnan Shimpō* from 4 July 1909, cited after: Iwaori, *Hachinohe-ura 'kujira jiken' to gyomin*, 419–20.

²⁹ As marine environmental historians have pointed out, early fisheries science was closely intertwined with the interests of the industrial complex of nation-states and many scientists approached their research from the perspective of maximal resource extraction for the national economy, often underestimating the long-term implications of overfishing and other human disturbances in favour of short-term economic goals. For more on this topic, see Schwach, 'The Sea Around Norway'; Holm, 'Crossing the Border'; McEvoy, *The Fisherman's Problem*; Finley, *All the Fish in the Sea*.

³⁰ *Ōnan Shimpō* from 4 July 1909, cited after: Iwaori, *Hachinohe-ura 'kujira jiken' to gyomin*, 419–20.

whaling faction, fisheries science was limited in its scope and potential explanatory power and one rather had to rely on first-hand observation and knowledge of former generation, i.e., their ecological knowledge to accurately describe and understand the situation.³¹

The conflict between the pro- and anti-whaling factions was at a tipping point in Hachinohe when Dai-Nihon Hogeï merged with other whaling companies into Tōyō Hogeï in May 1909. The appearance of a new whaling juggernaut shifted the power balance once again in favour of the pro-whaling faction. Without losing much time, Tōyō Hogeï applied a new request for the construction of a whaling station at Ebisu Beach. They also used a new tactic: instead of negotiating directly with the fishermen, they went to their largest political supporter: the Ōnanha faction, the owner of the *Ōnan Shimpō* newspaper. The Ōnanha faction had been sympathetic with the fishermen but was mostly managed by representatives from the merchant class. Tōyō Hogeï invited reporters of the *Ōnan Shimpō* to visit the Daitō Hogeï whaling station at Ryōishi in June 1910 to prove that whaling would bring economic prosperity to Hachinohe. Apparently, the scheme worked perfectly as the *Ōnan Shimpō* wrote favourably about the trip:

A month has passed since the inauguration of the operation, and already ten whales have been caught. From now on, we will enter the whaling high season. Especially our whaling spot is not like the Sea of Kinkazan, where the [whales stay] offshore, and will have a more promising future with high profits. Like many other fishing places with factories, there have also been some initial discussions in Ryōishi. However, now the factories created a demand for hiring many people to the extent that even women and children are now receiving good money. Because the village receives great profit by the demand of goods for the factory, it now welcomes the industry with great affection.³²

The *Ōnan Shimpō* highlighted the high wages of the workers and the economic growth of the town while downplaying the anti-whaling movements in Ryōishi as mere ‘discussions’ and failing to mention that this newspaper had, up until this point, written repeatedly that whaling would bring famine and death to the fishing communities. In June of 1910, the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce approved the building of a whaling station at Ebisu Beach and granted the company a license to hunt whales between April to September of the following year. This news was celebrated in the *Ōnan Shimpō* who claimed that while in the past

³¹ We see a similar line of argument also a few years earlier in northern Norway, where the anti-whaling faction had also argued that the centuries old ecological knowledge of the fishermen was more reliable of describing changes in the coastal ecosystem than scientific research conducted over the period of only one or two years, see Holm, ‘Bringing Fish to the Shore’.

³² Ōnan Shimpō, ‘Hogeijigyo no yūbō’.

fishermen had protested against the whaling station as there had been no time to conduct deeper research whether whaling would damage the fishing industry, such research had been conducted in the meantime and it had been shown that ‘there are many benefits [to whaling] and little harm. The benefits will outweigh every possible harm’.³³

In the following negotiations between the Same-ura fishing union and Tōyō Hogeï regarding the compensation for possible environmental pollution, the Ōnanha faction took up a new role as neutral mediator. Under the new agreement, the Same-ura fishing union would receive ten yen for every whale killed and flensed at the station.³⁴ With this proposal, Tōyō Hogeï managed to turn the situation around and the two most important political factions, the Doyōkai and the Ōnanha, were now both supporting the whaling station. Meanwhile, Hasegawa and his supporters had managed to secure their exclusive contracts with the whalers and remained the sole buyers of the discarded whale waste to be turned into fertiliser.

However, this deal had been made without the knowledge or consent of the other fishing unions, who did not receive any compensation, even though the pollution was not contained exclusively to the waters around Same-ura.³⁵ Yoshida Keizō, the unofficial leader of the anti-whaling movement, was especially unhappy. The fishermen had elected him as the head of the Minato Fishing Union explicitly to deal with the situation. Furthermore, as a fish fertiliser producer, he was a direct competitor to Hasegawa and had much to lose personally if the deal went through. Sardine catches would likely drop even further and unlike Hasegawa, he could not compensate for the loss with whale fertiliser as Hasegawa had an exclusive deal. Under the leadership of Yoshida, the opposing fishing unions decided to visit the other industrial whaling places on the Noto Peninsula, in Chōshi, and Ayukawa. They wanted to see with their own eyes if whaling really did not harm sardine fishing as Tōyō Hogeï had repeatedly claimed. After the trip, Yoshida sent a report in early 1911 to the Minister of the Interior in Tokyo and the Aomori Prefecture governor stating:

For a detailed investigation, [we] visited every coastal whaling station in the whaling regions. The large-scale damage of the sardine fishing was obvious. The growth of seaweed is obstructed, fish, and shell breeding was disturbed. Fish species increasingly leave coastal waters; it is clear that the normal fishing industry is suffering.³⁶

³³ Ōnan Shimpō, ‘Hogeï konkyochi no secchi’.

³⁴ *Hachinohe* from 13 January 1910, cited after: Hachinohe shakai keizaishi kenkyūkai, *Gaisetsu Hachinohe no rekishi*, 1:204–6.

³⁵ Iwaori, *Hachinohe-ura ‘kujira jiken’ to gyomin*, 35–7.

³⁶ Cited after: Hachinohe shishi hensan iinkai, *Shinpen Hachinohe shishi: Kingendai Shiryōhen* 2, 2:238–9.

Most shocking for Yoshida, however, was that this obvious destruction had not been recognised by scientists as being caused by whaling. He urged the minister and governor to revoke their approval otherwise the lives of the fishermen would suffer: 'To make the matter simple, for the profit-making of a single company, the well-being of a whole region is gambled.'³⁷ Yoshida's report further increased the pressure on the local elite, and eventually, the mayor of Same-ura, Kubo Tadakatsu, who had been a supporter of whaling, had to resign. However, the report did little to change the minds of the bureaucrats in the ministries.

The Attack and the Aftermath

Despite local protests, the construction of the whaling station went along and in April 1911, three whaling ships arrived in Same-ura to officially open the first season. As we have seen in the opening paragraph of Chapter 5, Ōashi Bō, a writer for the Ōnan Shimpō attended the opening of the station in June, praising whaling as the future of Hachinohe. One hundred and fifty people worked at the newly built whaling station at Ebisu Beach and an additional 350 people worked at the fertiliser plants owned by Hasegawa and his friends. This made Tōyō Hogeī the biggest provider of jobs in Hachinohe.³⁸ Together with the western Japanese whalers arrived also the Norwegian gunners, who lived in the guesthouse of Ishida Tako. After work, they celebrated with the other whalers at lavish parties to the envy of the rest of the population. Some younger factory workers also flirted with local women, which was not taken well. According to rumours, one of the Norwegian gunners even had a child with a local Geisha.³⁹

Over the course of the summer, the whalers hunted 186 whales, which was a spectacular success for them. Most whales were brought via a slipway to the station and flensed on dry land. This meant the out-flowing blood was contained and pumped into a holding pond so as not to pollute the surrounding area. As the whaling station was not yet finished, however, more whales were caught than the pond could contain and most of the blood and oil leaked into the ocean unfiltered. Hasegawa and his associates were also not able to cope with the large quantities of waste and the whalers could only sell a small percentage of the whale waste, with the rest being thrown back into the ocean. Soon, sea life began to whiter near the station and fishing became impossible, as nets and fishing lines were

³⁷ Hachinohe shishi hensan iinkai, *Shinpen Hachinohe shishi: Kingendai Shiryōhen* 2, 2:239.

³⁸ Hachinohe shakai keizaishi kenkyūkai, *Gaisetsu Hachinohe no rekishi*, 1:206–7; Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*, 265.

³⁹ Satō, *Kujira kaisha yakiuchi jiken*, 32, 294.

clogged with blood every time they were let into the water. The sardine swarm that normally reached Hachinohe in September did not come that year. It goes without saying that the fishermen blamed the whaling operation for their poor catch results and to make matters worse, the price of rice rose by over 20 per cent compared to the previous year.⁴⁰

To make ends meet, the fishermen began to illegally harvest Sakhalin surf clam that had died from the exposure to whale blood and been washed ashore. The coastal area around the whaling station had effectively been transformed into an industrial sacrifice zone for the whaling business. The whaling company paid such concerns little attention and instead applied for an extension of their whaling activities until the end of the year. When the official approval was delayed, however, Tōyō Hogeï decided that two of the whaling ships should continue to the Korean whaling grounds, while one stayed behind and continued whaling without a license.⁴¹

That the government ignored the illegal whaling after the expiring of Tōyō Hogeï's license was what the final straw that broke the camel's back. In an emergency meeting on 31 October 1911, the leaders of the anti-whaling faction met at a nearby guesthouse to discuss the situation.⁴² Fishermen came and went throughout the night, and it was finally decided to start the raid on the whaling station in the early hours of the next morning. Over 1000 fishermen, many of them armed with knives, clubs, and swords, assembled in three groups and attacked from various sides the whaling station, which was fiercely defended by the employees and eight police officers. The attack on the station ended in a fiery inferno when the whale oil caught fire during the siege, causing two of the attackers to be killed and two very seriously injured (one later died). On the side of the company and the police, 14 people were injured, three of them severely. All facilities, as well as stored oil and meat were lost, the total of the estimated damage was estimated to be around 180,000 yen.

After the station had been laid to waste, the rioters continued their rampage through the street of Same-ura. They demolished the local police station, the house of Kanda Shigeo (the former Minato Fishing Union head), and the guesthouse of Ishida. At Hasegawa's house, the

⁴⁰ Ono, *Aomoriken seijishi*, 2:440; Satō, *Kujira kaisha yakiuchi jiken*, 32.

⁴¹ Iwaori, *Hachinohe-ura 'kujira jiken' to gyomin*, 141–2; Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*, 264–9.

⁴² There are conflicting reports of Yoshida Keizō's role during the preparation of the attack. Some saw him as the leader of the opposing fishermen, while other believed that he betrayed the anti-whaling faction and warned the police beforehand. Yoshida, himself, claimed after the attack that he was present during the meeting for some time, but not involved in the discussions and that he returned home before anything was decided. For a full discussion, see Iwaori, *Hachinohe-ura 'kujira jiken' to gyomin*, 159–81; Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*, 270–4.

rioters not only systematically broke all the furniture, but they also set the hated fishing gear and boats on fire and destroyed all documents and certificates related to loans Hasegawa had given to fishermen. Around eleven in the morning the rioters broke up and police officers and fire fighter from Hachinohe and the surrounding villages rushed to the scene to restore order and put out the various fires. A military division that was holding a practice drill in the neighbouring Iwate Prefecture were ordered to go and appease the situation, but they arrived only after the rioters had already dissolved. Nevertheless, forty people were arrested the next day and among them were the suspected ringleaders of the riot, including Yoshida Keizō.⁴³

Over the following weeks, the police held an interrogation of the arrested rioters. In their report the police theorised that a group of instigators (presumably the group around Yoshida, but the names were omitted from the records) had been responsible for manipulating the locals into a mob. The police claimed that these instigators had made use of the superstitious belief of the rioters that whale oil and blood had an effect on fishing. All forty suspects denied having taken part in the riot, however. Furthermore, in the protocol of the interrogation, we can see that several of the accused even denied having been against whaling. Only one accused, a twenty-nine-year-old man working in the fish fertiliser business, stated bluntly: 'Whales are gods. It's bad to catch them.'⁴⁴

A month later, on 6 December 1911, a preliminary hearing was held, after which the magistrate released the following written statement:

Originally, in the district of the defendants, whales were called o-Ebisu-sama (Revered Mr Ebisu) and regarded as sacred. It was held that sardine fishing depended a great deal on the benevolence of passing whaling and there was a custom in the area whereby, as soon as a whale spout was seen far out to sea, those watching would clap and bow three times in prayer beseeching the god for good fortune in fishing. Consequently, there are many traditional tales and proverbs about how shoals of sardines coming close to shore are blessings from the god Ebisu to the fishermen living along the coasts. And, because there are still some among the fishermen even today who believe this, any talk of catching whales, let alone cutting them up and letting their blood and oil spill into the sea, is regarded as anathema to them.⁴⁵

The magistrate highlighted that there had been no proof that whaling was an issue for public health or that it would negatively affect the local flora and fauna. Following the conclusions drawn in the police report, he

⁴³ Ono, *Aomoriken seijishi*, 2:437–8.

⁴⁴ English translation cited after: Watanabe, *Japan's Whaling*, 62.

⁴⁵ Ōnan Shimpō, 'Same bōdō yoshin shūketsu'. English translation is cited from Watanabe, *Japan's Whaling*, 63.

accused the people connected to the fishing unions of having used the superstitions of the fishermen to instigate an attack on the whaling station for their own sinister reasons.⁴⁶ As fishing historian Ishida Yoshikazu has pointed out, with this report the elite deflected from the pollution issue and illegal whaling by blaming the riot on the unfounded ‘Ebisu superstition’ of the locals.⁴⁷ In this way, the ecological knowledge of the fishermen was turned against them as it was reduced to its religious component. Any mention of whaling causing pollution was thus made invalid as it was based on superstition and not scientific research, the only form of legitimate knowledge in a ‘modern’ society.

A few months later, in February 1912, the full trial was held in the Aomori District Court. Leading the defence was the famous lawyer and member of the House of Representatives Hanai Takuzō (1868–1931) from Hiroshima. Hanai had made himself a name by defending commoners against large corporations and he had just recently defended a group of farmers in the Ashio Copper Mine Incident. In front of the court, Hanai refuted the claim of the prosecutor that the whaling station had caused no harm to the fishermen and pointed out that the violence had only broken out because Tōyō Hogeï had broken the law by continuing whaling even after their license expired. Without the wrongdoing of the whaling company, the incident would never have happened. As the government had done nothing to stop the company despite their illegal whaling, the fishermen had no other choice than to use violence.⁴⁸

The accused fishermen received also help from an unexpected direction: Oka Jūrō, the president of Tōyō Hogeï, appeared before the court and admitted that part of the guilt laid with his company: ‘It was our fault. I would like to offer the defendants 10,000 yen per person in compensation. We will not demand compensation for damages.’⁴⁹ Oka did not deny the accusation that industrial whaling caused coastal pollution and he explained that the company had in the past in such instances negotiated with the local fishing union and donated money to the community for buildings schools or roads. However, in hindsight, the negotiation with the fishing unions around Hachinohe had turned out to be unsatisfactory.⁵⁰

With this admission of guilt, it was finally acknowledged that the rioters had not only acted out of superstition but that their ecological concerns had been legitimate. In the end, twenty-three of the defendants received prison sentences between one and eight years, while six rioters were fined

⁴⁶ Ōnan Shimpō, ‘Same bōdō yoshin shūketsu’. ⁴⁷ Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*, 309.

⁴⁸ Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*, 315–22. ⁴⁹ Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*, 326.

⁵⁰ Iwaori, *Hachinohe-ura ‘kujira jiken’ to gyomin*, 141–7.

forty yen each. Yoshida Keizō was found not guilty. Only a few months later, all rioters were granted a general pardon upon the death of Emperor Meiji.

Much has been debated as to why Oka Jūrō was willing to take part of the blame for the outburst of violence. While Ishida saw this as a sign of the virtuous character of Oka, Watanabe Hiroyuki argued that it was more likely that the Same-ura whaling ground had proven so valuable that Oka wanted to make peace with the locals as quickly as possible.⁵¹ Indeed, after the raid, Oka Jūrō travelled to Hachinohe himself and met with all the key players in the anti-whaling movement to broker a compromise. After making little progress for some time, a deal was finally reached when he announced that Tōyō Hogeī would in the future strictly observe the whaling period and take measures to prevent blood from being spilt into the ocean. As a further concession, Tōyō Hogeī donated money to fund the cost of the trial. Oka also promised to hire family members of the arrested fishermen to work at the station. In general, Tōyō Hogeī would train more locals and hire them to work in the industry. Furthermore, the company agreed to help facilitate new industries related to whaling in the region. For this, Oka terminated the exclusive whale fertiliser contract with Hasegawa and sold whale waste to everyone who was interested.⁵² Okas attempts at *nemawashi* paid off: When he finally had the approval of the locals, he immediately submitted a request to rebuild the station. He hired one hundred local fishermen to rebuild it and in June 1912, whaling commenced once again. Oka's intervention not only appeased the situation in Hachinohe but also secured the future of the Same-ura whaling station, which was important for the further expansion of industrial whaling towards Hokkaido.

Conclusion

The Same-ura Incident was by no means the only 'site fight' of a civil movement against a controversial industrial facility in the Meiji period. Also, considering the degree of violence and the number of people involved, the death toll of three was relatively low. Rural protests against elite rule had been widespread in early modern Japan: one study counted over 6,800 peasant uprisings (*ikki*) over the course of the Tokugawa period.⁵³ In the first years of the Meiji period, when the Meiji state performed land and fishing reforms, non-violent and violent protests

⁵¹ Watanabe, *Japan's Whaling*, 71; Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*, 326–8.

⁵² Ishida, *Nihon gyominshi*, 326–8.

⁵³ Bowen, *Rebellion and Democracy in Meiji Japan*, 72.

increased dramatically against the government, but with the growing acceptance of the new government and the continuing industrialisation of the periphery more and more protests were no longer directed against the state itself but against local elites, such as landlords, factory owners, and capitalistic fishing entrepreneurs. Contemporary newspapers described the Same-ura protests as a violent movement (*bōdō*), a term used to describe violence against homes and properties of officials and wealthy merchants, but short of an all-encompassing rebellion.⁵⁴

While the Same-ura Incident was the most violent clash between whalers and fishermen, as we have seen, anti-whaling protests were not limited to northeastern Japan and appeared at nearly every newly built whaling station, even in regions with a long whaling tradition. This suggests that the conflict was more complex than a cultural struggle between western whaling regions and northern non-whaling regions. Instead, I argue that the main source of conflict was not whaling per se, but the industrial methods that caused large-scale coastal pollution. In the *Journal of the Fisheries Society of Japan*, fishing experts debated the existence of a nation-wide anti-whaling movement, but from what we can tell from local sources, the individual movements were not connected to each other. Political scientist Daniel Aldrich argued that controversial facilities often produced public goods from which large parts of the society profited, while the specific sites, where these facilities were built, had to deal with the ‘public bad’, which were in this case the external costs of a degraded ecosystem.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the particular circumstances of the Hachinohe region, the long dependence on sardine coastal fishing, which was helped by foraging whales, the experience of coastal pollution of whaling in the past, and the local culture and folktales surrounding whales were all additional factors that made the whaling question even more explosive than in other regions.

The problems the Hachinohe fishermen faced were not all caused by industrial whaling, however. Coastal fishing seems to have been in decline for years. The seriousness of the situation became apparent in the early Meiji period when the traditional *iriai* system was abolished and the pressure on the stocks increased drastically. The result was a decline in sardine fish catches, which hit Hachinohe fishermen the most. Increased demand for fisheries products, including fish fertiliser and oil, for the increasing human population as well as better fishing equipment, contributed to the constant pressure on the coastal fish stocks. The poor fish catches of 1911 were, therefore, not caused by whaling but were simply a sign of the low resilience of an ecosystem reaching its threshold.⁵⁶ It is

⁵⁴ Ōnan Shimpō, ‘Bōdō jiken to chōsa’. ⁵⁵ Aldrich, *Site Fights*.

⁵⁶ Walker and Salt, *Resilience Thinking*.

very likely that climatic factors also played a role as the world's climate was still adapting from the Little Ice Age to a warmer weather regime. This only reinforced the point, however, that an already weakened ecosystem was less resilient against additional disturbance. In other words, the fishermen were already fighting against the deterioration of the coastal ecosystem that they had caused when whaling arrived and made everything worse. From this, we can see that the anthropogenic taking over of the cetosphere was closely connected to changes in the fishing regime.

Finally, let us consider why the anti-whaling movements played out so differently in Ayukawa and Hachinohe even though both communities are situated on the Sanriku Coast and have a long history of rejecting organised whaling. In the case of Ayukawa, this goes back as far as 1677, when the town was part of the anti-whaling coalition against the Kii whalers. The Hachinohe region did not have such an organised anti-whaling opposition in the Edo period, but countless whale strandings had contributed to the creation of a distinct culture of 'living with whales' transmitted through folktales and material objects such as the Same-ura whale stone. A further commonality was the economic reliance on sardine and bonito fishing for producing proto-industrial fish fertiliser exported to the core regions. Whales played a vital part in bringing fish closer to the shore and indicating the presence of fish stocks.

Unlike the Oshika Peninsula, the fishing villages near Hachinohe were not separated by inaccessible rias but were all easily reachable either by land or water. This not only made environmental pollution less site-specific, as wind and water currents could disseminate pollutants much more efficiently, but also allowed for a mobile fishing society. Many Hachinohe fishermen worked during the herring season in the waters off Hokkaido, encouraging interactions between fishermen originating from different villages. Indeed, the fishing villages directly adjunct to Hachinohe (Same-ura, Minato, Konoha, and Shirogane) are so closely connected that they form their own social and ecological system. Direct contact between the fishing unions, merchants, and also fishermen was common. As many of the locals worked as travelling fishermen and were away most of the year, more people were living in the region than the near-shore fish stocks could otherwise sustain. The social strata were also more complex than on the Oshika Peninsula, where a small number of families had managed to monopolise most of the capital. In Hachinohe, medium-sized fish fertiliser merchants, like Yoshida Keizō, also had a chance to thrive. Well-off fishermen had access to the new net techniques invented by Hasegawa or even owned a motorised boat to harvest offshore fish stocks.

The arrival of the whaling companies created a decisive rift not only between elite and subaltern fishermen but also among the fertiliser producers. By looking at the development in Ayukawa and other places, Hasegawa Tōjirō realised the potential industrial whaling had for supplying his fertiliser business and his exclusive deal with the whaling company would probably have worked in a place like Ayukawa. In Hachinohe, however, more stakeholders were involved in the fertiliser business and when Yoshida and other middle-sized fertiliser producers realised that Hasegawa had outmanoeuvred them, they found allies among the subaltern fishermen to give additional weight to their political goals. Over the course of the whaling dispute, the fishing unions changed their stance towards whaling several times, showing that a power struggle among the elite existed.

On the eve of the raid, only the Same-ura fishing union, remained pro-whaling; all other unions had switched to the anti-whaling faction. Excluding the middle-sized fish fertiliser producers from the benefits of industrial whaling had proven to be a mistake. Although Tōyō Hogeï was the largest employer in the region, the economic boost industrial whaling brought to the region was not large enough to demarginalise the existing, already overcrowded local population. Instead of seeing industrial whaling as an opportunity, they felt a moral obligation to protect their traditional way of life. Whales also played a bigger role in the ecological knowledge in Hachinohe as the locals not only referenced the old whale folktales but also had a close religious and ecological attachment to Kabushima Shrine and the nearby Ebisu Beach. Whaling at these places not only angered the gods, but it also destroyed the local flora and fauna. In the end, it was Tōyō Hogeï's willingness after the incident to integrate the locals into the industrialisation process that solved the conflict. They not only trained and hired locals to work at the station, but they also financed new peripheral industries such as whale fertiliser plants to give a new economic perspective to the locals. Thus, the Sanriku Coast became part of the Japanese whaling empire and the anti-whaling movements were soon forgotten.