LESSONS OF ISLANDS

Place and identity in the Faroe Islands

F I R O U Z G A I N I

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Foreword

Lessons of Islands focuses on the anthropology of small-scale islands with the Faroe Islands as main case. The book develops some of the discussions that were initially presented in *Among the Islanders of the North* (2011). The goal is to shed light on small island characteristics: Do island cultures have something special in common? The analysis has three levels: the Faroese community, the family and the youth. The book is inspired by the work of the French anthropologist Marc Augé, especially as regards his concept of 'non-space'.

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'Objects in mirror are closer than they appear'
(note on side mirror of Korean car)

Part one

There is something definitive about islands, wherever they are located, and that is surely at the root of the metaphor 'cultures as islands' that the first generations of European and North American anthropologists seriously relied on.

Borders of islands

Islands, contrary to mainland areas, have unambiguous boundaries which never change. They are surrounded by bodies of water which efficiently isolate them from their neighbours. Small-scale island societies, where the contrast between land and water is sensed by everyone, are especially interesting, because here nobody can help but feel that the island or archipelago represents a limited universe, detached from the rest of the world. Remote islands, without any immediate prospect of fixed connection to the mainland by bridge or tunnel, symbolize authentic communities, cut off the globalized world. The inhabitants of such places basically have two options: to stay or to leave. For those who migrate the decision is practically irreversible. Even if they return later, the risk of being deprived of the island identity is considerable. The ultimate choice of the islander is, therefore, existential. Those enduring the hardship of isolation, or even enjoying the tranquillity of the human outpost, shape the cultures of the islands.

Islanders, as well as inhabitants of lonely desert oases and forest villages, are very much aware of the concrete barrier of nature, which makes the world beyond the horizon and wood mysterious. The solitude of small islands in the ocean – also when they represent parts of large groups of inhabited islands – gives their inhabitants ambivalent

feelings of personal freedom and social restriction. In contrast to the people of the desert or forest, islanders cannot leave on foot or on the back of an animal, because they are totally dependent on boats and – in modern times – airplanes.

The strong fatalism of islanders helps them face permanent seclusion from the continent with patience and humility. In many cases remote island communities can be seen as microcosms reflecting the same properties that large urban communities take credit for. So, are islands, from this point of view, just miniatures of larger societies? Is the difference only a matter of scale? There are other essential qualities dichotomizing small islands and main continents. Even if the classic notion of cultures as islands has been rejected by prominent researchers since the mid-20th century, it reflects the philosophy of anthropology found in peripheral communities. The cultural universe of islanders is literally surrounded by untamed nature, which acts as a fluid and incoherent neighbour.

Islands are enclaves, like warm planets in a cold solar system, protecting human civilization in hazardous natural settings. The mystery of remote islands is materialized in the curious case of the Pacific Easter Island, famed for its giant statues, which represent voiceless remnants of a vanished culture. What really happened in Easter Island? Several competing theories have been put forward. Cultures, critics say, are *not* islands, because they connect people from different territories and continents through cross-border communication. Easter Island, for example, according to the pivotal theory of the Norwegian archaeologist Thor Heyerdahl (1950), was settled by people from the faraway continent of America. The isolation of remote sparsely populated islands, in other words, is never a complete isolation. In most cases a thorough study of the history of the islands will demystify the hidden people and culture in question. Islanders, even those residing in territories adjacent to the mainland, tend to be the targets of myths and stereotyping legends.

Exotic islands

To what degree a specific island fits to the general social construction of islands presented here depends on objective criteria like size and

geographical location, but most of all on world-view and cultural norms. Islands can be observed and analysed from many different angles. Islanders, notably residents of small sparsely populated islands, are often confronted with and influenced by a strong ideational dualism between land and sea, culture and nature, life and death. They are fearful and humble when they think of the powers of nature. Between man and nature, the anthropologist Leslie A. White said in a conference speech in 1958 (Sahlins 1976: 105), "hung the veil of culture, and he could see nothing save through this medium". In his acclaimed yet controversial book *The Science of Culture* (2005: 358), he also says:

> *"Man is wholly at the mercy of external forces, astronomic and geologic. As a matter of fact, it is rather disconcerting to think of how narrow is the margin within which man lives. Change the temperature, velocity, amount of water, or atmosphere of the earth but a little and life would cease. It is a curious, and from a cosmic viewpoint, momentary, concatenation of circumstances that has made life possible."*

This account by a cultural researcher, by many said to be outdated, has regained importance in contemporary debates on global climate change and its potential effects on small islands. Could we say that islands are less absolute today than they were in the past? 'No man is an island' is an expression suggesting an alternative to the contested 'cultures as islands' metaphor. New technologies of communication are also changing the identities of the people of remote islands, who are no longer in a position to claim to be disconnected from global webs of time and space. Islands are still islands, but they have lost their innocence. Many visitors to remote islands, in search of exotic experiences, get an astonishing feeling of being caught in a time warp, because many islands make out to be traditional and (late) modern at the same time. Islands have been at the heart of anthropological studies throughout the 20th century – as geographical and mental models. The Trobriand archipelago (Melanesia) is to anthropology what Galapagos is to biology (Eriksen 1993). The early modern

anthropology of Bronislaw Malinowski and Margaret Mead was, not by accident, based on fieldwork on 'exotic' islands (Eriksen 2010). The classic ethnographic monograph is also typically structured as an island: autonomous and internally coherent with rather unambiguous external boundaries. Islands, as kaleidoscopic lenses depicting cultures, their morphology and meaning, are as relevant for non-islanders as for islanders.

Outlandish islands

There might be many reasons for personal or academic interest in small islands. Some islands are attractive because of their landscape, their climate, history legends, or, more philosophically, their exotic 'otherness'. Biologists, ethnographers and other researchers see islands as 'laboratories' with relatively limited contact to other environments. It is, in theory, easier to uncover and control the explanatory factors of complex research questions here than in more intricate contexts. Remote island communities have also become the favourite research location of geneticists trying to crack the codes of human genes. Some islands are, indeed, more accessible than others. Also, some seem more welcoming than others. What resources do they contain? Are they inhabitable? Can ships be harboured alongside their shores? For centuries the islands of the Mediterranean Sea were at the centre of European civilization. They had names and were drawn into primitive maps of the then known world. The islands of the North Atlantic, on the other hand, were unknown or veiled in legends of dangerous expeditions out of the Strait of Gibraltar. They did not have names, hence were culturally non-existent. Nevertheless, the virginal islands of the North Atlantic, and perhaps especially the Faroe Islands, fit better to my model than do the multicultural and historically labyrinthine Mediterranean islands. The isolated Faroe Islands were hard to find in the sea between Iceland and Scotland. They were, as far as we know, uninhabited for most of historical times. The islands were, says John F. West (1972: 4), "one of the last territories in the world to be discovered and peopled". They were attractive for people, like the Irish hermits of the seventh and eighth centuries, in search of oceanic solitude.

The remoteness of the islands that very few people had the privilege

to visit gave the archipelago an exotic and mystical identity. Today most international travellers are equipped with sophisticated maps – physical and digital – which with extreme precision illustrate the distances, directions and shapes of the islands of the North Atlantic. They seem to be perfect representations of the physical world in all its tiniest details. But, looking at one of my core questions, what is an island? Greenland, further west, is larger than countries of Europe, so why not define it as a proper continent? What is the essential difference between Australia and Greenland which makes the first a continent and the second an island? Also, interestingly, Greenland has, until the recent meltdown of the ice, been connected to North America. Greenlanders of the Paleo-Eskimo culture came on foot or dogsleds when (almost 5.000 years ago) they settled 'Kaalalit Nuunat' known, quite ironically, by foreigners as Greenland. The Faroe Islands are much smaller, but is the question of definition thus settled? Because they are eighteen in number, not just *one* single island, the country feels like a continent to the locals.

> *"Because the Faroes are geographically complicated, because until recently travel around them has been slow and uncertain, and because they were for centuries peculiarly cut off from the rest of the world, the Faroes know their tiny archipelago with a vocabulary so large and elaborate and pervasive that the islands come to feel like a continent" (Wylie and Margolin 1981: 13)*

For most Faroe Islanders it seems to be a more intricate test to describe the internal variation in society than to illustrate the outside world. Every stone, every valley and every mountain has a name and a story as well as a link to other places in the Faroe Islands. It is like a miniature continent with a condensed social structure that could be expanded to a much larger context. For many centuries – at least until the industrial fisheries of the late 19th century – Faroe Islanders were inward-looking as regards their way of life; agriculture and handicrafts had a much higher priority and value than fishing and whaling. There was little interest in the ocean and its resources. In

some Polynesian communities locals, in same way, barely notice that they are surrounded by the Pacific while working on small plots of arable land and hunting and gathering in the forests (Belwood 1987). The Faroe Islands are isolated and hard to find, but having said that, it is quite easy for diverging boats to unintentionally end up in the islands. Storms and currents may force a boat away from the calm shores of Norway or Scotland towards the deep sea and the wind-swept archipelago. Shetland, the nearest neighbour (285 kilometres away) is close by, yet far away. There is an essential difference, because Shetland and Orkney, "plainly visible to anyone rounding the north of Scotland", have been inhabited for thousands of years (West 1972: 5). The Faroes are out of sight. It is perfectly possible to sail quite close by without spotting the islands because of the mists that most of the time shrouds the archipelago. Some even claimed that the islands were floating, hence constantly changing position (Jacobsen 1898).

For around thirteen centuries now people have been living on the islands. Let's say they got a fixed position when the Vikings settled and built the foundations of the Faroese society in the eighth or early ninth century. The islands, a stop for people en route from Norway to Iceland, became part of the Nordic world, eventually also of a larger Christian world. They got an official name and a fixed position on maps. For many centuries – in the tourist´s worldview all the way up to the 20th century – the islands were described as a 'terra incognita'.

> *"[I]t is refreshing to find a remote corner in Europe that has up to the present been spared the desecrating foot of the tourist, and still remains a terra incognita. To those who would diverge from the beaten track, and enter the confines of [the] mysterious North…, Iceland offers a fair field, and the Faroe Islands should be included, as they are on a direct route" (Anon. 1899: 385 in Wylie 1987: 1)*

The celebrated national naval hero Magnus Heinason (1545-1589) was the son of a Norwegian/Icelandic priest, who after an amusing boat cruise with friends, as the story goes, was storm-blown away from Bergen and shipwrecked in a Faroese village. What did he think

when he woke up alone on a deserted beach in the Faroes after a gay evening in the vicinity of the cosmopolitan city of Bergen? Did he consider this as fate? Was it a blessing or a punishment? He survived and became a famous priest, who fathered and raised the naval hero. Remote islands can turn out to be a refuge for some and a prison for others. "No man is an island" (John Donne 1572-1631) and therefore island communities, also the smallest and most isolated of them, need visionary men and women to form a viable society.

The green passport

Nowadays it is much easier to place the Faroe Islands on a physical geographical map than to place them on a political map. Foreigners without any noteworthy prior knowledge of the islands often feel distressed when they in conversation with locals ask for basic facts about the Faroes. Many Europeans feel uncertain when confessing that they hardly know anything about the archipelago, which is placed on their own continent. Faroe Islanders, on the other hand, seldom expect non-Nordic visitors to have any knowledge on their country, except for an ability to give the approximate geographical position of it. It is easier to define the Faroes as islands with 'insular' characteristics than to define it as a country or nation, society or community. Should the Faroe Islands (and Faroes) as a word be used in the plural ('they') referring to the 'islands' or in the singular ('it') referring to the 'country'? This is more than a linguistic detail, because the choice is both a result and consequence of cultural constructions of the archipelago. In other words, what do we want to highlight? Is it the islands as islands, or the land as society? In many contexts the first option will be linked to exotic otherness compared to urban continental societies.

The concept and metaphor of islands refers to something detached from other societies; something more natural and stable. It is difficult to ignore the insular perspective, because even the name of the Faroe Islands refers to islands. On the one hand the Faroe Islanders seem to have a strong (national) island identity; on the other hand, as a modern society, they have a complicated and ambiguous relation to the 'world community'. Most islanders have been involved in discussions with

foreigners where they have tried to construe the Faroe Islands in relation to other societies. Here are some examples of the rarities.

- *The Faroes is part of the Danish Kingdom yet outside the European Union*
- *The Faroes has its own stamps, flag, anthem, etc. yet no seat in the United Nations*
- *The Faroes is outside Schengen, yet Faroese citizens travel as Schengen-country citizens*
- *The Faroe Islands do not have armed forces, yet are part of NATO (through Denmark)*
- *Faroe Islanders can freely select the red Danish passport or the green Faroese passport*
- *The Faroes has distinct bank notes (with Faroese motives) but the currency is the Danish Kroner*
- *Faroe Islanders are not an indigenous population, yet not immigrants*
- *Faroe Islanders have their own language and culture, yet strong roots in neighbouring countries*

The rather embarrassing situation occasionally occurring at passport controls at international airports far from the North Atlantic is an explanatory instance of the liminality (ambiguity and disorientation) that characterizes the status of the Faroe Islands in many situations.

The solemn inspector looks slightly surprised at the green passport, which he cannot immediately recognize. It does not look like a false passport or like a wanted (dangerous) person's documents, but the passport confuses the inspector, who doubts how to react to his own puzzlement. He looks at the passport for a while, mumbles, turns the first pages back and forth, sighs a bit irritated, but avoids any direct eye contact with the passport-holder. He is silently waiting for the unidentified traveller to explain the green passport to him. 'Føroyar', at the top, and then 'Denmark', just below, is printed on the front page, hinting at the connection to the Kingdom of Denmark. The Danish regalia, a crown with three identical lions, is also printed on the front page. Maybe the inspector is just curious about the place called

Faroe Islands, which he had never heard of? If he does not return the passport to its owner without comment, then he will raise questions like: Where do you come from? Is this a Danish passport? Where did you receive this passport? Do you have a visa? Do you have other documents? The inspector might at this moment be tempted to make some impulsive remarks that will invigorate his monotonous working routine: I have never seen this before. I have never met anyone from this place before. I did not know this place existed. But, actually, few inspectors express personal sentiments in the communication, even if some of them try to be funny in a professional manner.

The recent biometric passports have to some extent made the work easier for the geographically ignorant controller. Today he will normally just check the photo and let the computer take care of the rest. The scanner will at once recognize the Faroe Islands as a code in its software. Faroe Islanders will almost always get smoothly through the control, but in some cases the sceptical inspector will call a colleague for a double check, and in very rare cases, usually as a result of verbal misunderstandings, he will even make a call to the police authorities. While this action takes place, the traveller might feel humiliated and deprived of his national identity.

This drama can also give the traveller a feeling of existential insecurity: Have I done something wrong? Have I made a mistake of some kind? Other autonomous communities face similar passport problems that give their citizens a good reason to reflect on questions of national identity and recognition.

Inside, outside

Much more could be said about the passport as a symbol of identity, which organizes permission and prohibition rules for individuals and nations. Travelling from the Faroe Islands to Denmark, the Faroese passport-holder is covered by the Nordic Passport Union, which gives citizens the right to travel to (and reside in) other Nordic countries without a passport or a residence permit. Even if the Faroe Islands is a part of the realm of Denmark, movement between the countries is considered international transport. In other words, the traveller can fly to Copenhagen (arriving at the international terminal) and

thereafter continue to Oslo or another Nordic destination without passport. Most passengers will anyway, by their own choice, carry their passports throughout their Nordic voyage.

What about the foreigners that live in the Faroe Islands? Danish passport holders, including non-Faroese persons, are not considered foreigners. Other Nordic citizens are, of course, also covered by the Nordic Passport Union. For other foreign nationals the rule of thumb is that if you need a visa to visit Denmark, you also need a visa to enter the Faroe Islands. This sounds quite simple as ground rule, but there are some principles complicating the issue. A visa valid for Denmark is not the same as a visa giving access to the Faroe Islands. In some cases unlucky foreigners, planning to visit the Faroe Islands, have by mistake only applied for a Danish visa, hence they have been stopped and forced to send a new visa application before reaching the islands in the north. In rare tragic cases relatives applying for family reunification in the Faroes have managed to make the same serious mistake without any correction or warning from the immigration authorities: they have applied for residence permit in Denmark instead of the Faroe Islands.

There are many quite unbelievable case stories about families' contact with the bureaucratic immigration authorities. Looking at the case of a journey from the Faroe Islands to Denmark, the (non-Nordic) foreign national with the (provisional or permanent) residence permit in the Faroe Islands will not get through the passport control without a valid Schengen visa. Even if the destination is within the realm of Denmark, a Schengen visa is required. The Faroe Islands is outside the Schengen area while Denmark is inside. The foreign national will therefore experience serious restrictions of movement until he can apply for the Faroese/Danish passport.

The passport inspection at a distant airport is another interesting story when the traveller is a Faroese resident holding a non-European passport (with a Schengen visa for transit in Europe) on his way home to the islands. In most cases the documents will be checked without any problem. If this is not the case, the reason might be that the inspector, again in doubt about the location of the Faroe Islands, observes something that he is not familiar with in the passport's visa or

residence permit information: Is this a Schengen visa from Denmark? Do you have residence permit in the Faroes? Why is the Schengen visa handwritten? Who issued the visa? These and other questions go through the inspector's mind while he prepares to return the passport to its owner as a signal of approval.

The passport checking ritual of international airports seems at first glance to be a smooth and rational enterprise, especially since the computerization of the procedures made the personal interaction superfluous, but a closer look at the ritual unveils its discriminatory practice, which casts doubt on the existence and validity of small and marginal passport categories.

The dark green passport with Føroyar written on its cover is, according to Faroese authorities, probably going to disappear in the near future. A growing number of Faroe Islanders choose the red Danish (European Union) version when they order new passports at the police office. The choice is completely free and personal. Why do people prefer the red passport? For many Faroe Islanders it seems to be a practical decision, because they believe that a Danish passport offers additional opportunities – e.g. in relation to careers within the European Union – and an extended international mobility at the same time as they get to keep all their legal and political rights in the Faroese society. Some islanders, frequently on international journeys, point at the mentioned border crossing difficulties when asked why they bet on the red passport.

Many green passport owners, on the other hand, do not feel that they have taken any active decision regarding their passport identity; they have just kept what they already had. For others it is an essential choice that reflects national feelings of honour. The red passport, they argue, suggests a rejection of the Faroese identity as well as a silent blessing of the Danish state and its political interests. Sometimes it is easier to travel with the exotic Faroese passport than with the Danish equivalent. When for instance the Danish Muhammad cartoons controversy peaked a few years ago, it was more convenient to travel with the green than with the red (Danish) passport in parts of the Middle East and Central Asia. The passport colour is often based on a collective family agreement rather than the outcome of individual

preferences. The young children's passports will obviously usually have the same colour as their parents' passports. We can imagine the incomprehensibility mirrored in the face of the already puzzled investigator if the daughter holds a Danish passport and the mother a Faroese passport at the passport check. More and more islanders choose the red passport.

The World of Sports

Football-loving Faroe Islanders are proud of being independent members of FIFA and UEFA, which give the national team the right to participate in all World Cup and European Football Championship qualifying tournaments. Football, if anything, despite repetitive miserable results on the pitch, has put the island community on the world map. The unexpected fame is first of all a result of being the opponent in media covered matches involving strong football nations like Italy, France and Germany.

Football (even more than the controversial whale hunt) has made millions of people aware that there is a place called the Faroe Islands in the North Atlantic. The name has been imprinted on their minds. The case of football is somehow linked to the previous passport discussion. The relevant question here is: why or how did the Faroe Islands become members of UEFA and FIFA? Scotland and Wales are also independent members, even if they are parts of the United Kingdom. Greenland, although it has the same status within the Kingdom of Denmark as the Faroe Islands, has not been assigned FIFA membership. The Faroe Islands, though, do not have the privilege of representing own flag in the Olympic Games, by cause of IOC (International Olympic Committee) rules, but the islands have successfully – in the form of gold and silver medals in swimming – competed as independent nation in the Summer Paralympic Games since 1984.

Top athletes from the Faroe Islands can in principle choose to represent either of the national teams of the Faroes and Denmark, but very few persons have actually been candidates that both nations wanted on their team. The retired football player Todi Jónsson, who for years played with a famous Copenhagen club, was, when his career

peaked, a potential candidate for the national squad of Denmark, but Todi (originating from Klaksvik) always made it clear that he preferred to play in the white jersey of the Faroese national team. His personal choice reflected national sentiments, but it was also a strategic arrangement that offered the footballer the position as star of the team composed of amateurs and semi-professionals. If the Faroes were not FIFA members the situation would have been very different, because in that case Todi's choice would have excluded him from international competitions – except of the Island Games, which are considered uninteresting and unambitious by the professionals of the world of sports.

Pál Joensen, a young swimmer from Suðuroy, has already a collection of medals won at events in Northern Europe and elsewhere in the world, but his ambition is to add an Olympic victory to his other achievements. As long as the Faroes do not have an independent representation at the Olympic Games, Pál will have no other option than to join the national squad of Denmark. And he was, due to his remarkable achievements, invited to accompany the Danes to London in 2012. He accepted but was not successful in the race for the medals. Looking at the Faroese FIFA membership, I find no clear answer that can unveil the reasoning behind the decisions as to accepting or rejecting the archipelago from different international associations. There seems to be some haphazard at play. When the Faroes were entitled FIFA membership in 1988 (two years later also UEFA membership) the opposition against minor island communities without political independency was, luckily for the football-loving islanders, relatively insignificant among FIFA Congress delegates. Later, in disfavour of Greenland and other non-independent islands, the FIFA policy changed in direction of the will and benefit of the large football nations.

In their very first (competitive) international match in September 1990 the Faroese footballers shocked the world and made international headlines. The Austrian team, packed with professional stars, including notorious goal getter Toni Polster, was sent to the Swedish provincial town of Landskrona to play against a completely unknown 'squad of fishermen and farmers' from a team called the Faroe Islands. The

islanders, as a consequence of the lack of FIFA-authorized grass pitches in the Faroes, were forced to play their home matches on the European continent. With an almost impenetrable defensive wall, comprising eleven men fighting the sportive combat of their lives, as well as a large portion of luck, the Faroe Islanders created one of the greatest sensations in the modern history of soccer by scoring the only goal of the match. More than two decades later many foreigners (among them faraway passport controllers) still remember the Faroe Islands because of this extraordinary result in Landskrona. The victory in 1990 was followed by one dreary failure after another, but, astonishingly, without noticeable loss of enthusiasm among the footballers themselves.

At the Zurich FIFA headquarters there might be some highly placed persons cynically regretting that such a small archipelago was given admission to the lucrative world of international football, which obliges the federation to send big nations to the stormy North Atlantic for their qualifiers. Most Faroe Islanders, despite embarrassing post-Landskrona results on the pitch, feel honoured to have their own team with their own flag in international gatherings. Being excluded from many well-established associations because of their non-state status the islanders are very appreciative of the fact that some organizations recognize them and other truly independent nations on equal terms. The national football team hence becomes a symbol of much more than competitive sports, because it also gives the islanders a sense of societal autonomy as well as a connection to the world 'club of nations' without having to be representatives of the State of Denmark.

Betwixt and between

There is more to say about the different forms of inclusion and exclusion, permission and prohibition, along a scale with extremes and intermediate stages that the Faroe Islands is obliged to tolerate as precondition for regional and international cooperation at different levels of engagement. The Faroe Islands is for example not a European Union member even if Denmark is within the EU, but Faroe Islanders can obtain a Danish (EU) passport, which entitles EU citizenship on

choice. By taking up residence in Denmark red passport-holders will automatically become EU citizens without restriction.

In EU jargon the Faroe Islands (as well as Gibraltar, Cyprus and others) is categorized as a 'special territory' outside of the union – 'special' referring to the political and economic link to an EU member state. The Faroe Islands has a Fisheries Agreement from 1977 and a Free Trade Agreement from 1991 (revised in 1996) with the EU. Faroe Islanders have never seriously considered applying for full membership, mainly because of fisheries concerns, but also because of scepticism towards the EU political infrastructure that most likely would place a small community represented through the Danish state in a very weak position (if it became an EU member). On the other hand fundamental changes in the relation between Brussels and Copenhagen, indirectly, affect the sensitive alliance between Copenhagen and Torshavn: To what extent will Danish ministries take Faroese interests into account when they make agreements and ratify conventions in Brussels? Are the Faroese interests opposing EU policies?

These questions forced the Faroese government to take new measures and to establish offices of representation in Copenhagen, Reykjavik, London and Brussels (EU office, from 1998), which, nevertheless, do not have diplomatic status according to the Vienna Convention[1]. The Faroese offices assume some of the non-diplomatic functions of Danish embassies. All the offices have been established under the surveillance and direction of Danish authorities. The Faroese offices, except for the representation in Reykjavik, are, to emphasize the island community's attachment to Denmark, physically located within the Danish embassy buildings. The Faroese flag decorates the face of the building, but always in the shade of a Danish banner. The office in Reykjavik is, though, located a few hundred metres away from the Danish embassy. After a long emotional struggle in media and in the political corridors, the Faroe Islands was given permission to raise its flag, alone, on the two-storey building at the heart of Reykjavik.

The Faroes is betwixt and between. Faroe Islanders have tactfully, in order to circumvent the restrictions of formal political networks, taken advantage of the inclusiveness of many international Non-

Governmental organizations (NGOs). The independent Faroese section of the Amnesty International alliance is highly respected as one of the oldest in the world. The Faroese section of the International Red Cross (and Red Crescent) Movement is on the other hand a regional division of the Danish Red Cross, albeit with special self-ruling status. Faroe Islanders are involved in many international organizations as full members, associate members, observers, volunteers, guests, members of Danish delegation, etcetera; especially within the Nordic region Faroe Islanders invest in activities in the domains of political, economic and cultural collaboration. The Faroe Islands – as well as Greenland and Åland – is represented by two associate members in the Nordic Council of Ministers. Faroe Islanders have in vain requested full membership (refused with reference to the Helsinki Declaration) in the council that, in other respects, puts a lot of focus on the self-governing regions.

From a definite island perspective there is no more cheering event than the biennial Island Games that are organized by the International Island Games Association's 24 island communities (including Gibraltar, which is not an island) without political sovereignty. In 1989 the Faroe Islands proudly hosted the event that is more than just a sports tournament, since it is also a quite unique arena, which puts small-scale islands at the centre and the large states at the periphery. The island communities, sovereign as islands and dependent as states, have more than athletes and sports fans in common. Robin Hyde, a writer from New Zealand, says in a poem from 1938:

> *"The Japanese are described as, 'the most nostalgic people on earth', but I think possibly the remark applies to all island people, who have the spirit of adventure, but also the feeling of being secure on a small place among the waters."*

Worldwide islanders

Another way of defining the Faroes, leaving the geographical model aside, is to put the inhabitants at the centre of attraction. This cultural approach to the study of the islanders' way of life introduces the Faroese diaspora to the arena. There seems to be at least *one* Faroe

Islander settled in any country of the world. In the most inaccessible regions of the world there are very few representatives, but curiously, you will almost always come across at least *one* person – a backpacker or student, missionary or sailor – of Faroese origin. Is this an island phenomenon? Not necessarily, because it can also be treated as a coastal phenomenon with cases like Kerala (India), Bretagne (France) and Lebanon. Even in the most isolated of Faroese villages, hidden behind steep mountains, the view of the ocean is accompanied by local fishermen's vivid memories of exotic far-off countries.

The islanders are, beloved poems tell, meditating about what is on the other side of the horizon. Young islanders are longing for contact to the world beyond the village community. The geographical isolation has, ironically, to a certain extent encouraged the wanderlust and migration of generations of young Faroe Islanders. If a person decides to migrate out of the country, he will have to cross the ocean and set down in a faraway place. There is no adjacent alternative. The islander leaving home knows that he is taking a big step, which will separate him from his family for a shorter or longer period of time.

When the national radio and television channels of the Faroe Islands broadcast major international news the newscaster will often make a direct call to a Faroe Islander whom he has tracked down at the very hotspot of the 'news'.

When the earthquake and nuclear disaster in japan made headlines in March 2011, one of a few Faroe Islanders located in Tokyo got a call from the national radio. On air he told Faroese listeners, in calm understated manner, about his experience of the tragic event. The devastating Hurricane Katrina was also recounted in Faroese language and matter-of-fact style by a New Orleans resident of Faroese origin caught by the 'scouts' of the radio in 2005.

Even the dissonant telephone lines of volatile Northern Pakistan have been used to transmit first-hand information on Taliban's influence on everyday life to amazed listeners in the North Atlantic. Pointing to the fact that 'life is very different here', the young down-to-earth woman married into a Pakistani family avoided the inflammatory jargon of professional reporters; actually, her inside report reminded more of an ethnographic description of the field. It is quite easy

to identify the islanders that at any time are travelling or residing in remote areas of the world because of the social transparency of small island communities. There will always be someone who knows someone who is located in the country in focus in the media.

It is very difficult to be an anonymous Faroe Islander, especially in the age of the Internet, even when the person in question is on a private mission abroad. And if the cellular phone chimes and the person on the other end of the line is a Faroese reporter, very few Faroe Islanders en voyage would decline the opportunity to send a story and a greeting to compatriots back home. While the interview is on air the audience in the North Atlantic will, ironically, often be more interested in the person behind the voice than in the story itself: Who is she? Is this the neighbour's maternal cousin? What is she doing in that country? In this way local media is used to communicate major news from a Faroese angle, usually through the perspective and language of non-journalists, but also to circulate information about Faroe Islanders around the world.

Sending greetings home

Another recurrent media ritual is the Christmas greetings marathon transmitted on the national radio on the last days before Christmas. For several hours short messages from hundreds of Faroe Islanders located abroad – at sea and on land – are read aloud to the loved ones at home. In some places, like the main cities of Denmark, which have large Faroese Diasporas, the senders are gathered in studios where they personally read the messages that are transmitted by radio. Young children growing up in Denmark are, in broken but lovable Faroese, telling their beloved grandparents that they miss them, look forward to seeing them in the Faroes next summer, wish them a merry Christmas, etc. Others send messages to relatives that they might be going to meet just a few weeks after the Christmas holidays.

The Christmas greetings ritual is, a bit like the previous news interviews, a tradition that Faroe Islanders are very excited about, because it represents society as a (metaphoric) family. The most fervent radio listeners are often people that do not personally send or receive any of the broadcasted messages; still, they feel that the

messages, indirectly as members of the big Faroese 'family', offer them something valuable. The devotional listener gets a large amount of updated information on other people's relatives and family issues, and in a close-knit community that will logically often be the listener's distant relatives.

Christmas messages from Faroese sailors enjoy a special dignity among most Faroe Islanders. The hundreds of sailors behind the oceanic messages, mostly men working on large fishing and cargo vessels, are at work and cannot freely choose to spend Christmas at home. Most of them have their closest family in the Faroes. Their families cannot, in contrast to other Christmas message recipients, leave the islands in order to re-join the absent person for Christmas celebrations.

The sailor's long-term work on the ocean, considered tough and risky, as well as his contribution to the national economy, has placed him deeply in the hearts of Faroe Islanders. The oceanic messages are often co-authored by several men without family bonds to each other: 'We wish all our families and friends in the Faroes a merry Christmas, greetings from the Faroe Islanders on ship A'. The message senders will usually, even if the information does not affect the life and routines during Christmas aboard, hint their ship's location: 'We are sailing through the Gulf of Aden during Christmas' or 'We are on our way from Mombasa to Mumbai'. The messages from non-European waters are most commonly sent by Faroe Islanders in high positions on freighters, often belonging to Danish or Norwegian shipping companies criss-crossing the world.

The greetings ritual is repeated in the summer when the 'Ólavsøka' greetings, connected to the national festival (holiday) 29th July, are on the radio's schedule. How come that this tradition continues? Since Faroese sailors send Facebook messages from ships positioned in the Black and Red Seas and Faroese missionaries make calls from cellular phones in the jungle of Borneo and the savannah of Mali, then why should the radio still broadcast personal messages, often read in a very monotonous tone of voice, that could easily have been exchanged through more interactive digital media? It would have sparked public fury to skip the lengthy enumeration

of messages, because most Faroe Islanders cherish the ritual as a special part of Faroese popular culture that cannot be substituted by unceremonious private communication.

The essence of the ritual is not in the message itself, but in the symbolic gesture of remembering the loved ones together with everyone else. It is, thus, primarily a collective practice that has the aim of reproducing the Faroeseness of social relations. The islanders settled on foreign soil send messages to the whole Faroese society through Christmas greetings targeting named or unnamed relatives. The greetings are always crossing the Atlantic Ocean with the sender abroad and the receiver at home. The messages that go in the opposite direction are not broadcasted by radio. Before the Internet era it was not possible to receive Faroese radio signals far from the archipelago. Today Faroese radio and television are streamed on the Internet that practically anyone in foreign countries has access to.

Remembrance of the islands is not only a ritual act manifested in public media, because a considerable portion of the movements back and forth to the Faroe Islands is also connected to rituals of the cycle of life and their celebrations. Most Faroe Islanders will, as much as possible, cross the ocean in order to participate in the celebrations of baptisms, confirmations, weddings, birthdays and funerals, which are solemnly marked by the Faroese family (Gaini 2012). It is not unusual for young couples settled in Denmark or elsewhere to bring their baby home to the Faroes before it has reached the age of four or five weeks in order to show the proud family its newest member and, killing two birds with one stone, arranging a Faroese baptism which the same gathering of relatives and friends thus gets the opportunity to witness and take part in. It is much easier to gather the family at home than abroad.

Different push and pull factors are influencing the ever-changing pattern of migration in and out of the Faroes. As a relatively isolated small-scale society the Faroe Islands is chronically subject to strong push factors persuading islanders, especially from the younger generation, to leave home and cross the sea. Most peripheral Nordic regions with declining populations face a similar predicament. The big city lights function as magnets for young fortune hunters. Is this

image employable for the Faroes? It is indeed, but the islands have another magnetic effect on the Diaspora.

A person can leave the islands for life, but the islands will never disappear from his mind. Young families living abroad will often plan to return home for good before the children reach the age of primary school, because that is where they want their children to put down roots. For many people life abroad is, even after years on foreign soil, an interim before the ultimate return to the archipelago. This is the pull factor that saves the island community from cultural extinction.

At the airport

The ingenious happiness of the clapping passengers of the airplane that has just touched the ground on the airfield in the Faroes expresses the meaning of place better than words. 'Welcome home' (in Faroese language) is the first message coming out of the speakers while the plane approaches the terminal building where friends and relatives are waiting for the travellers. The 'welcome home' message (followed by the standard 'welcome to the Faroes' in Danish and English languages) symbolizes the shift into the last (post-liminal) phase of a rite de passage. The passengers are welcomed and reintegrated into the Faroese society.

For Faroe Islanders this place cannot be substituted by alternatives. The cultural pull factor is stronger than the winter storms. When the passenger sets his foot on ground and maybe waves to people that he recognizes inside the terminal's windows, his footstep might represent the conclusion of a journey that was prolonged by hours or even days because of bad weather conditions. No wonder then that some passengers applaud and laugh and even shed tears when they are welcomed home by the air crew.

The reunion in the terminal is informal and animated, almost like a family party, as the gathering chats along different lines: Were you also on the plane from Copenhagen? Do you still live in Norway? Are you home on holiday? When are you going back to work on the freighter based in Japan? Typically, the first question that the travel weary islander gets from relatives is: Did you know anyone on the airplane? Who was in the plane? Later, if at all, the relatives will demand

news about life abroad. In this smooth way the cycle is terminated. The expatriate is reintegrated into the corpus of the Faroes.

The airport terminal is not just a transit point for passengers arriving to or departing from the Faroe Islands; it is also a rare example of so called non-places on Faroese soil (Augé 2008). The urban globetrotter that has ended up in the Faroes will find a strange refuge within the white airport walls. It is a neutral place with typical transit characteristics: a large clock on the wall, informative signs in English, souvenirs for sale, a bank with foreign currency. It could be anywhere or nowhere. Nothing unexpected happens here; every movement is part of the logic of the international voyager. It is not a place where you just sit without reason. The non-place feeling is disturbed by small groups of Faroe Islanders, who oppose the emptiness of the space by talking loudly about anything but air travel.

For airline passengers on their way to the main destination Copenhagen the airport gives a small taste of the overwhelming and disorienting non-place that Copenhagen Airport represents. For busy world travellers, spending large amounts of time in airport lounges, the Faroese non-place might be enervating and disappointing; it has only one shop, one café/bar and one gate. And, a stressful fact for some, most Faroe Islanders seem to know each other. In case you are the only anonymous stranger at place, then you somehow stop being the invisible nameless passenger that flourishes at larger non-places.

The American movie 'Up in the Air' (2009) starring George Clooney portrays Ryan Bingham, a smartly dressed businessman in his forties, who constantly flies from one airport to the next, and who never seems to leave the ultramodern non-places that his lifestyle is adapted to. Ryan Bingham would, for sure, never have heard of any place called the Faroe Islands. It does not exist on the screens with flight information in his eyesight. People in non-places, says Marc Augé, taste "the passive joys of identity-loss, and the more active pleasure of role-playing" (2008: 83). The passenger is for a while freed from his history and identity. The space of non-place "creates neither singular identity, nor relations; only solitude and similitude" (op. cit.)

Many Faroe Islanders, as opposed to the postmodern world traveller, dislike the atmosphere of the non-place, which dissolves

the identities of people through social communication controlled by formal sets of rules. The orders transmitted through the airport's speakers are sometimes received with a foolish grin because they address people in a standardized bureaucratic manner. When the passengers walk through the X-ray scanner they might address the personnel personally without any sign of fear or stress that similar gestures would have set in motion at large and busy airports. In non-places people read signs rather than to talk. The 'role-playing' mentioned by Augé (2002) implies a structured behaviour that all passengers are expected to conform to. The Faroe Islands, as a mainly 'non-non-place' society, yet slowly changing, surprises visitors by its absence of anonymous spaces of transit.

Changing landscapes

The evolving non-places are, partly, an outcome of the process of mapping what in the past was kept in order by tradition. Until quite recently Faroese villages and towns did not have street names. Old houses had informal names referring to local family history. Today it is required by law to provide houses and buildings with a unique address. This development is not directly linked to the creation of non-places, but it reflects societal efforts to harmonize and rationalize the landscape. The visitor to a village will with new street maps be able to find his objective without assistance. A non-human 'mediation' (reading signs) between individual and public authority, characterizing non-places, is effectuated.

The mapping is also a precondition for the demarcation of space between private and public spheres. It defines prohibited and secluded places. There used to be very few signs of any kind in the Faroese landscape. Important information about places was kept in the minds of the locals. When an old person dies in Africa, says Augé (2002), a library is on fire. The situation is similar in the Faroes, because local knowledge is saved in oral traditions; it unfolds through verbal communication.

The pier at the Torshavn container harbour is an example of a public place in shift. For generations the pier was a favourite lane for evening strolls among Torshavn dwellers. It became a closed

zone some years ago. Especially young people loved to stroll here for same reason as people spend time on marinas in other coastal cities, without other purpose than to watch people passing by. Many young couples met and had their first date at this open place in Torshavn. When a new couple, promenading lazily hand in hand, was spotted on the pier, it was considered an unmistaken public announcement of the 'news'. Every movement and signal was carefully registered by the passers-by. In daytime the pier was occupied by Dockers and other harbour workers.

After the turn of the century the fence and prohibition sign were established restricting access to the pier. This change of the cityscape, which also changed youth lifestyles, was a consequence of new security regulations for commercial ports effectuated in the aftermath of the 'September 11' terror attacks. Only authorized persons have the right to trespass the fence. These persons do not have unlimited access to the zone, because they have to follow a strict set of rules; they have to play a role that is part of the contract between the individual and the authorities.

Most of continental Europe, says Augé, is in a state of 'super-modernity' dominated by non-place or, using Latour's (2005) concept, 'liminal space' that is associated to communication and transit (Augé 2008). The exciting airport atmosphere, being betwixt and between, hence detached from yesterday's concerns, covers most of (super) modern society and makes the search for a safe home in a real place an important preoccupation. People search for roots. What in marketing terminology is called 'cocooning' (creating a safe place around you) can be said to be a consequence of a non-place fatigue that is practically non-existent in the Faroes and other small island communities. The feeling of relief that some of the incoming airline passengers sense when debarking and walking out of the restricted passenger area is related to the Faroese place, which is densely loaded with identity and history.

There are no priority lounges at Vagar airport and no business class on the Atlantic Airways flights. There is hardly any security personnel and quite limited video surveillance. There are no transit passengers here. The Faroes is terminus. Once in touch with the ground there is

no need to hurry. The busses and taxis are waiting for the passengers. And if a Torshavn businessperson is waiting for a guest, he will not blame the traveller for delays due to the weather or anything else. There is nothing to do but to adapt to the rhythm of the islands. These characteristics, in a setting of majestic mountains and valleys, are, at least for the native islanders, stimulating a strong sense of belonging, which represents the major pull factor seducing expatriates, over and over again, even if it is just for short periods of time, back to the Atlantic remoteness. 'Here I can be the one who I am' or 'here I can live like I really want to live' are often more decisive arguments, according to persons having moved back home after years in foreign countries, than career opportunities.

In foreign countries, perhaps with the exception of Denmark which hosts a large and well-established Faroese Diaspora, Faroe Islanders will always be living as a small almost invisible minority (frequently mistaken for being of Danish or Icelandic ethnic origin). Many nostalgic Faroe Islanders will, even if they enjoy a comfortable life with an attractive job, miss the 'real place' of the Faroes, which links family, culture and history. Already at Copenhagen Airport, more precisely at the gate serving flights to the Faroes, you will get a taste of the Faroe Islands. For many islanders, most evidently among elderly people and others rarely travelling out of the Faroes, it is a bit difficult to find out which role to play while gathered at the gate.

At the international airport, generally, travellers seem to feel really anonymous, a condition that Faroe Islanders don't get the opportunity to experience at home, but at the gate the Faroese travellers find themselves, suddenly, surrounded by people they have seen before, some of whom they know personally: 'Hey, have you also been in Copenhagen? For how long?' Not anonymous anymore, still located at a non-place detached from the Faroese context, many passengers will sit down quietly, feeling 'out of place'. The intensity and scope of the international airport – the non-place par excellence – makes the islanders feel very small, very insignificant and even disturbingly so. While the Faroese context is characterized by personal non-hierarchical social relations, the non-place turns the individuals into 'passengers' without history or culture but with different appearances.

Here at the airport in Copenhagen, among thousands of people from all the corners of the world, all with the formal status of passengers, still very dissimilar in appearance, strictly following the rules and regulations of the airport authorities, many islanders feel like anti-social observers, stripped of identity. Queuing, practically needless in the Faroes (even among pupils at school), with a boarding card in one's hand, is also an uncomfortable scene for islanders that have not internalized standard rituals of discipline at airports and other non-places.

As soon as the passengers have boarded the plane, the atmosphere turns informal and loose. The passengers have symbolically left the emptiness of the mechanic non-place and entered the Faroese place where the abstract passenger identity is transformed into a personal identity strongly related to family and community affiliation. Some of the passengers feel much bigger and more powerful now, inside the Atlantic Airways airplane, because most fellow passengers know their privileged societal position. The social structure of the Faroes is thus intact in the plane. The politician or CEO smile while casting a glance at the seated fellow passengers. Here, among the islanders of the North Atlantic, they are recognized and respected as leaders and fellow citizens.

The intimacy of society

Foreign visitors, expecting the archipelago to only consist of sheep farmers and traditional fishermen living simple village lives, get astonished when they discover that the Faroes is a complex society with few inhabitants but many institutions and domains. The Faroes has a university and a symphony orchestra, newspapers, several television and radio channels, modern sports facilities in all towns, a semi-professional football league, consulates for several countries, three hospitals, a national parliament, etc. It has remarkably varied private and public sectors compared to the size of its population. Torshavn with its 16.000 inhabitants is the capital, as any other, with all the functions that a capital has to maintain.

This is a society where every citizen has many positions and functions, as well as social networks that are crossing other networks. Colleagues

are neighbours, board members are relatives, sports teammates are from the same Free Church congregations, and so on. Every individual has several different 'hats' to wear. This explains many world records that the Faroes hold. The small-scale community easily obtains the highest percentage of many things in comparison with other countries. The Faroe Islands, for instance, has the highest number (percentage) of Amnesty International members in the world. It has the highest number of victims of some rare diseases in the world. It probably also catch more fish than anyone else, compared to the population size. There are many other records that illustrate the paradox of scale without giving much essential information about the society in question. What is interesting is the fact that the same persons meet on many different arenas with different agendas and societal roles.

At one moment your cousin could be your daughter's school teacher and the next moment, he is the chair of the Board at your workplace. The same cousin could also be the treasurer of your trade union as well as the coach of the handball team in town.

This social density that prevents impartiality – a target hard to live up to for large as well as small societies – leads to inexhaustible disputes concerning leaders' competences to act in sensitive contexts. Which Faroese employer could say that he is not related or personally connected to any of the applicants invited to a job interview? It is hardly possible to protect yourself against accusations of nepotism in the Faroe Islands. The definition of legal incapacity or conflict of interest cannot be the same as in large societies, since it is practically impossible to find families that are completely free of attachment to one another. Incompetence is anyway unacceptable, because nepotism is in fact a bigger problem than society's small scale warrants. In many cases obvious nepotism could have been prevented by stricter formal regulations.

Robert Redfield's (1956) classic definition of community is based on four qualitative features in harmony with my analysis of Faroese society:

> *"[1] a smallness of social scale; [2] a homogeneity of activities and states of mind of members; [3] a consciousness of*

distinctiveness; [4] and a self-sufficiency across a broad range of needs and through time." (in Barnard and Spencer 2002: 114)

The limited community of academics compared to society's institutional ambitions is every day putting the Faroes to a test. Every individual becomes, principally, indispensable for the collective. If a leading person is on sick leave for a long period of time, many seats of different boards and committees will be empty.The high social density is from a negative angle blamed for people's feelings of psychological suffocation, but on the other hand, in more positive terms, it is also fostering an easy-going atmosphere of personal intimacy. The fact remains that the same individuals meet in different associations and committees with different agendas. This leads to a question of representation: whom are you representing where? The complexity of personal and professional relations, private and public identities, can give the outsider the impression of being caught in a schizophrenic setting where everyone is part of everything. This is the curse and blessing of small island communities.

The setting

"Lying below the Arctic Circle at 62 degrees north latitude, some twenty Faroe Islands of various sizes total only 540 square miles. Myriad fjords, sounds, and mountains intricately divide them. The archipelago is volcanic in origin, with layers of tertiary basalt separated by layers of tuff, a softer reddish stone made from volcanic ash […] With little foreshore, the islands are mostly sloping moorland and rocky terrain. The need for protection from winds and access to relatively calm sea made for a human settlement pattern of elongated or nucleated villages on fjords and bays at the base of mountains […] With various topographic features – promontories, gullies, ridges, chasms, and so on – the details of the coastlines and landscapes provide a panoply of unique geographic experience […] The weather is mostly cloudy and overcast, in contrary to touristic photos. Average temperatures are 52 degrees Fahrenheit in summer and 40 degrees Fahrenheit in winter. The insulating effect of the Gulf Stream and surrounding ocean moderate the climate, despite its subarctic position. The winter weather is windy and rainy: snow remains on the ground only briefly, except on mountaintops. The other seasons are also windy and rainy, but less so, and summer can have several sunny days. Frequent fog lies low on the sea." (Gaffin 1996: 2-3)

'I have learned that to be with those I like is enough'
(Walt Withman)

Part two

Faroe Islanders are firmly anchored to their kin. In some situations the family name and family affiliation influences a person's opportunities in society, but more often what matters is being connected to a (any) strong family network. The question is thus to have a family or not to have a family.

Faroese individualism

The Faroe Islands is a family-based society, but not in the confined anthropological meaning. Family matters, but it is not the determinant of one's prospects in society. It can rather be seen as a highly valued capital among other symbolic capital forms which position individuals at different points in a complex web covering the whole society and beyond. The family, emancipating it from theoretical tautologies, is thus part of the social infrastructure enhancing Faroese 'individualism'. People are in general aware of their family history, the roots of their kin, but "nowadays lineages are not corporate groups" (Gaffin 1996: 102). The family, as societal institution, connects individuals across boundaries rather than segregating them in collective segments. Large extended families, says Gaffin, are missing "because of neolocality, the interlocking cognatic relations and the multiple naming systems" (op.cit.)

Faroe Islanders have, as many other people organized in bilateral kin systems, vast circles of relatives that they can, but need not, actively use. The family represents, except for the closest relatives of the household, a very loose and elastic entity that, anyway, is at the core of the self-ascribed cultural identity of Faroe Islanders. By themselves, says Gaffin, "bilateral ties do not set up systems of

obligations" (op.cit.). The vitality of Faroese kinship is, ironically, probably a consequence of its non-committal character, which assigns family relations a function as latent 'repertoire' to be mobilized when needed as capital. Kinship is therefore strongly linked to context and space. The extensive internal migration and intermarriage is fragmenting imagined corporate family entities and magnifying the number of relatives to contact when needed.

Most Faroe Islanders think it is important to have articulate knowledge of family relations for use in everyday conversation, but people do not necessarily pursue close contact to their relatives beyond the household and neighbourhood. Choice of social reciprocation, says Gaffin (1987 and 1996), is the rule. Family capital is yet more than amusing remarks about the kin in chat and gossip, because it also functions as a social safety net when in trouble. The family is there if the weakened individual needs moral and economic aid. On the other hand, the small scale and strong transparency of the Faroese society makes it unimaginable for individuals to hide from their family without physically leaving the archipelago. There are always relatives around. Even if many people have limited contact to their relatives – except for their siblings, parents or children – most still appreciate having them nearby.

Faroe Islanders living abroad often stress the hardship of being separated from their kin. In the Faroes, even in cases where the daily social interaction between relatives is limited, the feeling of being in contact with each other is very strong. If you don't communicate directly with, for example, your uncle there will still be a 'link' between you through common friends and relatives. Telling something to a member of the family corresponds to sending a message to maybe 20–30 persons from the same network. Moreover, the social contact between relatives is in many cases not primarily triggered by consanguinity, but, more coincidentally, by teamwork and cooperation at workplaces or other social arenas.

In small villages blood and marital ties often seem to be very condensed, but this is not simply a result of traditional lifestyles, as is often claimed, because it is also the outcome of collective village identities. The spatial attachment is thus often, in accordance with

Gaffin's (1996) analysis, mistaken for family attachment, even if the family and local identities are intertwined and interdependent. The egocentric cognatic kinship system[2] of the Faroe Islands, flexible and dynamic in character, gives individuals a large degree of freedom regarding social contacts. Faroe Islanders living abroad, because of their absence from the place that sets the family capital in motion, often feel forgotten or overlooked by their kin. For these faraway Faroe Islanders, trying to preserve a vital connection home, the family birthdays, weddings and other ceremonies are of immense importance. This explains why they travel thousands of miles to catch festivities at home that many other guests attend without noteworthy enthusiasm.

The family is taken for granted when it is present, but strongly desired when missing. The Faroese family-based individualism can be portrayed as a state of being accompanied as an independent person rather than being alone in the middle of a crowd. The latter description fits to the islander lost at an international airport or other non-place.

Communicating family

The ego-based bilateral kinship puts everyone at the centre, on equal terms, and prevents open conflict. The family capital is necessary as a mean to being accepted as member of the informal collective of individuals, because a person without family would be regarded as a person without attachment to the place (Gaini 2012). This family-based individualism stresses predictability and stability that reflect a "desire for social accommodation" (Gaffin 1987: 329). The family, rather than state institutions, inspires Faroe Islanders to respect the individuality and uniqueness of each other at the same time as they produce and disseminate legends and jokes about each other. Among the Faroe Islanders, says Gaffin (1987: 336), the emphasis

> *"on human fallibility in every aspect of life uses individual deviation to foster conformity. The Faeroese appear able to criticize and cooperate simultaneously, to ridicule behind the back while remaining friendly face-to-face, and thereby to*

modulate conflict and maintain peace. This pattern stresses deviations to create social harmony."

The introductory question in conversations between strangers is usually: Whence do you come? The question refers to location – village or region – and family at the same time. This typical start will lead to a lengthy technical discussion that basically is genealogical search for a common ancestor and link that, if discovered, will release revealing smiles signalling an intuitive happiness of being of the same blood.

In case the kin deciphering game is successful and the connecting person is identified and named, the dialogue, now released from the precautious style of the 'strangers', might continue with the exchange of a wealth of details that demonstrate the family knowledge and 'capital' of the involved persons. This rhetoric will unveil the symbolic strength of the identities of the persons. In other cases an imbalance in the prior knowledge of the persons discussing family relations will turn the dialogue into a monologue with a slightly embarrassed listener receiving questions of this kind: Did you know that we are relatives? Didn't you know that our great-grandmothers were cousins through their fathers?

Not being aware of a relative, when meeting him in person, is a bit like not knowing about rumours that you should have known. The monologue will then, depending on the expert's insight and level of oratory skills, often continue with colourful stories about places and events that are associated to common relatives. The reaction of the listener will reflect his opinion on the person in front of him all of a sudden 'claiming' to be a relative: Is this unfamiliar guy really my relative? Do I have anything in common with this stranger?[3]

Non-relatives also enthusiastically engage in informal conversation stressing family issues in the Faroe Islands. There will always be a link between the persons, if not as consanguineal or affinal (in-laws) relatives, then maybe as co-villagers or colleagues, or at least as friends of friends. The conversation can serve as a reminder of existing social relations, but the objective is also to personalize communication and, thus, link the person to the place and history. The focus on family and local identity in the opening of conversation is also, reasoned from

another angle, a way of making non-relatives harmless. No one fears the local strangers. The 'we are related' finding, even if it in most cases does not directly affect the everyday lives of the 'reunified' persons, implies a loyalty alliance that involves a pact of respect and honour between the kin members.

Kinship is the difference that makes a difference when people face a situation where they are compelled to select one person and sacrifice the other. The general laxity concerning kinship obligations, in other words, does not represent a real threat to the Faroese family institution as most people will, due to their symbolic loyalty to consanguine relatives, give the kin first priority. The difference of the value of matrilineal versus patrilineal relatives is logically quite limited in a bilateral kinship system, but the Faroe Islands have some patrilineal features, for instance regarding the informal system of patronymics; "a child takes its father's last name, and is informally known by its father's first name or place of residence" (Wylie 1974: V/19). Also, children and youth get questions about their paternal relatives when they talk to strangers: Who is (or was) your father? Who owns you? For people belonging to small village communities there is no reason to ask such questions, because all the relevant information on family will already have been internalized and comprehended during late childhood or early adulthood.

The conversations, consequently, bring attention to the behaviour and attitudes, myths (legends) and reputation of the persons in the community. Social control and mockery are parts of the same chat. In the Faroese egalitarian context, everyone has to prove his individual status and rank through action and verbal 'know-how', commonly by displaying (as narrative art) a detailed and impressive knowledge on family and local culture, ergo demonstrating the embodied family capital.

The child-centric family

Children are at the very centre of the Faroese society. The bilateral kinship is not only ego-centric, it is also child-centred, and the study of this distinction (maybe a small island hallmark) can lead to a better understanding of Faroese kinship and culture. Children are the fulcrum

of the family. Very few places in the Faroes are inaccessible and no-go for children. In the villages children learn at an early age where not to go alone: to the steep cliffs, to the rocky seashore, etc. These dangerous places, usually without any fences or warning signs, are the only limit to the local children's freedom of movement. Otherwise they are welcome to play and fool around wherever they like. In many families the laissez faire norms furthermore give the children, from an early age, an almost round-the-clock unstructured playtime covering indoor as well as – though depending on the season and weather – outdoor activities (Gaini 2011). The doors are unlocked and children hold the privilege to cross the threshold whenever they want.

The Faroese individualism, ergo, includes the youngest generation, which might be interpreted as miniature adults but without adult responsibilities. Even small children enjoy a strong personal autonomy, which is intentionally offered by parents. Children are, says a surprised American anthropologist, "raised with an almost incredible tolerance" and, he continues, "the only time I saw a hand raised against a child was when a young boy made fun of me (to my face, in his father's presence) for my halting Faroese" (Wylie 1974: I/31). This incident would not have raised eye-brows if the victim was a local. Many foreign first-time guests get quite irritated and frantic seeing young children, mixed with older age groups, rambling without any parental supervision. Who belongs to whom, they might wonder with the feeling of disorientation as regards the Faroese children–parent relationship. Children are, says Wylie (1974: I/32), who made extensive fieldwork in the Faroes in the 1970s, "generally allowed to do as they will, to be shy or obstreperous as the mood takes them"; and in this way the child, contrary to the foreigner's first impression, is actually trained in own individuality at the same time as it, through intense social interaction with peers, also learns to tolerate the identities of others (1974: I/33).

A father or mother carrying a small child will hardly ever experience to be denied access to any private or public place because of the child; on the contrary, the presence of the child will usually create a cosy 'familial' atmosphere that suits the Faroese mind. Parents of small children are often categorically encouraged to bring the youngest

members of the family to different social gatherings that are otherwise intended for adults. The presence of small children in public areas puts the close-knit family in focus and the parents' identity as family members – above their professional identities – in the foreground. In this way the (nuclear) family is symbolically acclaimed in all spheres of society[4].

Most Faroe Islanders believe that the North Atlantic archipelago is a children's 'paradise'. This does not necessarily refer to religious or other transcendental arguments but simply to a portrayal of society as a safe and peaceful haven in a 'chaotic' world. The child centrism of the islands gives the youngest inhabitants the feeling of a peaceful adult power takeover. And in the Faroes children are expected to find friends on their own and to entertain themselves without parental guidance or interference. That is how they, step by step, get in touch with the Faroese individualism.

Family as capital

The predicament of being a family-based and (late) modern society at the same time is particularly apparent in contexts where the family is presumed yet absent. The family is fairly unrestrained when it concerns the dynamics of social interaction, but very categorical as regulative concept in cultural discourse. There is an indisputable discordance between the idea and the practice, between the map and the terrain, leaving a growing number of people with the feeling of being in limbo. The traditional openness of the family has, in a new era with a new style of discourse, turned into a narrow family ideal that hardly fits to life experiences anno 2013. New political and religious worldviews, stressing the right versus wrong in relation to family (values), indicate a new societal era with a new ideological constructions of the family.

The family is still fundamental as capital and social institution, but it is, as a consequence of modern reflexivity as regards identity construction, today discussed in the light of analytic perspectives detached from the family itself. The family, basically not the 'measure' anymore, can thus be isolated and evaluated in relation to other societal domains. The expectations radiating from societal discourses

on family and children are hard to satisfy. Many people are struggling to fulfil conflicting impositions of two different – family-based and (late) modern – individualisms. The conundrum at play here is to introduce modern individualism without the loss of traditional family identities. Modern individualism, focusing attention on personal cultural liberties, has, paradoxically, petrified constructions of family and kinship, but it has also, indirectly, discredited the symbolic inviolability of the family as family.

Earlier	*Family / Locality* ⟶ *Individual*
Today	*Society* ⟶ *'Family'* ⟶ *Individual*

Genealogical research is very popular among laymen trying to reconstruct a forgotten past with scientific accuracy in order to map the roots of the family. It is not only the recent years' progression in the field of information and communication technologies that has aroused the remarkable public interest in genealogies in the Faroe Islands. This is, in the first place, a result of the conundrum that urges people to recapture what they had thrown away. Genealogies, creating beautiful family trees (some succeed in mapping their kin all the way back to the medieval era) represent late modern society's logical answer to an enigma that never came to conclusion. It is dead capital. Genealogies offer interesting copious information on consanguineal and affinal structures, but they are reductionist and spiritless.

The rapidly growing interest in genealogy is also connected to the new awareness of human genetics in medical research and general debate in the Faroe Islands. People do not only want to know who their ancestors were, but also what physical or mental disorders they might have inherited from their progenitors. They have been told that islands with small populations (that have been relatively isolated) often experience serious inbreeding, increasing the risks of catching hereditary diseases. In this way the family can symbolize a negative (biological) capital, which no storytelling ingenuity can change. Genealogical research can cover several centuries by reason of the comprehensive and very reliable Faroese church records, but the non-professional genealogist, critically reflecting on own rank

and honour, will often try to ignore the unexpected and undesirable relatives of the past – persons that the genealogist doesn't wants to be identified with.

Another popular way of objectifying and framing the family identity is to apply for the registration of a new surname that associates to a specific place or family in the Faroe Islands. This is, like the genealogies case, a modern individual's strategy with the aim of being affiliated to an honourable family of the past. In the absence of better methods, the person, looking for an authentic family identity, which will offer him the impression of existential 'continuity' in a time of change, will take the decision to change his surname. There are several options and the decision will always be the result of reflection on the potential consequences of the new name and identity. Will the name tell what I want it to tell? Will it really fit? And while the metamorphosis of the autonym normally is presumed to be a correction or adjustment of the identity, which represents a legitimate image of the person in question, the shift is also disintegrating collective identities as siblings and parents suddenly lose their common (family) name. What is most interesting is not the fact that people change surnames, but the specific reasons behind such decisions that symbolically eradicate the owner of the dismissed name.

The reinvention of the family as an ideal that is made obvious in popular genealogies, is also introducing new perfected family rituals such as the pretentious kin celebrations that have the explicit goal of gathering relatives – preferably the whole population in accordance with to formal membership criteria – that belong to the same honoured family. The celebration is usually meticulously planned by a committee of central family members, who are committed to giving the participants as authentic and appropriate an experience of family as possible. In some of the modern family gatherings, which have no other purpose than to praise the kin, the participants are equipped with stickers or ribbons in different colours in order to show everyone who is and who is not a 'real' consanguineal member of the kin. This untraditional arrangement is something quite different from the previously discussed Faroese individualism rooted in egalitarian values[5].

In the shade of the family

Outside the tight family webs, which run along each other, there is a void without the dense relations that make up the familiar society of the Faroes. 'Outsiders' are, allegorically speaking, drifting in the sea between the islands. This should not be misunderstood as a coherent boundary between the people who actually have a family on the one hand and all others on the other. The secluded are in many cases individuals that have deliberately withdrawn from the family group without any substitute for the renounced network. Strangers can, furthermore, succeed in their effort to become integrated parts of strong Faroese families, even when consanguineal and affinal kinship ties are missing. In other cases individuals, considered deviant in their lifestyles, express feelings of being excluded from the family network against their wish. In other words, there are many persons that, if they do not find it in themselves to migrate, experience a cultural alienation that puts a pressure on them to live 'double lives' in order to save reputation and honour.

A rather harmless and charming case is the steadfast single woman in her 30s or 40s without children, who shows up at family gatherings to be questioned why she is not married or does not have any children yet. The intimate questions hint that 'time is running out' for the relative that is lacking the 'basics' of life in the Faroe Islands. She will also, when not personally at the centre of attention, probably try to join the other women in their enthusiastic chat on babies, kindergartens and other parents-of-small-children subjects[6].

Another outsider–insider case story apropos family networks is the recent affectionate debate on sexual identities in the Faroe Islands (Gaini 2011). Without the ambition of presenting the multiple discussions, involving religious and political arguments, it can still be touched on in order to clear up predicaments of the Faroese family. Non-heterosexual identities, an unmentionable subject in public debate until the turn of the century, but not within the private homes, have been at the centre of a polemic for some years now. Homosexuality has by the religious conservative community been described as a threat to Faroese family values, which are evolving with the expanding scope of globalization. While it is positive that

sexual minorities have entered the stage of the open debate, the gain has also, ironically, urged everyone to take up pro or contra stances, ergo to mass opinions at the extremities of the scale. The frequent religious undertones in the exchange of views on sexual identities are upholding the morally correct/wrong contrapositions.

Individuals belonging to sexual minorities sometimes reveal that, contrary to popular supposition, the generation of their grandparents represents larger tolerance towards their values and lifestyles than other generations. This information can be interpreted as an allusion of the differences between the past and present with respect to the cultural construction of family in the Faroe Islands. This does not mean that people belonging to sexual minorities had better lives in premodern eras, but it demonstrates some of the qualities of the pragmatic individualism that characterized the traditional family[7]. Today's discourse idealizes culture in a strongly reductionist fashion.

The 'outsider' is a person that, whatever his reputation, in traditional society smoothly would have been embraced by the family based society. Today's youth's emancipation from cultural dogma is a process that, ironically, truncates cultural variation rather than to broaden it. Family and society used to be inseparable institutions as long as family relations surpassed social and sectorial divisions of society. It was impossible to be a true outsider. Contemporary Faroese society is distinguished by its unsteady process of confining the family as a well demarcated sphere of privacy and intimacy, therefore also bringing into existence a public non-family space that needs a modern social structure.

The family home

It is time to leave the abstract map and take a closer look at the sensible field. How do today's Faroese families organize their lives? First of all, the terrain is much more incongruous than the ideational draft suggests. There are many different family types and lifestyles to be recorded by ethnographers and kinship analysts. The relatively uniform physical structure of family life materialized in detached (single-family) houses with small surrounding gardens keeps the cultural and social distinctions of the household hidden from the public eye.

There are no working class ghettos or posh avenues for the wealthy families, even if material shading might expose the local better-offs in the eyes of the sensitive observer. Some new residential neighbourhoods in the capital and main towns resemble archetypal middle-class suburban areas in the vicinities of cities and provincial towns of neighbouring Nordic countries, but there is also a dissemblance to be aware of.

Faroese family houses are never completely identical, neither in colour nor shape, because the householders want to stress the uniqueness and individuality of the family. These personal 'signatures', for instance house facades painted yellow, are the result of house-owners' (perfectly lawful) actions. The colourful man-made landscape should not be misinterpreted as a derivation of social stratification, because it is in point of fact just the opposite. It is a physical manifestation of the special individualism and egalitarianism of the Faroese culture. Some foreign visitors get dizzy when they are confronted with the colour cacophony – houses painted in the colour gamut – that tricks their eyes. Not only the colours, but also the size and shape of houses and gardens give many visitors the feeling of having arrived at a picturesque yet anarchic place, which seems to be constructed with no common regulations. Even modern urban townhouses, shaped as a long row of family houses joined by common sidewalls, are painted and decorated according to the individual householders' own choice. Small children can hence easily recognize their home, which is unique among the houses attached to it.

Most Faroe Islanders want, to the authorities' annoyance, to create their own homes, preferably from scratch, with as few inhibiting building regulations as possible. The personalization project is a two-edged sword, because even if people usually desire to get a house that is 'different' they don't want it to be too different or conspicuous. Consequently, the analyst of the residential landscape will discover a pattern in the variation, which unveils a relatively strong conformity in the style of the houses. People identify with their homes (give them a special quality), but seldom in a decadent style that might provoke the local community. The house is the pot where the dweller develops his roots.

The assumed 'originality' of private homes in modern neighbourhoods, not to be confused with the modest old houses of the villages, is always contested by the contagious tendency of 'borrowing' the neighbours' creative solutions. The freedom of choice includes the right to copy what others have exhibited. In other words, the house as physical construction is a symbol of the symmetry between egalitarian collective and diverse individual identities. The home, today preferably a large privately owned house, is an irreplaceable component of Faroese family life.

The home is the centre of the social and emotional life of the family members. More than ever the private sphere that the family house represents is made into a sacrosanct place, which shields the residents from symbolic societal aggression. The home is the refuge of the reinvented family. There is no urban 'street corner' society in the Faroes, since most people get together in private homes (Whyte 1993). Walking in through the doorway symbolises the transition from the public to the private space. Most people favour spacious living rooms with enough seating and table space for large gatherings of relatives, friends and acquaintances. The kitchen is also a very important room for social interaction within the family. Many mothers of small children spend a lot of time by the kitchen-table (Gullestad 1984)

Most Faroe Islanders, even if the housing preferences are changing (especially with regards to the youth generation), connect their feelings of freedom to the ownership of a house. For those that do not have the privilege of inheriting the house of their parents or grandparents, the project may end up being a very expensive lifelong affair. There will always be something that has to be fixed or renovated. Home owners will spend much more time and energy on house work than they had expected. A well-built house is also, of course, a practical shelter against the harsh North Atlantic weather conditions, which force people to spend much time indoors. The magnificent houses being built on farmland in the periphery of towns and villages in all regions of the Faroes, constructed in a style satisfying the needs of modern families, express a contrast to the small and modest dwellings, always densely clustered near the seashore, of the past generations.

Most islanders, instead of nostalgically striving for the preservation

of premodern lifestyles, invest heavily in the buildings of their twenty-first century dreams. The new houses, quite hedonic compared to the Lilliputian grass-roof houses, announce the new privatized family identity of the islanders. The mansion of the modern family fortifies emotional children-parent relations and minimizes the extensive informal kinship relations.

Behind the curtains

Family homes hide secrets rarely brought into daylight. From the outside the houses appear diverse, yet all of them seem presentable; nothing particularly suspicious to espy from afar. Taxi drivers are usually the best informed persons, able to hook different houses and households on the same complex webs of social relations. It is not possible to locate, for instance, grave social problems by a simple walk through the alleys of the town; neither is it easy to spot alcoholics or drug abusers at squares or street corners. If one is not informed of the troubles and dangers, it would be difficult to believe that the sleepy picturesque towns hosted anything but happy healthy families.

Belonging to a household has roughly the same meaning in the Faroe Islands as (social) class has in European industrialized societies. The expression 'liquor house', for example, refers to a family that is struggling with alcoholism. Malicious gossip circulating in the local community is often stigmatizing the persons and houses at the same time, hence affecting all members of the same household. The social 'heritage' of children, normally used in its negative sense (as a burden hard to get rid of), is connected to the house in the Faroese societal debate. These facts indicate some peculiar challenges that contemporary Faroese society positioned between tradition and (late) modernity has to face.

At the same time as society intends to protect and uphold the welfare and rights of every citizen, it reinforces the walls secluding the nuclear family units. The 'sanctity' of the family life and privacy (home), a judicial maxim adapted to contemporary Western family ideals, makes it difficult for authorities to penetrate the home's walls and personally witness domestic affairs (if they are not requested to interfere directly by an insider).[8]

The extensive sport of gossiping is uncontrollable in small-scale communities. Rumours are warped by symbolic struggles for power and honour. Therefore, the stranger observing the houses from the street has no access to the secrets of the houses, while the locals, on the other hand, often have too many stories deriving from rumours. If, let us say, it is suspected by one or several disinterested persons from the local community that a child is being seriously neglected by its parents, the child welfare board has to open thorough investigation proceedings. The first question is going to be: Is it true what people are saying about this child and its family? Thereafter, in case the story is not pure fabrication, the following question: How serious is this problem?

Sometimes the (legally binding) obligation to notify the authorities of such problems is not upheld by the persons with the sensitive information about the family. Why not? There could be many reasons, but the underlying cause of this silence is often a strong reluctance to interfere in other people's matters. Also, the close connection between families and houses in villages gives everyone a feeling of being implicated in the problems of their neighbours[9].

The child welfare board members risk being accused of bias, because of their family affiliation and social status in the local community. Even if they face their task professionally, their credibility is in the view of the locals easily undermined, and therefore their access to inside information practically cut off.

Who is unbiased? When is the board biased? The challenge is contested by putting a non-local board on the case. This step gives the impression of a neutral and proficient board that can reach a balanced view of the situation, but the drawback is here found in the board's minimal insider intelligence that is needed in order to get behind the charming setting. So, it is no simple job to intrude upon the domestic space in order to inspect complex family affairs.

Family and religious identities are interrelated and mutually reinforcing in the context of the Faroe Islands. Religious identity is, to a large extent, a heritage associated to the family home. People from the same household belong to the same church or congregation. There are exceptions, but most Faroe Islanders faithfully stick to their parents' spiritual values and identities (Gaini 2008).

Any sincere attempt to delineate contemporary Faroese family types has to consider religiosity, first of all the Lutheran evangelical Protestantism of the national church, but also the doctrines of the myriad of free churches, because the frontiers between family categories are normally defined by conflicting and competing sets of norms and values (Pons 2011). This diversity is an outcome of idealized and well thought out family accords that define the identities of the families.

Navel of the world

Torshavn is situated at the centre of the archipelago, anchored to the obscure bottom of the North Atlantic Ocean. It is hard to spot on a world map, but looking carefully through the magnifying glass, you will discover a whole universe of people, villages and breath-taking landscapes. The Faroe Islands, says William Heinesen (1900-1991), is like a grain of sand on the dance floor. And here – "in the endless mercury fluorescent ocean" – you will find a remarkable old town named after the Nordic god of thunder and lightning: Thor. For twelve centuries Torshavn, meaning Thor's Harbour, has been the heart and nerve centre of Faroese society. Now, holding the magnifying glass carefully above the miniature town, you will find a narrow strip of land jutting out into the bay. This is the centre of the centre. On this isthmus called Tinganes the first colonizers gathered to hold parliament and govern the Faroe Islands. Tinganes is still the seat of the Faroese governmental offices. From Tinganes the capital has expanded heavily towards the east, west and north.

The old settlement of the Vikings has transformed into a modern urban centre with ties to the global world. The large growth started in the 19th century. In the year of 1801 Torshavn had 554 inhabitants; in 1950 it had 5.607 inhabitants. Today the capital municipality shelters almost 20.000 souls, more than a third of the total population in the Faroe Islands. Torshavn is the political, administrative, financial and cultural centre of the wind-swept archipelago on 62° north. It is, in Heinesen's worldview, nothing less than the "navel of the World". All roads – on sea and land – lead to the capital. Looking at the nocturnal town from a high altitude panoramic view, the lights of the streets and houses

of the sprawling town give the watcher the illusion of being placed in a huge metropolis. Daylight unveils another truth: a green town with small detached houses painted in a great variety of colours.

During summer Torshavn is full of activities. Faroese and foreign tourists pack the picturesque alleys and walks of the centre. Thousands of Faroe Islanders living abroad – most of them based in Denmark – fly home to visit the islands during holidays in July and August. Summer is also marked by its numerous sports, culture and art festivals. The culmination of the summer's festivities is at the end of July. The Faroese national festival, Ólavsøka, honours the Norwegian king Olav Haraldsson (Saint Olav) who was killed in a sea battle 29th July 1030. Ólavsøka is also the day when the Faroese parliamentary year is reconvened. During the festival the population of the capital is doubled, most of the partying people gathered in a few jam-packed streets in the centre. Ólavsøka marks the end of summer. Slowly Torshavn returns to its normal rhythm and routines.

The Faroese author Gunnar Hoydal (1987) reflects philosophically on the dimensions of his hometown:

"The size. Our curse and blessing. Our limitation and special potentiality. Maybe the dimension is our most valuable belonging, and we possess it ahead of others. A whole society that you can witness from all its members and objects…"

Torshavn's banner portrays Thor's magic hammer, which is never lost. Every time the God of thunder hurls it, it returns safely into his hands. For those visiting Torshavn, the same happens. When they leave town, it comes back…

'The speed of light does not merely transform the world. It becomes the world'
(Paul Virilio)

Part three

As a human habitat the Faroe Islands is young, or, in the vocabulary of poets, unspoiled and natural, hence a nonchalant youth among nations. This observation can be presented as background for society's child centrism, yet more accurately as an antecedent to the society's youthful qualities.

Youthful freedom

In more than one sense the youth is at the centre of attention in the Faroe Islands. The youth embodies the roots of the cultural ambivalence of the archipelago that, in relation to the modern globalized world, is in a permanent state of liminality between dependency and independency. Adolescence, commonly theorized as a rite-de-passage between the universal categories of childhood and adulthood, reflects a symbol of blameless childhood and responsible adulthood at the same time.

Faroese youth is expected to use the freedom that it grows up with as a substructure for an adult life as self-supporting and responsible citizens (Gaini 2011). Because of the distinguished taken-for-granted liberties of the Faroese childhood, parents do not interfere as much in the life of their children as could have been expected of them (Wylie 1974 and 1987). They rarely attempt to control and restrict the youth in order to keep it on the right track. It is expected that young people solve their problems on their own, in robust peer groups, while parents, quite uninvolved, support them with unconditional devotion. Young people are, as the aphorism goes, the architects of their own fortune.

Children admire the youth as 'grown-ups', who they can imitate and identify themselves with; adults on the other hand, if they are not their relatives, tend to ignore the youth. And perhaps, says Vered Amit-Talai (1995),

> *"like many other adults, anthropologist view youth as not to be taken very seriously: occasionally amusing, yet potentially dangerous and disturbing, in a liminal phase."*

Perhaps this image also reflects the challenges of contemporary small-scale island communities in general: their struggle to be taken seriously among large nation-states?

The youth of a community without well-regulated age stratification is considered a threat to the modern 'order of things' as represented in large-scale nation-states. The island youth is principally untied and unimpeded in its motions and actions within all spheres of society, but the informal social control typical of small-scale communities is structuring the youth's patterns of communication along certain lines. Everyone is aware of society's thousand eyes and ears: a person's words and actions, if considered disrespectful, might easily generate a bad reputation and a poor social status hard to get rid of. To be labelled with a 'bad name' is a stigma that can have huge consequences for the victim, since it is hardly possible to remove it without external help. In many cases the disheartened individual with a 'bad name' will take the radical decision to leave the local village or even the Faroe Islands in the hope of eliminating his burden.

Young people are especially vulnerable to societal stigma as they no longer can do the habitual pranks of children without facing the risk of targeted social sanctions, which will affect their future identity. They also, repeatedly, have to convince their peers of their social value, a challenging enterprise that most adults as 'well-established' citizens have settled for good. Without exaggerating the hazards of informal social interplay, it is important to stress the meaning of the implicit collective rules of action that young people, as well as any other Faroe Islander, use to bypass society's pitfalls.

Neither tourist nor vagabond

Most young people, affiliated to dense family networks, feel confident that their kin gives them a silent moral backing as regards their individual activities and ventures. The cultural identity of the island youth is anchored to the archipelago and family history, symbolizing their position in a non-hierarchical familial society. Therefore, the island youth does not personify the same sort of cultural individualism that modernity theorists advocate in the following style of argumentation:

> *"…in modern life the individual is confronted on many levels with the following challenge: You may and you must lead your own independent life, outside the old bonds of family, tribe, religion, origin and class; and you must do this within the new guidelines and rules which the state, the job market, the bureaucracy own" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1996: 36)*

This reasoning reveals the limitations of predominantly urban discourses on late modern individualism which rationalize a supposed disappearance of tradition while overlooking the realities of the rural periphery. An independent life, in the Faroes as in most other small-scale societies, is not contradictory to the bonds of family and local identity. It is, rather, a premise of Faroese individualism. Much of modernity, Thomas Luke (1996: 117) affirms in a reaction to simplistic sociological presumption, "is, was, and will be, traditional in its make-up". Young Faroe Islanders, at the same time as they are linked to global culture and lifestyle currents, thus active participants in social networks on the Internet, purposely retain their family centred island identity, which prevents them from becoming 'vagabonds' and 'tourists' in Zygmunt Bauman's archetypes of modern individualists.

> *"Pulled forward by hope untested, pushed from behind by the hope frustrated – the vagabond journeys through an unstructured space; like a wanderer in the desert, who knows only such trails as are marked with his own footprints, and blown off again by the next gust of wind." (Bauman 1996: 53)*

This powerful poetic description of the lone stranger, without roots or home, who went from being a marginal character to being the normal person in the modernized world, is not in conflict with the identity of the islanders, but it represents a rough generalization of modernization processes, which ignores substantial urban–rural and global–local contrasts. The "world is catching up with the vagabond", Bauman maintains pessimistically. This thesis can also be interpreted as a parallel to Marc Augé's non-place versus place dichotomy. No one, thus, is permanently settled in a rooted 'place' with peculiar identity. The Faroese vagabond could if anyone be an underprivileged person involuntarily migrating to foreign countries. What, then, about the 'tourist' metaphor? The life of today's men and women, says Bauman,

> *"is more like that of tourists-through-time; they cannot and would not decide in advance what places they will visit and what the sequence of stations will be; what they know for sure is just that they will keep on the move, never sure whether the place they have reached is their final destination." (Bauman 1995: 268-9)*

The tourist is in no danger; he has his homely 'owned place' for the breaks between exhaustive expeditions as a tourist. The late modern tourist dreams of belonging and of being 'of' rather than 'in' the place in an imaginary future. In point of fact he does not want the vision to ever come true, because more than anything else the tourist fears 'home-boundedness' barring him from escape (Bauman 1996). This fascinating yet tragic figure, eternally escaping from 'home' as a fixed material place, does not fit the context of the Faroe Islands that fosters a different kind of personality and identity in the age of globalization. Bauman's tourists are as rare as non-places. They strategically pass around the Atlantic archipelago, which exemplifies a menace to the constant tourist's escapade's lightness and detachment from concrete places. Faroe Islanders, like most other people, enjoy international travelling, but except for a clique of middle-class globetrotters, I don't think they feel any close association to Bauman's stereotyped tourists.

Home is not a dream; it is more real than any escapade. Young people, along these lines, grow up in a place that forms their cultural identity and sense of belonging. This is of course not an exclusive Faroese characteristic, but it seems to be easier to bring the shortcomings of the vagabond and tourist metaphors to light in small-scale societies than in big cities like London or Berlin.

The creative artist

Exploratory scientific investigation of present-day Faroese youth styles and world-views leads the ethnographer to the heart of a society in shift, because the youth, more than any other generation, embodies the new and innovative in culture, hence also what belongs to the future (Fornäs 1995: 1). As a youth researcher I regularly receive the following question from colleagues: So, what is special about Faroese youth cultures? I wish I had a brief answer, but, obviously, there are many different ways of replying to the question. The approach depends very much on framework and focus. The youth represents a universal cultural provocateur confronting the parent generation's 'Establishment' and model in the unconditional symbolic struggle for power and recognition. In the Faroe Islands the youth, as a hint of local distinctiveness, links the local cultural heritage to new international cultural trends. They master the art of uniting tradition and modernity in creative and aesthetic endeavours in music, poetry, painting, etc. They make use of tradition in order to enact meaning in the context of a globalized world in flux.

Is this pattern, anyway, not reflecting youth in all modern societies? Young people do, indeed, nonchalantly experiment with popular culture in other places than the Faroes, but the Faroes have vital bonds to the premodern era's customs and values, because society seems to accommodate traditional and modern traits at the same time. Traditions, "dynamic, contemporary, and forward-looking" in Thomas Luke's analysis (1996: 116), represent an integral part of everyday life in the North Atlantic. When young people through the inventive enterprises of distinct subcultures revitalize something from times past, a relic of ancient society, it is not considered particularly exotic, because the Faroe Islands never lost touch to the traditions. This detail

marks a difference in the cultural premises of youth in the Faroes and elsewhere.

When, for instance, the Faroese rock band Týr (the name of a Norse God) gets its international breakthrough with a track based on medieval ballads recounting heroic battles of Vikings, it symbolizes a successful musical experiment tactfully connecting the past to the present and the local to the global. The ballads, exotic and mystic for any foreign listener, are powerful and captivating, leading thoughts back to the world of the Vikings, but, from a general Faroese viewpoint, Týr is first of all celebrated because of the local musicians' triumph in their effort to produce hard folk rock for an international audience. Faroe Islanders assert Týr's 'international' style as curious and exotic.

The ancient ballads (without Týr's interpretation and adaptation to a 'deterritorialized' music genre) are regarded as a part of the national cultural heritage, but they do not have a central place in today's youth life, although they do not represent a vanished tradition conserved in books. The men behind Týr did not need to ask their grandparents for information about the ballads, because they, as all other Faroe Islanders, had themselves from time to time, for example at wedding parties or National Day (Ólavsøka) celebrations, participated in traditional chain dancing accompanied by the collective chanting of 'kvæði' (old ballads). Týr's formula, thus, was to simplify and adjust the ballads, first of all 'Ormurin Langi' ('The Great Dragon', the name of a legendary Viking ship) that represents the structure of their most famous track and breakthrough, to a new context with the musical outfit of folk metal that emphasizes 'folk' as something authentic and ancient (Gaini 2008). The men behind Týr are 'bricoleurs' composing new tunes and texts out of a well-defined cultural repertoire at hand. Is it maybe just an advanced form of plagiarism – accepted as postmodern pastiche remodelling old creations – which we are witnessing?

The project of any contemporary youth culture, to be a clever copycat and genuine architect at the same time, frequently results in strong emotional accusations of vulgar attitudes towards national cultural symbols – e.g. the medieval ballads and national costume – which express, according to authoritative conservative voices, a lack of respect of the national heritage. The youth culture is, approached

from this angle, 'matter out of place' (Douglas 1966). It is culturally blasphemous, because it attempts to change what is not supposed to be revised by anyone.

When young women, inspired by the daring provocation of Eivör, the beloved Faroese diva, some years ago decided to wear the multi-coloured national costume together with tight black leather trousers or miniskirts, it triggered public outcry reflecting deep tensions and taboos in a society between tradition and modernity. The enraged persons, a segment of all generations, were infuriated when, in addition to the individual acts of local 'undisciplined' girls, a Danish politician of immigrant origin was photographed wearing the complete Faroese costume (for men) at the same time as he strongly condemned the restrictive abortion law of the Faroe Islands as (religious) fundamentalism. The politician, performing as 'Faroese' at Shrovetide in Copenhagen, was wearing the custom comme il faut, without any fashionable modification, but he got on the nerves of many Faroe Islanders considering it a farcical performance with the aim of humiliating their national identity. For the local youth the cultural experiments are much deeper than entertainment and customary generational mockery, because they represent principles of the identity project that are necessary in the construction of meaning and consistence in a society in shift.

Young people, as the example of Týr shows, work hard to find a 'Faroeseness' in their cultural identities that is not just a replication of the parents' values and norms that neither fits the premodern culture of the grandparents and great-grandparents nor the late modern cultural flows of peers around the globe. Týr's formula only works once, because the youth constantly pursues novel styles that symbolize cutting edge cultural flows. Týr's hits are largely forgotten and substituted by other bands and songs that fuel the tireless engines of the global youth cultures in motion. Unlike tradition 'as tradition' the popular culture of contemporary youth is transformed and redefined, day by day, making yesterday's innovative creation already seem passé. Small islands, however, do not forget as fast as the continent. Týr is still a big name with passionate fans.

Young people do not feel the urge to keep abreast of the latest

styles all the time, because, in one way or another, it does not change their everyday life in the North Atlantic. The Faroese concept of time, harmonized with the rhythm of life in a community in the European periphery, allows breaks – 'slow time' in opposition to 'fast time', as the Norwegian anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2001) has called it – as a shelter in a symbolic time warp, from the never-ending rush of global cultural flows.

Constructing identities

To be hip is not a critical condition giving life meaning. The appetite for new cultural experiments, like the escapades of Bauman's permanent tourist, is not insatiable among the pragmatic no-nonsense youth of the Faroe Islands, who seeks identity change without revolt against his past. Today's youth are more interested in their cultural heritage, for instance the traditional hymns and ballads, than their parents (especially those affiliated to the Torshavn middle class), who for the most part considered tradition an obstruction against modern secular progression in society.

The annual photo ceremony at the upper secondary high school in Torshavn symbolizes a visualization of the on-going cultural development. The gradual growth in the number of students dressed in national costume for the collective photo session after receiving examination certificates has since the 1990s been inversely proportional to the use of traditional costume in casual everyday settings. The costume was in the beginning decorating one or two students, hardly visible in an obscure corner of the pictured aggregation of happy students organized, like a football team, in even rows fitting to the photo frame, while the rest carried modern clothes. Since the turn of the century the pictured students have, except for a small minority, invested in the high-priced costumes that display their 'Faroeseness' in a ceremonial context. The photo communicates a shift between generations that at first glance might seem paradoxical, but at closer inspection unmasks the pivotal cultural identity project of contemporary youth, because the students want to stress a distance to the parent generation as well as to media disseminated models of youth.

At an individual level, as in the case of the girls' composite costumes, the cultural creativity is impressive, but in the wider context, for instance in the case of the students' orthodox costumes, originality is often hard to spot. While the first case manifests the genuine handiwork of young 'bricoleurs' the latter reflects a search for authenticity in new political constructions of national culture. These statements display a duality in the preferences of youths that, referring to the radical German education researcher Thomas Ziehe's concept of cultural emancipation, in substance is based on a free personal choice.

To be modern today, says Ziehe, means to be able to name and formalise definite goals for oneself (1989). Therefore, whatever the youth's strategy in regard to cultural identity formation is, it is the explicit outcome of individual priorities. Identity construction is hence, corresponding to Anthony Giddens' (1991) writing on reflexive modernity, unchained from traditional primordial bonds to family, ethnicity, religion, etc. Well, here as in relation to Bauman's colourful vagabond and tourist metaphors, it is crucial to critically question the potency of the grand theory before drawing conclusions on emancipated unfixed cultures.

The Faroe Islands were, as regards the theoretical tradition–modernity differentiation, probably less traditional (referring to the Faroese individualism) in premodern times and less modern (referring to the strong family and village identities) in late modern times; the contrast is, thus, in reality much weaker than leading sociological models tend to proclaim. Týr, for instance, wouldn't choose a medieval ballad about Viking chiefs for their music if it was not something that they could identify with, ergo a genuine input in a mix of different volatile cultural features. Young Faroese women wearing controversial self-designed costumes, different and eye-catching, are in a similar manner creating personal styles based on traditional elements: the pure Faroese costume (Gaini 2011).

Young people, blamed for crippling the 'real' language of the Faroes in general carelessness, especially since the Internet and mobile phones became the prime arenas for the expression of written language, are intentionally contesting and remodelling the authoritative rules and

practices of the Faroese language. This represents a provocation, but it also symbolizes the work of the pragmatic bricoleur wishing to revitalize a stiffened language as part of his subjective identity construction. The youth does not in any case prefer English to Faroese, as suggested by malicious critics, because the 'Faroeseness' in the identity of the youth is also attached to the language of the islands.

Slow and fast time

Demographic fragility is, as briefly outlined earlier, small island communities' Achilles' heel exposing them to the eternal risk of depopulation and decline. Young people, longing for foreign shores, find it easier to move away than to move back home. Small islands are usually very vulnerable to global financial cycles and economic recessions that motivate young men and women to pack their belongings and set sail towards new territories.

The 'brain drain' is a chronic condition, which reproduces the social fabric of Faroese society. The recent amplification of the dynamics of economic and cultural globalization seems, nevertheless, to have had a negative impact on the demographic trend, as the archipelago fails to keep up with the youth's new preferences and demands as regards lifestyles and careers. The concurrent birth rate decline, according to leading statisticians, paves the way to a prolonged population decrease in the Faroes. It is of course very difficult to predict the future, as the economic trends can change very rapidly in the community, but the Faroes seem to have turned into a periphery integrated in the economic infrastructure of Europe, while they used to be an isolated centre apart from the continent. The pull factors, from this viewpoint, are weakening while the push factors still entice the youth away from the Faroes.

The good things are still easy to name – the peaceful, safe and intimate atmosphere – but today they associate more to childhood memories and holiday priorities than to the overall estimation of the modern family's everyday life values and tastes. How will my future look? Where will it take place? These are questions that young people individually reflect on without finding any definite answer. How can I make a living in the Faroes? How can I fulfil my dreams

without leaving the country? These and other fundamental questions influence the adolescence's erratic premonition that the islands will not remain what they used to be. Is the place, in other words, going to turn into a non-place?

Another provoking question, stressing the meaning of anthropological place, would be: How many people have to live in the Faroes in order for it to survive as the cultural place it is? Endless discussions on how to turn the tide of migration have borne no fruit. They release a strong current of disconnected hypotheses on the problem of society without reference to the cultural 'place' per se. Marc Augé illustrates the place with the following words:

> *"The place held in common by the ethnologist and those he talks about is simply a place: the one occupied by the indigenous inhabitants who live in it, cultivate it, defend it, mark its strong points and keep its frontiers under surveillance, but who also detect in it traces of chthonian or celestial powers, ancestors or spirits which populate and animate its private geography; as if the small fragment of humanity making them offerings and sacrifices in this place were also the quintessence of humanity, as if there were no humanity worthy of the name except in the very place the cult devoted to them." (Augé 2008: 35)*

This might well sound like a tribal non-modern place, but it also leads to the heart of the discussion on the Faroe Islands as a special unparalleled place. There must, according to the puzzled anthropologist, be an axiomatic model approving society's raison d'être in similar way as Marcel Mauss' concept of 'total social fact' that gives reason for integration and continuity in primitive societies (Mauss 1995). There must be, beyond the general modernity process, a relation between individual and place – between individual and culture – that makes the 'Faroese' Faroese.

The islands, as place cleared of non-places, are characterized by the stunning 'slow time' of the countryside, as well as of the suburban monotony. Beyond the major international hubs, the noisy crossroads

and insomniac megacities, 'fast time' is a very scarce resource, which is restrained in the unhurried rhythm of life. The Faroe Islands, especially beyond the capital area, represent one of those many places that foreign visitors consider comically stress-free and adorable. And right here, analysing the connection between place and time, we also catch sight of young people's dilemma: how to live 'urban' lives without metropolitan rapidity? How to engage in creative youth culture without complex time in motion? The rather unhealthy drinking habit of some young people is probably not unconnected to the fact that boys and girls, in absence of better alternatives, try to boost the slow-moving time with alcohol.

Slow time is not a problem in itself; it only becomes an obstacle when in direct contact with fast time, because, as Thomas Hylland Eriksen points out, slow time will end up being the loser in any confrontation with fast time (Eriksen 2001). Why is it so? The explanation is that if you have fast time of any kind in your life, for example through Internet communication, then your thirst for more fast time will steadily increase. It makes the slowness seem more and more decelerating. Young people, in contrast to the parents' usual opinion, contest the accelerating time of 'supermodernity'. Their cultural identity is very much the outcome of the bricoleur's indefatigable attempt to reconcile apparent cultural contradictions. It is, in other words, quite discreditable to charge the youth for the sacrifice or surrender of slow time (in place) in order to inflate late modern fast time (in non-place).

Rethinking the periphery

The Faroe Islands can be illustrated as being traditional and late modern at the same time. This statement implies an alternative understanding of the processes of change in society. 'Detraditionalization' is an idea that should be interpreted with strong caution (Heelas 1996). The youth is perfectly able to (even forced to) move between different places that have different locus as regards the tradition–modern and local–global domains. Therefore, fast time is, as in Aesop's fable of the Tortoise and the Hare, never going to reach the ultimate goal in the competition with slow time. There will always be some slow time left

somewhere. The same is true about the interplay between tradition and detraditionalized modernity.

On the basis of this reasoning we can also argue that young people may well have youth cultures fitting to the individualized liberties of the late modern era without consequently being obliged to define the youth as non-traditional as a whole. Zygmunt Bauman (1995: 266) believes that 'to be provident' today indicates "...more often than not to avoid commitment. To be free to move when opportunity knocks. To be free to leave when it stops knocking". This is not untrue, but how much does it tell about the life of the youth in the periphery? Bauman also stresses the uncertain nature of things today:

> *"We understand now that uncertainty is not a temporary nuisance, which can be chased away through learning the rules, or surrendering to expert advice, or just doing what others do – but a permanent condition of life…" (1995: 287)*

Following this quote it is easy to understand that Bauman professes a very fluid 'liquid modernity' of ephemeral meaning and function. Does it reflect life conditions on the fringe of the modern world? What is uncertain and when? My intention is to propose an additional dimension to Bauman's theory. The uncertainty is maybe not temporary, but does that necessarily mean that it is universal? Young Faroe Islanders indeed feel a degree of uncertainty in relation to their values and styles, hence also prospects, but at the same time the Faroe Islands as a (total social) 'fact' and place determines their firm sense of belonging. The uncertainty, easily linked to the fast time notion, does not trigger any cultural anarchy as it is embedded in specific contexts of activities and rituals that do not represent a threat to the cultural continuity of 'Faroeseness'. Paul Heelas addresses the same issue in the following question:

> *"…is it really reasonable to suppose that 'traditional' societies can swallow up the person to the extent of muting or denying the exercise of autonomous voices, or to suppose that dwellers in 'modern' or 'postmodern' societies are content, let alone*

able, to live with little or no guidance from determinate orders?" (1996: 8)

The power of continuity in culture is regrettably often ignored in sociological studies of social change. The continuity, empowered by some sort of tradition or 'cultural fact', is a prerequisite for the order and meaning of change. Even under exceptional circumstances, says Eva Poluha, "it is surprising how persistent norms, values and traditional ways of doing things tend to be" (2004: 21). What also promotes continuity – e.g. according to the Bourdieuian theory of 'cultural schemas' (Strauss and Quinn 1997) – is repetition, and who experiences continuous repetition if not the people of peripheral communities? The repetition in social interaction, establishing what Pierre Bourdieu defines as 'habitus', also makes culture as tradition more durable than commonly presumed. We tend to reflect on the past, Poluha notes, "in the light of present factors and to experience the present through our knowledge of the past" (2004: 195).

This insight can undoubtedly contribute to a better understanding of the situation in the Faroe Islands, for instance by reminding of the viability of local identity in the age of globalization. It equips us with convincing arguments concerning the resilience of the culture. Analysing the restructuration of the Faroese economy in the 1990s Richard Apostle puts emphasis on similar economic mechanisms:

"[L]ocal values and dense personal networks still seem to have great importance […] it is because they still are 'traditional' that localities, contrary to the arguments of conventional economics, [that they] manage to create relatively successful economic ventures!" (Apostle et al 2002: 17)

Continuity, he point out in accordance with my critical reflection on the culture of the islands, may "represent norms and values that promote and support positive social change" (op cit). Repetition, on one hand associated to routine preventing cultural advancement, is also an imperative for the reproduction of cultural traits from one generation to the next. Small islands are special and represent the

'place' where, say Godfrey Baldacchino and David Milne, "many a weary mainlander has turned over the years for inspiration, fresh starts and remedies to various problems" (2000: 1). The world, the political scientists argue, might actually learn "important lessons from the small and remote cold-water islands of the North Atlantic" (op cit).

While the *Lessons from the Political Economy of Small Islands* obviously emphasizes the jurisdiction and political institutions of the independent and autonomous island communities, the success stories introduced to the readers are directly linked to the island cultures' rich traditions and history. The offshore Lilliputs function as a model for a project aiming to "revisit and rethink our mind's sense of what makes a place strong or weak, or what makes for peripheral or central place" (Baldacchino and Milne 2000: 2). Our mission is the same, just from the cultural angle of the anthropologist. The local is too often delineated as a place lacking something, stripped of coveted qualities, rather than as a place furnished with local resources promoting transformation and progression. From a culinary perspective, writing on 'local food' in globalized society, Brad Weiss (2011: 457) concludes that:

> *"Rather, a concern with the connection between taste and place – grasped as a sensory field, producing space – helps us better understand how places are made. Greater attention to the possibilities, and limitations, of these wider activities, and the array of elements [...] that participate in making place may help us appreciate the specific qualities (both recognized and excluded) of 'the local'."*

Wayfaring youth?

The sense of place is materialized in the astonishing landscape of the Faroe Islands. The landscape of memories is always around you. It is inescapable and taken for granted. Moving through the landscape on foot, for instance in the valleys and mountains of the islands, creates what John Elder (1985) calls an 'emblem of wholeness'. The recent obsessive urge to theorize place and space in social sciences is very much a result of so called non-places' colonization of larger and larger parts of urban and rural landscapes. Many small-scale island

communities do not feel the same urge to reinterpret the relation between place and identity. The walk of the pedestrian is urban and searching for unique adventure while the alpine trek is rural and repetitive or circular.

Memories, Susanne Österlund-Pölzch (2011: 118) claims in an article titled *The Ephemeral Act of Walking*, are "tied to specific landscape details. In this way, places [...] become linked with the creation of personal biographies". For Faroe Islanders the landscape is always in dialogue with memory, and a "walk through a familiar landscape", Österlund-Pölzch makes clear, "holds a potential for identity confirmation" (2011: 125). It initiates an inverted sense of 'outsideness' that non-places tend to breed. The landscape, full of history that only relates to the Faroe Islanders as no other ethnic group was ever the dominant population of the archipelago, represents an elementary part of the 'Faroeseness' of the islanders. "The social and the natural world", as the Danish anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup (2008: 73) tells about the neighbours in the West, the Icelanders, "constitute a whole".

People know their local landscape through what Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) describes as their 'muscular consciousness' (1964: 11). Tim Ingold, a philosophically oriented anthropologist, uses the concept 'wayfaring' in order to avoid what he considers the 'empty' concept of space and to stress the movement in life when illustrating how "human beings inhabit the earth" (2011: 148). Reflecting on the meaning of travelling Ingold provokingly says:

> *"Perfect transport is impossible for the same reason that one cannot be in two places, nor indeed everywhere, simultaneously. As all travel is movement in real time, a person can never be quite the same, on arrival at a place, as when he set out: some memory of the journey will remain, however attenuated, and will in turn condition his knowledge of the place." (2011: 152)*

Ingold, an outspoken opponent of the mainstream discourses on space that he considers fruitless and misleading, suggests wayfaring

across boundaries as a better approach to the understanding of human life. The wayfarer as model might possibly also contribute to a new interpretation of the identity of the inhabitants of small islands that, actually, were never as isolated as popular tales claim. The inhabitants – Ingold avoids the term locals – have always been moving and hence connecting one place to another. This perspective, at first glance contradictory to the previous arguments on tradition and continuity, is appealing as it challenges conventional categorization in social research.

Does it make sense to involve the concept of 'wayfaring' into the discussion on cultural continuity? It certainly does when considering the dialectic dialogue between people and places, as well as between tradition and modernity. We could even suggest that the youth symbolizes the 'wayfarer' par excellence. No society is entirely closed, says Thomas Hylland Eriksen (1993), and "no society is entirely open either, since it then ceases to be a society". People, goods and ideas are moving in and out. Young wayfarers implement longer and longer journeys that affect their 'memory' of the starting point. Repetition, making journeys circular, strengthens the sense of wholeness and meaning of tradition and cultural continuity.

Nowhere is the new fast time more apparent than in the domain of digital interactive media that young people encounter today. Communication through Internet – online in 'real' time – is the prime example of accelerated time as opposed to slow time. Can we, now, conclude that fast time eliminates slow time when they meet? In accordance with the discussion above, I would say no. Not really. Young people are strongly influenced by the new media, which are an integral part of their everyday lives anno 2013, but they are also, more or less consciously, profiting from the traditional rhythm of time that lasts longer. Fast time, as non-places, is curious and seductive, as well as culturally inspiring, yet not considered as real as the traditional time concept. What does this mean? It suggests that the cultural identities of young Faroe Islanders are special because of the local context. Most of the chat on the Internet, for instance, is among people that are neighbours and classmates and know each other in place as well as in cyberspace. The anonymity of the net can never be transmitted to

the Faroese society. It is, in other words, hard to confuse cyberspace with concrete place in the Faroe Islands and other rural communities.

Young people enjoy the freedom of movement on the net that symbolizes a connection to global cultural currents. Internet as system is not only a representative of fast time that seems detraditionalized, it is indeed also a technology enhancing standardized global time. News crosses frontiers without delay.

The periphery and the centre are, principally, equal partners on the decentralized Internet. For young people in the periphery this signifies a revolution, nothing less. They get direct access to the virtual non-place of the Internet even if they represent the place without fast time. In this climate, on small islands with large family networks, the child and the youth use new technologies of communication to reproduce the peculiar 'insular' characteristics of their island identity.

Notes:

1. The authorities of Somaliland, an autonomous region of Somalia, have established offices in Addis Ababa, Rome, London and Washington D.C. They are established in order to make Somaliland more visible and better known around the world. The Faroese mission is similar.
2. Cognatic kinship is in anthropology also called bilateral or consanguineal kinship. Kinship is traced to relatives through both father and mother. Consanguineal refers to a relative by birth (i.e. a ‚blood' relative), as distinguished from in-laws ('affines') and step-relatives.
3. The receiver of the 'facts' might in some cases also regard the revelation as inappropriate and even offensive, especially if the new relative is a person of bad reputation in the society or, more likely, a person that has pestered and harassed him in the past. He might also wonder if the revelation is intended to irritate him, but, of course, the suspicion will not be exhibited in front of the well informed person.
4. Hardly anyone raises an eyebrow if, for instance, a minister cancels a political meeting because he is going to stay at home with a sick child, but he might also chose to postpone a meeting in order to get the chance to watch his daughter play the piano at a concert or to play a football match. Some people would consider the decision improper, but many more would defend his action as a demonstration of family's superior value in society. Teenage mothers, described as a serious social problem in many European countries are very seldom decried in the Faroes, because the child is always, from a cultural perspective, welcome in a child centred society. Faroe Islanders are proud of their national fertility rate (approx. 2.5), which, even if it is dropping, still represents one of the highest in Europe. The new-born represents a human counterweight against

the eternal menace of losing inhabitants that migrate to the continent.

5. The arrangement could be considered rather provocative, but it does not initiate noteworthy controversy as many take it as a joke or as a visualization of something that everyone already knows. Nevertheless, the underlying explanation for the growing interest in family, as system, is related to the new ideological discourse on family.
6. Children's birthday parties, for instance, are sometimes dominated by adults that use the occasion to meet relatives and friends while the person of the day seems to be in the periphery of the celebration. The typical character of the party is, however, an egalitarian gathering of children and adults, who intermingle and communicate across age and gender borders.
7. Without the claim of any direct correlation between the two sets of observations, it is nevertheless noteworthy that, according to recent linguistic research, people from the older generation seem to be more easy-going and broad-minded concerning 'danicisms' (Danish loan words) in Faroese spoken language than the youth generation.
8. This practically unsolvable ethical dilemma, which is part of the everyday challenges of social workers in most countries, is in the Faroe Islands combined with social transparency: almost everyone knows everything about everyone, but a large portion of this 'knowledge' is undocumented.
9. When confronted with the 'why not' question, the individuals might defend themselves with the answer: Why has no one else informed the authorities about the problem before? It is, principally, a very easy task to check the facts, but people will often strategically ignore or hide parts of the story…

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