

SEA OF CHANGE

A Faroese ethnography written from within

Stuðlað útgávuni hevur Mentanargrunnur Landsins



**MENTANARGRUNNUR
LANDSINS**

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Annika Isfeldt og Firouz Gaini (Eds.)

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At viðgera og greina *broytingar* í mentan og samfelag er nakað av tí, sum antropologar hava arbeitt mest við í sínum rannsóknum og ritgerðum seinastu hálvaaðru øldina. Nær umboðar ein broyting eitt veruligt skifti, og nær umboðar hon nakað, sum regluliga endurtekur seg? “Gevið mær eitt stað at standa, og eina nóg langa stong, so skal eg flyta heimin”, segði grikski vísindamaðurin Arki-medes. Hann vísti á, at tað í grundini er trupult at finna nakað pláss, sum ikki er í støðugari rørslu. Hendan spekiliga útsøgnin avdúkar hvussu trupult tað er – bæði í landafrøðiligum og samfelagsligum høpi – at lýsa og skilmarka eitt skifti. Skotski heimspekingurin David Hume er kendur fyri sítt kausalitetsástøði, ið stutt sagt sigur, at breið semja kann vera um at A elvir til B (til dømis at tá ið ein biljardkúla rakar eina aðra kúlu á borðinum, so fer seinna kúlan altíð á rull av stoytinum) uttan at man skilir logisku orsøkina til kausalitetin. Hóast Hume er meira atfinningarsamur enn tey flestu, so kann læra hansara brúkast sum áminning um, hvussu ein frágreiðing um stórar søguligar samfelags- og mentanarbroytingar kann menna sína tign sum eitt slag av ‘sannleika’, um hon verður endurtikin nóg ofta. Tað er hetta, sum vit í hesari bókini ynskja at varpa ljós á. Hvør avgerð hvørjar broytingar koma í søgubøkurnar, og hvørjar broytingar, ið hvørva úr huganum? Okkara ætlan er at royna at fara aftur um tær ‘stóru’ ráðandi frásagnirnar um samfelagsbroytingar í Føroyum við tí fyri eyga at opna fyri einum breiðari og meira kritiskum kjaki um kompleksa samspælið millum framhald og broyting í føroyska samfelagnum.

Sum ungt og fáment oyggjasamfelag langt úti í Atlantshavi eru Føroyar sum skaptar til skaldbornar myndir av einum eksotiskum og tíðarleysum plássi, har fólk liva í samljóði við náttúruna og uttan at stúra fyri øllum tí, sum hendir handan havsbrúnna. At Føroyar ikki einans eru eitt lítið oyggjasamfelag, men haraftrat

ikki hava verið sjálvstøðugt ríki í túsund ár, hefur eyðsæð eisini ávirkað søguskrijvingina og samfelagsmyndina. Ein stórir partur av tilfarinum um Føroyar undan tjúgundu øld er skrivað av donskum ella øðrum útlenskum prestum, amtmonnum, keypmonnum, vísindafólkum og ævintýrarum. Føroyar vóru hjá hesum høvundum (harav teir flestu vóru menn) at rokna sum eitt ‘óskrivað blað’, sum teir kundu vera við til at mynda og seta inn í ein størri kontekst. Jørgen Landt sigur til dømis í sínum kenda verki *Forsøg til en beskrivelse over Færøerne* (1965):

De til Færøer rejsende unge Præster ville finde sig tjente med den Forkundskab, som de af dette mit Skrift kunne indhente om hine Øer, deres beboeres Økonomie og Landbrug, der er saa paafaldende forskjellig fra det, de kunne have seet i de øvrige danske Provindser; og Færøboerne selv ville heri finde et og andet Vink til Forbedring i deres Landhusholdning, dersom de kunde overtale sig til at benytte sig deraf.

Føroyar vóru øðrvísi og til tíðir ringar at skilja hjá hesum høvundum, sum í nógvum førum høvdu hug at dúva uppá einfaldar myndir av mótsetninginum millum hitt siðbundna (bygda-) og modernaða (býar-) samfelagið í sínum frágreiðingum. Seinastu árin hava søgufrøðingar og aðrir føroyskir samfelagsgranskarar leitað djúpt niður í skjalagoymslurnar fyri at eftirkanna, hvat ið ‘veruliga’ hefur elvt til hvørjar samfelagsbroytingar í landinum í farnum øldum – og harvið eisini farnir at seta spurnatekin við eldri ráðandi søgufrágreiðingar, hvat ið hesum viðvíkur. Erling Isholm hefur í bókini *Fiskivinnan sum broytingaramboð hjá amtmanninum* til dømis greinað leiklutin hjá amtmanninum í moderniseringini av føroyska samfelagsbúskapinum í nítjandu øld. Christian Pløyen og Tillisch-brøðurnir, sum vóru ungir og væl útbúnir, tá ið teir byrjaðu sínar starvsleiðir í Føroyum, høvdu stórar visjónir fyri Føroyar, fortelur Isholm:

Fyri teir vóru Føroyar afturúrsgladdar, og tí tóku teir stig til ein hóp av ymiskum nýskipanum. Ferð eftir ferð rendu teir seg í trupulleikan við, at Einahandilin var ein forðing, og tí gjørdist tað við tíðini høvudsspurningurin, hvussu Einahandilin kundi takast av á ein hátt, sum var so lítið skaðiligur fyri føroysku almúguna, sum til bar. Hugburðurin millum ráðandi embætismenninar var púra greiður, at føroyingar ikki vóru til reiðar at taka við frihandlinum, og uppgávan var tí at menna fólk við til komandi tíðina við fríum handli. Á henda hátt endaðu Føroyar í einari støðu, sum kann samanberast við „waiting room of history“, sum indiski søgufrøðingurin Dipesh Chakrabarty hevur nevnt støðuna, har koloniserað fólk verða sett í eina bíðistøðu, til umboðini fyri koloniveldið halda, at tey eru klár at taka ímóti onkrum nýggjum. (Isholm 2020: 22)

Hetta er eitt dømi um, hvussu nýggj søguskiving hjá føroyskum granskarum kann vera við til at rætta og ríka okkara fatan av eini broytingartíð í Føroyum. Um ein broyting er góð ella ring fyri eitt samfelag, er eisini ein spurningur, sum serfrøðingar og leikfólk kunnu vera djúpt ósamd um. Tað kann taka fleiri ættarlið, áðrenn mann fær frástøðu til eina serliga ógvusliga hending í samfelagnum.

Oyggjasamfeløg verða ofta lýst sum pláss, ið hava síni heilt serligu eyðkenni, og sum ikki kunnu samanberast við onnur samfeløg. Í veruleikanum hava tey nógv í felag. Ikki bara tað at tey liggja í havinum, men eisini tað at tey hava havt nógv meira samband við umheimin enn tað, ið fólk hava lært í skúlabókunum. Sum longu nevnt, so hava vitjandi ofta sæð oyggjarnar sum eina leivd av eini gloymdari fortíð og sostatt eisini sum eitt slag av livandi savni, ið ikki tolir stórar broytingar. Jean Charcot, franski pólgranskarin, sum javnan vitjaði Føroyar í skonnartini hjá sær fyrstu árinum í tjugundu öld, sigur í bókini *Ferðir til Føroyar* millum annað:

Hóast tann vælviljandi fyrisingin í Danmørkini hevur bót um korini hjá føroyingum í tann mun, tað er gjørligt, og hevur lætt um samskiftið við umheimin, eru teir tó noyddir at líta á seg sjálvar í øllum [...] Fyrimumirnar av framstignum [í samfelagnum], um framstigið kemur líðandi og varisliga, gera henda oyggjaflokkinn enn áhugaverdari. Danmørkin kann upp aftur eina ferð vera errin av sínum verki. (Charcot 1994)

Franski gesturin var hugtikin av fólkinum og náttúruni og gav Danmark stóra æru fyri at føroyingar sluppu at liva, sum teir gjørdu. Føroyingar eru her statistar á einum vøkrum leikpalli. Teir skriva ikki sína søgu, men geva teimum vitjandi forvitnisligt tilfar at skriva um. Ein máti at loysa skrivningina úr søguligum hafti er at seta oyggjasamleikan í brennidepilin. Hvat er ein lítill oyggj? Nær er ein oyggj lítill og nær er hon stór? Hetta veldst sjálvandi um eygað, sum sær. Amerikanski antropologurin Dennis Gaffin sigur, eins og so nógv onnur vitjandi fólk hava sagt í líknandi vendingum, at “as a faraway place in the midst of ocean, the Faeroes have always been almost mythical in character” (Gaffin 1996: 13). Hesar romantisku myndirnar, sum stava av meginlandinum, hava (lesandi) føroyingar mangan tikið til sín. Tær eru góðar til at marknaðarføra landið – til dømis í mun til ferðavinnumenningarátøk.

Í dag eru Føroyar partur av einum globaliseraðum heimi, og tað gerst alsamt truplari at varðveita (í)myndina av oyggjalandinum sum “unspoiled, unexplored, unbelievable” (óspilt, ókannað, óveruligt) – burtursæð frá í reklamutilfari hjá Visit Faroe Islands. Við nýggja altjóða áhuganum fyri Norðuratlantshavinum og Arktis í handilsligum, politiskum og hernaðarstrategiskum ljósi, eru Føroyar alt annað enn avbyrgdar og burturkrógvaðar. Í samfelagsvísindaligari oyggjagransking hevur nógv verið granskað í leiklutinum hjá havinum, ið oyggjasamfeløgini eru knýtt at. Havið kann lýsast sum ein partur av landinum í eini roynd at sleppa av

við fordómar um evarska lítlar oyggjar, sum illa síggjast á heims-kortinum. Føroyar – sjóøkið íroknað – fevna um ikki minni enn 293.620 ferkilometrar, harav 99,5% er hav. Landgrunnurin er á leið 20.000 ferkilometrar til støddar og miðaldýpdin er umleið 100 metrar. Tær eru úr hesum sjónarhorninum eitt risastórt havland.

Okkara bók, sum fyrst og fremst hyggur at broytingum í nútíðarsamfelagnum (tvs. seinastu tígguárin) ynskir at “skriva aftur” (“write back”) frásagnirnar um broytingar í mentan og samfelagi. Bókin inniheldur 5 antropologiskar kapitlar, sum viðgera ymisk evni, ið hava fylt nógv í almennum og vísindaligum kjaki seinastu árin. Vit lesa um umhvørvisviðurskipti og tilfeingi, um samferðslu og flytføri, um ferðavinnumenning og tjóðsamleika og um familjulív og nýggjar pápaleiklutir. Haraftrat er ein kapitull (inngangur), sum greiðir frá, hví oyggjasamfeløg hava verið lýst sum eksotisk tíðarleys pláss, og hvussu oyggjabúgvar kunnu fáa nýggjar myndir og frágreiðingar um framhald og broytingar í samfelagnum fram í ljósi. Bókin gevur eitt íkast til kritiska samfelagsvísindaliga kjakið, um hvussu lokal og global viðurskipti saman og hvør sær ávirka samfelags- og mentanarrák í dag. Ofta verður sagt, at Føroyar eru á einum vegamóti, men tað hevur samfelagið verið meira enn eina ferð, og tað fara at koma fleiri avgerandi tíðarskeið í framtíðini. Spurningurin er, hvussu vit fáa eitt betri innlit í okkara egna samfelag og mentan uttan at hava fyri neyðini at leita eftir svarum í gomlum tekstum á fremmandum málum.

Heimildir

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March 18th, 2025

Firouz Gaini & Annika Isfeldt

Writing Back with Change

Annika Isfeldt & Firouz Gaini

This anthology explores the Faroes, a semi-independent country under Danish sovereignty,¹ an archipelago of 18 islands in the North Atlantic Ocean, and a home to roughly 55,000 inhabitants.

Reclaiming the Insider's Perspectives

In the view from afar, small islands are often imagined as exotic insular places with secrets about the past of humanity. They are seen as ideal laboratories for the study of rituals, myths, close-knit communities, (genetic) diseases, and fauna (Gaini 2013). The Faroes² is no exception to this. Historical narratives about the Faroes have been shaped largely by imperial administrators, foreign guests, and visiting scientists who, while spending varying lengths of time in the archipelago, produced something akin to

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- 1 The relation between Denmark, Kalaallit Nunaat, and the Faroes is often referred to as The Unity of the Realm (Ríkisfelagsskapurin/Rigsfællesskabet) (Harhoff 1993), but this term is misleading as it conceals the historical asymmetry between the countries, as well as the fact that Kalaallit Nunaat and the Faroes continue to be 'junior partners' within the unity (Adler-Nissen 2014; Jensen 2018; Gad 2020). Therefore, we refrain from using this term.
 - 2 It's not just a linguistic issue whether to refer to 'The Faroes' in the singular or plural. Throughout the anthology, we use the singular form to emphasize 'The Faroes' as a country, rather than referring to it as a collection of islands.

‘hit-and-run’ knowledge (Graugaard 2020), and then ultimately returned to their homes overseas. This pattern resulted in studies at an arm’s length in tones that were either romanticizing or patronizing, where the Faroese were cast as an exotic Other — characterized by perceived backwardness and a static existence, more closely aligned with their natural surroundings than their cosmopolitan Danish or European counterparts.

Outsiders have described the archipelago as, for example, a sociological laboratory (e.g., West 1972), a static and isolated system in which functional adaptations to rough natural surroundings shape the lives of the people (e.g., Gaffin 1996; Nauerby 1996; Wylie 2011a, 2011b), and where the historical events of the outside world seem far away (e.g., Pons 2011). It seems that the natural borders, finitude, and distance to surroundings mislead the reader coming from outside into believing that the Faroes is closed upon itself as a relatively simple and unchanging microcosm that can be described exhaustively. We wish to challenge and ‘write back’ (Aschcroft et al. 2002) to these external and previously dominant narratives about the smallness, slowness, and insularity of the Faroes by applying a lens of change to the archipelago.

Contrary to outside portrayals of the Faroes, the perception and concept of change is a central theme in the popular local discourse of the contemporary Faroes. As indicated by the title of the anthology, change can at times feel so pervasive here that it seems as though the ocean is continually reshaping the very rocks on which the Faroes rests. Yet the anthology does not take the popular local discourse of change at face value. Rather, from micro to macro levels, it presents a selection of studies aiming to explore and critically examine the processes of continuity and discontinuity influencing social structures, agency, innovation, syncretism, and conflict in the Faroes, both past and present.

The conversation about change within the Faroes has been multi-layered, with large national narratives about the milestones of the political history of the islands, local microhistories of social fluctuation and veiled shift, and representations of local transformation resonating global movements and crises. From this perspective, change is generated from the inside, the outside, or both at the same time. In other words, the physical border of the Faroes provided by the sea is not a sharp delineation to the rest of the world, but rather a road to neighbouring countries (and to their global discourses) that the Faroes has always been affected by and has developed synergistically. The anthology is about change that delimits chronological milestones in the history textbooks, as well as change that seem to float through elastic temporal lines. To use an expression with a maritime touch, we hope that the chapters can help to explain the relation between ‘sea change’ and other gradual and mundane passage in the Faroes and (island) societies more generally.

This introductory chapter examines complex processes of change within Faroese society, revealing the relationship between continuity and transformation, as well as between short-term and long-term shifts. It reviews changes in the Faroes through three waves: the Faroes’ smallness, islandness, and present-day context. More specifically, it pursues these questions: What has influenced perceptions and narratives of cultural and societal change in the Faroes as a small island society? And how can this knowledge help us better understand change in contemporary society?

The anthology is written by researchers to whom the Faroes is not a distant foreign entity, but an integral part of our identities.³ The Faroes is the vantage point from where we think and write about the Faroese matters that constitute both our academic inter-

3 Still, we do not wish to judge who – on a more general note – is or is not Faroese, as there are no easy demarcation lines to being a native within a specific context (Hastrup 1987; Narayan 1993; van Ginkel 1994).

ests and our everyday engagements.⁴ A knowledge producer's position shapes the knowledge they may produce (Harding 1986; Clifford & Marcus 1986; Haraway 1988), and as individuals with deep-rooted connections to the Faroes through both family ties and long-term residence, we are in a position allowing for analyses that have perspectives and nuances inaccessible to those written by outsiders. Our intimate understanding of the local culture and social dynamics allows us to identify subtleties, interpret local symbols, and comprehend unspoken assumptions that might be overlooked or misinterpreted by someone without a long-term lived experience and embeddedness within the community. Our insider perspective is what grants us the opportunity to write about change.

According to a Faroese saying, when two Faroese individuals meet, they will generate at least three disparate viewpoints. As a group of researchers with diverse lived histories and research interests, we do of course not espouse (or believe) in a singular Faroese viewpoint. Not seeking to reconcile our divergences, we believe they reflect the dynamic nature of the Faroes – a country in flux, characterized by both synergies and discrepancies, occasionally aligned, and at times dispersing directions. This is reflected in the chapters of this anthology that do not add up to a one-stringed answer to what the Faroes has been or is today.

4 Even while allowing valuable perspectives, writing about a familiar context inevitably also carries the risk of 'home blindness', where our close connection to the community prevents us from critically engaging with aspects a stranger may easily identify as worthy of analytical scrutiny (Messerschmidt 1981; Howell 2017; Anderson 2021). We embrace the potential for home blindness as an opportunity to remain professionally vigilant. It serves as a reminder to constantly question what we might otherwise take for granted and to recognize areas where our personal involvement in the themes we explore could influence our analyses (Gaini 2005). Thus, our longstanding relationship with the Faroes requires us to continually reflect on how these connections shape our perspectives and work.

Smallness

Small local places and large global questions are at the core of this anthology about the Faroes, a small Northeastern Atlantic archipelago with a large oceanic territory. In the social sciences, the examination of the ‘small’ spans a vast field of contemporary scholarship. We learn about ‘smallness’ as the (dis)advantage of small states, small islands, small communities, small minorities, and small spaces. The Faroese is, as mentioned, accustomed to being the target of such minimizing narratives influencing their representations of the country in the world. To outsiders, the Faroes may look like the thing you spot when you look through a reversed magnifier; its scope is often compressed to a miniature world in the outsider’s exoticizing representation of the islands.

The geographer Russell Fielding, who has written about whaling in the Faroes, says in the introduction to one of his books:

If you were a young Faroese boy living in the village of Nólsoy during the late sixteenth century, the scale of your world would be defined by the beaches and sea cliffs that ring your small North Atlantic island, also named Nólsoy [...] That’s the scale.
(Fielding 2018: 1)

In a dry spatial sense, it is indeed small; the Faroes measures land-mass of only 1,399 km², considering also the sea surrounding the islands and to the limits of the exclusive territorial waters, it becomes a ‘large ocean country’ (Jumeau 2013) or a ‘sea of islands’ (Hau’ofa 2008). So considered, viewing the territory to include coastal ocean, the islands become no less than around 275,000 km² – larger than Romania. From a three-dimensional perspective, including the depth of the ocean, the land becomes even bigger. In other words, the dominant two-dimensional, land-oriented carto-

graphy makes islands look smaller than they are, and continental countries look bigger than they are. These academic and political rewritings of size that include both dry and wet territories are politically charged. They intentionally contest uninformed continental and colonial narratives about island communities as isolated, backward, and unchanging (Gaini and Nielsen 2020: 1). It is time to reconsider how we perceive islands - in the Faroes and beyond; islands need to have the maritime territory taken into account when viewing their world.

The Faroese writer and artist William Heinesen un-reverses the magnifier in a creative attempt to maximize, rather than minimize, his treasured native islands. His perspective is land-centric in the sense that he subscribes to the old narrative of the land-sea dichotomy, rather than integrating them to the same extended aquapelagic landscape. Nevertheless, he uses poetic reflection to reveal that the tiny 'empty' place in the ocean in fact contains a universe full of colours and variations when you take a closer look at it. In a much-quoted passage from his novel *The Lost Musicians*, he writes:

Far out in a radiant ocean glinting like quicksilver there lies a solitary little lead-coloured land. The tiny rocky shore is to the vast ocean just about the same as a grain of sand to the floor of a dance hall. But seen beneath a magnifying glass, this grain of sand is nevertheless a whole world with mountains and valleys, sounds and fjords and houses with small people.
(Heinesen 2006 [1950]: 1)

It is tiny from the cosmos, but massive in the islanders' cultural imagination. It is almost invisible in the massive ocean yet feels like a continent when you travel its fjords and mountains (Wylie and Margolin 1981: 13). It is a common cultural imagination to see the Faroes as the small and resilient brother in relation

to the surrounding Atlantic Ocean. Smallness, says the Faroese writer Gunnar Hoydal in an essay, is “our curse and blessing, our limitation and special potentiality” (Hoydal 1987). His dualistic, rhetorical, and experimental approach is tailored for a poetic essay raising awareness of the nation’s qualities, but it also resonates with counternarratives against the continental (and often colonial) gaze downsizing island worlds.

In a globalizing yet increasingly chaotic and fragmented world, many people seem to have a high regard for the imaginaries of smallness – and, in geographical terms, for small-scale island settings – contrasted against the labyrinthine, stratified, and hurried landscape of large systems. It seems that the prevailing narrative of ‘small is ugly’, following from ideas of modernization and centralization in the final decades of the 20th century, have been turned into the (reinvigorated) narrative of ‘small as beautiful’ in the beginning of the 21st century. And from this vantage point may follow positive stories about small islands.

Writing back, islanders can turn the smallness to a positive aspect of their society. In an exploration of smallness regarding the Seychelles, the anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2020: 18) suggests seven general advantages of the small scale:⁵

5 Eriksen’s objective is to show that there are understudied and undervalued positive social dynamics in small islands that are in the shadow of elegiac narratives about vulnerable island worlds. This is an analytic way of empowering the weak. He is not seeking to undermine the fundamental societal problems on people’s minds in island communities, however. Especially in the Global South, climate change, for example, risks making the whole discussion about the seven advantages irrelevant. Will the islands disappear? And how will the current neocolonial and new geopolitical interests of regional and global superpowers that are also targeting vulnerable small islands in the Global South – appropriating land for military bases, prisons, refugee camps, secret detention centres, laboratories, the extraction of marine resources, and so on – continue in the future? These questions remain open and show the vulnerability that smallness may also entail.

1. The importance of a single person is disproportionate to the size of the society (individuals ‘punch above their weight’).
2. The country’s international influence (e.g., in international organizations) is stronger than the size (population and geography) indicates.
3. Smallness entails flexibility (smaller societies can change course more easily than large ones).
4. Generally, there is stronger trust in institutions in small-scale societies than in large-scale ones.
5. Smallness serves as a disincentive against invading foreign cultural influence (e.g., no IKEA, Macdonald’s or KFC).
6. In small societies, many tasks are accomplished more rapidly and efficiently (e.g., no traffic jams, unlike in big cities).
7. The flexibility associated with smallness can mobilize (individual) creativity and (collective) vision in small societies but is unavailable in larger ones.

Several among these seven suggested strengths bear upon the scholarly conversation about change in the North Atlantic. Combined, they might suggest that (societal) smallness makes the individual (with agency) larger than they appear and that smallness frees up space for change. In other words, smallness is associated with flexibility, which makes it easier to manoeuvre towards a new – altered – state of society. As people of the Faroes know, it is easier to change the speed and direction of a small boat than of a super tanker. The small boat might look vulnerable in the ocean, but it adapts to the waves of the sea. Flexibility is defined as an ‘uncommitted potential for change’ in Gregory Bateson’s theory on the ecology of mind (cited in Eriksen 2016: 24). In a flexible system, ‘many things can be done differently; it has not locked itself to one particular course’ (ibid 2016: 26). This kind of flexibility, which might be more influential in small-

scale communities than in large modern societies, needs to be taken seriously in analyses of the processes of social change in the Faroes.

Islanders have various motivations for the project of writing back their histories, because this writing can be the result of ambivalent feelings, identities, and postcolonial political and cultural discourses. When Trobriand people (re)discovered and started reading Bronislaw Malinowski's famous anthropological monograph about their archipelago located in Melanesia, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1961 [1922]), some of them came to refer to it when presenting their culture and history to tourists and other visitors. While Malinowski's monograph is a classic that can be recommended to readers, Trobriand people also have reasons to write back and communicate new stories about themselves as island people, but as the example shows, it is not straightforward to (re)represent one's own story when it has already been represented by others.

There are many levels of smallness; some societies are extremely small while others are relatively small. For many small islands in the world, it used to be difficult to travel to and from the place, as well as to integrate it into a larger society, before they got a bridge or tunnel (creating a fixed link) to a larger neighbouring island or continent. In the case of the Faroes, processes of globalization have made the country smaller and bigger at the same time: Small as people and places (inside the islands) are becoming closely connected because of new technologies, transport infrastructures, and globalizing lifestyles, yet also large as the Faroes is becoming connected by global (digital) networks, regulations, and associations. In the globalizing world, we may say that no island is an isolated island entity.

Islandness

Small islands have been illustrated as “places ‘away’ where anything can happen” (Boon et al. 2018: 2). From the continental urban

view, small islands may appear disconnected from the rapid change associated with globalization, but islanders do not perceive themselves to be remote from the activities of overseas nations (Ardener 2012).

Change in the Faroes, as an oceanic island society with no adjacent neighbour, is related to the sea, not simply in a metaphorical sense (as in ‘sea change’), but also in a cultural and social meaning. Most things triggering change were at some point in history linked to seaborne ‘cargo’ reaching the shores of the Faroes. Like driftwood washing ashore, new things and ideas usually have a veiled story leading to places beyond the horizon. The islanders have from the beginning been trained to keep an eye on the waterfront in search of unfamiliar movements and activities (Gaini 2022). This does not mean that islanders are missing the capacity for endemic creative and scientific innovation leading to social transformation; rather, the inspiration and motivation for change often has its seeds in objects and ideas from the other side of the ocean (Gaini 2011). The ‘other side’, as the supernatural parallel world of nonhuman earth- and sea-dwellers, was also believed to provoke change and rupture in the premodern Faroese peasant society (Gaini 2022).

Until the era of modern aviation, the harbour was the centre of all transit in/out of the islands and hence drove the processes of transformation in the islands. The maritime culture and society, connecting the Faroese to the sea, has influenced life and work in the islands since the Viking era, and the Faroese economy has relied heavily on its fisheries since the latter half of the 19th century (Joensen 1985). The best part of the Faroes is what is “never lifted to the surface”, says Sigurð Joensen (1987) in a poem about the maritime knowledge of Faroese coastal fishermen. Joensen refers to the cultural and economic value of the maritime territory that is under the surface of the sea (see also Gaini, this volume).

There is an important difference between *one* island and a group of islands, for example in the case of the Faroes, because the archipelago with straits, fjords, inlets, and promontories might constitute a much more complex geography with variation in its settlements and local environments. The coastline of the Faroes has a total length of more than 1,100 km of beaches, cliffs, and foreshores. Seashores, says John Gillis, symbolize “precarious but seductive places [...] associated with both arrivals and departures” (Gillis 2012: 60-62). The insular morphology of the place is therefore an interesting element in the critical study of social change.

In the Faroes, a society with a littoral culture and global maritime ambitions, knowledge of the adjacent sea has engendered a sensitivity to change (Gaini 2022). Not located in just *any* sea, but in the notoriously unpredictable and insidious North Atlantic, the Faroes is a place where the weather changes by the hour, and where all seasons of the year seem to fit into one and the same day. This inspires the notion of it as a ‘land of maybe’,⁶ so dubbed in an amusing essay by an English serviceman stationed in the Faroes during World War II (Norgate 1943). Without much knowledge of Faroese culture and history, he mulled over the word ‘maybe’ as used by islanders in their everyday communication about work, travel, family activities, celebrations, and so on. The Faroese, he says, is “ruled under despotism – the not so benevolent despotism of the weather” (Norgate 1943). His account of the Faroese ‘maybe’ presents a romanticizing colonial narrative of the islanders’ relation to nature, and it exaggerates and simplifies

6 Curiously, similar descriptions have been applied by outsiders coming to other colonial areas. For example, the Americans arriving to Kalaallit Nunaat called this the *land of immaqa* (Inuktitut for “maybe”) to describe an ethos of Kalaallit Nunaat adaptability and openness to change; and the novelist Joseph Conrad referred to African countries as ‘lands of maybe’, suggesting that they are unknown, uncertain, and morally ambiguous, in his 1902 novel *Heart of Darkness*.

the opposition between islanders and non-islanders regarding the role of nature and weather in their everyday lives. Nonetheless, like today's Trobrianders representing their homes by referencing Malinowski's old observations, 'the land of maybe' has become a popular expression among Faroese writing about Faroese culture in texts introducing the 'exotic' country to tourists and other visitors. And the 'maybe' has – from the insider's perspective – many other meanings that do not necessarily refer to adaptation to ecological and climatic environments.

Still, the island nature, and especially the ocean between the archipelago and other countries has defined the volatile links between the Faroes and the rest of the world, historically and culturally. The ocean is isolating and protecting, but it is also a highway with people, commodities, and ideas moving in and out of the island community. At present, these connections are changing through a process of de-archipelaging, whereby new inter-island bridges and tunnels are connecting parts of the archipelago previously divided by the sea, and where an increasing number of flights and boats minimize the distance to the rest of the world.

The Present-day Faroes

Let us now turn our attention to some of the significant, streamlined, and opposing changes occurring in the Faroes today. In general, the societal prospects are positive. The population of the country has been growing for many years, the cultural scene is blooming, and the national political discourse towards the world is characterized by strong self-confidence and ambitious plans. The Faroes' GDP has doubled between 2009 and 2022 (Johansen 2023: 40), and the unemployment rate has remained stable at around 1% in recent years (Hagstova Føroya 2025). This economic upswing has prompted the current government coalition to, for the first time in 20 years, plan a

reduction in the annual block grant the Faroes receives from Denmark, aiming to increase independence. If realized, the block grant will be cut down by 100 million DKK over its four years in government and will end at 541 million DKK in 2026 (Jákupsson 2022).

Of course, this is a short and simplified image of trends and developments in the Faroes today. The fishing industry has many unresolved challenges that might impact the Faroese economy negatively in the years ahead of us. The dominance of the fishing sector, which accounts for roughly 95% of export income, along with the lack of a diversified economic structure, puts the Faroes at a disadvantage in global competition. The fishing sector has substantively driven this expansion, but dependence on the fishing industry leaves the economy susceptible to fluctuations in livestock prices, international relations, markets, and maritime environmental conditions (Hovgaard 2002). In a critical review of the governance and management of the Faroese fishing industry, economists Hans Ellefsen and Daniel W. Bromley argue that “The Faroe Islands is an exemplar of what should *not* be tried in the way of fisheries governance and management” (Ellefsen and Bromley 2024: 1). Their article concludes:

The Faroes is a small fishing nation with a parliament of just 33 individuals. This governance regime creates an ideal setting for micro-managing an important economic sector. Unfortunately, economic coherence can be elusive under committee rule. Flawed fisheries governance continues to undermine rational fisheries management (policy) in the Faroes.

The huge quantity of fish caught, processed, and (almost entirely) exported by Faroese companies has been illustrated in an article written by human ecologist Ragnheiður Bogadóttir:

Per capita, fish catches went from 80 kg in 1903 to almost 14 tons in 2017, corresponding to a 175-fold increase. A large proportion of this catch is exported, more than 500,000 tons in 2017, corresponding to more than 10 tons per capita. In the quarter century between 1993 and 2017 total physical exports grew from 176,000 tons in 1993 to 589,093 tons in 2017. Physical export in 2017 corresponds to more than 11 tons per capita. In comparison, physical export in the EU is approximately 1 ton per capita. (Bogadóttir 2020: 4)

To strengthen and diversify the Faroese economy, the Løgting (Faroese Parliament) has, over the past decades, focused on promoting tourism as a new supplementary industry alongside fisheries. Spearheaded by the innovative and award-winning advertisements of the nationally owned tourist agency, P/F Visit Faroe Islands (VFI), the archipelago has garnered attention from a large international audience, and in 2021, the world's largest travel guide, Lonely Planet, highlighted the Faroes as one of the world's best destinations to visit (Tyrl 2021). The current global interest in the Faroes as a travel destination is not only the outcome of VFI's hard and focused work for Faroese tourism, but also the result of a trend making island communities attractive as 'unspoiled' tourist destinations. Researchers have pointed out that islands "are gaining worldwide interest and [...] are increasingly seen as marketing opportunities" (Santana et al. 2024). It is becoming easier and faster to make the journey to the 'exotic and remote' islands in the oceans. Echoing the previously dominating outside narratives about the Faroes, some wealthy tourists from the Global North see the Faroese as inhabitants of an otherwise bygone past (see e.g., Satariano 2019; West 2021), but the Faroese have nonetheless begun appreciating their homeland with a newfound admiration due to the increasing

outside interest in the Faroes as a worthwhile tourist destination (Rønne 2020; Gaini 2024b; Isfeldt, this volume). In years to come, the fresh ‘coolcation’ trend (tourists heading north/south in order to avoid extreme heat and drought in the traditional sunny tourist destination) might also attract new groups of tourists to the ‘cool’ Nordic region, including the Faroes.

Faroese popular culture is also experiencing a ‘coolification’ (Pedersen 2022), with artists like Týr, Teitur and Eivör gaining recognition for their unique musical styles, the double Michelin-starred restaurant Koks redefining local cuisine, and woollen fashion by Guðrun & Guðrun capturing global interest (Gaini 2023). This coolification is likely part of the reason that, unlike previous generations, most Faroese youth today choose to continue to live in the archipelago (á Rógvi & Reistrup 2012; Hayfield 2017; Hagstova Føroya 2022). They see new opportunities at home, and they carve out different life trajectories than did generations before them (see e.g., Biskopstø 2016 or Holm 2021 on employment within fishery). This trend can easily turn, however, as has happened many times before, and the attractiveness of the Faroes based on a cultural ‘coolification’ effect cannot convince the youth generation to stay in the country if there is not a degree of national economic and political optimism in the islands.

The demographic composition of the Faroes is changing as the number of international migrants moving to the Faroes is growing rapidly. Between 2010 and 2023, the percentage of immigrants grew from 1.5% to 5.5% (Hayfield 2024: 2), most of whom move to work, to marry, or to join semi-professional Faroese sport clubs (Ísfeldt 2019; Holm 2021). Unlike previous waves of immigration, which mainly had other North European countries as point of departure, today’s immigrants come from all over the world. These new groups of people have settled in the Faroes and challenge the relatively homogeneous

structure – culturally, linguistically, and ethnically – of the Faroese society of the 20th century (Johannesen 2012).

Recent discussions of family, gender, sexuality, and childrearing not conforming to the dominant conservative heteronormative model have gained traction in public debates, leading to calls for political reform (see e.g., í Skorini et al. 2022; Gaini 2024a; Hermannsdóttir & Nolsøe 2024). A clear indication of the shift in opinions on sexual minorities and new alternative family types could be seen in the summer of 2012, when the Faroese subsection of the LGBT+ movement advocating for gender and sexuality rights mobilized almost 5,000 participants (i.e., 10% of the total population) for their annual parade, and in the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2016 (Gaini 2024a). However, these developments have not been without controversy, and not all changes have promoted equality. For instance, 2021 legislation granting equal parental rights to same-sex couples regarding their joint children passed only after having brought the government to the brink of collapse (Hansen 2021). Furthermore, a proposal to change the Faroese abortion law – which is among the strictest in Europe – fell in 2024 because of a tie of votes.

The question of religious belief is an undercurrent in the above-mentioned discussions of change in Faroese culture and society. The strong polarization witnessed in public debate on moral education, sexuality, family values, and Faroese culture is often closely linked to the question of the role of religion in islanders' identities. Many Faroese hold an unwavering religious belief and follow the Lutheran Church, the Pentecostal movement, or other independent churches. The role of religion in shaping Faroese society is evident in various aspects of life, including education, politics, and cultural traditions, and the churches and congregations in the Faroes play a significant role in community events and social welfare pro-

grammes, where they prioritize personal commitment and have a strong presence in the community (Jensen 2021). Religious practice has undergone several changes over recent years (í Skorini et al. 2022), however. Although no polling has evidenced this, it is believed among scholars of religion in the Faroes that Faroese youth increasingly identify as non-religious or atheist.

Independence from Denmark represents a defining debate in Faroese politics, and three of seven parties currently in parliament are mainly pro-separatist.⁷ Since the *Home Rule Act* (*Heimastýrislóg*) of 1948, the subsequent *Takeover Act* (*Yvirtøkulóg*) and the *Foreign Policy Act* (*Uttanríkispolitiska lóg*) of 2005, the Faroes has gradually assumed responsibility for competences pertaining to the Faroese nation. As it stands, Faroese laws continue to be shaped in accordance with the Danish constitution. The Faroes (in line with Kalaallit Nunaat⁸) holds two seats within the Danish Parliament, although what influence these politicians ought to have on politics in (The Kingdom of) Denmark is a continuous topic of both Faroese and Danish debate (Johannesen 2016; Skaale 2019; Baungaard 2022).

7 It remains a subject of debate – in Faroese, Danish, and international academic circles, as well as in public discourse in the Faroes – whether or how the relation between Denmark and the Faroes may accurately be described as colonial, or if it is better characterized as a dynamic of centre and periphery (e.g., Thisted 2006; Mitchinson 2012; Simonsen 2012; Körber & Volquardsen 2014; Pedersen 2017; Jensen 2018; Kočí & Baar 2021; Nolsøe 2023; The Kinship and Coloniality Collective forthcoming). Possible definitions of the relationship are not continuous; they change with the narratives of the present and what light these enables us to structure the events of the past within. But for the readers to understand the contemporary changes occurring in the Faroes, we believe it is important to recognize that the historical asymmetry between the two countries has had paternalistic, discriminatory, and extractivist traits.

8 Like the Faroes, Kalaallit Nunaat has gradually pursued greater independence. It was granted home rule in 1979 and self-government in 2009; however, Denmark retains control over more competencies and provides a larger block grant to Kalaallit Nunaat than to the Faroes. Interestingly, political opinions on independence vary between the two countries. While the issue remains divisive in the Faroese parliament, 4/5 parties in Kalaallit Nunaat are currently in favour of independence.

The delineation of political jurisdiction between Denmark and the Faroes is in many cases ambiguous. Denmark frequently intervenes in matters deemed ‘too serious’ for the Faroese to manage independently. The mechanism is particularly evident in areas framed as ‘security politics’, which are administered by Denmark, as opposed to ‘trade politics’, managed by the Faroes. Through a process of securitization (Wæver 1995), extraordinary measures are justified by perceived security threats, allowing Denmark to exert control over the situation (Bostrup 2020; Hagemann-Nielsen et al. 2023).

The Faroes is in the middle of a geopolitical maelstrom today, as established power dynamics in the Arctic/the North Atlantic are being destabilized, paving the way for new centres of influence, and granting agency to the countries within the region (Gad et al. 2018; Thisted & Gremaud 2020; Adler-Nissen et al. 2021; West 2024).⁹ China, Russia, and the U.S. have all been considering and engaging in close dialogue with the Faroes as a society to establish strategic commercial, technological, political/diplomatic, and maritime collaboration (í Skorini et al. 2024). American president Donald Trump has recently (January 2025) reiterated his direct interest in appropriating Kalaallit Nunaat because of American security needs, as a reaction to Russian military ambitions in the Arctic. This provocative rhetoric has yielded new political debate about (neo)colonialism, independence, and strategic alliances in Kalaallit Nunaat, and it also forces the Faroes to reassess its position in the Danish Kingdom, Nordic Atlantic, Europe, and part of the so-called ‘Western world’.

9 However, it is worth noting that the room for manoeuvre for the Faroes and Kalaallit Nunaat, both within The Kingdom of Denmark, is very different. Kalaallit Nunaat has both been shown more attention from global superpowers and, ironically, simultaneously been pushed towards less independence. For example, when Donald Trump aired the idea of ‘purchasing Kalaallit Nunaat’ from Denmark in 2019, the Danish administration began underscoring the intimacy of Danish-Kalaallit Nunaat relations. And when Chinese suggested they could build a new flight infrastructure in Kalaallit Nunaat, Denmark suddenly found the money to subsidize these buildings instead.

Recent examples interweaving geopolitics, defense alliances, and trade show what waves direct change in the Faroese national identity, and how the islanders are rethinking their relation to the world. In September 2019, one of the parties in the Faroese coalition, the religious Miðflokkurin (The Center Party) that held the post of the minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, wanted to align with the American administration of Donald Trump by controversially recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and establishing an embassy there, in the heart of the Israel-Palestine conflict (Jørs & Kristensen 2022).¹⁰ In November in the same year, a leaked audio recording revealed Chinese pressure on the Faroese prime minister to adopt the Chinese technology giant Huawei's 5G network in exchange for trade access to the Chinese market, highlighting the intricacies of international relations (Winther & Kruse 2019). And since 2015, Faroese trade agreements with Russia have been strongly criticized by the European Union. The tension and political dispute were based on EU's unfulfilled expectation that the Faroes (a non-EU country) would decide to follow EU's 'restrictive measures', i.e. trade sanctions, on Russia, instead of continuing to engage in trade with Russia (í Dali 2015). Since the beginning of the large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the conflict has also been linked to discussions about security with reference to the risk of Russian sabotage and espionage operations in the island society. As the examples show, the local Faroese political landscape today is strongly influenced by complex conflicts, crises, and new alliances in the globalizing world. The fast pace and the vast unpredictability of these developments make it difficult for the island society to interpret and prepare for the temporal and spatial shocks and ruptures coming in waves to its shores.

10 The Faroese embassy to Israel was later established, but with an office in Tel Aviv instead of Jerusalem.

The Faroese filmmaker Sakaris Stórá's recent film *The Last Paradise on Earth* (2025) tells the story of a young man from a small village who refuses to leave when the local fish factory faces closure, and the future of the community looks dire. The village is the young man's 'paradise' in a fast-changing world. Small islands have often been illustrated as paradise from the view of the outsiders, but it might also represent (another) paradise in the view of the locals. In Stórá's film, the de-exoticized paradise is to be found, or rediscovered, in the simple and mundane life within the island community. In this chapter, we have seen how change and continuity in small island contexts is connected to questions about place, time and island-continent relationships. Writing back with change, we want to add new perspectives to the study of change in island communities.

Outline of the Changes Within this Anthology

This anthology deals ethnographically with a broad variety of the changes in the Faroes:

In Chapter 1, Isfeldt brings us up to date on Faroese national identity through an exploration of the rapidly growing tourism industry within the archipelago, which is making the Faroese perceive themselves with new eyes. She demonstrates how the development of tourism makes it highly challenging to take a critical stand on the consequent changes the archipelago faces, particularly in peripheralized areas.

In Chapter 2, Gaini examines the recent construction of the subsea tunnel, Eysturoyartunnilin, which links the largest Faroese islands, Eysturoy and Streymoy. In line with the global trends, the Faroes has undergone an urbanization over recent decades, with the archipelago being increasingly interconnected through the construction of (subsea) tunnels, and Gaini explores the relation-

ship between infrastructure development and a change of islandness and local island-identities.

In Chapter 3, Bogadóttir reviews 20th century changes that have led to what she describes as the *Anthropocene Faroes*, where fossil logics continue to guide sustainability efforts in the context of transitioning to renewable energy. Green awareness is only slowly translating into political practice in the Faroes, raising concerns about the urgency of transitioning to a greener economy both within the archipelago and globally.

In Chapter 4, Gaini explores the role of the family, with special focus on the position of the father and paternal masculinities. Gaini shows how ‘new’ fatherhoods and fathering practices today are shaped by intergenerational relations, life in the small island communities, and new cultural globalization. Looking at different groups of fathers, the chapter outlines a complex landscape of the various coexisting family types that constitute the Faroe Islands of the 21st century.

Taken together, do these changes place the Faroes within a sea of change? We will let our readers decide. Góðan lesihug!

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Ambassadors of Nation Branding

Annika Isfeldt

Creating and Discrediting a New National Subject in the Context of Faroese Tourism

Abstract

The Faroese parliament hopes that tourism will become a key economic pillar for the archipelago to rest on in the future. In order to convert this hope into practice, the nationally owned tourist agency P/F Visit Faroe Islands (VFI) has successfully promoted the islands on the international stage. As a result, a steadily increasing and unprecedented number of international tourists have begun visiting the archipelago. This is visibly transforming Faroese infrastructure, housing and cultural offerings, while also shifting the self-perception of the Faroese, who are growing increasingly proud of their national identity. Building on this momentum, VFI encourages Faroese citizens to view themselves as ambassadors who can help promote the archipelago simply because of their being Faroese. This blending of national identity with support for tourism makes it difficult to criticise the developments in the sector, although they profoundly influence life within Faroese society.

Keywords: *Tourism, Periphery, Nationality, Subjectivation*

Introduction

The Faroes is currently experiencing a redefinition of its place on the world map in unprecedented ways. Historically, the archipelago has primarily been engaged with and defined by its neighbouring Nordic countries, especially the imperial power, Denmark. But recent geopolitical shifts along with increasing attention toward the Faroes and its growing involvement in global affairs (as outlined in the introduction to this volume) are changing both its global positioning and its national self-understanding.

Drawing on long-term fieldwork¹¹ conducted in 2019 and 2020 across 10 of the 17 inhabited islands, this article uses international tourism¹² as a lens for exploring these changes. Over the past decade, efforts have been made to develop tourism into a key economic pillar in the Faroes, which has prompted significant visible changes to Faroese society. As I will argue, this has catalysed less visible, yet profound, shifts in the national self-understanding of the Faroese.

11 I have analysed approximately 500 pages of documents and 15 short videos, including promotional materials and tourist guides from VFI and other tourism agencies, strategic and legislative papers from VFI, social media discussions, newspaper articles, and radio and television programmes by international, Danish and Faroese media. I have also conducted participant observation across a diverse range of tourist activities, including fishing trips, hiking tours, speedboat excursions, cave concerts, ‘cultural evenings’, private dinners for tourists and trail maintenance projects, as well as industry-related events, including citizen hearings, internal meetings, conferences for private tourism organisers and excursions for foreign tour operators. Finally, I have conducted 30 open-ended interviews with staff working within the national and regional administration responsible for tourism, an NGO, a private company, the head of a tourism leadership programme and self-employed agents within the tourism sector. Throughout the project, I have, of course, also had many informal conversations with staff, tourists and participants at the various events that I have attended. Taken together, this material is vast and diverse, and as with most long-term anthropological projects, this article only focuses on a small fraction of it.

12 According to OECD, tourism comprises “the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes, different from the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited” (OECD 1998: 1). This means that the Faroese can also be tourists within the Faroes if they are ‘outside their usual environment’, i.e., visiting places in which they do not normally reside. When referring to ‘tourists’ in this article, however, this should be read as tourists visiting the Faroes from an outside.

The article is structured in two parts. The first part examines the promotional efforts of the nationally owned tourism agency P/F Visit Faroe Islands (VFI) to make tourism a new key pillar in the Faroese economy. It shows how VFI intertwines¹³ Faroese nationality with support for Faroese tourism by encouraging the Faroese to be ambassadors of the Faroes, and how this intertwining seemingly resonates with many Faroese. This is closely linked to another consequence of tourism, namely that the influx of curious visitors has led the Faroese to reassess their own identity and to take increasing pride in their country. As a result, the Faroes has become a place one will aspire to represent as an ambassador. However, as the second part of the article reveals, tourism is structured in a way that leaves little room for dissent, and criticism of the naturalised intertwining between Faroese nationality and support for tourism is stifled.

From Fishery to Diversity

The Faroese economy has relied heavily on the fishing industry since the late 19th century (Joensen 1985; Johansen 2018). This has introduced significant economic risks, as fluctuations in fish stocks, changing market prices and shifts in international relations can create considerable volatility (Hovgaard 2002; Malthe-Thagaard 2018). To mitigate these risks and create a more stable economic foundation, the Løgting (the Faroese parliament), in 2012 set out to make tourism a key pillar of the economy. At this point, the Faroes was largely off the radar for most international tourists, despite the rising trend of ‘cold islands’ as tourist destinations (Moberg 2021: 201). Revenue from tourism in the Faroes was significant,

13 I refer to VFI in the singular to underscore its unity as an agency. I was unable to gain access to conduct fieldwork among VFI's staff, and therefore, I do not have the material to analyse the differences and disagreements that undoubtedly exist among the staff.

but still relatively modest, and the sector development was still in its infancy in 2012. The Løgting's goal to turn this around was ambitious: They wanted to attract 200,000 tourists annually, create 1,000 new jobs in the sector and generate an income of 1 billion DKK by 2020 (VFI 2019b).

VFI was intended to head this transition by “coordinating, developing and branding the Faroes as a tourist destination” (Lógasavnið 2017, my translation), funded by an independent provision in the Faroese Finance Act. VFI is led by a board of eight members appointed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, including representatives from tourism, transport, sports, culture, public regional tourist offices and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Industry and Trade. On a daily basis, VFI's operations are run from a renovated warehouse a few doors down from the prime minister's office in the heart of Tórshavn's old harbour. The organisation is staffed by 12 employees, the majority of whom are young, female, hold academic degrees and have lived abroad before returning home to join VFI. Alda¹⁴, one of the staff members, explains their work in this way:

*The Faroese landscape is obviously a pretty good core product to sell, but no one knows about the Faroes. So, we have to start all our promotional videos with a voice-over introducing the name and location of the Faroes. I don't think any other country would do that in their marketing. France doesn't promote Paris by saying, 'There's a country called France, and it has a capital which is called Paris.'*¹⁵

14 All individuals mentioned in this article appear under their actual names. Due to the high level of mutual person-based recognisability among the Faroese – meaning that people typically recognise each other as specific individuals (Johannesen 2012) – it is extremely difficult to anonymise or pseudonymise Faroese individuals. However, if anyone mentioned in this article had preferred anonymity, I would, of course, have taken steps to accommodate their request.

15 I have translated all originally Faroese quotes into English.

In 2013, VFI turned the seeming obstacle of promoting a little-known destination into a unique selling point. They oxymoronically framed the Faroes as an *un-destination*¹⁶, signalling that this is a place which distinguishes itself from other tourist locations not by the features it shares with them, but by what sets it apart (VFI 2013; 2019a). They promoted the archipelago as *Europe's best kept secret* and developed a brand for it consisting of three negations: *Unspoiled, unexplored, unbelievable*¹⁷ (VFI 2019a). Then they encouraged the wider Faroese tourism sector – which consists of a few large agencies and many small, often family-run businesses – to adopt this line of branding in their work as well in order to streamline the image that tourists would have of the archipelago.

VFI's branding has hit a nerve. The agency currently has 575,000 followers¹⁸ across their various social media pages, one of their promotional videos was the third most-watched news story worldwide in 2016 (VFI in Moberg 2020: 228), and they have won over 80 international awards for their various campaigns. Over the last decade – except for the COVID-19 pandemic years 2020 and 2021, when international travel was either highly restricted or banned – revenue from tourism has kept growing. Between 2013 and 2023, overnight stays¹⁹ in the archipelago grew by 134% (Hagstova Fø-

16 In VFI's strategy for 2030, the brand has been relaunched “to be closer aligned with the views of the local population” (VFI 2023: 19).

17 Elsewhere (Isfeldt 2020), I have analysed the colonially sounding implications of the rhetoric employed by VFI. See also Lamhauge-Mortensen 2021 and Moberg 2022 for similar literary analyses of Faroese tourism as self-exotification building on colonial connotations.

18 It is difficult to determine the exact number of social media followers, as individuals may follow VFI across multiple platforms. I arrived at this total by combining the follower counts from Facebook, Instagram, X, LinkedIn and YouTube.

19 In the industry, this is thought to be the best possible way of counting the number of tourists in the archipelago. However, the number only accounts for the economic footprint of tourists' overnight stays. It does not include tourists who go camping without a licence or stay with friends or family during their visit to the archipelago.

oya 2024), and in 2022, Faroese tourism had a revenue of 900 million DKK, equalling an export share of 6% of the total Faroese economy (VFI 2023). The influence of tourism is visible almost everywhere one turns in the Faroes. New, more frequent and longer distance flight routes have been established; numerous new hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, cultural offers and cafés have opened; local tourist agencies are thriving across the islands; many Faroese have found employment in the sector; and a new tourism leadership programme has been launched in the village of Vestmanna.

At the time of writing (Autumn of 2024), the numbers suggest that tourism is well on the way to becoming a key economic pillar in the Faroes – that is, of course, granted that international trends and the economic leeway of tourists remain relatively stable. This development of Faroese tourism is a definite success of VFI’s efforts to raise global awareness of the Faroes. According to a survey conducted by the global analytics and consulting firm Gallup for VFI among tourists leaving the archipelago, tourists are very satisfied with their trip, and they agree with VFI’s branding of the archipelago as ‘unspoiled, unexplored, unbelievable’ (VFI 2020: 14).

This kind of successful tourism depends on how local communities are integrated into the tourism process (Novy & Colomb 2016), and, as we will see in the following, the Faroese play a central role in VFI’s work.

With a Little Help from the Faroese

“Dear Google. I’m the prime minister of the Faroe Islands,” the Faroese prime minister Alex V. Johannesen says with a heavy Faroese accent in a short YouTube clip. He is sitting behind his prime minister’s desk and looks straight at us with a subtle smile on his lips. “I have an important request for you.” The prime minister hopes that the technology giant will include Faroese in

its popular online translation service, Google Translate. At the time of his request, it is 2016, and Google Translate covers 103 languages which is estimated to translate over 100 billion words²⁰ daily (Turovsky 2016). But Faroese is not among the languages it covers. The prime minister sees this as a pity – not only for the 80,000 native Faroese speakers, but also for the tourists, business associates and scholars who are interested in learning Faroese, which he calls “one of the most important aspects of the Faroese culture and identity” (VFI 2017a).

The prima facie audience of the clip is, of course, Google, but the actual audience is possible future tourists. The video is part of a campaign launched by VFI that developed an alternative tool, *Faroe Islands Translate* (see faroeislandstranslate.com), for people to use while – allegedly – waiting for Google to offer Faroese translations. VFI’s tool is designed with a layout strikingly similar to that of Google Translate and allows users to learn Faroese directly from native speakers. The user enters an English word or sentence they wish to learn, and in response, a Faroese native speaker records a short video of themselves pronouncing the translation in Faroese. In less than two months, the *Faroe Islands Translate* platform amassed a repository of several thousand short videos featuring Faroese sentences, created through the collaborative effort of – according to VFI – 41% of the Faroese population, spanning all ages, genders and ethnicities (VFI 2017b). Although Google finally fulfilled Johansen’s request in the summer of 2024, adding Faroese²¹ to their Google Translate service as one of 110 new languages, the *Faroe Islands Translate* repository remains available, and it continues to offer a wide variety of phrases, such as:

20 The service has only grown more popular since then, and today it is estimated to translate 146 billion words daily (Mirela 2024).

21 When trying this out as a Faroese speaker, however, one quickly notices that many of the Faroese translations are, at best, poor and, at worst, misunderstandings.

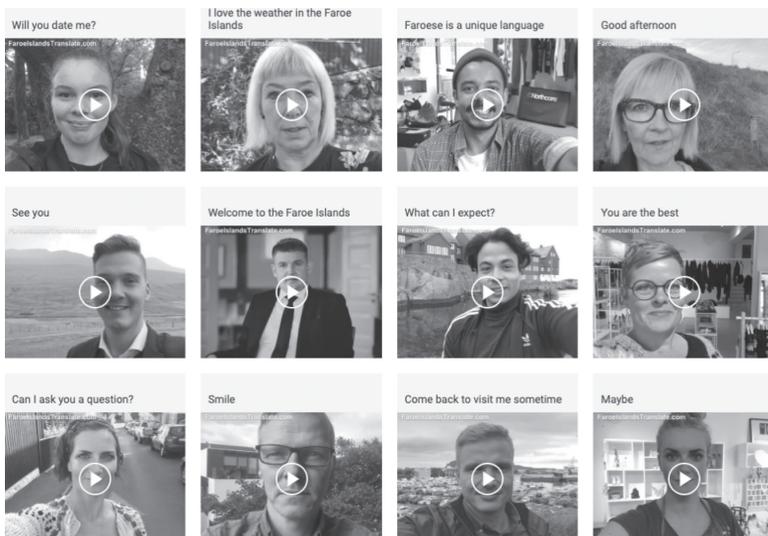


Figure 1. Screen shot from the repository on *FaroelandsTranslate.com*. Note that the second man from the left in the middle row, who translates: “Welcome to the Faroe Islands”, is the Faroese Prime Minister, Aksel V. Johannesen.

The Faroe Islands Translate campaign is not the only initiative through which VFI has sought to mobilise the Faroese to participate in their promotional efforts. In late 2023, VFI invited Faroese citizens to become ‘Faroencers’ – local influencers who share their everyday lives on Instagram, offering a more personal and relatable insight into the archipelago (VFI 2023: 19; VFI 2024). And on the Faroese version of VFI’s website, one finds a general invitation for all Faroese to consider themselves as ‘ambassadors’ of the Faroes, who can help brand their home country “in their networks, whether at meetings, as exchange students, through their digital channels etc.” (VFI 2018: 22, my translation). To facilitate this, VFI offers four different English-language PowerPoint presentations on the Faroes, which users

can download in formats of 5, 10, 15 or 20 minutes directly from their website.

In these three examples, VFI ignores the fact that the Faroese might not necessarily support tourism. Despite this, they encourage the Faroese to contribute to VFI's efforts in promoting the Faroes as a tourist destination, either through participation in official campaigns or by creating their own promotional content. Nothing in their framing suggests that the Faroese might not automatically want to be ambassadors of Faroese tourism. And perhaps this follows from the fact that it can potentially harm the work to develop tourism into a new key pillar for the Faroese economy if the Faroese do not support tourism, because the development requires significant societal restructuring.

Worldwide, locals at popular tourist destinations have protested the negative consequences of tourism (see e.g., Novy & Colomb 2016; Innerhofer et al. 2019; Vinayaka 2024), so should those aspiring to establish tourism as a key economic pillar in the Faroes not expect criticism? Perhaps. But up until recently, criticism against the shift toward tourism has been notably absent – or at least publicly quiet for a long time. I will return to the (lack of) criticism, but I first want to explore how VFI has succeeded in actively engaging so many Faroese in their promotional work, as this is also key to understanding the lack of criticism.

The Politics of Tourism

To understand how VFI reaches out to the Faroese, it is important to note that VFI is not just any company seeking attention on social media. As outlined above, VFI is closely connected to the national administration of the Faroes; as it is nationally owned, its mission is to realise the Løgting's goal of making tourism a new key pillar in the Faroese economy; it is financed by an independent provision

in the Faroese Finance Act; its board is appointed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Industry and Trade, whose ministry also has a representative on the board; it is located among the central political offices in Tórshavn; its staff can be seen as a type of public servant, and its work is vouched for by the prime minister's participation in the Faroese Islands Translate campaign.

I propose that VFI can be seen as a type of what Marxist theorist Louis Althusser (1972) has coined as an Ideological State Apparatus in his theory of how ideology works in capitalist societies. According to Althusser, ideology consists of the underlying ideas that we all hold about how the world functions, how we function within it, and how we are made subjects through the world's functioning and our own functioning within it. It is continuously constructed through the combined work of two state apparatuses: the Repressive State Apparatus, which includes institutions such as the police and army that operate through force, and the Ideological State Apparatus, which includes schools, religious authorities, the family, the media and political systems, all operating through consent (Althusser 1972: 29). VFI does not fall under any of the categories that Althusser lists as part of an Ideological State Apparatus, but these categories seem both dated and generalised. As societies vary, the defining powers of an ideology ought also to vary accordingly, and due to the close connections to the national administration of the Faroes, I propose that we consider VFI as an Ideological State Apparatus specific to the Faroese context.

An Ideological State Apparatus operates through a process of interpellation²² that Althusser famously illustrates with an example of a policeman calling out to an individual in the street:

22 'Interpellation' derives from the French word *interpeller*, meaning 'to call forth'. The concept has its roots in Freudian vocabulary but gains a new meaning with Althusser.

'Hey, you there!'. The individual promptly turns around to see who has hailed him, and "by this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject (...) because he has recognised that the hail was 'really' addressed to him (Althusser 1972: 60, my translation; italics in original).

Two processes occur simultaneously in this interaction. By voluntarily responding to the hail, the individual acknowledges that they are the body being addressed, thereby giving their consent that the hail is appropriate for them. At the same time, by responding, the individual contributes to the ongoing constitution of the ideology they are subject to, as they recognise that which has hailed them as their own ideology, internalised through the act of responding to the hail (Althusser 1972: 67). Therefore, the ideology and its subjects are mutually dependent on each other, and in interpellation, the individual is created as a subject by a power which subjugates, to which the subject submits, and which also grants freedom to the subject – that is, freedom in as much as the subject subjugates itself to ideology.

If we see VFI as an Ideological State Apparatus, its address to the Faroese takes on a new significance. Similar to Althusser's example with the policeman and the individual in the street, VFI addresses the Faroese directly as a specific type of subject: Faroese nationals that support tourism. This kind of subjectification²³ adds an interesting layer to Althusser's original theory, which primarily focused on how capitalism is reproduced by a justifying ideology, and according to Althusser, national consciousness is only

23 For other studies on changing subject positions within tourism, see e.g., Lanfant 1995; Routledge 2001; Bruner 2005.

a tool for capitalist exploitation (Althusser 1972: 155).²⁴ In our example, invoking and expanding nationality becomes a means to an economic end.

As mentioned above, VFI's address to the Faroese does not appear to leave room for them taking anything but an appreciative stand on Faroese tourism. VFI's implicit assumption seems to be: *If one is Faroese, then one also supports tourism*. Or, as VFI phrases it, they reach out to the Faroese as *ambassadors* of the Faroes. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2024), the term 'ambassador' can hold the figurative meaning of a 'representative', "a person who represents, speaks for, or advertises a particular organization, group of people, activity or brand". And bearing in mind the high participation of the Faroese in VFI's work (with, for example, 41% participating in the Faroe Islands Translate campaign alone), there is a high number of Faroese who want to be representatives of the Faroes, and who thus give their consent to being seen as the type of subject that is both Faroese by nationality and support tourism. This must be said to be an effective interpellation.

Althusser's illustration with the policeman hailing an individual in the street is arguably more dyadic than real life. For an interpellation to work, it cannot stand alone. Only if the hail resonates with the larger context of the ideology, it may function as an interpellation. As Judith Butler (1995) convincingly argues in their reading of Althusser, no subject can exist prior to a subjectification; we are all always-already subject through our being-in-the-world. Of course, a single hail cannot create or radically change a subject. In the Faroese context, this interpellation occurs against the ideological backdrop of the novel political economy of the Faroes, where tourism is developed into a key pillar that can stabilise the Faroese economy.

24 But this article is not the first to analyse the creation of national belonging using Althusser's theory of interpellation (see e.g., Finlayson 1996; Zake 2002; Mawere 2015).

When VFI addresses the Faroese, this is not an address to an imagined community (Anderson 1983). It is an address to fellow Faroese whom the VFI staff know either personally or vicariously through kinship and friendship spanning the archipelago. Reaching out to the Faroese, they address no characteristics other than the shared nationality. VFI addresses a unified, national ‘we’ in the manner which Michael Billig (1995) would characterise as the everyday deictic use of language that flags the nation in ways so subtle that they might easily be overlooked, and which he therefore calls *banal nationalism*. Billig’s own examples of this language include weather forecasts, where a weather reporter will say: ‘This is what the weather will be tomorrow,’ without specifying the location of that particular weather, or a sports journalist will proclaim, ‘We won the match,’ without clarifying who this winning ‘we’ refers to. Such sentences are highly flexible, as they can refer to different subjects depending on where they are uttered from, and for their meaning to be conveyed, the speaker and listener must therefore share a contextual understanding of who is speaking, and where they are speaking from – namely a common ground.

When VFI addresses the Faroese as a ‘we’ who can be ambassadors of the Faroes, without adding further characteristics to this ‘we’, this is the creation of a Faroese national ‘we’ that aligns with the ambition to develop tourism into a new key economic pillar within the Faroes. Or, to borrow from Althusser’s terms, it is an interpellation of a specific type of subject: a national subject supporting tourism. Following Butler, we can say that Faroese individuals, from birth, are always-already hailed as national subjects through the work of Ideological State Apparatuses and their own responses to them. When VFI encourages the Faroese to support the local economy by acting as ambassadors who help promote the archipelago to tourists, this is done against the

backdrop of the already existing and internalised ruling (national) ideology. This is an expansion of an already existing national interpellation, and it is from this existing interpellation that their address to the Faroese gains its strength. Perhaps the experience of the Faroese as national subjects is further reinforced through the collective and purposeful action of presenting the archipelago to an audience of tourists.

In the Eyes of the Guest

During my fieldwork, many Faroese, both within and outside the tourism sector, expressed that they are revaluing their cultural identity and the surrounding landscape in response to the influx of tourists.²⁵ They have become prouder of their homeland, and many are eager to share this pride with visitors. Take Durita, for example. A few years ago, she entered the tourism sector and now runs an independent agency in collaboration with her husband, Fróði. Through their work with tourists, Durita has developed a deeper appreciation for the Faroese mountains. She has taken up hiking and is now part of the ‘Topp 100’ hiking group, whose members have reached the one hundred highest peaks in the Faroes. Durita understands this growing interest in the Faroese landscape – both her own and that of fellow Faroese – through an old Faroese proverb. As she puts it:

The tourists see something we take for granted. It's like that proverb ‘Observant is the eye of the guest’ [‘gløgt er gestins eyga’]. Our backs are straighter now because we mirror what the tourists see when they visit us.

25 Bergur Rønne Moberg (2020) has also observed a recently increased pride deriving from the influx of tourists to the Faroes.

The old proverb, as Durita notes, has gained new relevance considering tourism. The influx of visitors, with their ‘observant eyes’, has encouraged the Faroese to reflect on what they previously took for granted.²⁶

When I notice the frequency of the narrative of this newfound pride, I share my observation with Oyvindur, who is the representative on VFI’s board from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Industry and Trade. He laughs and asks: “We Faroese have such a big need for confirmation all the time, it’s incredible. What is it with us?”. I believe the answer may lie in the archipelago’s (post)-colonial history. The colonial tie to Denmark has, among other things, entailed centuries of fighting to have the Faroese language and cultural identity recognised and valued (see e.g., Gaini 2009; Mitchinson 2012; Hovgaard & Ackrén 2017), when the Faroese have been portrayed as backward compared to the more ‘advanced’ and superior Danes (Jensen 2018). In other words, the Faroese have historically received very little ‘confirmation’, to borrow Oyvindur’s phrasing. According to postcolonial scholars, colonialism affects the psyche of the colonised, instilling a sense of inferiority through processes of Othering, where the colonised adopt the coloniser’s view on them and see themselves as lesser in comparison to the coloniser (Fanon 1967 [1952]; Spivak 1988; McClintock 1992). If the same holds for the Faroese, and they have internalised an imperial perspective of themselves, it explains why the Faroese ‘have a big need for confirmation all the time’, as Oyvindur says, and why they may mirror themselves in the observant (and non-imperial) eyes admiring the archipelago, as Durita points out.

26 A shift in self-perception following an influx of tourists can be found at many other popular tourist destinations around the world (see e.g., Picard 1995; Arellano 2004; Bruner 2005).

Annika, who has had a long career in the sector and now heads the tourism leadership programme in the village of Vestmanna, has noticed a shift driven by tourism that supports this postcolonial reading. She explains:

Previously – that is, maybe ten years ago – Faroese people did not think much about what it meant to be Faroese. Back then, no one would really tell you much about the Faroes if you came here as a visitor. Maybe a ‘tjóðskaparmaður’ could tell you some things about the Faroese, but then it would be in that bombastic way. Now, more people are eager to tell you about the Faroes. With the growing interest in the islands, people are starting to feel: ‘Yes, we do have something to offer here. Yes, the Faroes is an amazing place.’

In Annika’s observation that only a *tjóðskaparmaður*, which literally translates to ‘national man’ and refers to a supporter of independence from Denmark, used to be proud of the Faroes, we may trace the legacy of colonialism persisting in the psyche of the colonised Faroese. Because being proud of the Faroes then also means standing up against imperial history and its dynamics leading to inferiority. Tourists, in turn, offer the Faroese new eyes through which to view themselves, where they are increasingly detached from their colonial past.²⁷ This detachment may also be caused by the economy following tourism. Because if the Faroese tourism sector continues to thrive, it will, as mentioned, contribute significantly

27 However, it is ironic that tourists are presented to the Faroes in rhetoric with colonial connotations, as inherent in the un-destination branding, because territory such as the Faroes, which is not ‘unexplored’ to the Faroese, was historically unexplored from a colonising perspective (see also Isfeldt 2020). Either the Faroese must (whether consciously or not) overlook these colonial connections, or they must seek to reappropriate the language of the devalued categories, mirroring strategies employed by movements such as antiracists and feminists, for example ‘Black is beautiful’ campaigns (Joseph 2009), and restaging ‘slutwalks’ (Reger 2014).

to stabilising the economy, which the Løgting has established as a necessary step towards increasing independence (Jákupsson 2022). Having proposed in the above how interpellation creates the ambassador as a national subject that supports tourism, we can now add that this ambassador is in a stronger position relative to the imperial power due to the increased pride. Perhaps this colonial aspect is the reason why the national interpellation of the Faroese to be ambassadors is effective in the first place.

However, despite the positive effects tourism has had on the Faroese sense of identity and economy, not everyone is pleased with the way in which tourism is being developed in the Faroes. In the remainder of this article, I will turn to explore the downsides of tourism and the potential negative consequences of criticising its growth, using a singular case that has become a cautionary tale for those critical of tourism.

Discrediting (and Hoping to Become) the ‘Un-destination’

The village of Saksun is situated at the end of a long valley, 11 kilometres from the neighbouring villages of Hvalvík and Streymnes, and can be reached by an old and relatively unmaintained one-way road with occasional pull-off areas. Saksun became famous on Instagram after VFI used a photo of a private summer cabin on Saksun Bay in one of their social media campaigns. The cabin’s owners were not asked for permission before the campaign was launched. Nor were Sonja and Jóhan, whose farmland must be crossed to access the cabin, and this sparked the couple’s anger towards VFI.

Sonja, Jóhan and their three young daughters make up over half of the village, which has a total population of nine. Following the tradition passed down through Jóhan’s family, the couple farms the land, raises sheep and manages the approximately 300 years

old Dúvugarður, which houses a small café and a museum showcasing artefacts from different periods of Faroese history. But to the frustration of the couple, only a small fraction of the tourists visiting Saksun pay a visit to Dúvugarður. On a cloudy afternoon in June, as Sonja and I prepare waffles for the day's visitors to Dúvugarður, she suddenly exclaims: "Jóhan's off to tell someone off again! He hopes that if he tells the tourists off, they'll carry his message back to Havn²⁸." From the window, we see Jóhan speeding down the narrow road leading from their farmhouse on the mountainside in his tractor. He jumps out and walks briskly toward a group of tourists strolling around a small, whitewashed church with a grass roof. The tourists must have ignored Sonja's homemade 'keep out' signs which she has made in the hope of protecting the grass around the church, which has been so trampled by tourists that the couple's sheep can no longer graze there.

Word about Jóhan has spread. He has become famous in the Faroes after shooting at a group of tourists with a rifle. The story about the incident first appeared on *Portalurin*, the largest Faroese news portal, and then it travelled via word of mouth and was echoed to me on numerous occasions during my fieldwork. According to the story, Jóhan had grown fed up with tourists trespassing on his private property, and he had lost his temper with a group of tourists. But Jóhan had not been home when the incident allegedly occurred. In fact, it was his father who had threatened the tourists with a rifle – but he had no intention of shooting anyone. He was trying to force a group of South African tourists on luminescent skateboards to take down their drones, which were flying illegally over Sonja and Jóhan's house, where Sonja was alone with their daughters and nervous about the drones. When Sonja and Jóhan heard how the story had morphed, they tried to correct the narrative, but it was too late. The story was already irretrievable.

28 In Faroese, 'Tórshavn' is almost always referred to simply as 'Havn' ('harbour').



Figure 2. Caricature by Óli P. in the newspaper *Dimmalætting* entitled ‘Tortourisma’, collapsing the two words ‘tortur’ (‘torture’) and ‘turisma’ (‘tourism’).

Jóhan became a figure of public ridicule in the Faroes. He was mocked in newspapers and caricatured in drawings (see figure 2), and in the annual cabaret of 2018 in Tórshavn for Ólavsøka, the national holiday in the Faroes, he was portrayed running around shooting at tourists. He was a reference point at almost all the sites I visited during my fieldwork, serving as a straw man for all sorts of opinions – if only they were critical of tourism – and people would mention him either in a sympathising manner or to voice their own critiques of the tourism industry. Even tourists visiting the archipelago had heard about Jóhan. A few days before my visit to Saksun, a group of Icelandic tourists visiting the valley approached Sonja, asking if she knew how to find ‘the angry farmer’, and on the travel forum TripAdvisor, she recently came across a thread where tourists were discussing ‘how to reach the summer cabin without upsetting the angry farmer.’ “I guess ‘the

angry farmer' has become some sort of brand now," Sonja says. "It's strange to think of ourselves as villains. All we want is to be left alone, but people don't seem to understand that. Hospitality is so ingrained in Faroese culture that when we're not welcoming, they take it personally. We just don't feel like having people around us all the time. That's why we chose to live here in the first place."

Jóhan comes through the door of Dúvugarðar wearing a pair of blue work overalls and a subtle smile on his face. He helps himself to one of the freshly baked waffles and takes a seat on a rickety kitchen chair. Without commenting on what just went on outside, he instead updates me on their ongoing dispute with the municipality, which plans to expand the parking lot in Saksun by up to 97 spaces. Although the infrastructure in Saksun is ill-equipped to handle the current volume of tourists, the villagers do not want a larger parking lot. They fear it will only attract even more tourists to the area. What they would prefer, they say, is for the municipality to focus on improving the existing one-way road, which has become increasingly hazardous due to tourists who are not familiar with the way of driving there. But the municipality has been slow to consider widening the road, and Sonja and Jóhan see this as yet another example of how the authorities are more prone to catering to the tourists than caring about the villagers. "It feels like the municipality would rather have a tourist park than a living village," Jóhan says. "We are suffocating from their success. That 'Unspoiled, unexplored, unbelievable' image they want us to be – we have ceased to be just that because they have sold it to the tourists." While some farmers have begun charging fees for tourists walking on their land, Sonja and Jóhan would rather regain their privacy than benefit financially. Therefore, the couple has even considered moving further up the mountain on their property to escape the buzzing tourism.

Much like locals in other popular tourist destinations around the world who have voiced concerns about tourism (see e.g., Colomb & Novy 2016; Innerhofer et al. 2019; Vinayaka 2024), Sonja and Jóhan's objections to tourism are less about anti-tourism sentiments per se and more about the broader processes, policies and forces at play in tourism that threaten their quality of life. Though they are themselves part of the tourism industry through their work at Dúvugarðar, they are critical of how tourism is managed by the authorities.²⁹ In particular, they are dissatisfied with how the Faroese identity is misrepresented in tourism branding, with the authorities' disregard for local concerns and, more generally, with the lack of space for criticism of VFI's work.

Returning to Althusser's theory, we can see that Jóhan fails to respond to the interpellation as an ambassador when he questions the naturalised intertwinement between national identity and tourism support which is promoted by VFI and embraced by many Faroese who contribute to VFI's work. Althusser categorises those failing to respond when they are hailed as *bad subjects*. These individuals do not become interpellated because they do not recognise *das Bestehende* – the existing state of affairs – and, as a result, they pose a threat to the established social order (Althusser 1973: 66). In the Faroese case, the existing state of affairs is that tourism is rapidly becoming a new key pillar of the Faroese economy, which requires large-scale societal changes and strong popular support. By challenging VFI, Jóhan also questions this emerging political economy. And he is seen as challenging the Faroese norms for

29 Sonja and Jóhan are not the only ones living in particularly beautiful, remote areas that are difficult to access who experience the flipside of tourism. In these areas, many express frustrations over not being able to roam their home village during the tourist-crowded daytime, pressured or failing infrastructure, and a lack of income generated from the visiting tourists. Elsewhere (Isfeldt 2020) I have analysed these developments as a case of centre/periphery dynamics between Tórshavn and these areas.

being a good Faroese who welcomes tourists, because he does not display the hospitality that the Faroese expect of each other.

According to Althusser, a ‘bad subject’ provokes a response from the Repressive State Apparatus – the police or military – which works to remind the subject of their ‘proper’ place within society. In Jóhan’s case, the punishment for failing to respond when sought interpellated is less tangible. He faces gossip and ridicule, which Dennis Gaffin identifies as a common means of reasserting social cohesion in the Faroese context (Gaffin 1996: 147). Since the Faroes is akin to a ‘small village’ (Gaini & Jacobsen 2008) due to its small geographical size, small population size and high mobility, everyone knows or knows of each other, and unfortunate narratives stick to people (and often their families too), which can potentially harm one’s opportunities in society.

Despite the social pressure and ridicule, they face, Sonja and Jóhan continue to challenge the direction of tourism in the Faroes. They persist in their efforts to regain control over their immediate surroundings in an imbalanced struggle against the authorities who hold political and financial power in the tourism sector. Their efforts include protesting the municipality’s plans to build a large parking lot, posting critical comments on social media, and trying to regulate who enters their land, even confronting tourists who fail to follow the code of conduct of the village.

Though this backlash against Jóhan is not orchestrated by VFI, it aligns with VFI’s interests to have Jóhan’s serious criticisms dismissed as laughable, with ‘the angry farmer’ branding serving as a cautionary tale³⁰ for others who might consider publicly dissenting from tourism.

30 Underscoring the point here is a similar case from 2021, when the discussion about where to position the double Michelin-starred restaurant Koks sparked complaints from a neighbouring farmer, which resulted in its forced relocation by the authorities and led to a flurry of highly personalised gossip and jokes.

Epilogue

In this article, I have explored international tourism as a lens for viewing the Faroes' evolving global positioning and national self-understanding. Through an analysis of VFI's work to promote the Faroes, I have shown how nationalism and tourism become intertwined in an ambition to develop tourism into a new economic key pillar for the archipelago. And with an ethnographic example from everyday life at a popular tourist destination in the Faroes, I have shown how difficult it has been to oppose tourism in the Faroes.

During my fieldwork in 2019 and 2020, it became increasingly apparent to many Faroese that tourism-related issues required political attention. Yet, most politicians at the time were hesitant to engage in the polarising debate on tourism. Pressure on them to regulate tourism grew in the following years, culminating in the long-awaited *Ferðavinnulógin* (Tourism Industry Act), which was agreed upon by the Løgting in the summer of 2024 (Lógasavnið 2024). Recently, VFI has also taken concrete steps to address the criticism of tourism coming from the local communities in the Faroes. In their strategy for 2030, which they call *Heim* ('Home'), they recognise that welcoming tourists to the archipelago must co-exist with a preservation of what the Faroese call 'home', and they take measures catering to this balance (VFI 2023). Although these recent developments will likely have a significant impact on Faroese tourism, I have not delved into them here, as it remains unclear how the new act will ultimately influence the trajectory of tourism.

As of the Autumn of 2024, the debate between the Saksuners and VFI remains unresolved. Sonja and Jóhan are still struggling to obtain a legitimate standpoint from which to criticise what they consider to be inequalities deriving from the tourism industry, but alongside their work, the stories about 'the angry farmer' are passed on among tourists and locals, serving as a cautionary tale for other Faroese voicing criticism about tourism.

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The Subterranean Corridor

Subsea Tunnels and the Search for New Territory in the Faroes³¹

Firouz Gaini

Abstract

This chapter is based on the thesis that a ‘sea change’ is occurring in the Faroes of the 21st century and that this transformation – which in more than metaphorical nature – has been brought about by the sea. Submarine space is being appropriated in futuristic infrastructure projects that are continentalizing the Nordic Atlantic society. The relation between the world above and the world below the sea is reconfigured, and the new vertical landscape gives us the opportunity to reassess images of island communities and reflect on what an island is. The chapter discusses the value of vertical and volumetric approaches to the critical anthropological study of islands and subsea tunnels. It examines the relation between islandness, modern infrastructure, and the colonized territory below the seabed. The changes in transportation infrastructure influence the perception of the sea among islanders.

Keywords: *Tunnels, Infrastructure, Islands, Islandness, Subterranean space*

31 This chapter is a revised and updated version of the article *The Roundabout at the Edge of the World – Subsea Tunnels, the Sea, and the Islands* (2024b)

The subsea tunnels creating fixed links between previously separated islands represent one of the most spectacular spatial and social changes in the Faroes in the 21st century. The subsea tunnels play a key role in the ‘continentalization’ of an island society, which used to be based on slow interisland transport.

This chapter investigates the subsea tunnel as a materialization of imaginaries about the deep underworld and its potential for future human society. Starting with a broad discussion about the growing interest in subterranean and submarine spaces, the chapter takes a closer look at the context of the Faroes, an island society in the Nordic Atlantic. The chapter considers why so much money is put into subsea tunnel projects in the Faroes. Finally, the chapter explores the relation between islandness, fixed links, and the new territory beneath the seabed.

In the Belly of the Islands

Islands and Sub-islands

“It is not what is upon this island, but what is underneath that interests me”, says Professor Otto Lidenbrock, an eccentric geologist, in Jules Verne’s science fiction novel *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864). The professor’s nephew and travel companion, Axel, says, ‘Who would have ever imagined, under this terrestrial crust, an ocean with ebbing and flowing tides, with winds and storms?’ Subterranean fiction, focusing on fictional underground settings, existed long before Verne’s famous novel was written. In Dante Alighieri’s *Inferno*, the first part of his poem *The Divine Comedy* (circa 1321), Hell has its base at the earth’s centre, farthest from God. Humans have probably always been curious about the obscure underworld deep beneath their feet, and they continue to search for real and imagined subterranean realms. In esoteric and folkloric theories about the interior world, for example myths

based on the Hollow Earth concept, our planet contains substantial interior space. Underground creatures, which in many cases take the form of small and quite harmless earth dwellers living close to humans, are found in old mythology from all corners of the globe.

The Faroese *huldufólk* (hidden people) are, according to the folklore, black-haired supernatural beings dressed in grey clothes who reside in or beneath rocks. They have been highly respected among the islanders who, up to the second half of the 20th century, would not plan a new road or tunnel project without taking the ‘inhabited’ rocks in the landscape into consideration. Before permission was given to destroy a rock, engineers and road workers would usually be advised to consult the elders to ensure that the rock was not home to hidden people (Gaini and Jacobsen 2008: 55-57). “Humankind may claim dominion over the Earth”, writes Stephen Ellcock, “but we have barely scratched the ever-shifting surface and will always be at its mercy” (Ellcock 2023: 6). The underland, according to Robert MacFarlane, is vital to the material structures of contemporary existence, as well as to our memories, myths and metaphors. It is a terrain with which we daily reckon and by which we are daily shaped. Yet we are disinclined to recognise the underland’s presence in our lives, or to admit its disturbing forms to our imaginations (MacFarlane 2019: 13).

Interest in what lies beneath the surface, including the underwater worlds, seems to be growing among researchers, entrepreneurs, artists, and politicians. These realms hold unexploited possibilities on which to capitalize. They are also food for thought; space where the imagination blossoms. The upper layers of the underground contain sedimentary rock, rare minerals, fossilized organic materials, groundwater reserves, caves, tubes, tunnels, and so on. The earth under our feet is not eternal because it is “constantly moving, continually transforming” (Ellcock 2023: 24). The subterranean

space hides sources of large economic value, geological hazards that threaten communities, archaeological information about (pre) historic eras, strategic geopolitical interests, and important possibilities for transport infrastructure. My chapter explores the last of these elements: the underground in relation to modern transport infrastructure, or, more specifically, subsea road tunnel systems. I analyse the role of subsea tunnels in small island societies, using the Faroes as a case study. Thus, in this chapter, ‘the subterranean’ refers to space below the seabed. Faroese subsea tunnels are not *in* the ocean but deep *under* the floor of the ocean. The story about the Faroese subsea tunnels is therefore also a story about geology and new island territory.

The subsea interisland road tunnel lies at the core of this chapter. It represents a futuristic and very expensive transport technology that many island societies cannot develop because of geological, technological, or financial constraints. Such tunnels are not always a realistic dream for transport infrastructure planners. They are the bridges of the wealthiest of island societies. In a new anthology on islands and fixed interisland connections, *The Bridge Effect*, no chapter discusses tunnel systems (Brinklow & Jennings 2024). Scholarship on fixed interisland transport infrastructure has predominantly examined bridges – material, digital, and metaphorical. There are important differences between conventional bridges and tunnels. Tunnels are not directly exposed to rain, snow, fog, wind, hurricanes, large ocean waves, or other weather phenomena. The landscape of the islands cannot be seen when one drives through a tunnel. The fact that the interisland subsea tunnel is not a passage on the surface underlying the ocean but a corridor constructed deep beneath the seabed is what makes it fascinating and provocative in discussions about the boundaries between sea and land. Such tunnels penetrate rock that is not

visible on geographical maps. They are solutions connecting islands without leaving any visual trace of the link in the maritime vista.

The hypothesis of this chapter is that interisland subsea tunnels influence our perception of islands and islandness: what is an island? They represent a continentalization of island worlds. My chapter is motivated and guided by this key question: are subsea tunnels connecting islands, or are they creating new territory? Are subsea tunnels leading to a change in islanders' perceptions and construction of the sea/ocean? The chapter contributes to new perspectives on the land–sea nexus in critical island studies. It presents a new emphasis on verticality – bringing subterranean space to the fore – in a three-dimensional turn in the study of islands. The subsea tunnel demonstrates the value of territory that, strictly speaking, is neither sunlit land nor sea. Including what is under the surface, subterranean and submarine space, in island studies results in altered images and maps of island worlds. In this model, the small islands become larger, deeper, and bulkier. Transport infrastructure is therefore explored in relation to island future imaginaries, spatial integration projects, and the search for territorial enlargement. Ferry-free island-to-island movement based on motorized vehicles is changing the landscape of the Faroes, but at what cost?

Beyond Space and Time

Tunnels, as “prolonged holes”, are “thick spaces, whose atmosphere activates all our senses” (Navone & Brigenthi 2022: 5). As heterotopic spaces, they provide an experience similar to flying when they transfer people from A to B: “the climate and humidity are constant, and the weather does not exist” (Navone 2022: 11). Day and night are equal; winter and summer are one and the same thing. Therefore, says Navone, tunnels are ambivalent objects (ibid.). Modern tunnels are often associated with urban placelessness and

the lightness of being in a smooth non-place that serves modern travellers. Tunnels, showing simultaneous spatial and sensory intensities, perform “an overcoming of the constraints of space and time” (Lanng et al. 2022: 41). They may sometimes feel monotonous and mundane, but at the same time, they intensify travellers’ sensorial impressions. Subsea tunnels are not like other tunnels. From the inside, they might not differ much, but subsea tunnels are deeper underground and further away from urban centres. Humans, says Garrett, continue to burrow more deeply into the Earth, and “what is at stake is access and control over volumetric territory” (Garrett 2019). Today’s extensive disruption of underground rock, for example in the construction of road tunnels, has no analogue in the history of our planet (Zalaseiwicz et al. 2014).

Tunnel projects are never concluded. There is always a future project to be discussed and planned. Infrastructure is always in a state of ‘becoming’, unfinished, and in a state of flux because one intervention leads to other unpredictable changes in the landscape (Kourri 2022). A subsea tunnel replaces a ferry connection. In the Faroes, the ferry stops sailing the same day as the subsea tunnel opens for traffic. Many other aspects of how people plan and organize their movements in space and time change. “Nobody is really in charge of infrastructure”, writes Star, because things generally change from below without a master plan (Star 1999: 382). This evidence explains the political complexity and social role of the grassroots of society in the different stages of the process – from idea to completed construction. Infrastructural production does not *just* happen in a context because it is also productive of a context, changing the idea of place as ‘relational’ (Kourri 2022: 53). Tunnels contribute to the making *of* place. The subsea tunnel is related to the rock through which it is dug. The Faroese nature, above as well as below the sea, is therefore an important part of

the infrastructural setup. The territory beneath the seafloor is being conquered and colonized in tunnel projects.

Road tunnels have various functions. Their main function is to facilitate safe and smooth transportation from A to B. Subsea tunnels' main function is also to make round-the-clock interisland transportation fast and easy. However, they have also become attractions in themselves. In the Faroese subsea tunnels, there are large spaces where travellers can stop their cars and look at art on the walls under the ceiling. Recently, a grotto concert in the Sandoy Islands was cancelled because of bad weather conditions. The concert was moved to a place deep below the sea, in the new Sandoy Tunnel. In case of war, the tunnels might even serve as shelter or bunker sites for inhabitants escaping military action. Closed off from everyday (real life) distractions, says Hunter, “we can engage in subterranean imaginings” in subterranean spaces (Hunter 2021: 203).

Deepening the Landscape

The subsea tunnel – at the intersection of anthropology, geography, and critical island studies – is a key materialization and imagination of the ‘volumetric turn’, which investigates the territory under the surface. It forces us to rethink two-dimensional cartography and to accentuate the “volumetric approach to space” (Billé 2019: 3). It challenges representability based on conventional cartographic practices. This volumetric shift signals, Elden argues, a more radical move than simply adding a vertical axis (Elden 2017). The subsea tunnel, as well as other submarine spaces, represents spaces “challenging the assumed fixity and groundedness of space” (Billé 2019: 4). This volumetric approach to the progressive study of space indeed has a strong geopolitical dimension because knowledge and control of maritime, aerial, and subterranean realms depends on technology, science, and innovation. Tunnels, for example, “traverse spaces that are not visually accessible”

and “constitute vectors of movement that elude, challenge and complicate surficial inscriptions” (Billé 2022: 145 + 148).

To date, there has been limited research interest in the vertical expansion of the domain of islands and what is far above and deep below the surface of the earth, even if a growing curiosity about unexplored submarine territories seems to inspire contemporary discussions about islands and islandness (Fleury 2013). One of the original and inspiring ideas about the land–sea continuum in island studies is found in the concepts of the aquapelago and aquapelagic assemblages. The aquapelago, comprising “an integrated land and aquatic space” (Hayward 2012b: 2), is a concept developed by Hayward in the quest to expand our understanding of the role and meaning of aquatic spaces in the lives and cultures of people living in island societies. The aquapelago is, in brief, “an assemblage of marine and land spaces of a group of islands, and their adjacent waters” (Hayward 2012a: 5).

The air above the waters and land, the weather that occurs in it, the windblown seeds and species that are born by it and the birds that inhabit the air, sea and land are just as much part of the integrated space of the aquapelago [...] Indeed, it is the multiplicity of submarine depths, of regions of water and currents, of seafloor surfaces and their interactions with topologies of land and of aerial and weather systems, and of flows of materials between them, that produces an aquapelago.
(Hayward 2012b: 2 + 12, my italics)

The aquapelago is a performed entity produced when people ‘occupy and interact with’ integrated land and sea spaces.

The subsea tunnel is also a construction resulting in large-scale movements of materials. When the tube is excavated, an enormous

amount of rock is transported to the surface. It is used to create deep wharfs, jetties, roads, and other features. From this perspective, subsea tunnels have a significant impact on infrastructure above the sea. Tunnelling the territory beneath the seabed expands the volume of the territory above the sea. Subsea tunnel roads also have a section that is above the sea (linking the tunnel to the main road system), and this stretch of road is politically contested: where shall the tunnel entrance be located? Where shall the tunnel start and end? A subsea tunnel project, which has its entrance/exit within or close to a village or town, is planned in relation to economic, geographical, geological and social considerations: how to plan a road leading to the tunnel that causes the least possible disturbance to people, animals, and land? While tunnels are commonly linked to infrastructure values associated with modern urban settings, the Faroese tunnels – above and below the sea – have mostly been located in rural areas. The first ‘urban’ tunnel in the Faroes will open in Tórshavn in 2025. It connects the eastern part of the capital (and the subsea tunnel to Eysturoy Island) with the western part of the capital (and the road leading to the subsea tunnel to Sandoy Island). The subsea tunnels are therefore strongly influencing infrastructure systems above the sea.

The Faroes and the Sea

The Faroes is of volcanic origin and appeared as part of an extensive lava sequence relating to the opening of the northeastern Atlantic Ocean in the Tertiary Period. The archipelago is formed from the remnants of a huge plateau – between Norway, Scotland, and Iceland – created by volcanic activity some 55 million years ago. The visible lava pile has a thickness of over 3,000 metres of basalt, consisting of a lower, a middle, and an upper series (Jørgensen & Rasmussen 1986). The invisible lava pile (below the sea) consists of some 3,000 metres of basalt. The glacial ice of the many ice

ages of the last 2.5 million years has pushed, eroded, and ground the plateau, thereby forming the valleys, mountains, fjords, and straits characterizing the Faroes today. The archipelago is located on the (submarine) Greenland–Scotland Ridge.

The Faroese area of the Atlantic Ocean covers more than 290,000 sq. kilometres, 99.5% of which is sea. The area’s surfaces – seafloor as well as dry land – are extremely varied, “with a geology that reflects the tectonics and erosion of a volcanic area over more than 50 million years” (Árting & Mortensen 2023). The Faroese plateau, commonly defined as an area where the bottom depth is less than 200 metres, is surrounded by deep water, except for the area towards the Iceland–Faroe Ridge. The Faroese plateau covers an area of roughly 20,000 sq. kilometres with an average depth of 100 metres (Larsen et al. 2023). The coastline of the Faroes is 1,118 kilometres, the land area is 1,399 sq. kilometres, and the sea area is 274,000 sq. kilometres. The distance between the extreme north and south of the archipelago is 113 kilometres. The archipelago contains 18 islands and more than 700 islets and skerries. The seabed is a landscape with mountains, ridges, valleys, sandbanks, and other formations. The oceans of the world cover 71% of the surface of the Earth and contain approximately 1.35 billion cubic kilometres of seawater (Ellcock 2023: 99).

Holes and Tubes

A Feast for the Senses

The first road tunnel project in the Faroes was the 1,450-metre-long (old) Hvalba Tunnel, which was started in 1961 and completed in 1963. It connected two villages on the island of Suðuroy. It was a very narrow and dark tunnel going through a large mountain. This tunnel marked the start of a new era in the history of Faroese transport infrastructure. In 2021, a new tunnel was dug through the

same mountain because it was easier and cheaper to make a new hole than to enlarge the old Hvalba Tunnel, which did not meet modern standards and expectations. The archipelago has no fewer than 22 tunnels, in addition to the four ultramodern subsea tunnels, at the disposal of travellers today. The shortest tunnels are under 1,000 metres long, while the longest tunnels on land are around 3,000 metres. The subsea tunnels are between five and 11 kilometres. There are 33.3 kilometres of subsea tunnel roads in the country today. In some cases, the new tunnels have offered a better and safer travelling option for people who had previously been at the mercy of primitive, hazardous mountain roads. In other cases, the tunnels have represented an isolated village's first fixed link to the world beyond the surrounding hills. Boats have been replaced by cars. In this way, the tunnels have become a symbol of the progress and modernization of the small coastal communities across the islands.

The subsea tunnel saga began in 2000 when the construction of the Vágur Tunnel started. This road tunnel, connecting the capital to the airport on the neighbouring island to the west, had been discussed by a handful of daring politicians since the 1980s. The first geological investigations of the underground of the strait between the islands were conducted in 1989. The tunnel opened to the public in December 2002. This was the first opportunity to journey to the territory beneath the Faroese seafloor. The tunnel was seen as a great success, technologically, financially, and in relation to transport statistics. Follow-up projects were immediately put on the political agenda. Today, the subsea tunnel connecting Streymoy and Eysturoy, the two largest of the Faroes, is the most famous tunnel in the country because of its spectacular subsea roundabout.

The subterranean roundabout represents a paradigm for 21st century Faroese transport infrastructure. The news about the Eysturoy Tunnel crossed the globe when the ultramodern submarine con-

struction officially opened a few days before Christmas in 2020. In a French article published in the *Huffington Post* (Duperron 2020), for example, it was announced (to readers from Quebec, Canada) that, in terms of design and finesse, Montreal’s Louis-Hippolyte-Lafontaine Bridge-Tunnel comes nowhere near the Eysturoy Tunnel, with its underwater roundabout “that is (really) out of the ordinary” (Duperron 2020). The Eysturoy Tunnel makes rival tunnels envious, the *Huffington Post* suggested. Fox News published this headline online: “Incredible underwater roundabout to open” (Rogers 2020).

The roundabout, located 73 metres below the seabed of a large fjord, links three two-laned tubes, leading to (a) the southern part of Streymoy (in the vicinity of the capital Tórshavn), (b) the western and (c) the eastern shores of the fjord of Skálafjørður in the southern part of Eysturoy Island. The over-eleven-kilometre-long subsea road tunnel, which provides a new fixed link between the largest and most populous islands of the country (they have been connected by a bridge since 1973), dives 189 metres below the surface of the sea (and almost 100 metres beneath the seabed) at its deepest point. The Eysturoy Tunnel, a “feast for the senses” (according to the website *Atlas Obscura*, which presents itself as a “guide to the world’s hidden wonders”), was indeed one of the longest subsea tunnels in the world when it opened for traffic.

The large blue jellyfish-shaped roundabout under the seabed, which has become a tourist attraction, is decorated with an 80-metre steel artwork by the Faroese sculptor Tróndur Patursson. The artwork stretches all around the roundabout’s rocky centre, and the motif is silhouettes of people engaged in traditional Faroese chain dance. Seen from afar, the life-size dancing islanders resemble *buldufólk*, supernatural beings from Faroese folklore that live in a parallel world in nature yet behave like humans. Colour-changing lights on a central structure illuminate the artwork. “I hope that I have succeed-

ed in making the art simple and easy to understand”, Patursson humbly remarked in an article about the tunnel art, “so that it is timeless and can be understood by all people, now and always” (Poulsen 2021). Timeless and hence also, in a sense, placeless. Patursson ponders the soul of the rock in a Faroese documentary about his submarine artwork titled *The Ring in Atlantis* (Hansen & Niclasen 2021). The subsea tunnel even has its own piece of music – a soundscape created by the Faroese composer and sound engineer Jens Lisberg Thomsen, who recorded all the sounds during the construction of the tunnel – which travellers can enjoy by tuning in on FM radio 97.00. “The idea of adding a piece of art came up after the story of the roundabout became widely known”, stated Teitur Samuelsen, CEO of Eystur- and Sandoyartunlar (Tyril 2022: 21).

Merry-go-roundabout

Roundabouts offer the freedom to choose direction, but they also facilitate U-turns or circular movement leading nowhere and therefore expose the ambivalence in the ‘car-friendly’ society – between collective and individual trajectories and intersections in the landscape, and between accelerated and decelerated transportation for work and leisure. Revolution is a movement, writes Paul Virilio, “but movement is not a revolution” (Virilio 1986). The modern roundabout takes up considerable space and is more common in semiurban and rural areas than in old city centres (Paris representing an iconic exception because of its spider-web system of boulevards). However, at the same time, roundabouts, together with the roads that they connect, can indeed be portrayed “as the paradigmatic infrastructure of the twenty-first century” (Dalakoglou & Harvey 2012: 459).

The roundabout is a non-place for transit from A to B, a place to enjoy in motion, and a structure handling increasingly intel-

ligent cars with computerized driving functions. It is a material expression of the image of a frictionless and individualized society with a “culture of automobility” (Urry 2012), drawing on the car as “avatar of mobility” (Thrift 1996: 272). The roundabout symbolizes the choice of the rational and responsible driver who wants to minimize risk (it is, for instance, not a good place for illicit street racing) and avoid unexpected incidents on their trip. Like a ball in a pinball game, the car is kept in motion, moving from one roundabout to the next, hence also giving the driver a sense of cruising in a landscape that is much larger than the one around them. Entering the roundabout, the driver savours a ‘timeout’ on their joyride, situated in liminal space between two sections of an undefined journey, and enjoys a moment for the exercise of agency. Where does the circle start and where does it end? The circle – or wheel – echoes an idea of repetition and infinity.

Down in the submarine tunnel, deep below the seabed, new territory has been reclaimed. “Deep under the sea”, the reader is told in the Danish/Faroese novel *Island*, “all land masses meet” (Jacobsen 2021: 70). Increasingly, connectivity is becoming “a fact of island life” (Hay 2013: 216), with tunnels “contributing to the creation of continuous and unified urban space...” (Santana et al. 2022). In the underground, in space without the “feet-only-user” (Beckmann 2001), the jellyfish roundabout represents the small new Nordic Atlantic version of the sleepless cacophonous roundabout of big cities, which often looks more like a carousel ridden by exhausted drivers, struggling to find a way out of the circle, than like a hub for smooth and safe motor vehicle circulation. In Jacques Tati’s 1967 film *Playtime*, the amusing roundabout scene serves as a brilliant, ironic comment on the modern urban dogma of the efficient organization of complex transit spaces with special sets of rules and norms of conduct.

In *Playtime*, passengers cruising the heavily trafficked streets of Paris in a private car get stuck in a roundabout, orbiting the small island in the centre of the ‘carousel’ with rows of honking cars on the outer lanes that keep them away from the exit. Nobody really knows how to stop the absurd merry-go-round gyration of tooting cars.

In the future imaginaries of the most dedicated Faroese tunnel enthusiasts, the archetypical subsea roundabout would represent a junction of roads going to all the islands of the continentalized archipelago. The planned subsea tunnel linking the island of Suðuroy to the mainland is “the vision of the ultimate goal” (Tyril 2022: 21) of the “tunnelling nation” using tunnel-kilometres as a “yardstick for measuring all infrastructure” (Bennett 2018). Deep in the underground, where landmasses meet and “tectonic plates converse in mumbling dialogue”, as described in the novel *Island* (Jacobsen 2021: 162), tunnels permeate virgin territory and prompt human meditation on the limits of islands and islandness.

Cars and Connection

The subsea tunnels are, as emphasized, made not for walkers but for motor vehicles, and the car is the new ‘ferry’ facilitating inter-island movement. After housing, “cars are the largest single item of consumer expenditure” (Urry 2004), and they will not disappear soon because “too many people find them too comfortable, enjoyable, exciting, even enthralling” (Sheller 2004: 236). The Faroes today is a society based on automobility, with a mixed landscape of roads, bridges, and tunnels intersecting the islands and the fjords between them. “Whole parts of the built environment are now a mute but still eloquent testimony to automobility”, says Thrift (2004: 46). The modern private car has accompanied a process of intense “time-space compression” in society (Harvey 1990).

“Roads will never play a major role up here, as the sea is our country road”, the Faroese politician Frederik Petersen concluded in a parliamentary debate in 1905. He was horribly wrong. The last existing ferry routes are between islands not (yet) connected by tunnels or bridges. The vision of Landsverk, the public agency overseeing road, harbour, and entrepreneurial tasks in the Faroes, is to create a society where nobody is more than a 60-minute car drive from the capital Tórshavn. The agency’s report ‘Infrastructure Plan 2018–2030’ contains this text under the headline *The Faroes – One City*: “One of the main goals during the last years has been to connect the islands. Societal changes through the last 70 years have significantly shortened the travel times in the country” (Landsverk 2019: 4). Reducing travel time is an important political tool in the evaluation of future infrastructure projects. The subsea tunnel between Streymoy and Eysturoy reduced the Runavík–Tórshavn travel time from 64 minutes to 16 minutes and the Klaksvík – Tórshavn travel time from 68 minutes to 36 minutes (www.estunlar.fo). More than 90% of the present-day population of the Faroes is attached to one fixed road network.

Today, 11% of the entire Faroese national road system is underground (Landsverk 2022: 7), and there are (if the future Suðuroy Tunnel is included) “nearly two metres of tunnel for each of the 50 000 inhabitants [...] most likely the highest figure worldwide” (Samuelsen and Grøv 2018: 25-26). A research project has also revealed that tunnels can “facilitate the development of new Faroese tourism destinations” (Santana et al. 2022). The tourism agencies have also started writing about the tunnels as attractions comparable to islands, sea stacks, and spectacular promontories. The Guide to the Faroes tells its online visitors:

Tunnels make it so much easier to get around in the Faroes. Most mountain tunnels have been made in terrain where it is impossible to build roads from one point to another simply due to the steep landscape [...] Inter-island travel has become so much easier thanks to a total of four sub-sea tunnels in the Faroes. All these tunnels are spacious and two-laned with a single tube. The speed limit in all four underwater tunnels is 80 km/h (50 mph) [...] Planning to visit the Faroes? You will for sure enter some of the tunnels in the island group. Take a look at the widest selection of guided tours where local guides will take you through tunnels to explore the vast beauty found on all islands. (www.guidetofaroeislands.fo)

The tourist guide demonstrates how the tunnels make the remote and exotic destinations of the archipelago easy to reach. They serve car drivers' aspiration of frictionless mobility (Gebauer et al. 2015: 6-9). The hypermodern tunnels are also a part of the journey. They represent what could be called the 'car-only-sights' (Beckmann 2001) that can be experienced while moving through the inner parts of the islands. The "beauty of speed", as Marinetti (cited in Wollen and Kerr 2002) talks about in relation to the visual-emotional experience of speed under open skies, has another meaning in a tunnel, where speed is not felt in the same way.

Place and Placelessness

As a non-place, the tunnel is a symbol of placelessness. Augé's seminal work on problematizing the human value of different material spaces defines places as those already suffused with human meaning through ritual and labour efforts, while non-places are those lacking such marks of human place-making. As a non-place, a tunnel could in principle be anywhere in the

world, and there is no difference between day and night. Nobody feels “truly at home” in a tunnel (Bauman 2000). Like airports, shopping malls, and other emblematic non-places, the tunnel might give tunnel-travellers a sense “and passive joy of identity loss” (Augé 2008: 83). In the tunnel, the Faroese traveller moves through space without encountering the usual lost sheep, heavy rain, mountain fog, snowstorms, or simply disturbing pedestrians. This scenario is in harmony with a futuristic image of the perfect Autopia, where islanders are the masters ‘finally’ in full control of the surrounding nature and weather. There is, in principle, no friction. There is no landscape in the subsea tunnel except for the carefully crafted artistic simulacra, such as the artwork at the roundabout and other lighting art. The artwork creates place in imagined placelessness, erecting Faroese-ness in a dark and meaningless space. It could be argued that the human touch of the subsea tunnel is mirroring the world above the sea. From this perspective, the question about the start and the end of the island resurfaces: how is the Faroese island universe connecting its islands? “If the subsea tunnel is constructed, it will no longer be special to come to Suðuroy”, some young people claim, because then “it will be possible to decide yourself what time you leave home” (Hayfield and Nielsen 2022: 207).

Non-places “do have social significance, cultural dimensions and relations to reveal” (Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012: 464), and the tunnels of the Faroes “do become familiar places and homes-from-home for individuals such as commuters” (Merriman 2009). It is, in other words, important not to exaggerate the contrast between place and non-place, as what we call non-places “are more contingent, open, dynamic and heterogeneous than Marc Augé proposes” (Merriman 2004: 162). People using spaces of mobility, such as roads and tunnels, have “experiences of boredom, isolation and detachment” emerging

from “spacing” (Merriman 2004: 162). As a place, which can be defined as “space infused with meaning” (Tuan 1977), the subsea tunnel is a construction narrated as the outcome of pioneers’ struggle to expand their land, but what does this tell us about the future of society?

Breaking the Barrier

The subsea tunnels, with the roundabout underneath the seabed as chef d'oeuvre, “have become a huge factor in the Faroes, indeed changing the geographical and socio-economic face of the island nation”, writes Búi Tyril in the magazine *FAROE Business Report* (Tyril 2022: 20). As a kind of masculine symbol of potency, the fruit of resilient man’s struggle against the powers of nature, the tunnels are the technological face of societal progress. Discussing the strength of a small society in the Nordic Atlantic with a focus on its maritime culture and fishing industry, Jackson writes:

The combination of nationalism and material progress enables them to cope with the problems facing a small group of people trying to compete for a place in the world scene. (Jackson 1979: 63)

The income from the export of fish products is also key to the futuristic tunnel projects of the Faroes, a community ‘resilient, both in discourse and practice’ (Hokwerda 2017: 45). In a report with the guiding title *Removing the Island Barrier*, which presents facts and recommendations about the future Suðuroy Tunnel project, Uni Rasmussen, Minister of Infrastructure, states:

The continuously improving road grid has tied the country together, improved mobility – socially, commercially and not least for the working power [...] Despite the discussion, there seems to be political concord that the country should be tied

together so that most Faroese can travel in an easy, quick and safe manner in the Faroes. (Rasmussen 2022: 3)

Despite ‘the discussion’, he says, referring to the public debate about the extraordinary twin-tunnel project with a total length of roughly 30 kilometres, Faroese politicians seem to agree that the project is inevitable. ‘Societal game changer: The subsea tunnels’ is the headline of an article praising the subterranean tunnels and the men constructing them. The article considers the tunnels to be a manifestation of the (will)power of the islanders:

Arguably [...] those engineering marvels may well in themselves have served to inspire and further galvanize the sense of achievement and empowerment that the islanders already have been blessed with from earlier. (Tyril 2022: 21)

Norwegian tunnel engineers and scientists, considered to be the pioneers of subsea road tunnel projects in the Nordic region and beyond, talk about the spread of Norwegian technological ‘solutions’ to other Nordic Atlantic states and island territories. They are very optimistic about developments and do not say much about the possible negative consequences of the tunnel trend. The Faroese subsea tunnels, strongly linked to Norwegian know-how and infrastructure values,

[e]nable highly desired improvements of the road network, reducing the number of ferry connections and vitalizing local businesses, according to a Norwegian article from 2005. (Blindheim et al. 2005: 570-571)

The next markets will be Greenland, Åland, Orkney, and Shetland. Without citing any specific supporting references, the article argues that the Faroese “welcome these local scaled ‘major’ projects allowing new possibilities for decentralized business growth and development” (Blindheim et al. 2005: 579). This might be the case, but it has yet to be investigated and assessed. In a discussion about a future subsea tunnel project in Åland, the positive impact on “social aspects of life on the islands” is presented as the main driver of the project (Grøv et al. 2021). Fixed links rearrange spatial hierarchies between islands, but they do not remove disparities. Connecting an island to the main road system “automatically excludes the islands not connected by fixed links” (Sancho Reinoso & Heleniak 2024).

The subsea tunnels symbolize a new chapter in the story about the centuries-long struggle for survival in the remote Nordic Atlantic. “These really are tunnels for society”, says Teitur Samuelson, the Managing Director of Eystur- and Sandoyartunlar, and the islanders, he argues, “have great trust in their tunnels” (Samuelson & Grøv 2018: 26-30). He also reflects on past achievements in relation to the infrastructural magnum opus: the Suðuroy Tunnel, the tunnel of all tunnels. “Challenge after challenge solved, the tunnel has now emerged from fantasy to the drawing table”, says Sigurð Lamhauge, CEO of Landsverk, adding, in the language of a soldier heading to the frontline, “we dare to dream, and we know we will succeed” (Lamhauge 2022). The sea between the mainland and Suðuroy Island is the last “barrier” in the continentalization process of the Faroes. While some young people in Suðuroy oppose the construction of this subsea tunnel, Hayfield and Nielsen state that “the majority [they] spoke to had complex sentiments” (Hayfield & Nielsen 2022: 207). The tunnel will of course make it easier to travel quickly to the capital, but it will also affect the special identity and islandness of the people from Suðuroy Island.

Islandness and Tunnelogics

Speed and Technological Solutionism

“There is no speeding up without slowing down”, says Beckmann (2004: 82), referring to Virilio’s work on the logic of speed in every aspect of life. This theory, which Virilio terms ‘dromology’, stresses how high speed compresses time and affects our perception of reality (Virilio 2012). It is also important to avoid becoming too dependent on *one* single link – for example a subsea tunnel – out of an island, in case of infrastructural and environmental problems (Santana et al. 2022). Subsea tunnel projects are extremely expensive – at least as a direct investment, if not in the long run. Keeping the tubes beneath the seabed dry is also an undertaking, as “anywhere between 600 and 1,300 cubic meters of water a day are evacuated from each of the Faroes’ subsea tunnels” (Bennett 2018). Removing the so-called island barrier might be a more complex enterprise than most people imagine. “It would be an infrastructure revolution to be able to drive ferry-free from Suðuroy to the islands in the north”, says Samuelsen (Samuelsen & Grøv 2018: 30), but the islands will also be “at risk of suffering from an increased human footprint” (Santana et al. 2022).

Large transportation infrastructure projects give political prestige and “have often been infused with a potent aura of modernity” (Kanoi et al. 2022: 9), but who is benefiting from the new fixed links in society? The social realities that they cultivate “are often highly ambivalent with uneven outcomes” (Kanoi et al. 2022: 10). Infrastructure, in the form of roads and tunnels for motorized vehicles, is also the outcome of masculinist spatial planning practices that reproduce gender divisions in island communities, Dahl argues (Dahl 2020). The “unexplored demonic underworld” (Franceschi and Heinesen 1971: 38), with its *huldufólk* and other creatures, is now a part of the network of underground roads

connecting the islands, and the car is the passport to the interisland journey. The car, a symbol of freedom, nevertheless forces the driver to follow strict traffic rules, thus directing their action. “The essence of automobilization is that it destroys the liberating effects of spatial mobility the very moment that it creates them”, critiques Beckmann (2001: 602), and this dilemma also reflects a difference between the boat and the car. The tunnel initiates fast and unwavering transportation, while the sea is an unpredictable avenue for interisland journeys. The enormous investments into the enterprise of breaking ‘island barriers’ do not always result in faster transport because new bottlenecks and queues at different locations appear at traffic junctions and peri-urban roads.

How Islanders Move

It is very important, Brinklow and Jennings underline, “to be cautious in attributing change to islands and islanders to a fixed link alone” (2024: ix). In the case of the Faroes, the fixed link has been a symbol of progress and desired connectivity in hegemonic political and technocratic narratives. The future is a society without any island barriers. The subsea tunnel is a manifestation of the ultramodern futuristic turn in the island society’s infrastructural landscape. Big cities have tunnels – and now Tórshavn, with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants, is also getting its intra-city road tunnel. The interesting quality of the subsea tunnel is that it does not simply “dissolve spatial boundaries” between Tórshavn and the smaller villages and islands (Hokwerda 2017: 44): it also represents a new ‘betwixt and between’ space forcing the islanders to rethink the volume and width of their islandness.

The planned subsea tunnel to Suðuroy will be very long when it is realized, and it will therefore continue to make the island of Suðuroy feel like a remote place in the mental map of the islanders.

Because the Faroes is located far from the European continent and are composed of small islands in proximity, the new subsea tunnels do not represent a gateway to a continent with large urban communities. On both sides of the tube, small communities at the edge of the (same) ocean are found. On Prince Edward Island, the Confederation Bridge was built against the will of many groups of islanders (Baldacchino 2007). Later, when people got used to the tunnel, it started to be portrayed as an “essential island artefact” (Baldacchino 2007: 333). In the Faroes, there was never strong resistance to any tunnel project, whether above or below the sea. People are generally proud of the tunnels penetrating the rocky hills and submarine territories. The tunnels strengthen the common sense of islandness in relation to the outside world. In the ongoing political debate about tunnel projects in the (imminent) future, narratives about the ‘slow and sure death of the isolated village community’ (which will occur if the tunnel is not constructed as soon as possible) are very common. One example is from the small island of Skúvoy, located between Sandoy and Suðuroy, where the municipality has loudly warned that the village community will not survive if the island is not linked to the planned Sandoy–Suðuroy subsea tunnel.

In the Faroes, as mentioned earlier, an interisland tunnel connection means the automatic termination of a ferry link between the same islands. The slow ferry voyage is considered to belong to the past. However, as Vannini has explained, when people travel by boat, they are ‘wayfaring’, performing a journey, ergo not just being transported from A to B (Vannini cited in Lanng 2014: 6). Transit space, for example in the tube beneath the seabed, is more than a rational (utilitarian) transportation solution. The subsea tunnels adjust the social and cultural geography of the archipelago, triggering a reconfiguration of the island universe, but island boundaries – with or without fixed links – should always be regarded “as permeable

membranes permitting or denying passage” (Nimführ & Otto 2020: 190). The transportation, or pattern of movement, in and out of islands is essential for any attempt to illustrate islandness. Islanders talk about place, distance, boundaries, links, and the ocean in their narratives about islandness. An island can be defined as a practice, which is the outcome of “what islanders do, and in particular of how islanders move” (Vannini & Taggart 2013).

Conclusion

Subsea tunnels impact the island culture of the Faroes. The paradox of the tunnel is that it is invisible from the island itself, and hence it preserves the horizontal image of the ocean dividing the island territories. However, at the same time, it represents a fixed interisland link circumventing the ocean. It connects the islands to the subterranean land beneath the ocean. The ocean is, so to speak, untouched by this infrastructure. Like a water pipe in a house, the subsea tunnel is hidden behind a wall yet expected to be available for users whenever they need it. From this perspective, the tunnels do not threaten the touristic image of islands as exotic and relatively isolated (or insular) places beyond the turbulence and chaos of the globalized world. Rather, the subsea tunnels represent an additional attraction for visitors. In this Autopia, a car driver’s paradise, the drive through the landscape is like a (mobile) museum tour (Gaini 2024a). The ultramodern tunnels take the traveler from one ‘collection’ to another. As soon as the driver exits the subsea tunnel, a new thrilling landscape meets their eyes through the car window. The ocean is always in the background, but there is no longer any need to risk the sea route (except to travel to the smallest and most remote islands, which in many cases also have helicopter transportation service). In other words, the ferry journey no longer defines the island culture. It

is a part of personal memories and the local cultural history, but the mobility structures are less island-specific today. “The way it feels to move”, says Vannini, “has to do with how often, through what means and routes, and for what motives we move” (Vannini 2011: 256). The subsea tunnel provokes new feelings. Islandness, as an expression of living closer to the sea and nature and of being at the mercy of the powerful forces of nature, changes meaning when fixed links separate humans from the sea. The question of whether to leave or stay on the small island is still important for island youth, but the sense of flexibility in relation to relocation, migration, and commuting is strengthened.

We have seen that a stronger focus on the three-dimensional landscape of the archipelago facilitates analysis of the connection between the sea, the seabed, and its subsurface in studies exploring transportation systems and small-scale island societies. The new links between islands, in the form of tunnels, are situated neither in the center nor in the periphery, because the islanders embrace them as a new shared space extending the scope of both.

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The Anthropocene Faroes

Otherring Fossil Imaginaries for the Sustainability Transformation

Ragnheiður Bogadóttir

Abstract

Thinking with metaphors of time and islands, the chapter provides a critique and rethinking of dominant narratives of past and future socio-ecological transformations in the Faroes, particularly as it pertains to long-term environmental sustainability, environmental justice, and human well-being. Drawing on theoretical and analytical frameworks of socio-ecological change, the trajectory of Faroese social metabolism is assessed through some key indicators of material and energy flows, showing remarkably high increases in per capita resource and energy use. While this historical trajectory is commonly interpreted as a “success”, the chapter presents an alternative interpretation of the profound changes taking place in the Faroes throughout the 20th century and beyond, shaping what may today be considered the Anthropocene Faroes. The current renewable energy transition is discussed as an example to illustrate the potentials and inadequacies of current sustainability strategies as they continue to be guided by fossil imaginaries and logics of change.

Keywords: *Anthropocene Faroes, Sustainability transformations, Energy transitions, Fossil imaginaries*

Introduction: The Anthropocene Faroes

“Once islanded, humans are awakened from the stupor of continental fantasies. The islanded can choose to understand that there is nothing but more islands to look forward to” (Teresia K. Teaiwa 2022).

Conventional understandings of Faroese modern history generally follow interpretive and analytical frameworks which present the Faroes as one of the nations in the world that succeeded where others failed in the quest to become rich and prosperous (Acemoglu & Robinson 2013; Diamond 2005). This chapter adopts a re-interpretive approach to the dominant historical understandings of the changes underpinning Faroese modernity and the implications of these changes for nature, society, and people. It departs from the recognition that the inability of high-income countries “to fight the growing social divide combined with their overuse of resources” means they can no longer serve as role models for sustainable development (Kroll 2015: 5). Moreover, it aims to contribute to ongoing endeavours of “galvanizing change” by decolonizing world-views of expansionist myths and values (Paulson 2017: 425). Such endeavours must involve both a deconstruction, or a defamiliarization (Marcus & Fischer 1999), of dominant colonial logics, as well as an emphasis on (already existing) alternatives and non-colonial dimensions of society. Here, focus is on the former through a deconstruction of the conventional understanding of the Faroese modernization process as a “success”. And on the latter through contemplation over how metaphors of time and islands can be useful for thinking up and imagining alternative future scenarios. Hence, the purpose is to contribute to the “critical agenda for the Anthropocene“ (Pugh & Chandler 2021) by offering a critique

of current historical narratives sustained by ideas and ideals of progress while engaging with and worrying about the “otherness” of the present rather than the past (Azoulay 2013; Gange 2019: 300). Othering, and defamiliarizing, our present understanding requires asking questions of how and why. For instance, how and why did we come to view ever-increasing resource and energy use levels as normal and desirable?

A critical Anthropocene perspective implies writing “after the end of the world” (Tsing 2015), not necessarily in the sense of writing after environmental collapse but rather cracking Cartesian dualism (i.e., the human/nature divide of modernity). Thus, writing from the Anthropocene means acknowledging that “humans are relationally entangled with the more-than-human forces of transformative planetary changes” (Pugh & Chandler 2021: x). According to Jonathan Pugh and David Chandler (2021), as geographical forms, islands have become powerful symbols in Anthropocene thinking and forces such as global warming, rising sea levels, the waste of consumerism, and ongoing colonialism. Their book *Anthropocene Islands: Entangled Worlds* emphasizes how islands “have generated new or alternative approaches to being and knowing in the Anthropocene” (Pugh & Chandler 2021: xi). If islands are powerful geographical forms to think with, metaphors of time may similarly help us grapple with the temporal dimensions of ecological crises, for instance, defamiliarizing another well-known characteristic (i.e., peculiarity) of modern thought: a linear, progressive view of time and history.

In one of his many fascinating books, palaeontologist and historian of science, Steven Jay Gould (1987), wrote about the discovery of deep time and the role that the two paired metaphors of *Time’s Arrow*, *Time’s Cycle* played in this scientific discovery. Gould argued that linear and circular time are “eternal metaphors” through which humankind has always tried to understand time

and history. Time's arrow represents the flow of consciousness where history is an "irreversible sequence of unrepeatable events" (Gould 1987: 10). Moreover, the metaphor of time's cycle, circular time, in Western thought is famously expressed in the book of Ecclesiastes, where there "is no new thing under the sun" and apparent motions are only "parts of repeating cycles" that establish a "basis for intelligibility" (Gould 1987 pp. 10–11). While a distinctive characteristic of Western thought is to comprehend time and history through the metaphor of time's arrow as linear time, Gould (1987) quoted Mircea Eliade (1954), the great scholar of myths, to explain that most other cultures and people throughout history have "held fast to time's cycle and have viewed time's arrow as either unintelligible or a source of deepest fear" (p. 12).

Hence, Gould (1987) reminds us that dichotomies (e.g., paired metaphors) are not true or false but useful or misleading. Therefore, the paired metaphors of time may help us make sense of our predicament in the current global ecological crisis and the failure to address it. In the case of the discovery of deep time, Gould (1987) argued that "metaphors of time's arrow and time's cycle ... proved as fundamental to the formulation of deep time as any observation about the natural world" (p. 13).

Similarly, thinking with the fundamental metaphors of arrows and cycles can help us come to grips with historical and potential future sustainability transformations. As climate scientists have modelled increasingly gloomy future scenarios corresponding to the levels of greenhouse gases that human society will release into the atmosphere in coming years, in the words of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (2022), a linear progression along this line is a "highway to climate hell".

Nevertheless, faith in capital expansion continues to be the lodestar of policymaking, even its scientific basis is incrementally

eroding across the human, social, and natural sciences. However, the widespread sense that no alternative exists – that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of our current economic system (Fisher 2009/2022) – remains a powerful impediment to addressing the ecological crisis; imagining and forging alternative sustainability transformation pathways.

Several disciplinary lenses can be applied to approach and know the Anthropocene Faroes. Here, its trajectory is traced through an analytical focus on socio-ecological “relational entanglements” (Pugh & Chandler 2021), more specifically through sketching out the changes in socio-metabolic relations and the organization of flows of matter and energy between nature and society during the past century. The analysis reveals how these relations have been transformed while placing the development in the Faroes within the global environmental history of the 20th century.

Since the term “Anthropocene” was reinvented and popularized by Nobel-prize-winning chemist Paul Crutzen in 2000, it has become a powerful narrative tool to convey the environmental predicament: the unprecedented human-induced global environmental change apparent in processes of biodiversity loss, climate change, deforestation, and pollution. However, a fundamental critique accompanying the term’s popularity has been its quantitative and positivist bias and naturalized view of humankind that masks the inherent social inequalities in the ecological crisis (Lövbrand et al., 2015; Malm & Hornborg 2014). As Eva Lövbrand et al. (2015) argue, critical social science should aim to repoliticize the Anthropocene to help “extend the realm of the possible for environmental politics” (p. 212).

Subsequently, the following sections address global socio-ecological transformations as they pertain to human wellbeing since the middle of the 20th century, which is the point in history many

scholars date the beginning of the Anthropocene. This phenomenon is often referred to as the “Great Acceleration” (McNeill & Engelke 2014; Steffen Broadgate et al. 2015), which refers to the rapid acceleration of resource use since approximately 1950. Therefore, Faroese social metabolism is assessed to situate the Faroes within this broader discourse of global environmental change. This assessment focuses on the quantitative changes in material and energy flows required to sustain Faroese society, and the resulting transformation of nature-society relations. Then, the Faroese green energy transition (i.e., *Orkuskiptið*; Orkuskiptið 2024), is discussed as a case to illustrate both the potentials and the inadequacies of current transformation strategies and initiatives as they continue to be guided and framed within fossil logics and imaginaries. In the concluding sections metaphors of time and islands are evoked to defamiliarize fossil imaginaries of the past and present.

Sustainability Transformations and Human Wellbeing

As current trajectories of nature-society interactions challenge the living conditions of humanity (Brondizio et al. 2019; Lee & Romero 2023; Steffen Richardson et al. 2015), sustainability transformations have been on the agenda for quite some time in the scientific community (Meadows et al. 1972). As the crisis has intensified, sustainability has been increasingly called for as a future vision for society (Salomaa & Juhola 2020). The term “transformation” has been a leading concept in sustainability science for a long time (Brand 2016), so it is no coincidence that it headlined the new sustainability declaration and The United Nation’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals resulting from the Rio+20 Earth Summit, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United

Nations 2015). The preamble to the declaration states, “We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path” (United Nations 2015).

While a consensus exists over the urgency of the sustainability transformation, little to no agreement concerns what it means and how to assess it (Brand & Wissen 2018; Salomaa & Juhola 2020). Within sustainability science, the concepts of transformation and resilience are associated with socioecological systems (SES) thinking (Fabinyi et al. 2014), a perspective arising from concern with the lack of holistic understanding of the interrelations between nature and society. In this sense, the socioecological approach grew out of previous attempts and developments in the social and human sciences to do the same (e.g., cultural ecology, environmental sociology, environmental history, political ecology, and environmental humanities). These perspectives share an ambition to study human society as part of nature.

Consequently, a socioecological approach rejects the prevailing tendency in the sciences to study ecological and social systems in separation by establishing arbitrary and artificial boundaries between nature and society (Berkes & Folke 1998; Descola & Pálsson 1996). Research within this field has included empirically studying how social and ecological systems are coupled and how “power and competing value systems are not external to, but rather integral to the development and functioning of SES” (Cote & Nightingale 2012: 476). Therefore, a just and democratic socioecological transformation is not simply a technological transition but, more fundamentally, a transformation of power and value systems (Brand et al. 2021; Büchs & Koch 2017; Dietz et al. 2020; Dryzek & Stevenson 2011; Gough 2015; Haberl et al. 2011; Koch 2022; Pichler et al. 2020).

A dominant belief deeply rooted in modernistic value systems – a primary obstacle to achieving necessary CO₂ emissions reduction – is the idea that expanding energy consumption is necessary to improve people’s lives (Roberts et al. 2020). Empirically, the relation between energy consumption and human well-being is complex and varied (Gough 2015; Smil 2004, 2008), yet such energy determinism is actively promoted and financed by the fossil industry (Roberts et al. 2020) and remains a dominant narrative.

The availability of cheap fossil energy powered the great transformations of the 20th century, including environmental change such as climate change, ocean acidification, land-system change, biodiversity loss and more (Rockström et al. 2009). In his environmental history of the 20th century, *Something New Under the Sun*, environmental historian John Robert McNeill (2001) used paired metaphors of time in the book title to evoke an understanding of the novelty and anomaly of the historical period we live in, where human-induced change happens so rapidly at such scale that for the first time in human history, something is actually new under the sun. The pace of change and its effects on humans and nature has been variously described as the “Great Acceleration” (McNeill & Engelke 2014; Steffen et al. 2015), the “Social Acceleration” (Rosa 2013), and “Overheating” (Eriksen 2016). Since a defining trait of modern society is this rapid pace of change that eventually threatens to undermine itself, some scholars have argued that the consequences of this system are unmistakably showing “in the current financial, democratic, ecological and psychosocial crises” (Rosa et al. 2017: 55).

Socio-ecological Change in the Faroes

The social metabolism approach is one way to empirically study socio-ecological change (Fischer-Kowalski & Haberl 2007; Kraus-

mann 2017). This approach measures the biophysical resource flows of energy and matter required to sustain social systems. A certain social system, a country for instance, uses natural resources, materials and energy, to maintain its stocks and services; housing, food, heating, transport and so on. Hence, resource flows in human societies and economies are always socially organized following dominant cultural logics.

When we approach the topic of change and transformation in the Faroes through a socioecological lens, we may overarchingly inspect the long-term changes in social metabolism that transformed Faroese society from a relatively self-sufficient subsistence economy to a modern high-level consumption society highly dependent on imported materials and energy for most critical societal functions. Indeed, central indicators (e.g., export and import volumes, domestic material consumption, energy use, and greenhouse gas emission levels) provide insights into how the interactions between society and the environment have changed over time.

Publicly available statistics on physical import and export volumes and domestic material consumption in the Faroes date back to 1998 (Statistics Faroe Islands [SFI] 2023a). Between 2000 and 2020, physical imports grew almost fourfold (from approximately 340.000 to 1.3 million tons), while physical exports grew fivefold (from approximately 123.000 to 612.000 tons). In 1998, the total domestic material consumption (i.e., all natural resources consumed by the Faroese society) was approximately 887.000 tons, while in 2020, it had more than doubled to approximately 1.888.000 tons. Although the figures fluctuate quite significantly between years, between 1998 and 2020, per capita domestic material consumption increased from approximately 18 tons in 1998 to 34 tons per capita in 2020 (SFI 2024).

Statistics are also available for the three decades between 1992

and 2023 for the energy flows required to sustain the Faroese social metabolism. During this time, oil consumption grew from approximately 225.000 to approximately 300.000 tons (SFI, 2023b), an absolute growth of approximately 30%. Moreover, statistics on greenhouse gas emissions are available from 1990, when total emissions were approximately 800.000 tons (CO₂ equivalents). However, by 2022, emissions had increased to 1.1 million tons (Hansen 2023). Furthermore, in 1990, per capita emissions were approximately 17 tons, while in 2022, they had increased to 20 tons per capita, more than twice the average of per capita emissions within the EU.

The statistics on the material and energy flows comprising Faroese social metabolism date back only 2–4 decades, yet they show a stupendous sustained growth curve that could only be maintained for a limited period. Although statistics are generally unavailable for earlier historical periods, figures on the total fisheries catch in the Faroes are an exception, with statistics from 1903. The case of fishery provides insights into the scale of longer-term change. During the century between 1903 and 2003, statistics show that the extraction of fish biomass from the natural environment increased from 80 kg per capita to 14 tons per capita, an almost 180-fold increase in resource extraction per capita (Bogadóttir 2020a).

Indeed, making sense of the figures of Faroese social metabolism can be challenging because, as is the case with human understanding of deep time, we can only comprehend the magnitude of these changes through metaphor. If we use the metaphor of time's arrow to think about Faroese social metabolism in a linear developmentalist fashion, it took Faroese society close to 2 millennia, from the initial settlement of the islands to the year 2000, to reach a level of material consumption of approximately 20 tons per capita.³² However, only 2 additional decades were required to almost double this consumption.

32 For comparison, the global per capita material footprint in 2017 was 12.2 metric tons (United Nations Statistics Division 2024).

Thinking also with the metaphor of time's cycle can help us imagine what would happen if we could sustain this circle of acceleration for another century until 2120. Calculating this hypothetical future scenario with the figures on domestic material consumption above would mean that every Faroese inhabitant would consume several hundred tons of natural resources annually. Such calculations highlight the peculiarity and anomaly of our most recent past, which can help us to defamiliarize and “other” our present. From the perspective of long-term sustainability and environmental justice, these increases in resource use cannot be considered “normal”; they are outrageous. The following section discusses the current Faroese green energy transition within this larger socioecological context.

Orkuskiptið: Energy Transition or Addition?

Orkuskiptið is a Faroese word meaning ‘energy transition’ composed of the words *orka* (energy) and *skifti* (transition). The word has also become the official term for the political strategy to replace fossil energy with green energy by 2030. In practice, *Orkuskiptið* is a cooperation between the energy department under the Faroese Environment Agency (*Umhvørvisstovan*) and SEV, the power company owned by the Faroese municipalities. The goal of the *Orkuskiptið* is to inform and encourage the transition of Faroese society from oil to green energy solutions, with a specific focus on heating and transport on land (*Orkuskiptið* 2024). In this sense, the Faroese green energy transition follows a similar path as green energy transitions have elsewhere by tending to focus on selected sectors like electricity and biofuels instead of total energy consumption (Haas & Sander 2016; Pilcher et al. 2020). Total energy use in the Faroes in 2021 was approximately 3978 GWh, of which 161 GWh (i.e., 4%) were renewable (Faroese Environment Agency [FEA] 2022).

Following the energy transition strategy, investments in renewable energy infrastructure on land have materialized in windmill parks, solar panels, and hydropower to replace the fossil energy infrastructure in the transport sector (e.g., electric automobiles) and heating (e.g., heat pumps). Hence, local energy is produced from renewable sources, which has arguably enhanced energy resilience in the Faroes. However, from a broader sustainability perspective, the ecological costs and consequences of producing a renewable energy infrastructure have not necessarily been transformed but displaced to other regions of the world and groups of people (Hornborg 2020; Scheidel & Sorman 2012; Tornel 2023).

The strong strategic focus on electromobility, especially electric private automobiles, ignores the outsourcing of socio-ecological costs to other regions of the world (e.g., the Andean plateau between Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina), where the extraction of lithium³³ has been profitable (Anlauf 2017). Moreover, studies have suggested that debates on responsible sourcing and natural resource justice appear even more scarce and fragmented in renewable energy-related sectors than in the timber, food, biomass, and textiles sectors (Kügerl et al. 2023). Likewise, discussions about energy justice in the Faroes and beyond, including who benefits from increasing energy use – whether fossil or renewable – and who bears the consequences of production are currently absent from the discussion.

Although the Faroese energy transition can potentially contribute to radical change (Hölscher et al. 2018), *Orkuskiptið* should not be conflated with a more general sustainability transformation. The energy transition in its current form does not radically challenge fossil logics. This result is especially evident since current strategies and imaginaries do not consider the possibility of reducing or stabilizing energy production and consumption.

33 Lithium is an indispensable natural resource in current battery systems for electric vehicles.

In the official Faroese energy strategy, published by the Ministry of Health and the Interior (MHI) in 2018, an increase rate in energy use and demand of 2% annually was used to calculate projections and future energy scenarios. In this sense, the energy policy plan is firmly grounded in a fossil logic of acceleration and escalation that is fundamentally at odds with a sustainability transformation. This fossil logic is the root cause for the gross discrepancies between intended strong sustainability goals and actual outcomes.

For instance, in the wake of COP15³⁴ in Copenhagen in 2009, the Faroese Parliament agreed to a 20% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions compared to 2005 between 2010 and 2020. However, emissions increased by at least 40% (Hansen 2023), throughout the decade. Therefore, the following section discusses how thinking with metaphors and relating to time and islands in alternative ways can help us “other” these logics and decouple enhancements in human wellbeing from increases in social metabolism.

Thinking with (the Faroe) Islands About Wellbeing and Resource Use

The function of islands as metaphors for (scientific) thought is a well-known and often reiterated phenomenon. Charles Darwin famously thought with and on islands about bird beaks and deep evolutionary time. Island metaphors of “Spaceship Earth” (Boulding 2013) and “Earth Island” (Bahn & Flenley 1992) have been important in the formation of modern Western environmentalism. Likewise, the idea of “thinking with islands” (Gillis 2003/2020) has contributed to inspiring a whole generation of interdisciplinary environmental and historical research (Pastore 2023).

The Faroe Islands are often used to think about contradictions between tradition and modernity (Gaini 2011; see also the Intro-

34 The Faroes reports official statistics on greenhouse gas emissions to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 9 (IPCC). The Faroes has also joined the Paris Agreement, a legally binding international UN treaty on climate change.

duction to this volume). For instance, the high level of material consumption is contrasted with the continuation and resilience of traditional land-use practices, including the (in)famous traditional whale killings, the *grindadráp* (Bogadóttir 2020b; Bogadóttir & Olsen 2017). In the political sphere, the Faroes stands out as a Nordic exception regarding the importance of religion (i.e., Christianity) concerning contemporary cultural and political struggles for minority rights, LGBT+ rights, and legal abortion (Hermannsdóttir 2022; Skorini et al. 2022).

Moreover, the Faroes is good to think with concerning allochronism - the tendency to view other cultures as existing in another time than one's own (Fabian 2002). Faroese modernity's "backward" particularities (e.g., the continuation of certain hunting practices) are often understood as allochronic and belonging to different stages of historical societal development since they do not fit neatly within the binaries of "tradition-modernity" or "backward-developed". Avoiding the allochronic trap, however, forces us to think about the Faroes as yet another empirical case where "growth" (i.e., increases in material and energy flows in a social system) is not causally or deterministically linked to "growth" or "progress" in liberal, secular, moral, democratic, or other values traditionally associated with modernity or to human wellbeing in any straightforward manner. The emerging research fields of degrowth (e.g., Kallis et al. 2018) and sustainable welfare and wellbeing (e.g., Büchs & Koch 2017) build on such well-established observations that an increased social metabolism can result in improved welfare up to a certain level, after which further increases more likely result in its erosion (Costanza et al. 2014; Easterlin 1995; Inglehart et al. 2008; Kubiszewski et al. 2014; Myers 2000).

Metaphors of time and islands can be useful in conveying the importance of decoupling wellbeing and ever-accelerating growth

in natural resource use and depletion. For instance, economist Manfred Max-Neef (2017) stressed how it is critical to avoid “assumptions of linearity” in development strategies while understanding fundamental human needs as cyclical: “finite, few and classifiable ... the same in all cultures and in all historical periods” (p. 18). Thus, when thinking with the Faroes on this point, the extraction of fish biomass from the oceans may have increased 180 times (per Faroese capita) during the 20th century, approximately the lifespan of people in my grandparents’ generation. However, the quality of life for people in the Faroes has not improved 180 times more broadly.

Although social metabolism separates generations manyfold, the criteria that are of importance for well-being cannot be understood along these simplified lines of economic expansion. However, the fossil logic guiding most policymaking in the Faroes, including the green energy transition, largely continues to be based on these expansionist myths and values. Strategies are narrated with visions of continuous escalating growth in social metabolism and of humanity as a common “we” progressing into the future with ever-increasing levels of material resource use yet with some unfortunate externalities lagging, such as inequality and ecological crisis (Hornborg 2009; Pugh & Chandler 2021). This historical narration does not “make ecological sense” (Cronon 1992), neither projected onto the past nor the future.

Islanding Future Imaginaries

In this text, I have used established metaphors of time and islands to defamiliarize and “other” current and dominant fossil imaginaries in the Anthropocene Faroes. From a critical perspective, some of the perceived successes of Faroese modernization must be reinterpreted as failures related to the challenges faced by human

societies in the Anthropocene. Not least, the high socio-metabolic path dependencies embedded in critical societal infrastructure present a barrier to sustainability transformations in the sectors providing the most fundamental human needs (e.g., housing, heating, and food), including the energy sector. Hence, a strategic focus on decoupling human wellbeing from accelerating natural resource use is urgently required, as is a stronger focus on global and local environmental justice. Nonetheless, imagining different worlds by moving beyond modernist fossil imaginaries proves difficult. One main reason is the discursive fixation on technological fixes to solve the current crises. As Maarten Hajer and Wytse Versteeg (2018) argue,

The use of fossil fuels is deeply embedded in our societal values and everyday routines. As a consequence, we lack coherent imaginaries of alternative post-fossil futures. This lack of imagination hinders our capacity for change. Currently, the available imaginaries are almost all corporate and focused on technological innovation. (p. 131)

Concomitantly, Hajer and Versteeg argue for new “techniques of futuring” and a social science concerned “about how to narrate viable alternative” and promising post-fossil imaginaries (Hajer & Versteeg 2018: 126). Building on how islands have been thought about to generate an understanding of the global ecological crisis, islands may likewise be generative of relational thinking in the Anthropocene (Pugh & Chandler 2021). One such narrative device was expressed in poetic form by South-Pacific scholar Teresia K. Teaiwa (2007, 2022), who suggested we “make island a verb” and islanding a form of living and world-making that could “save our lives” (p. 127). To island as a form of world-making accepts limits

while prioritizing care; in Teaiwa's words: "care for other humans, care for plants, animals; care for soil, care for water" (p. 127).

Inspired by Teaiwa and writing about the islanding of cultural geographies, Godfrey Baldacchino and Erik Clark (2013) reminded us that "[I]slands maintain a unique grip on our imagination as intriguing places where fantastic utopic and dystopic worlds are possible" (p. 131). Thus, islanding is about iterative and ongoing practice – about how to *do* your island. Doing the Anthropocene Faroes more sustainably – islanding the Faroes – will require imaginaries that acknowledge and respect limits with innovation that prioritizes care and wellbeing.

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New Fathers in Old Families

Changing Fatherhood and Family Life in the Faroes

Firouz Gaini

Abstract

This chapter examines the Faroese family in relation to economic, cultural and social transformations in recent decades. It reviews changes in family values and parenting styles, with a focus on the father's role and status in the household. Moreover, it examines the history of the Faroese family to better understand parenthood and the father-child relationship in a small-scale maritime society in the North Atlantic. It represents a critical social anthropological perspective on fatherhood and family life today. The ethnographic approach is explorative, and the aim of the chapter is to present a variety of contemporary fathers' perspectives and narratives on their paternal masculinity and fathering practices. The chapter draws on qualitative data from the research project 'Fatherhood in transition? Exploring everyday life, family relations and masculinity across two generations of men in contemporary Faroe Islands' (2018–2022). The chapter uses concepts and theoretical models from gender and island studies. It contributes to knowledge about gendered family relations and values in a society with a close connection to the ocean.

Keywords: *Parenthood, Masculinity, Care, Islands, Fishers*

Introduction

Family matters, no matter where one is located. The Faroes has sometimes been described as a ‘family-oriented’ society, but what does this really mean? One way of exploring the family is by shedding light on internal structures and relations within the core family unit. In this chapter, I discuss and review the father’s new roles and the transformation of the family as a gendered institution in Faroese society. The father’s role and status has changed over time in different contexts. The family is an institution, metaphor and concept that plays a central but confusing role in diverse debates and everyday conversations about change in the Faroese society. It is a “controversial term in anthropology with a definition beset by difficulty and disagreement” (Seymour-Smith 1986: 110). In the Faroese context, the family is strongly linked to dominant cultural and political images of the ‘Faroese way of life’. Most people in the Faroes have a common understanding of some of the family’s main characteristics; however, it is difficult “to define precisely what sorts and range of relationships the word covers” (Barnard & Spencer 2002: 223). The family might be associated with conservative (and often religious) values that oppose any change in parent-child relations; in other contexts, it might also represent a network that endorses changes in lifestyles and identities. As demonstrated in this chapter, this dualism also influences the interplay between ‘old’ and ‘new’ fathering styles in the Faroes. The central position of the family in Faroese society can be seen in the far-reaching webs of relations that define the islands’ extended families:

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”.
(Gaini 2013: 39)

However, it is important to avoid misinterpreting the role of the family in Faroese society. As Dennis Gaffin stressed in his ethnographic study of a Faroese village community,

[n]ot even adult brothers, sisters, or first cousins are necessarily close. One man said that he had as little as possible to do with one of his brothers and that brother's wife ... While Faroese kinship does channel some social contact and exchange of help, especially within the household, choice of social interchange is the rule. (Gaffin 1996: 102)

Slowly but steadily, the Faroes is moving in the direction of neighbouring countries in the Nordic region, but the 'traditional' gender and family identities of many islanders remain deep-rooted, especially among men and women from relatively small village communities that rely on fisheries (Hayfield 2020; Gaini 2011).

Many people see the family as a community with consanguineal intergenerational depth that gives them a sense of having deep roots in historic times; thus, it has become a very important part of the identity of many contemporary islanders. They want to explore their family history to find information about 'themselves'. The digitalisation of many national registers has facilitated this endeavour.

Case. Digital communities

The kinship register ('ættarbandsskráin') is by far the most visited page on 'Vangin', the gateway to digital Faroe Islands (gathering digital services from municipalities and public institutions). Faroe Islanders have, since Vangin was launched in November 2020, been able to immerse themselves in the deep history of their kin without much effort: investigating their

great-grandfathers' uncles and aunties, as well as many other mysterious long-gone relatives, on their computers. What used to take weeks and months of painstaking research, with time-consuming visits to dusty archives and conversations with the oldest living members of the family, can now be accomplished within just a few minutes. At the same time, this information will also make it easier to check if the present-day person that you know from your working or social life is a relative or not. The kinship register – based on large amounts of data from church books, censuses, national registers, and so on – goes all the way back to the Nordic Middle Ages. Before to the introduction of Vangin, only dedicated geneticists (and some genealogy experts) had been digging into this goldmine of knowledge – the kinship register – about the roots and meshwork of kin. This case demonstrates how new technologies are being used to facilitate old projects of tracking family roots among the islanders.

This chapter starts with a brief presentation of the history of the Faroese family, with a focus on the role of the sea and maritime work in the father's paternal masculinity and family identity. Historical context is important because the discussion about the 'new father' is connected to images of the 'traditional' father, with links to past centuries. The chapter continues with a section on changes in family values and fatherhood ideals within the island territory. Then, the chapter presents results from a large Faroese project on contemporary Faroese fatherhood(s). It reveals how different groups of fathers experience and respond to new demands and expectations on the so-called 'new father' in relation to their own fathering practices and family arrangements.

Brief History of the Faroese Family

Village Life Before the Fishing Industry Adventure

In the introduction to the first edition of the monthly children's journal *Ungu Föroyar* (*Young Faroe Islands*) from 1907, the publishers informed their young readers why they decided to launch a new periodical. Starting with "Dear children", they wrote about busy parents, among other topics: "When the light has been switched on, and your father has gone to the spinning wheel to spin, or to do some other work, and your mother has gone to prepare supper, or has sat down to sew – could be clothes for you – then you sit down by the light to read *Ungu Föroyar*" (Skarði & Konoy 1907: 1). The father is busy, but not far away. He is working, indoors or outdoors, and will have time to tell stories another evening. If the grandfather, grandmother, uncle, cousin, or any other familiar person who frequents the family home is unavailable for the storytelling session, the child now has *Ungu Föroyar* at their disposal.

This introduction indicates the beginning of a shift in (traditional) family life at the beginning of the 20th century, but it also reveals the Faroese father's central position in the home. Contrary to common (present-day) narratives about parenthood and care in past centuries, the Faroese father spent considerable time with his children – albeit more through work than play and more in winter more than in summer – in the 18th and 19th centuries (Rasmussen 2016). According to the family historian John R. Gillis, who largely referred to societies in the Global North, motherhood and fatherhood have switched places in people's mental maps over the centuries:

Before the nineteenth century, when Europeans and Americans thought about family and home, they almost exclusively conjured up father figures. Today people imagine family and home using

primarily images of mothers [...] Mother and father figures function in our culture to represent the familiar and unknown. Invariably, mothers are perceived as close, and fathers as distant. Together they set the boundaries of the family, but neither is true to the real people who are our parents. (Gillis 1997: 181)

While this indeed is a rough generalisation, it highlights the risks associated with uncritical use of contemporary concepts and schemes in the analysis of fathering practices and realities of past centuries. There was no clear division between home and work, and the father and mother's working tasks were usually not weighted against each other until the 20th century (Gaini 2011). The Faroese cultural historian Jóan Pauli Joensen has argued that the family, with the father at the forefront, was the "production entity" in peasant society until the 19th century (Joensen 1985: 9). Parents were associated with a larger group of kin that reached far beyond the individual household. In historic and folkloristic literature from the Faroes, the father is never presented and discussed in isolation and without direct reference to kin and local community. Instead, it discusses the small and tightly knit village community, ancient customs and rituals, natural resources and geographic conditions, and collective work on land and at sea (e.g., Joensen 1987).

The Family and the Individual

What individual mothers and fathers discussed at home, how they organised their everyday life activities and rituals, and what kind of pedagogical 'principles' they subscribed to concerning child rearing are themes that have been overlooked in most books and theses about the Faroes prior to the last decades of the 20th century. Such private topics were not considered to be stimulating or relevant to scientific studies of island dwellers. Some publications that outlined

the Faroese child-parent relationship were also marked by a lack of understanding of the connection between the family unit on the one hand and the larger kin group and social community on the other. The Danish priest and botanist Jørgen Landt, for instance, wrote about families and child rearing in his book about the Faroes from 1800:

The child rearing does not deserve to be praised. Due to the parents' somewhat exaggerated love for their children, they are raised to be completely independent; and one must be amazed that the children of this neglected and strange upbringing, when they grow up, become quite smart, healthy, and even well-mannered young people. (Landt 1965: 246)

The ‘strange upbringing’ that disturbed the Danish priest, who described the work and norms of the islanders of the north with a colonial gaze and a paternalistic narrative, was also mentioned by the American anthropologist Jonathan Wylie, who stated that Faroese children were “raised with an almost incredible tolerance”, even well into the 20th century (Wylie 1974: I/31). He continued, “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/74). While it is easy to detect a veiled colonial tone in this ethnographic text, Wylie made an interesting observation in his quote that contributes to our understanding of the parent-child relationship in the Faroes. This ‘free’ childhood performed in the local communities discussed by Wylie reflects so-called Faroese individualism, which attributes the role of guarding children’s extensive individual freedom to the family (Gaini 2013: 43-46). The child’s social position within the family is based on the close interrelation between family,

community and place in the Faroes. The child is not only a member of a family, he is also a part of the community and environment. The family is embedded in local social and geographical structures.

Gaffin, another American anthropologist with fieldwork experience in the Faroes, also analysed the position of the family (kinship) in Faroese society. He argued that it is because of non-restrictive blood and marital ties that the islanders' attachment to space (native village and surroundings) is so strong. He highlighted,

The looseness of social bonds goes hand in hand with cardinal features of Faroese culture – individualism, egalitarianism, and spatial attachment and identity. (Gaffin 1996: 102)

Fathers at Sea

In the 19th and 20th centuries, new opportunities for a wage-earning career as a fisherman who worked at sea for longer periods of time changed the everyday lives of many fishing families. As a result, fathers were periodically far away from home. Their fathering and caring practices at home became seasonal and depended on the schedules of the fishing vessels that they belonged to (Joensen 1985). Although fathers did not become completely disconnected from the family home, family arrangements needed to adapt to their new working conditions. The so-called 'fisher-farmer' (fishing at sea and being a farmer at home) was a common system from 1880 to 1940, and women were probably much more involved in farming activities than fishery-focused historical narratives often seem to indicate (Jacobsen 2007).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the 'family' (primarily at the household level) was explicitly introduced to central cultural and political debates in society. Family life, parenthood, children's health and welfare, education, women's societal position, and other themes

were discussed in newspapers and meetings. Women established their own associations and networks in a struggle to gain influence beyond their household (Jacobsen 2007). The household – rather than the village community – operated as an (economically and socially) autonomous entity in the society that emerged when fisheries-based capitalism, with its free trade and monetary economy, was introduced to the Faroes in the second half of the 18th century (Joensen 1985). Global economic trends now had a strong influence on the Faroese economy, and the Faroese family became entangled in financial turmoil. To a growing degree, fishermen’s work and incomes were influenced by wars, crises, international trade agreements, competition and opportunities for engagement in long distance work.

More than a father, the Faroese fisherman also became a national cultural icon at the end of the 19th century and was glorified in literature and arts productions. From this perspective, he lived a brave and dangerous life at the mercy of oceanic swirls and storms, which was very different from the mundane lives of farmers in villages. According to Sverre Patursson (1871-1960), Faroese men “[were] hard-working and diligent sailors whom the country [could] be proud of” (Patursson 1901: 1). In popular narratives, the fisherman father was presented as a responsible man and a breadwinner who took care of his children and family by working at sea. The empty space left by a father when he worked at sea was filled by other relatives and covillagers but first and foremost by the mother herself (van Ginkel 2007). In many cases, she combined the roles of mother and father into one person. Because of the father’s maritime work, fisherman families had homes where the mother oversaw all everyday tasks, from caring for, playing with and educating the children to paying bills, participating in parental meetings and fixing the kitchen sink (ibid.). The father was a guest in his own home, so to speak. As in other families with fathers who

are engaged in long-distance work, the Faroese fisherman family had a relatively invisible father whom everyone discussed. He was admired, but he was also missing from many family and social gatherings that involved the children: birthday parties, Christmas celebrations, school parties and so on.

In the last decades of the 20th century, the Faroes underwent a severe economic crisis at the beginning of the 1990s, which involved a transition to a late modern society with less of a focus on the fisherman as the country's irreplaceable 'breadwinner'. For many fishermen families, the restructuring of the economy in the 1980s and 1990s put pressure on fathers to find new work and a new identity that suited other modern sectors. Nicole Power, who wrote about men and gender in Newfoundland in relation to the fishery crisis, stated,

[m]ale fishers' coping strategies and responses to restructuring initiatives reflect a desire for continuity in a tumultuous time, as well as the availability of particular tools – both material and ideational – to resist and accommodate change. (Power 2005: 31)

The transformation of the fisheries sector advantaged the large-scale deep-sea fishing from trawlers and disadvantaged traditional small-scale coastal fishing from open boats. This transformation altered the image of the fisherman as a national icon. The industry continued to dominate the national export economy, but the masculinity of the fisherman became less popular among young people in the Faroes in the 21st century.

Returning Home

In the 1980s and 1990s, new 'modern' family values and ideals reached the shores of the Faroes through, for example, popular culture (film and television, music and lifestyle magazines) and

the growth of an urban middle class in the country's capital and main towns. This generated new debates about the Faroese father. Who was he? What fatherhood and fathering styles did he fit into? What about fathers who were not fishermen? The golden era of the 'brave fisherman' was ending as a growing number of young Faroese men started investing in training and education to prepare them for a career on land. The paternal masculinities and identities of many Faroese men, especially in village communities with a strong attachment to maritime industries, continued to be inspired and informed by the symbols and values associated with the fisherman (and his family). The men who were engaged in work in the fishing sector shared (local) knowledge and experiences across generations. Younger men learned from older men. Today, in the 2020s, a larger group of young men seems to be interested in and identifying with the 'new father' spending much time at home, together with his children and family. The inclusive and caring father has become the dominant fathering model in the archipelago in the Northeastern Atlantic.

Today, fathers are confronted with new gender and family values that focus on caring, inclusive and gender-equal fatherhood (Gaini 2022). Reading stories to one's children in the evenings, as mentioned in the *Ungu Föroyar* introduction, is good but not sufficient, according to the Nordic caring fatherhood model (Gaini 2022). Today, the father is generally expected to play a central caring role in the everyday lives of his smallest children, not only older children, as was the norm in past generations. However, with regard to caring for babies, the father usually leaves the primary care role to the mother. Hayfield stated that gender relations 'prove to be especially resistant to change in the context of care, at least for young babies' (Hayfield 2020: 114). We return to this point later. For men who work at sea, such as fathers who are engaged

in long-distance work, new technologies of the globalising world can help them ‘be there’ when they are away. Gestur Hovgaard, a Faroese sociologist who conducted a study on Faroese men who are engaged in long-distance work, explained,

[b]ecause family decisions, family planning and family obligations can be managed by cell phone, email, Skype and Facebook, you may be part of your home even while away. The mariners are talking with their family on a nearly daily basis, and the time they have for internet surfing means that they claim to be more up to date on local issues than family and friends permanently there. The merging of ‘home’ and ‘work’ has radically changed social relations onboard the vessel, because the private sphere has replaced former social organization onboard. (Hovgaard 2015: 182)

The father is at a crossroads. He engages in the (re)negotiation of his identity in relation to work, the family, the social community and the new meaning of care and hands-on fatherhood.

The Father at a Crossroads

Mobile Family Men

In discussions of the changing role of fathers in the Faroes today, it is necessary to emphasise *how* change is discussed: is it in relation to the friction between continuity and discontinuity in family practices and values, the balance between dominant and alternative narratives about the father or the encounter between local and global understandings of the ‘new’ father in society? While the number of men who work as fishermen has been on the decline for many years that most young people do not plan a future as fishers, the maritime culture of the Faroes continues to draw on idealised images of the

fisherman and the fishing family. Political and cultural discourses on family relations, parenthood, children, paternal leave, care and education continue to use the fisherman family with a father who works at sea as a key reference (e.g., Hayfield 2020).

This observation demonstrates the special conditions that influence family life in island and coastal communities in the North. Life in a small and relatively remote archipelago in the Northeastern Atlantic continues to be radically different from life in urban centres on the European continent. The ocean, the remote location and the small size of society influence the ways in which people discuss children, family, community and place. Fathers who are engaged in long-distance maritime work do not necessarily work in the fisheries sector. Instead, many Faroese men and fathers work on freighters (container ships) and oil tankers around the globe (Hovgaard 2015).

Family matters, and people spend considerable time discussing their family duties, identities and networks, but this goes hand in hand with extensive individual freedom of choice concerning mobility, social life and future projects. This family-focused individualism (or Faroese individualism, as I called it elsewhere [e.g., Gaini 2013]) fits to the inter- and intragenerational relationships in the fishing family with a father that spends much time at sea. Uncles and other male relatives might take the role of ‘father’ when the real father is away from home for longer periods of time.

Annika Biskopstø, who wrote a thesis on Faroese fishermen’s narratives about life at sea and at home, argued that young fishermen do not feel that they fit into the category of hardcore ‘real sailors’ and that they instead consider themselves to be modern labourers at sea. Her study explored the contrasts between “home and away, tradition and modernity, masculinity and femininity, danger and safety, experience and education, toughness and emotion” in their lives (Biskopstø 2016: II). Biskopstø claimed that Faroese fishermen

“feel more free at sea, but they still miss their families” (Biskopstø 2016: II). Thus, we can observe how the family and fatherhood values interlock the traditional maritime culture and the emerging globalising culture in the Faroes. The father wants to be close to his partner and children, but he also feel an urge to be at sea.

The Other Half

It is necessary to examine mothers more closely to gain a better and more nuanced understanding of Faroese fathers. While fathers were rarely discussed in Faroese literature prior to the second half of the 20th century, as previously explained, Faroese men were at the centre of the stage in dominant national narratives on the history of the nation. The Faroese man was, so to speak, the ‘father of the nation’. The written history of the Faroes was mostly produced by men and about boys and men (Gaini 2011). Generally (in a gross statistical sense), men had higher incomes, higher representation and positions on boards and committees and higher representation in local and national councils and governments than women (Rafnsdóttir 2010). Research on contemporary Faroese society has shown that many Faroese women work part-time jobs and thus earn less than men, on average (Hayfield et al. 2016; Knudsen 2009; Nielsen et al. 2020).

In the 21st century, new critical social studies on Faroese women’s societal participation and position, rights, identities, sexualities and mobilities have been conducted, with a focus on the geographical (small island society) and historic contexts (e.g., Djurhuus 2022; Hayfield 2024; Hermannsdóttir 2023; Knudsen 2016). The question of gender equality and egalitarianism has been central to discussions based on these studies. For instance, Hayfield noted the following in an article on gender equality legislation in the Faroes:

[D]iscourses of gender equality remain contested and a site of ongoing discursive struggle. From such struggles emerge diverse political visions, debates and policies pertaining to gender equality, which must be understood historically, geographically, and politically. (Hayfield 2024: 91)

Another new theme is motherhood and care in the Faroes, which were examined in Djurhuus's anthropological (master's) project. She explained that, in the Faroes (a small island society), women must

attentively consider consequences of being (too) different in how they choose to practice their motherhood, being that their social character is vulnerable to sustained judgement in the local community. (Djurhuus 2022: 4)

Her study is interesting from a father's perspective, because it reveals that mothers struggle to negotiate between own mothering practice and dominant images of Faroese motherhood. While many fathers turn to the 'new father' style of parenting, many mothers are under pressure to perform a special 'traditional mother' style of parenting. Djurhuus examined Faroese parenthood, gender and moral parenthood dilemmas. Future research on parenthood and families in the Faroes should expand the discussion on changed fatherhood values with studies on LGBTQ+ families and other families that do not fit the dominant heteronormative 'mother, father and children' model.

A New Family Landscape

There has been fundamental change in the Faroese family since the last decades of the 20th century. In previous work, I called the Faroes a family-oriented and child-centric society with extensive

family networks and large groups of siblings. Today, many men remain unmarried, live alone and do not become fathers. Moreover, total fertility rates are decreasing: 2.6 children in 2016, 2.3 in 2020 and 1.8 in 2023. However, fathers generally spend more time with their children today than 50 years ago (Gaini 2022).

Today, the Faroese family encompasses a variety of family arrangements. The heteronormative, nuclear family with married and cohabiting parents of Faroese ethnic origin and more than one child in the household is but one of many family types in the archipelago. There are also single-parent families, one-person families, LGBTQ+ families, international families, fisherman families and so forth. Families that voluntarily do not have children remain less common in the Faroes than in neighbouring countries (Gaini 2022). In a thesis on male childlessness in a child-centric society, Petur Háberg reported that involuntarily childless Faroese men expressed an emptiness and loss over ‘the story about themselves’ (Háberg 2022).

Although fathers’ roles and identities are changing today in many ways, some trends seem to remain the same across generations. For instance, the Faroes features a higher level of ‘familialism’ (a welfare system wherein it is presumed that families will take responsibility for the care of their members rather than leaving that responsibility to the government) in society than in other Nordic countries (e.g., Hayfield 2018). On average, Faroese fathers spend fewer days on paternal leave than fathers in other Nordic countries (Hayfield 2020).

Research on Faroese Fatherhood(s) and Fathering Styles Today

Fatherhood Research

I now discuss the father through my own extensive ethnographic research on the Faroes, which is primarily based on empirical data from the project ‘Faroese fatherhood in transition? Exploring everyday life, family relations and masculinity across two generations of men in contemporary Faroes’ (2018–2022)³⁵. In this project, I examined Faroese men’s own experiences and perspectives as family men, with or without children. Funded by Research Council Faroe Islands, the project represents the first large-scale research project on men and fatherhood(s) conducted at the University of the Faroes. It employed a mixed methods approach that included individual interviews, observations, essays and a national digital survey. The 20 interviewees were men from different local communities, age groups, socio-economic classes and ethnicities. All interviewees were Faroese fathers in heterosexual relationships with active participation in the labour market. One subproject examined the perspectives of youth. Young people from lower secondary school discussed the Faroese father in individual essays that we collected and analysed in relation to the rest of the qualitative data. All interviewed participants were heterosexual men with families and active participation in the labour market. The aim of the project was to go beyond the stereotypical dichotomy of the traditional local family versus the modern global family and to interrogate the so-called ‘new man’ (Johansson & Andreasson 2017) within this family landscape: Who is he, and what is new about the ‘new’ father?

35 Thanks to the team of researchers participating in the data gathering process: Runa Preeti Isfeld, Jónleyp Djurhuus, Sunniva B. Vang, Gunnhild Persson, Elsa Maria H. Hansen, Elisabeth Thomsen, and Ibrar Ali.

My work was informed by critical men and masculinity studies. In the 1980s, anthropologists started to study men as ‘engendered and engendering persons’ (Gutmann 1997: 400). As a subject of interest, men followed the expanding field of women’s studies, feminist theory and the women’s movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Men and masculinity studies was a segment of a strongly constructivist school in the social sciences, which attempted to break down essentialist understandings of cultural categories such as gender and sexuality. A key element of this endeavour was a poststructuralist understanding of gender and sexualities as categories created in discourses (e.g., Butler 1998; Foucault 2001; Ortner 1974; Rubin 2011; West & Zimmerman 1987). The scientific scholarship on men and masculinities has grown since the end of the 1990s, and key themes such as sexuality, gender equality and fathering/fatherhood are the focus of most interdisciplinary men and masculinity studies today (Johansson 2011).

Lisbeth Bekkengen discussed ‘child-oriented masculinity’ in her research on parenthood in contemporary Nordic families, which refers to men’s desire to spend more time at home with their children and assume a greater role in care work (Bekkengen 2003). Nordic research on fatherhood has also closely examined and analysed the welfare state and its policies of (gender) equality and parental leave. Berit Brandt and Elin Kvande’s book *Fleksible Fedre (Flexible Fathers)* explored Norwegian fathers and changing parenthood; it is one example of a very influential Nordic publication (Brandt & Kvande 2003). Writing about family politics, Kvande not only reviewed the extent to which more expansive paternal leave schemes strengthen the father-child relationship in the context of the ‘father-friendly’ welfare state but also how family politics influence ‘work-life balance’ from the father’s perspective (Kvande 2009). This is indeed a relevant subject in critical gender and family research

in the Faroes. The objective of the Faroese research project was to discuss fatherhood and family life as experienced by contemporary Faroese men from an anthropological perspective. It examines men's ambivalent identities in Faroese society: What does it mean to be a father in the Faroes today? In the following sections, a selection of the empirical material is used to discuss the situation of different groups of Faroese fathers in contemporary society.

Against Too Much Planning

Frank, a 35-year-old (unskilled) worker with a wife and two children under school age, said that he had a “dream of becoming a father” when he was an adolescent but did not have any focused goal concerning his family life as an adult. He just knew that he wanted to have children. “It just comes naturally”, he explained. Frank believed that it is important to build a solid foundation (e.g., housing and regular income) before starting a family life with children, but he was not overly worried about other family issues. More than once during our interview, he said “we figure out” in relation to the complex tasks and puzzles that he and his partner – like most other parents – needed to solve. He was optimistic and impulsive. Frank was a self-confident person opposed “too much planning” in life because this was “not natural”. He said that things “change rapidly” in life and that one needs to be ready to swiftly adapt to new conditions.

Frank argued that a “good father” should always be there for his family and children. he explained: “He should always take the lead if he or his family face problems. He should try to be a role model for his children”. Pondering his own childhood, Frank believed that modern-day children have less freedom to do what they want. While reflecting on the differences between the Faroes and other countries (especially neighbouring Nordic countries), he spoke disapprovingly

about large cities where “it is not possible to simply let the children play outdoors”. He also shared his thoughts on first-time fathers in the Faroes and in Denmark: “We are maybe a bit younger when we start our lives [as parents], while in Denmark they do more planning to reach a certain age before getting children”. This is an important difference, according to Frank. He explained, “You know, there are many people here in the Faroes who are parents from their twenties, or early twenties”. He added that, in the Faroes, “you can start a family life before you start with anything professional”, in contrast to Denmark. In this context, Frank was referring to modern young adults educational and career plans and strategies. He underlined that one could pursue both at the same time – that is, being a father and studying or working without risk of social stigma – in the Faroes. Frank felt that young adults are freer when it comes to societal expectations for their fatherhood and family life in the Faroes than in Denmark.

Frank was also eager to discuss paternal leave during the interview, which is an important topic to him as father. He said that his boss tried to persuade him to continue working, but Frank insisted on taking paternity leave for two weeks after the birth of his child. He revealed, “I was fired once because I asked for permission to get paternity leave”. Frank eagerly recounted daily routines and collaboration with his wife over the children's activities, upbringing and education. Frank and his wife regularly discussed and negotiated a variety of family-related issues, and there seemed to be a high level of flexibility in their arrangements. He said, “it [life] would maybe also have turned boring or uninteresting if it were to be completely directed by a template, so I also think it is fine to take it as it comes”. Frank's narrative, which promoted a “take-it-as-it-comes” attitude in relation to various family arrangements and decisions, reflected the behaviour of many of the fathers who participated in the study. They

approved a parenting style giving the parents the right to organise and perform their family life without much interference from society. This does not imply an endorsement of accidental parenthood because the actual parental practice is the outcome is stringently shaped by shared family and child-rearing values in the Faroese family, which is in harmony with the discussion on Faroese individualism from the first part of this chapter (Gaini 2020). The process of negotiation between father and mother, as well as between parents and close relatives, is largely based on tacit knowledge and cultural codes.

Listening to the Father's Father

A large smile appeared on Tróndur's face when asked about his grandchildren.³⁶ He spent significant time with them and had “a lot of fun” playing and being silly with them. Tróndur was 60 years old at the time of the study and lived in a village on a western island with his wife. He had four grandchildren: two in the Faroes and two in Denmark. Tróndur had a very close relationship with all of his grandchildren. He saw those who lived in the Faroes nearly every day and the ones who lived in Denmark four to five times per year, either when he and his wife visit Denmark, or the grandchildren travel to the Faroes. Tróndur expressed how nice it was to know that the grandchildren who lived in Denmark very much looked forward to being reunited with their grandparents:

Then they come to the Faroes, and they count the days until they get to be with their grandmother and grandfather. It is really touching that the children ... the five-year-old says, ‘Now, it will only be five more days’.

36 The data about the Faroese grandfathers was collected and analysed by Dr. Runa Preeti Isfeld.

From Tróndur's perspective, one of the main differences between being a father and a grandfather was that he was much more physically and mentally present when he is with the children as a grandfather. Both he and his wife had much more free time than when they were young parents themselves. Therefore, Tróndur loved to engage in outdoor activities with his grandchildren, such as hiking in the mountains, fishing at the shore or visiting the beach to run away from the waves. When Tróndur was asked whether there were any differences between his and his own grandfather's way of being a grandfather, he replied no: "My grandparents did everything they could to help [my parents] and we do the same [for our children]. In my world, there is no difference". However, when the conversation shifted to questions of gender equality and the distribution of house chores, Tróndur explained how the father's life has changed since he was a young father.

Yes, it has changed a lot. Before, it was expected that the mom did most of the work in the house – including raising the children. Especially if you were a sailor [...] But today, both parents do everything. At my age, there was hardly any grandfather who changed diapers and that stuff. But it is completely normal today. I have also changed diapers for my own children, but it was not normal. So, bringing up the children was the mother's responsibility while the father was allowed to be away [...] It is more equal today [...] It is a change for the better.

According to Tróndur, there has indeed been a shift over the generations with regard to caring fatherhood, with a close bond between the father and small children. However, the grandfather's role in his grandchildren's lives has changed very little in relation to play and relaxing and informal communication.

With or Without Children

Magnus is 35 years old. He lives by himself in a house in a village and is the father of three children from three different women. The children are between 2 and 12 years of age and all live with their respective mothers. Magnus said,

when they are here, it is fantastic. When they are not here, I miss them every single day. The worst thing is to say goodbye every time they leave. So, there are a lot of feelings at stake.

Magnus worked as a schoolteacher. He discussed how much he missed his children and spent considerable time thinking about them when he was not with them. However, Magnus was happy that they all lived in the same region as him, which meant that he could easily drop by to see his children, even when this was not planned beforehand. He described what he missed the most about not living with his children:

All the simple things in everyday life. They grow and develop every day, and I am not there to see all the small changes. [...] In the evenings, when you lie in your bed alone, you think about them a lot. What are they doing now? And to observe them becoming more independent and grown-ups, and to see them make progress [without being there]. That is the worst.

During the conversation, Magnus repeatedly stressed how much he missed his children. Nevertheless, he emphasised that one must set aside one's own feelings as a parent:

I think it is important that there is a good tone of voice between the parents. That you can set aside your own personal feelings

and that you put the child first. Because it is all about them. It is not about us anymore, right?

Magnus is one of the many men with very different backgrounds and lives who did not live with their children. He and most of the other men from not living together with their children tried to keep a good and close relationship with their sons and daughters. These fathers gave high priority to their children's health, wellbeing, education and need for close contact with their father (and his family), who did not live in the same house as them.

The Immigrant Fathers

In the canteen of a fish filleting plant on a southern island, we met 38-year-old Arief. Arief, who had lived in the Faroes for three years at the time of the interview, was originally from an African country. He lived in several other countries before moving to the North Atlantic. Arief lived in a village with his wife and their 6-year-old daughter and 3-year-old son. In his first year in the Faroes, he was by himself while his wife and children lived in Africa. He described his decision to relocate to the Faroes without his family as “one of the hardest and difficult decisions”.

Arief's wife, who is from the same country as Arief, had an aunt who lived in the Faroes. This was why they began to discuss the Faroes as a place that they could migrate to. They decided that Arief should move first to determine whether “it is good in the Faroes”. When he arrived in the Faroes, he did not immediately obtain a job. Arief received financial support from the government for some months. When the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, he worried that ‘they’ (the authorities) would send him back. However, with help from his wife's aunt, he secured a job at the fish factory. Arief was very thankful to his manager, who gave him this opportunity:

They are very good people and the owner of the factory. It is very good, and one of the first things that I have noticed here in this country, is the people here compared to others that I noticed, they have equality. Do you know what I mean? There is no class.

When Arief explained why he moved to the Faroes, he cited his children's futures as the most important reason: "I am pretty sure that the future of my children will be in good hands now since I am living in the Faroes". He described how much his daughter loves the Faroes, how happy she has been since they moved there and how she prayed that they would never move back to the city where they came from every day. In the Faroes, there are many children, and his daughter has many friends. Arief described how he and his daughter spent time together at weekends. During the summer, they played outdoors and went to nice places. Sometimes, they also went to church. This is what Arief called "father and daughter bonding". On weekdays, there is little time for fun activities because Arief worked 16-hour days at the factory. Therefore, their 'bonding' mostly took place at the weekend.

When Arief was asked what it means to be a good father, he said that the most important thing was to be responsible:

You are there for your daughter, for your children. All the time for her, no matter what. For me, that is being a good father, and you provide everything – even if there are things that you cannot give. You do your best to provide something for your family. I think that is being a good father.

Arief described how being a parent was the most difficult job in the world, but it was also the most rewarding and fulfilling. Arief

repeatedly mentioned his gratitude; he was thankful that he could never be separated from his family again and that he would see his children grow up. He said that he could not ask for more, as he had his family and his job.

The Children of the Fathers

Amy, an adolescent girl from Tórshavn who participated in our project, is in her own essay about the Faroese father reflecting on changes in fathering practices and images of fatherhood in the Faroes:

We always hear stories about how tough and masculine men used to be. The stories always start with “when I was young”. In the past, you got married, then you got children, and that was it, even if you did not love your partner [...] You can imagine a father from the 1950s–1960s, wearing a coarse-knitted jersey, rubber boots, looking dirty and smelling of wind-dried meat ... My father is not like that. He is shopping, playing football, and other things like a modern father would do in his everyday life [...] He is healthy, does a lot of training, and looks really happy.

Like many other adolescents, Amy used history and myths about the past to delimit and insulate representations of the modern father. She stressed that her father was ‘not like that’ to distance herself from stereotypes of the Faroese father.

Oliver, another adolescent from Tórshavn, wrote about the special role that the father plays for his children:

It is the boys who profit from a father who is caring and present through life. You can only learn a small part from the mother, and the rest is learned from the father. If the father does a poor

job in the upbringing of the son, then he has a bad influence on society. Life is a rollercoaster with many swings, and you don't know what tomorrow will bring – and that is why it is good to have a person who can help you in the struggle that characterises the young manhood years.

According to Oliver, the father provides the child with a different kind of care than the mother. As an adolescent in a difficult period of life and with many important decisions to take, Oliver highlighted the special role of the father.

New Fathers and All of the Other men

Flexible Fathers

Many of the fathers' descriptions of fatherhood underlined their striving to become 'modern' fathers spending much time in the family home – participating in housework, care work and the management of an inclusive family. At the same time, they discussed their own childhood in nostalgic narratives. Therefore, the fathers clearly valued both 'modern' and 'traditional' ways of practicing family life. Most fathers' experiences and fathering practices did not fit stereotypical representations of the Faroese (fisherman's) family. In her master's thesis on young contemporary fathers in the Faroes, the anthropologist Sunniva B. Vang wrote,

Through moral experiments such as adjusting working hours to be able to spend as much time with their children as possible or to take part in parental leave, the fathers transform themselves in order to become better parents [...] The fathers not only strive to be present – they also hold other dreams connected to education and career which can only be fulfilled abroad.
(Vang 2022: 3)

Vang claimed that young fathers face a dilemma, as they want to spend considerable time with children; at the same time, the small island context and new narrative of mobility necessitates a move away from home over shorter or longer periods of time for work, education or other opportunities. The men in Vang's study were not engaged in maritime work and did not plan to become sailors; many of them wanted to study or gain special working experiences overseas to strengthen their career opportunities in the Faroes. All fathers, young or old, whether they work at sea or on land, are interested in their children's future.

When he was asked what he thinks is the most important task for a father to fulfil, Jóannes, a father of three, answered that it is ensuring that children will do good later in life. According to him, a father should try to encourage his children to "acquire good qualities, such as discipline, to be a good person, a good friend" and "to prepare them for [adult] life and provide a good foundation to build upon". This aspiration was echoed in all the fathers' narratives. They shared an ambition to be fathers that could provide good prospects to their children, although they differed somewhat in how this should be done and what a 'good life' might look like. This kind of moral striving was identified as a central component in the men's narratives on fatherhood.

Child-centric Paternal Masculinity

The fathers in our study consistently said that the ideal role(s) of contemporary Faroese fathers has significantly expanded. The fathers expressed that they had busy lives and had to uphold many different roles at the same time. This contrasted with an image of the father from past generations as a man with a simpler and less ambiguous role and identity within the family. The fathers in our

study believed that Faroese fathers in the past only had to uphold a masculine role as a provider for the family.

For example, a young father named Jákup mentioned that it was perceived as strange when his grandfather went for a walk with his infant in a baby stroller as a young father. Today, Jákup said that nobody would notice. The fathers in our study were also very insistent on explicitly voicing their desire to be present and involved in their children's lives. They wanted to spend considerable time with their children and participate in everyday household chores. Jákup explained that he would be happy to take paternity leave and spend his time cleaning the house. The small geographical scale of Faroese society, which makes it easy to regularly meet relatives, was another topic that the fathers discussed in relation to questions about modern Faroese fathers. Elias, a father from a northern village, stated,

You have your parents close by – grandmothers and grandfathers, family. I think there is a great difference between the Faroes and Denmark. The family ties are a lot stronger in the Faroes [...]

Like Elias, many of the fathers discussed the central role that the family plays in the Faroes. Some participants who had studied or worked in Denmark or other places for several years returned to the Faroes when they were ready to start a family and have children. A main reason for this decision was the safe and peaceful life that they associated with the North Atlantic archipelago. Having family nearby was also a factor that drove them back to the region.

Based on the results of the Faroese study, we can argue that it does not make sense to discuss the 'new father' without considering the historical, cultural, social and geographical context. The fathers

discussed fatherhood, family life and care work based on fathering practices characterised by flexibility and open-endedness. I argue that this is anchored in the historical context of the Faroes.

Conclusion

Fatherhood is complex and multidimensional in the 21st century (Miller 2011). The father represents a ‘different’ kind of protective care, according to participants in the Faroese study. According to Andrea Doucet, fathers are engaged in the following types of nurturing, which are not only relevant to small children: ‘fun and playfulness, a physical and outdoors approach, promoting children’s considered risk taking, and encouraging children’s independence’ (Doucet 2018: 110). This is in line with observations from the Faroes, as young people generally described the father as the main parent who was responsible for the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge and nature-related activities (Gaini 2020).

By reviewing the micro-politics of men’s family lives, this chapter reveals that the Faroese father – as a ‘modified breadwinner’ – today lives with and negotiates different masculine styles of caring (Miller 2011). Faroese fathers, who belong to a ‘family-oriented’ and ‘child-centred’ society’ (Gaini 2013) with a culture that gives women a ‘natural’ primary caregiver position, have a certain ‘pick-and-choose’ privilege in their negotiation of their parental role in relation to small children (Johansson and Klinth 2010).

The father’s position in the Faroese family clearly indicates a shift in the history of the family in island society in the North Atlantic. The ways in which the participants discussed the role and value of the father and different generations (grandfathers, fathers and children of fathers) demonstrated a cultural landscape with simultaneous processes of continuity and discontinuity. Most father put a lot of effort into the performance of caring fatherhood,

but the specific meaning of care in relation to the child-father relationship is changing through time and across generations. The 'new' father is not as new as he is believed to be, and the 'traditional' father is more modern than he is often assumed. Many fathers engaged in childcare at home before the 'new' father was introduced in gender debates, and some young contemporary fathers who consider themselves to be champions of inclusive fatherhood have traditional perceptions of gender differences. In the Faroes, the father continues to play an important role in the lives of his children. He needs to find a balance between being at home and being away and between the nuclear family and the large network of relatives.

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