

The Faroe Islands

Tórshavn, capital of the Faroe Islands

Local Voices From The Faroe Islands

By Mikka Nieminen, Johanna Roto and Eija Syrjäntäki

1. Introduction

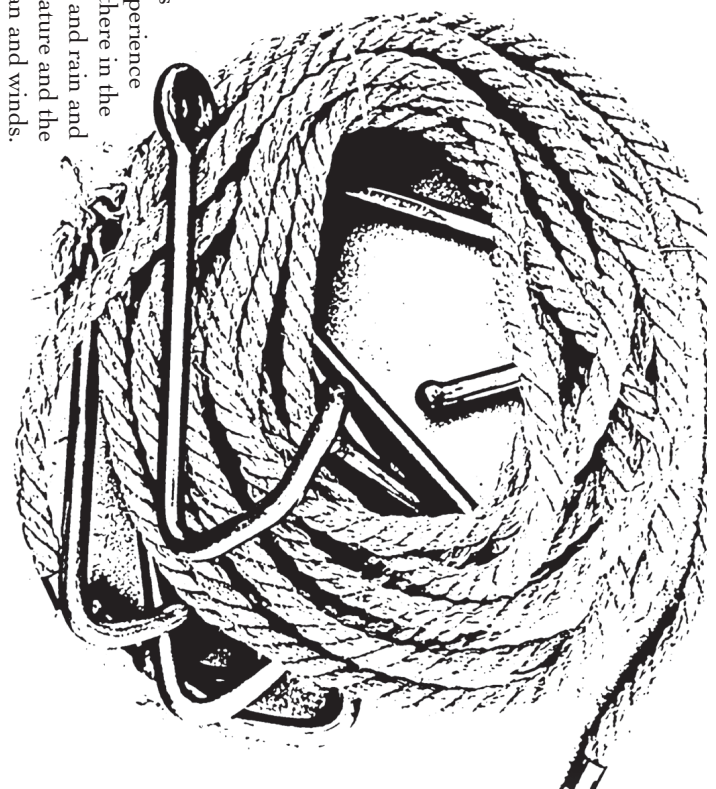
Englishman Sydney Norgate described in 1943 “The Faroe Islands as *“the land of maybe”*”. This maybe, *“kunniska”*, seems to be a crucial part of Faroese life and way of living: *“Maybe we go fishing, maybe we travel”* – everything is related to climate.

The Faroe Islands are located in the middle of North Atlantic Ocean, at 62°N and 7°W. The islands consist of 18 islands, which are separated from each other by fjords and sounds. Total area is 1396 km² - but there is always no more than 5 km to shore. The closest land is Shetland, which is located at a distance of 300 km to the southeast.

Just over 47000 people and 70 000 sheep live in the Faroe Islands, which capital is Tórshavn. The official languages spoken are Faroese and Danish. Religion has an important role in Faroese culture.

The Faroe Islands has been a self-governing territory under the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Denmark since 1948. Autonomy is ruled by local government, *Føroya Landaðing*, and parliament, *Føroya Løgting*. The Faroes has chosen not to be a part of European Union.

During the summer 2003 we had the honour of visiting those islands and discuss with the local people and learn more about their culture, how they value life and how they respect



nature. It was rewarding experience to get to live there in the middle of fog and rain and see the true nature and the power of ocean and winds.

In this paper we will be discussing and passing on the thoughts the locals shared with us. All the discussions are used with the permission.

2. Whaling

Schools of **long-finned pilot whales** (*Globicephala melas*) have been caught in the Faroe Islands for hundreds of years. Therefore, the Faroese culture is strongly connected around whaling and activities related to the whale hunt. **In Faroese the pilot whales are known as *grindavalar***

Whaling has had a great importance in the earlier days, because it brought needed addition to a subsistence diet of the people. Whaling has remained as well a way to get food and as a combining factor of people. Today the importance of pilot whaling can be divided to three different reasons – whaling has an importance as food, economically and it has a



social meaning.

The Faroese pilot whaling has been widely and heavily criticised in the International media. This happens often with false arguments, because lack of understanding the tradition.

Ólavur Sjurðarberg lives in Leirvík and works as a school teacher. He is the Chairman of Pilot Whalers Association, which main purpose is to spread information about pilot whaling and train the local people to conduct the whaling in a proper way.

“For the community, Faroes, they [whaling] brought a lot of food for free. That’s important for the community, for all, house holds and the community in Faroes, they got a lot of meat, for free, and also, of course, blubber and then the hunt is going on... when the hunt itself is over, it’s like a dealing process and preparing process to store the meat. It gets all the people in community in one way or another and there’s a lot of people out, so you can have a talk and meet people... it’s nice together.” [Ólavur Sjurðarberg]

According to Ólavur Sjurðarberg, whaling has been and still is an essential part in the people’s lives. Pilot whales bring food for people, and activities related to the hunt itself bring people together. No money is involved in hunting. After the hunt, meat is dealt for free among the participants and the habitants of the particular whaling district.

Ólavur Sjurðarberg also sums up the importance of pilot whaling and connects it into the cultural relevance.

“[Pilot whaling] have cultural importance. (You’ve seen how social it’s,) it can assemble a lot of people from different villages, it is one. It’s also a supply for special food for the Faroese households. We [have practised] that all the time people have lived on these islands and hopefully we can continue.” [Ólavur Sjurðarberg]

Everyone living in the Faroe islands has an opinion about pilot whaling. And often it can be heard from them that it is

natural part of their life. They do not have much land to be cultivated and they will take what the nature can offer them. They have developed the whaling methods and they do not see that the methods could hinder them from continuing the whale hunt. Therefore Bjarni Mickelsen, a biologist, compares hunting in Europe, and hunting in the Faroe Islands, and emphasises the way the pilot whale hunt is conducted.

“As a local I can’t see any difficulties in the pilot whaling. I can see that there have been some in earlier time the way that we traditionally hunted these animals with a spear for example. It was used to secure these animals. Also it was important that we got them. It was very important to get this meat, food source, so you put a lot of effort in to get them. But today we have cut out everything so we use only the most necessary equipment. So this is a way of hunt actually, it is quite different than what you experience in Europe in hunt of land animals but still this is a hunt and we kill these animals as quick as we can with traditional way, which we have found out to be the best way to do it.” [Bjarni Mickelsen]

Bjarni Mickelsen continues by telling about the sustainable level of the pilot whale hunt.

“... this is part of nature to harvest these marine mammals on a sustainable level. And in the Faroes we are, we have the very strong feeling about the sustainable level that we harvest and we do quite some calculations on numbers of whales and so on and so on. Still our traditional way of hunting these animals has been, has not threatened any stock of pilot whales in the North Atlantic.” [Bjarni Mickelsen]

Everyone is free to participate into the *grindadráp*, the whale hunt. There are no professional whale hunters, but the knowledge about conducting the hunt is taught by experienced hunters. There are no special vessels for whaling either. Boats, which are used are normal shore fishing boats.

The *grindadráp* happens only when it is possible to drive the whales into shore. This means that the school of whales



has to be close enough to the shore, before the hunt can take place.

“As you can see, nobody in the Faroes are a professional whale hunter, all have other civil jobs and we never go out for seeking; we never go out by boat seeking where the pilot whales are, we only take them who come here randomly in between the islands. And if it's possible so we drive them on the shore, it's also sometimes, it's not possible, we have tried, but they will not... then we have to let them go out again.” [Ólavur Sjurðarberg]

2.1 How the whale hunt happens?

The information presented next is compiled from interviews with Justines Olsen, Ólavur Sjurðarberg, and Páll Mikkelson.

The traditional hunt of pilot whales, *grindadráp* or *jiak grind* in Faroese, is a comprehensive process, which starts from spotting a school of pilot whales and ends when the meat has been dealt and killing area is cleaned.

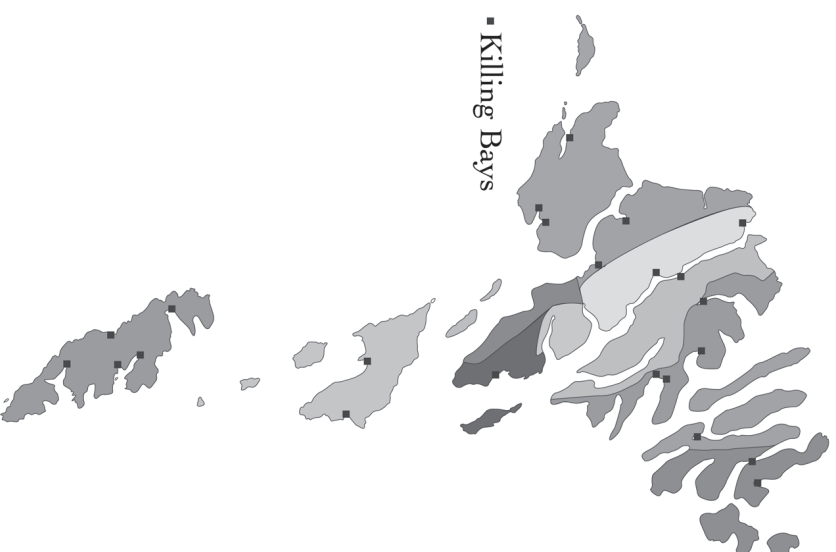
Three stages can be recognised in the pilot whale hunt that is traditionally conducted in the Faroe Islands. The stages are: 1) Driving the whales; 2) Killing the whales; and; 3) Dealing out the meat and blubber.

Driving the whales starts when a school of whales is spotted near the land - otherwise it is impossible or very difficult to drive them on the shore. The hunt can happen at any time of the year, but most frequently the hunts take place during the summer months. Spotting whales can happen from boat or on shore. A message about a school of whales, Grindabóð, is given immediately after spotting. Meaning of Grindabóð is to get enough people for catch. Nowadays this message is given normally via phones.

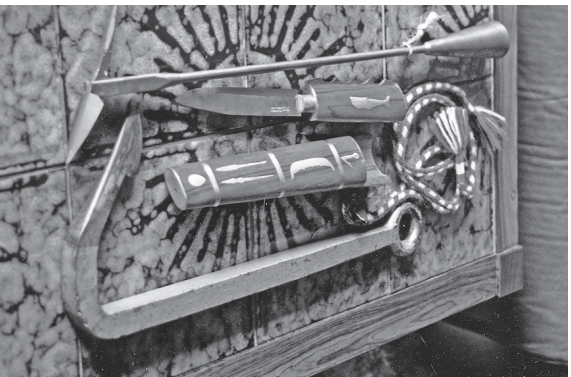
The whales are driven to the specific whaling bays. There are 22 official whaling bays in the Faroe. The legalization is based on the character of the bay – this means suitable sea to-

pography and sufficient land infrastructure. The boats participating into the hunt drive the whales in a wide semicircle. If some group of the whales cannot be beached like described, the group should then be driven out back to the sea.

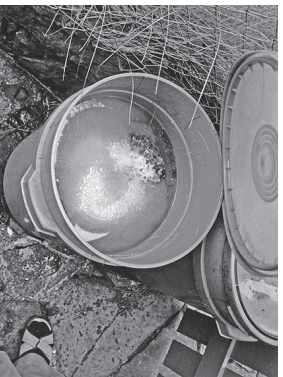
The second phase, killing the whales, takes place when the first whales are stranded. People, usually men, are standing



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Some of the traditional pilot whaling equipment: harpoon, knife and whaling hook. The use of the harpoon has been banned since 1986. The traditional whaling knife is decorated with figures related to the whale hunt.



Blubber has to be salted in order to make it last longer.

in the sea; with water about up to their waists. If the whales are in too deep water they should be hauled upper to the shore to ensure that the killing is as fast as possible and that the whale cannot escape back to the sea when it has already been injured.

Traditionally the hauling is done with the help of rope and special gaff, *sóknarvingullin*, designed for it. After this, the whale is killed using a traditional whaling knife, *grínaláknur*, by cutting down to sever the spinal cord. This cuts down the blood supply to the brain, which causes the loss of consciousness and death happens in seconds. Usually people who are the most experienced in hunting do the killing.

After slaughtering of the whales the meat and blubber are shared among the participants of the hunt and the residents of the whaling bay. The catch is dealt out according to the rules of traditional community sharing, which ensures that everyone gets their share. If a whale hunt takes place in the same bay for several times, the catch will be shared outside the district.

A district sheriff, who is responsible that the sharing is done in a correct way, looks after the sharing process. Sharing is still done in a traditional way, which means that whales are measured in old Faroese measurement units, *skinn*, which corresponds to roughly 38 kg of meat and 34 kg of blubber.

After the sharing, the meat and blubber are put into storage and prepared. There are various ways to storage and prepare the meat and blubber: meat is normally dried or frozen, blubber is salted or frozen - preparing occurs most typically by boiling. Páll Mikkelsen showed us the traditional way of preserving the blubber in salt.

The methods of whaling have changed in the Faroe Islands. The ways to kill the whales and haul them into a beach are constantly improved. Jústines Olsen, who works as a veterinarian in the Faroe Islands, has developed and keeps developing new tools to make the killing time shorter.

Danjal Andreassen reflected the changes in pilot whaling, which have occurred during the years.

"If you look to the past, when I was young, then we often had this spear, harpoon, so it was not good. Today it's stopped, it's very nice. So, it's much better than it was twenty years ago. I think it is very important for Greenpeace and other people to come to Faroe Islands, and for us to see this thing that you have to change it how you kill the whale. I think it's important." *Danjal Andreassen*

The way the killing process is done has been changing during the years. For example, the use of the whaling hook, *sóknarvingul*, has been criticised due to pain it causes for the whale, before the actual killing. Another traditional whaling equipment, harpoon, *skutili* in Faroese, has been banned since 1986.

The blowhole hook has been tested for several years in the Faroe Islands with the purpose that it would replace the

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The blowhole hook, *blósturvingul* in Faroese, has been developed to be used instead of the whaling hook. At the moment, the blowhole hook is tested in the Faroe Islands.



whaling hook. The idea of the blowhole hook is to secure the whale without unnecessary pain.

Other killing techniques are also currently tested, with the intention to make the killing process faster. A new design for the whaling knife can be seen on the right.

2.2. Taking Part In Whaling

During our visit to the Faroe Islands the pilot whaling happened twice. We were asked to join the hunt in Hvalvík, 3.8.2003. People who participated into the hunt were from very young to very old, men and women, but mostly men. About 200 boats and more than 1100 people, from which some 500 to 600 people where on land taking part to the hunt on that day. Roads along the bay were full of cars and people watching the hunt, everyone seemed to be there. To compare – no more than 200 (181 people in 31.12.2002) people live in Hvalvík.

When we got into Hvalvík, we asked people if we could join them and come with them into their boats. First we asked from an old man, who was sorry because his boat was very small and thus he could not take us with him, but he advised us to ask from a bigger boat, next to his. The bigger boat was also filled with people, but they made room for us. People on the boat hoped that the hunt would go well and fast.

Our first glimpse from the whales came and we were told that we can see only one tenth of the whole school of whales at time. Huge ring of boats was driving the whales towards the whaling bay, Hvalvík. All kinds of boats took part in the hunt and we were wondering, how it would have looked if the boats would have been those rowing boats that Faroese used in the past.

The most spectacular moment was when the first whales came into the beach and when the first kill took place. The peaceful men on the shore ran to the bay with knives and hooks to do what they had to do. 152 whales were killed and

the water in the bay become red in colour.

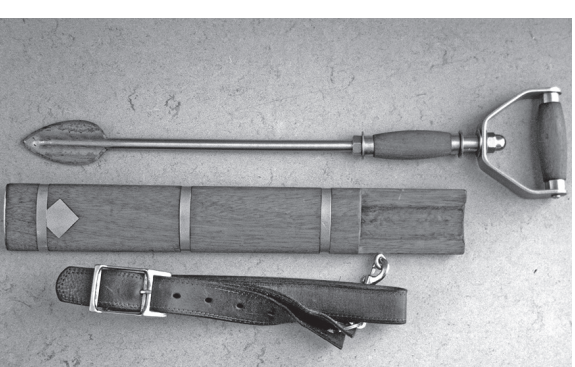
The killing was done fast and the hunt was over relatively fast. After this the slaughtered whales were hauled on the docks, where they were later cut into pieces and shared among the participants.

The time of the hunt was late evening and because of that the sharing was done not until the next morning. As suddenly as the village of Hvalvík had filled with cars and people, it emptied. Everyone went home to wait the next morning. Also we were offered a share from the hunt. Even though we are not Faroese we would have been entitled to a share because we took part by driving the whales to the shore. The whales were shared after killing parts, “*Drúgpartur*”. Everyone got 0,7 skinn, which corresponds to some 24 kg of blubber and 27 kg of meat, for everyone taking part in the hunt or living in Hvalvík’s whaling district.

© Justines Olsen. Used with permission.



Whale hunts are very spectacular and they might upset people who are not used to seeing them. This picture is not from the same hunt mentioned in the text above.



New design for the killing knife has been developed to make the killing process faster. This knife is currently tested by Justines Olsen.



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Puffins at Mykines, the most Western island of Faroes.

© Johanna Roto, 2003



Sheep herding is an important part of Faroese life.

3. Other Traditional Sources of Food

The traditional way of living mixed into the modern way of life can be seen in the every day errands of the Faroese people. The use of natural resources is important for both community and individuals. For example many people still participate in whaling and fowling, which are their ways to live off the land.

Very productive areas with abundant marine species surround the Faroe Islands. Fishing plays an important role in the every day life of people, by providing food and income. Fisheries products, which include farmed salmon, comprise more than 95% of total exports.

Many people get their food straight from the sea and in many cases the catch is divided up among relatives and neighbours. This also means that it is almost impossible to get a fresh fish from the local store.

3.1 Fowling

The Faroe Islands are densely populated by various species of birds. Some of the species e.g. puffins and fulmars are hunted. There is plentiful bird cliffs in the Faroes, but most of the fowling cliffs are on the western or northern coasts of the islands. Fowling happens on the cliff ledges. Men use the net at the end of the pole to catch the bird. Fowling and egg collecting are traditional activities and sources of local food.

Seabird colonies living around the Faroe Islands are harvested based on traditional methods. Hans Jacob Hermansen, who works as driving school entrepreneur in the Faroes and is the former Chairman of Pilot Whalers Association, describes the situation of the bird hunting today.

“We take the fulmars, the young fulmars, we take that in the end of August on the twenty fifth, later again and... I suppose fifty to sixty per cent of the Faroe Islands are active in this thing, whereas in other countries a small percentage

would be active, rest would go to shops and buy it. So we live in a way we go to the shop to buy things, otherwise we are self-providing with things: fish, sheep, birds and so on. So that is the way, it's a combined existence of the life, where the old way of living and the modern way of living.” [Hans Jacob Hermansen]

Rene Hansen, 29-year-old bird hunter from Nolsoy, a small island opposite to the capital Tórshavn, reflects that “*the first reason why I catch the puffins is to have something to eat*”. In addition, he also expresses his concern about the future of fowling.

“Means a lot for me [fowling]. I am the youngest who is catching the birds now, so it seems like that. When I get old enough, it's stopped.” [Rene Hansen]

3.2 Sheep Herding

It is said that “*wol in Føroye góð*”. A sheep is an important animal on the Faroe Islands – and nearly everyone who is living on a village could be called a shepherd. Many people in the Faroe Islands have some sheep by themselves, even on town area. Sheep herding is partly communal – each man owns certain sheep, but pasture is often locally owned. Individual sheep can be recognized with sheep ear marks.

The owner usually does the wool gathering and slaughtering of his or her sheep. According to Ólavur Stjørðarberg, it is an essential thing that you know how to prepare your food from the beginning; the only way to learn your culture is by practising the traditional activities.

Besides sheep, there are some cattle in the Faroe Islands, mainly for milk production.

3.3 Fishing

As a consequence of the location of the Faroe Islands near the strong sea currents the surrounding waters are abundant in fish. Fishing in such conditions requires great amount of



knowledge about the sea currents and navigation.

Faroese economy is strongly dependent on the fishing and aquaculture industries. Because of geographical location most of the exported fish is frozen or salted. But even these days there are a lot of fishermen who do the small catch on the side of fishing vessels. The species with biggest economical value are cod, haddock, seihe, salmon and halibut.

Due to the experience in fishing, the techniques to catch the fish and the other activities related to it have been shaped by the sea and weather conditions. Reðin Leonson, retired policeman from Mykines, tells about fishing in the Faroe Islands and criticises the fishing quota, which is used in many countries.

“Here in the Faroes it is very good with the fishing. Because we have no quota, it is crazy with the quota, because if you have quota as one tons cod today and they just take the good cod and rest is handed outside again. They maybe catching ten ton, and take one ton, the rest out, dead fish. But we have fishing days, all you can fish that day you come home with. We have fishing days, instead of quota. And it is ok because here is plenty of fish. Very good regulator with the fishing day. Much better than quota.” [Reðin Leonson]

Sofus Strøm, who lives in Suðuroy, in the southernmost island, and works as a teacher, assesses the factors affecting the amount and quality of fish.

“There are many things, which are affecting the growth of the fish stock: temperature, currents. So, we think that because there are so many things, which are affecting, you cannot just look, three, four years back that it is our fishing which is causing that.” [Sofus Strøm]

On the other hand, Strøm sees that over fishing is affecting the fish stocks in a negative way.

“But I believe we are over fishing. Not with trawlers, it was ten years ago I thought it was trawlers, which caused it. But now I believe it is the long line fishing, where hooks with

baits are used. In one line fishing ship there can be 40 000 hooks, and if you think there is twenty ships out during one night, I now mean only the biggest ships. And if the weather is good, you also have the smaller ships, so I think we have each day about 10 -15 million hooks in the sea, every day, 110/150 days a year. So, it's very much.” [Sofus Strøm]

4. Culture

In the Faroe Islands the local culture and habits have been seen as the power of own identity. In this contexts history, language and traditional livelihoods has had the biggest importance.

Language is for Faroese more than a way of communication – It's an important role Faroese culture and identity. Faroese language is rooted in Old Norse, and is rather near Icelandic. Faroese language was an important element in the process of Faroese nation-building. All informants we interviewed emphasised the importance of their culture.

Like Faroese culture, also Faroese language has been enriched due to the harsh environment and climate. As Ólavur Sjurðarberg reflected to us:

“We have many names, answers for wind because we are so dependent on the weather. So we have, we have many different words for wind and for weather, and also for rough sea.”

Faroese culture has its roots strongly in nature; it is dependent on the environment where it has evolved. In addition, natural resources, such as fisheries, are the main sources of income for the Faroese people. Mickelsen tells about how he sees nature and the people.

“I think nature means a lot for the Faroese. I think if you look at the islands you can say we have a lot of nature, still we do not have that lot of land that we can walk on but we have the nature very close to us and we live by nature.” [Bjarni



Mikkelsen]
Still today, many people are fishing and participating in whaling and fowling, which are ways to live off the land. The use of natural resources is seen as an important thing for both community and individuals.

However, changes in the Faroese culture can be seen. Rene Hansen tells about the change from his point of view as a bird catcher.

"[It's [puffins] the same as the pilot whaling, now it doesn't have so much meaning, but in the past it was very important. And that's the same about pilot whaling, it is not so today... we can eat anything else, but it is just the culture [why] we kill. And some people like very much, old people, but younger generation... I think, 50 years and we not kill whales anymore, make the same with the puffins, we are not catching them anymore. We change, the culture [is] changing." [Rene Hansen]

Access to exported food has got better and become more ensured, due to the faster and more reliable transportation. But still Ólavur Sjurðarberg discusses whale hunt as an event that brings people together and Sjurðarberg also wants to emphasize the cultural and social importance which cannot be enough stressed.

"For the community, Faroes, [whaling] brought a lot of food, for free. That's important for the community, for all, house holds and community in Faroes, they got a lot of meat, for free, and also, of course, blubber it gets all the people in community in one way or another and there's a lot of people out, so you can have a talk and meet people... it's nice together." [Ólavur Sjurðarberg]

Even though people are still getting together during a whale hunt, many of the traditions have been changing along the whaling methods. Ólavur Sjurðarberg gives an example by telling about the traditional Faroese dance, which was traditionally danced during and after the whale hunt.

"Earlier, I remember when, when there was a grindadance [pilot whale dance], every time when there has been a hunt. Grindadance was a dance that was going on from the point when the killing process was over, until the participant of the hunt was allowed to go to their way to the whales and cut their share. It was a social phenomenon in these waiting hours, but since our infrastructure has been as good as it is today, the grindadance is not a common way more. So we have lost, because of infrastructure this, I think so, the grinda dance. But it's written much about that in books, now they only talk about it and do not practice it that much. But we still have the old Faroese ring dance. Grinda dance and the old Faroese ringdance is the same, but when it's grinda day we do not dance." [Ólavur Sjurðarberg]

The meaning of this particular *grindadansur*, grinda dance, has changed. According to some of our informants (Ólavur Sjurðarberg and Dorete Bloch), the grinda dance had a purpose, it was danced in order to keep warm and dry out the wet clothes after the slaughtering of the whales.

Earlier, connections between villages and islands were irregular and moving from place to place was done only when necessary. Today, when people have cars and other possibilities for easy moving from place to place, there is no need for the warming up and drying the wet clothes by dancing anymore.

This was seen clearly during our own attendance to the whale hunt in the Faroe Islands. Many people came to participate into the hunt, but after the hunt was over, everybody went back to home and the sharing of the meat was done next morning, when everybody came back to pick up their shares.

5. Future and Current Concerns

During the last couple of years the main topic of Faroese





Mykines

proud to be Faroe Islanders. But I will never call Denmark our mother country, we are Faroe Islanders, and proud of that.” [Reðin Leonson]

5.1. State of Environment

Many of the concerns of the Faroese people are connected to the changes in nature. Environmental pollutants are seen as a threat, which affects consumption of the whale meat. Link between the whale meat and Faroese culture is evident, as many of the traditional activities are done during the whale hunt. Although Faroese culture contains a lot of other things than the whale hunt.

Rene Hansen discusses relationship with nature now and before. Hansen sees changes in relationship with nature of people.

“We are so far away from nature now, they don’t understand that [killing animal for food], but in the past when you lived so close to the nature... we lived like the animals, we had to so we could get them, we don’t live that way anymore.

political agenda has been the question of independence. Generally strong Faroese identity and the fact that the Faroe Islands is a self-governing territory under the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Denmark, divides people’s opinions whether the Faroe Islands should be totally independent from Denmark or not. Question is mostly economical and nationalistic. Leonson expresses his feelings about the independence.

“We can’t be independent. We are independent in [our] world.

They should call us Faroe Islanders, we are Faroe Islanders, we can never be Danish. We are Faroe Islanders. And we are very proud to be Faroe Islanders. But I will never call Denmark our mother country, we are Faroe Islanders, and proud of that.” [Reðin Leonson]

There is people who don’t like that.” [Rene Hansen]

Danjal Andreassen discusses about the importance of taking care of environment.

“The future... I hope we can take the whale, I also hope that the people outside look after us so we do it in human way, always, it’s very important. What I also hope is the people outside Faroe Islands, they will understand that we need it, it’s important for us. It’s not only for whale it’s for everything which is living in this world. You have to take care of everything. It’s the same with fish. As we say in the Faroe Islands: everybody can’t go out fishing. It will take five six years.-no more fish. So, I think we have learned it. If we do not have fish we cannot live on these Island. I think we will take care of this. I am sure about it.” *Danjal Andreassen*

5.2. Future of Traditions?

Sjurðarberg tells about problems of the modern world and sees them happening in the Faroe Islands as well.

“Young people are going to the center area, that’s a world wide problem. We also feel it here and areas on the outskirts of the Faroes are, I must say, dying out. Some villages earlier, if you only go fifty year back in this there was big villages and now really small villages. Decreasing, getting smaller and smaller.” [Ólavur Sjurðarberg]

Besides the fact that the young people are moving to the capital area, away from the small villages, Reðin Leonson expresses another threat, which is evidently changing people’s habits.

“I think in ten, fifteen years they [we] will not eat whale anymore. Because I will not give my grandchildren whale now because after all the talk about the quicksilver. I will not give them. If they want, ok, but I will not ask. When I was a child, it was, you have to eat so much blubber, because it is good for you. I would never do it for my children or grandchildren.” [Reðin Leonson]



In other words, if young people are not practicing the traditional ways to live off the land and other traditional activities, the future of any culture is uncertain.

Traditional way of living is an important part of people's life in the Faroe Islands. For instance, Faroese traditional pilot whaling has often been misunderstood outside the islands. For last twenty years the Faroe Islands are most known and criticized because of their whaling practices. The pilot whaling became the object of attention since mid-1980s when antiwhaling groups became interested in it. According to Hermansen, the Faroese pilot whaling is not going to be affected by international pressure, but by another external threat.

"I think that we are not in a position today that international pressure would stop us from killing pilot whales, what I find the biggest problem is pollution, why we have to stop, because the pilot whales, like everything living in the ocean, is so polluted that we cannot use that for consumption and perhaps they are even threatened to extinction because of the pollution." [Hans Jacob Hermansen]

Hermansen is concerned about the pollutants in the pilot whale's meat. Because of these pollutants in the meat and blubber, health authorities have set recommendations for the consumption of the whale meat. According to the experiences we had during our trip to the Faroe Islands, local people are very well informed and educated about the current situation.

For example, Rene Hansen and Reðin Leonsen emphasized in their interviews that no bird or whale will be killed just for fun; the killing is done only for getting food.

Hans Jacob Hermansen reflects the current situation from his point of view, and emphasises that the facts should always be checked before making any assumptions.

"The question, whether people are in favour or opposed to whaling that is a personal decision that everybody should be allowed to make. But, what we feel or what I feel is that it should be based on facts, and, I think, that is what happens

all around the world that we are drawing conclusions on information, but we are never checking whether it is right or wrong." [Hans Jacob Hermansen]

Ólavur Sjurðarberg also expresses his concern about the environmental pollutants, which are threat both to the people and the whales.

"Of course earlier the whale meat was a bigger part of the consumption, food here in the Faroes, because it seems we, every year got approx the same number of whales, approx thousand each year, so it was also earlier, but population only was a half of today, so earlier it was more to every household than today, still they got their share and ate it. But we got also a recommendation from health authorities, that we shall not eat whale meat more than every fourth day or so... it's because of pollution. (From the industrial nations here close to us.)" [Ólavur Sjurðarberg]

Justines Olsen brings up another threat, which is brought into the Faroese culture aside the environmental pollutants.

"There is one thing, which is worrying me for the moment, and it is that the recommendations that is coming out in the Faroe Islands at the moment is that they are recommending pregnant women and children: don't eat pilot whale. And from anthropological point of view that's a very tough recommendation. If the children cannot eat and the mother in the house preparing the food is not eating it when will they learn to eat it? I think if that message is coming through it will not take many years until there is no one except old, old man, eating it." [Justines Olsen]

Dorethe Bloch tells about her feelings and questions whether it is better to continue with the traditional diet or replace it by something other. Bloch compares the situation of the Faroe Islands to the situation in Greenland.

"I didn't eat it [whale meat] when I was waiting the babies but I also know from Greenland that it is more dangerous for human beings to leave the traditional food and instead eat,



what you call... if you see Greenland the alternative today to traditional food, birds and seals, whales, it is fast food, pizza and all that stuff. And it is more dangerous for the Greenlanders to eat that, the doctors in Greenland say to go on with the risk in the traditional food. So, I don't know." [Dorethe Bloch]

Another observation concerning people in the Faroe Islands, is the amount of birds. For instance, Rene Hansen has first hand knowledge about the birds, because he has been hunting them for many years.

"There's less birds than it used to be. I don't know what's the trouble. We think it's the food [of the birds]." [Rene Hansen]

Dorethe Bloch links the fluctuation in the bird populations and climate together.

"We think it [decrease of the birds] is about, it's climatic related. You know these oscillations in the climate and it influence on to production of the sea, and you can see it, if there is the pilot whales or not here, or bottlenose whales or not, it is climate related." [Dorethe Bloch]

Hermansen expresses his feelings about the way people are categorized to indigenous and non-indigenous.

"It's another thing that, very often, it depends on, it's the highest discrimination that I find is that the more indigenous you are the more cruel you are allowed to be, but we are not indigenous so we are not allowed to do such things, if we were a bit more dark or if we would have a span of dogs in front of our... in front of us. Then we would be allowed to do this." [Hans Jacob Hermansen]

The criticism is also pointed towards everyone who is presenting opinions and arguments based on feelings or untrue information. Or maybe the flow of information is not efficient enough in today's world even though we are living in the middle of information societies. Hermansen gathers the situation with following words:

"Also I think that the gap is so wide between people living here and the people getting the information about what we do while we are living here, because the image of Faroe Islanders far away, is quite different, I think, from those who have lived... who have been here, to see what actually goes on, I imagine that." [Hans Jacob Hermansen]

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Ecological Monitoring and Observations of Cultural Hunting of Pilot Whales In the Faroe Islands – The Local Society Perspective

By *Johanna Røto*

The Faroese have long been “*a place without interest*,” especially if we are talking about their culture. Internationally, the main topics about the Faroe Islands have recently been oil and whaling. In fact, the pilot whaling can be seen as a central part of the Faroese culture and way of living. The pilot whale itself can be seen as a symbol with both cultural and national meaning.

We can handle the social meaning of pilot whaling through actors and situations. Actors and situations are closely related to place and its special characteristics, both on the sides of physical and social environments.

The place has been a resource where the self-sufficient local culture has lived on in balance with nature. When we are talking about locality, our goal is to find cooperation between social processes and local conditions. The practice of hunting has long been a culturally meaningful practice for the Faroe Islanders as a tradition and a custom with historical roots.

The Faroese call the pilot whale “*grind*.” The traditional killing of the whales, *grindadráp*, has a huge social meaning. The whole village and even some others are taking part in it – there are no professional whalers in the Faroe Islands, neither special whaling vessels or boats.

However, there are plenty of specific rules, norms and habits about the catch. Also many Faroese words and practices are connected to the pilot whale and its hunting: special tools, activities, regulations, songs, foods, and so on.

Grindadráp is said to be bloody. The catch happens only

when a stock of pilot whales are observed near the shore. Then the whales are driven to a killing bay. Hunting the whales makes the killing place look like a blood bay for days. But it's most effective and humane to kill the whales by cutting the blood vessels in the whales' neck. It's the only method by which these whales can be killed successfully. Cutting happens with a special whaling knife, *grindaknivur*.

Pilot whaling is a non-commercial action - every participant of the hunting has rights to get a part of the catch for free. Participating in the hunt is not an obligation, and even the villagers who do not participate receive their shares of meat. After slaughtering the pilot whale the hunting traditions do not end. The *grindadráp* is a beginning for social communication between the villagers, relatives and friends. Whale division, carving and distribution (*grindabýti*) are also a crucial part of hunting. The pilot whale meat and blubber are a central part of traditional (ordinary) Faroese food.

Internationally, the Faroe Islands are most known and criticized because of their whaling practices, although there is often a huge lack of understanding of the economic, logistical, cultural and social dimensions of Faroese pilot whaling. Yearly the catch in the Faroes varies from a couple of hundred to thousand(s). Behind the criticism is the question about international networking and international contracts and relations. Centre – periphery relations have a central meaning.

The Faroe Islands as a northern autonomy are a small fac-



tor on the international arena, where the cooperation happens between micro and macro levels. We shouldn't see these levels as opposites, but concentrate on the interaction between the levels. It is important to make the actors with power to observe and pay attention also to local societies and their culture. We should see the local, national and international levels as a whole. It's important to give a chance to cultural

diversity, and respect others and their customs - There's not only one way to do and understand things. We are allowed to criticize the Faroese pilot whale hunting, but as long as it is a non-commercial cultural tradition with a great meaning to the local societies, we are not allowed to fight against it or forbid it. We should respect it.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Whaling												
Fowling												
Fulmar												
Puffin												
Gannet												
Gulliot												
Comorant												
Agriculture												
Lambing time												
Harvest (hay)												
Potato harvest												
Fishing												
Angling from jetty (coalfish)												
Offshore angling												
Onshore angling (salmon and sea-trout)												

Traditional Calendar of the Faroese Communities by Mikka Nieminen





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