

Parrot Time

The Thinking of Speaking

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Coming Home to Faroese

The Why and How of
Learning a Small Language

Faroese: Revisited

Excerpt from the 1875 book
"An American in Iceland "

Danish and Faroese: A Biography

Two languages fight it out in Faroese history and daily life.

The Faroese Festival Summer

Ólavsøka and the G! Festival

The Grind: Why the Faroese Hunt Whales

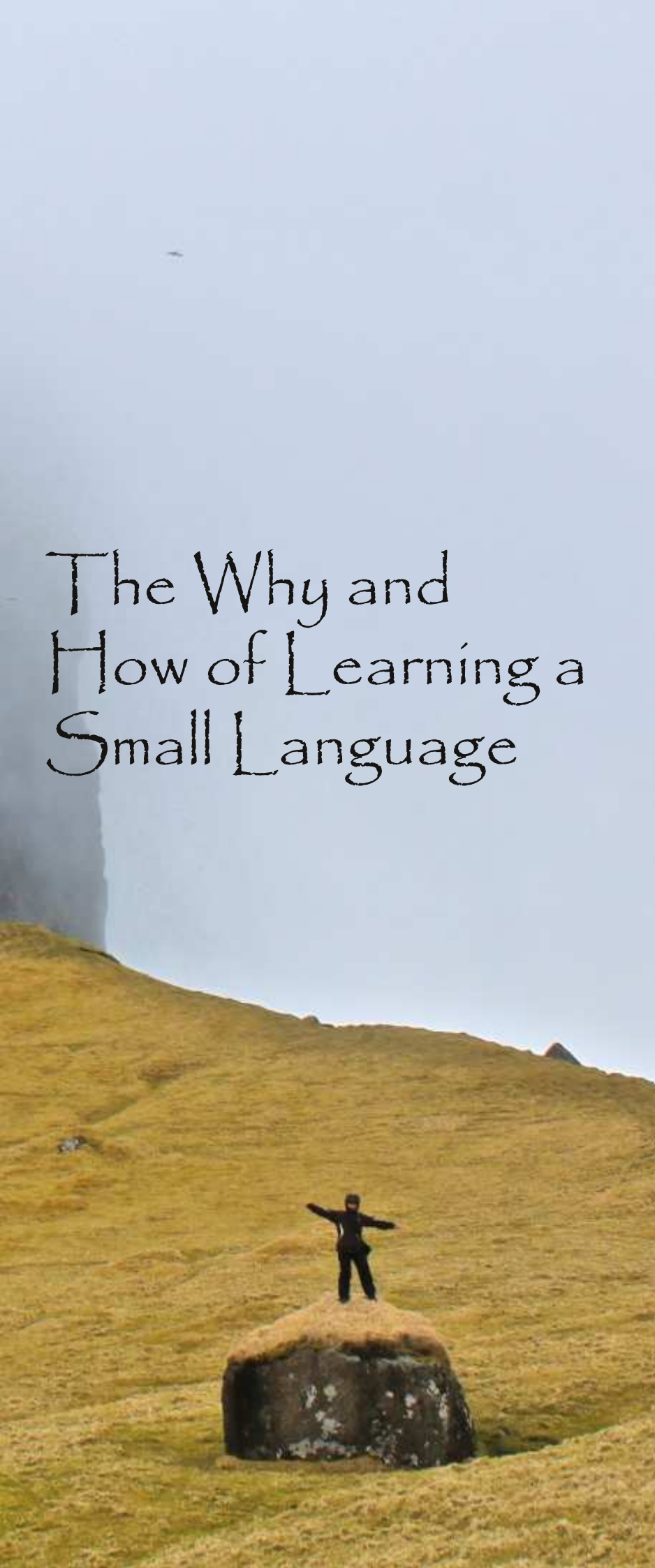
A look at the controversial grindadráp

Special
Faroe
Islands
Issue



Coming Home to Faroese

by Miranda Metheny

A photograph of a person standing on a large, dark rock in a grassy field. The person is wearing a dark jacket and pants, and has their arms outstretched. The background shows rolling green hills under a clear blue sky.

The Why and How of Learning a Small Language

Since I first became interested in learning the Faroese language, I've heard a lot of two questions from friends and family: "Why?" and "How?"

It was bad enough with Norwegian. They used to laugh and say, "Wow, that's useful! Now you can talk to a whole five million people, in one country, who already speak English!" They've stopped laughing, and now they're just confused. Faroese, with its 65,000 speakers mostly gathered in a remote archipelago and a small district of Copenhagen, makes Norwegian look dead useful in comparison.

But that's not why I learned Faroese. I don't deceive myself that Faroese is going to unlock job opportunities for me, or help me to travel wide swaths of the globe. I'm not going around recommending it to any friends. But that doesn't mean it's been a waste of time – far from it. Faroese has enriched my life, and I can't ask for more than that.

Choosing any language has to come down to personal motivation. It all depends on what you're looking for.

When I first heard Faroese, I liked the sound of it. I was thrilled by its echoes to the older form of Norwegian, intrigued by the chanted melodies of the ring dance, amused by the vocalic offglides and consonant clusters. Yes, it started out as a purely linguistic love affair.

I wouldn't judge anyone for learning a language just on the merits of liking its sounds. What people do with their free time is up to them, and I can't see how learning even a random language is more wasteful than spending just as many hours catching up on Netflix. But as I delved a bit deeper into Faroese, and realized that it was a pretty tricky language – highly inflected, highly irregular, loads of inflections – my motivation waned. I didn't know when or how I'd ever do more with the language

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than study it out of the dusty, outdated books I'd found in the university library. So as the going got rough, I shifted my attention to other things.

Then I visited the Faroe Islands. My curiosity, and my correspondence with a Faroese friend online, had outlasted my studies and compelled me to spend a long Easter vacation there. I love it. The islands were beautiful and exotic and wild, just mountains rising from the sea, with cirques and hanging valleys and other features my Midwestern vocabulary didn't even have words for. I loved the cozy, modern homes tucked under brightly painted concrete and turf-roofed exteriors, the drying sheds stocked with wind-cured meat, the undaunting sheep crossing the highways... and most of all, the people. I have received warm welcomes in many countries, but no one could ever outdo the Faroese. I have never felt so safe or so welcome. During my short stay, I was invited into so many homes for tea, cake, and often, gifts of woolen slippers and scarves, that I completely lost count.

If love of the language had not been enough, falling in love with the land and the people

It was as if by saying "Hvussu hefur tú tað?" I was actually saying, "I'm one of you, though not by birth. I know something about this place and I'm eager to learn more, I love this country and I respect you all."

themselves proved much better for my motivation. I made plans to return to the Faroes for a whole summer, and set to work learning the language in preparation. In the intervening time, a modern textbook and grammar book had been published, and an excellent dictionary made available online. I also collected a few Faroese books and movies, started reading the news and followed various Faroese Facebook



A child plays on the Johanna TG 326 during the celebration of the boat's 130th birthday in Vágur, Suðuroy. Although children in the Faroes start learning English in primary school, I was still grateful I could speak Faroese with the youngest ones.

groups. Once I really got going, I was able to find all the resources I needed.

Though at first I could only speak slowly and poorly, I developed enough of a knowledge of vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar that when I arrived in the Faroe Islands and immersed myself, I was able to progress rapidly. I was having halting conversations within the week, and managing a certain sort of rough fluency after a month.

Those who argue that a language is not worth knowing when "everyone already speaks English" are, I think, missing part of the joy of learning a language. Sure, most Faroese speak English to some degree, and all speak a more general Scandinavian language I can understand through Norwegian. Simple communication, therefore, would hardly compel me to learn their language.

But not everyone is equally linguistically talented, or linguistically bold – especially in older generations. Speaking to such people in their native language puts them at ease, makes them feel more comfortable expressing themselves. Young children, who haven't yet been to school, would have been a complete mystery to me had I not learned Faroese. Proficiency also made me more independent and informed in every aspect of my life there – I could read signs, listen to the radio, and watch performances without demanding and waiting on translations.

Most importantly, perhaps, Faroese people speak Faroese amongst themselves. To do otherwise is unnatural and uncomfortable for most. Not learning the language, then, sets you apart from social gatherings, lively discussions, and even Facebook conversations. Learning it means you can slip right in. There is also the simple matter of respect – of not expecting or wanting everyone in your host country to pander to you and your linguistic limitations at every turn... no matter how willingly.



Wearing the Faroese national dress on Ólavsøka was an amazing experience that I will never forget. It was beautiful – and heavy! – and really made me feel a part of the culture and celebration.

Most of the above is true for any language on earth. But small languages, for all their extra challenges, also come with extra rewards. The Faroese are fiercely proud of and interested in their language. Linguistic topics occur with astonishing regularity in their television programs, debates and everyday conversations. Even with a translator, a non-speaker would miss out on a full understanding of this whole element of their culture.

And languages are, of course, intimately tied to culture and place. Faroese is so well adapted to its own tiny, beautiful world that even translating it for my friends back home can be a struggle. *Eiði* is *isthmus*, but I didn't use that word once growing up – in the Faroes, it featured frequently in directions and place names. *Bour* and *Hagi*, *infield* and *outfield*, mean just that – but so much more.

The *bour*, the field near the village, is fenced in, safe, almost home. The *hagi* is beyond... wild, rough, even mysterious – the realm of the mythical “hidden people.”

At trola in Faroese means *to trawl*, in a fishing boat out at sea. They also use it for the act of running after girls. The Faroese word for *perspective* is *sjónarmið*, where *sjón* means *sight*, and *mið* means fishing ground. This baffled me, until I came to understand that *mið* are small fishing grounds, in sight of land. To make sure he's in the

Those who argue that a language is not worth knowing when “everyone already speaks English” are, I think, missing part of the joy of learning a language.

right spot, a fisherman depends on taking his bearings on features ashore – the view from his perspective. What a joy to discover all these little things!

The Faroese speak of “at fara niður” (to go “down” – to Denmark) and “at koma heim” (to come “home” – to the Faroes), and that doesn't only apply to locals. I had to smile the first few times I was asked when I would be going down and whether I would be coming home again soon.

I discovered that speaking Faroese, even badly, worked as a sort of shibboleth on the islands. Though the Faroese are welcoming to start with, I couldn't help but feel as though it opened even more doors for me. It was a conversation starter par-excellence, and a sign that I was taking my work there seriously. I found that I could wave off a wide range of concerns – that I might not know how to walk

The natural harbour of Gjógv, on Eysturoy.



Fishing boats in Klaksvík, on Borðoy.





I met these lovely ladies outside of the Faroese government buildings, and they told me stories about their time working there as secretaries. When they heard me speak Faroese, they opened up to me right away.

safely on the seaside cliffs, that I might be a hassle to deal with, that I might be an undercover anti-whaling activist (a major concern) – with just a short demonstration of my Faroese speaking abilities.

It was as if by saying “*Hvussu hevur tú tað?*” (How are you?) I was actually saying, “I’m one of you, though not by birth. I know something about this place and I’m eager to learn more, I love this country and I respect you all.”

Had I not learned Faroese, I imagine my summer in the islands would still have gone well. I could have done my work, though maybe not as thoroughly, not with such a diverse group of informants. I suppose the bird cliffs would have been just as high and majestic, the cured lamb just as delightful, the music just as hauntingly beautiful in the cool blue mist of midsummer nights. I would have

made some friends and had a nice time, undoubtedly.

But Faroese is there, in many of my fondest memories. I remember walking downtown one summer night, and a man bursting out onto his balcony as we passed to belt out the first stanza of the ballad, *Ormurin Langi*, and how it felt to be able to join in the singing as we sang the next few stanzas back and continued singing all the way down to Tórshavn. I remember evenings spent with my Faroese family, laughing about the news and world events and my life there, how nice it was to catch most of the jokes and how happy they were to explain the new ones to me.

I remember how it felt to speak Faroese down in Copenhagen, to navigate through the crowded city and yet feel as if I had never left the islands when I heard the language I had learned to love so well. The

Danes and other foreigners that passed were none the wiser that something didn’t add up, that I was an imposter, that I didn’t belong. In a way I did. In that moment, I felt I could just glimpse, just taste, that feeling of being a part of something... smaller. Something more intimate. Of what it meant to know just from a language that you were home.

“Why would you learn such a tiny language?” they ask.

“Do you have sixty thousand friends?” I reply.

“Uhhh.... no?”

“Well, to speak Faroese is to feel that you do...” **PT**



A mother and child walk up from the natural harbour of Gjógv, on Eysturoy.



A small concert in Tutl, the main Faroese record company, during the Faroese culture night.



At the Cinema



LUDO

reviewed by Miranda Metheny



Ludo
71 min
Drama
11 September 2014 (Faroe Islands)

Country: Faroe Islands

Language: Faroese

The game they play in the dark house is one none of them can win.

Ludo is the first feature film to come out of the Faroe Islands in fifteen years – and it's a dark one. It was written and directed by Katrin Ottarsdóttir, who is also behind the road-trip movie *Bye Bye Bluebird* (1999) and the slice-of-life relay *Atlantic Rhapsody* (1989), as well as several shorter movies and documentaries.

Ludo takes us into the home of a small family living in a beautiful house by the sea. A woman struggles with mental illness, her husband wonders how to handle the difficult and escalating situation, and their eleven-year-old daughter sings herself to sleep at night over the sounds of her mother's wailing.

The movie opens with a rare and beautiful summer day promising to let a little fresh air into the gloomy house. Father and daughter conspire to get the mother in a good mood, bringing her breakfast in bed to try to persuade her to go out with them on a walk in the hills. At first, she readily agrees, even chastising them for thinking they needed to do so much to convince her. But she soon changes her mind without cause, telling them icily to go on without her.

The young girl hesitates. She knows her mother, and it's clear to everyone that the mother doesn't mean what she says. But her father begs, unwilling to let the fine weather slip away, and finally they go on out for a pleasant hike that will upset

mother far more than they know.

The movie is heavy with symbolism. We see toys scattered throughout the house (including an eerie doll whose eyes open and close on their own), birds (mostly ravens crying and a dead chick the girl finds on the mountain), waves, knives, blood, the child's voice singing her own lullaby... As the movie continues, the shots of these symbols come faster and more frequently, repeating themselves in a way that makes us feel disoriented and trapped in a cycle. The director's purpose, I feel, is to make viewers not sympathize but empathize with the situation. The scary music and the mother's moans are unpleasant on multiple levels, and the knife sounds were sometimes so sharp that I felt they were coming through my speakers and cutting my skin.

Throughout the movie, we find ourselves perched uneasily between the mother's hallucination-fueled anxiety and her husband and daughter's attempts to say and do just the right things to keep her happy. But



The father and daughter, trying to remain cheerful



The mother, warning the daughter about lying

sometimes it seems impossible, as when the father asks the girl to lie so as not to unnecessarily upset the mother, but the mother seems to see right through it and ominously warns her about what happens to “little girls who lie to their mothers.”

Three times, we see the mother try to turn over a new leaf. She initially agrees to go for a walk. She sings and makes a batch of pancakes on their return. Finally, she eagerly suggests a family game of Ludo. But the game they play in the dark house is one none of them can win.

Ottarsdóttir writes that the topics of the movie have also appeared in her other work, but in *Ludo* she wanted to go all the way with them. She stresses that mental illness is a problem that is urgent for everyone, no matter where in the world they are. Certainly it is true that mental illness is a worldwide concern and that the movie could be appreciated by an international audience, even without any other knowledge of the setting in the Faroe Islands. With a short 70-minute runtime, the director is quite busy with her artistic and thematic goals, and exploring Faroese culture is not one of them. There is, in fact, a noticeable lack of proper nouns in the film; neither the places, nor the characters, are named – giving it a certain sense of anonymity.

But the movie is set in the Faroe Islands, and setting is more than a backdrop. The movie and the story it tells would be slightly different in another place. The family lives on the island of Sandoy, which is one of the more remote of the Faroese islands as it is not connected by road to the others. While the father and daughter are out walking, they happen to run into the local doctor and his wife, who know them well and inquire after their family. The mother later watches the couple walk past her window, gossiping and staring, and is convinced that everyone in the village is talking about her. Of course, gossip, anxiety about gossip, and the coincidence of happening upon people you know on a hike happen everywhere, but certainly more frequently in a small island village like Sandur than in a large city. The Faroese

are quick to say that, for better or for worse, everyone there knows everyone else's business.

While I was in the Faroes, more than one person told me life could be difficult there for people with any sort of psychiatric disorder due to the scarcity of specialized treatment in a remote and small society. In an odd coincidence, I also saw a striking similarity between the family in *Ludo* and the one readers meet in the first part of *Lognbraá*, by Heðin Brú – a famous Faroese novelist and Ottarsdóttir's grandfather. Both works explore the world of a young child caught between a mother's depressive instability and a kind but meek father.

In a small community, the family gains even more importance as the basic building block of society. There are fewer distractions from the crucial and complex interpersonal relationships of the home. “Coziness” is often cited as a fundamental aspect of Scandinavian culture, when everyone celebrates togetherness and the glowing warmth of being inside together despite darkness and bad weather just beyond the door. But what happens when you find yourself shut in with mental illness? As night falls on the house and a storm rises on the sea, *Ludo*'s small family gathers around a board game in what feels like a corruption of the very concept of coziness.

“The Faroe Islands can be quite eerie, can't they?” commented my friend who watched the movie with me, “In your pictures, they look so beautiful, but I think they would also be a great setting for a horror film. You could really play with the feeling of being trapped.”

I think Ottarsdóttir already has.

Language learners will be happy to know that the movie takes place entirely in Faroese. The cinematography and quality of the acting are impressive, especially considering the constraints placed on the production by the tight budget and small pool of Faroese actors. It's well worth a watch for those interested in the topic, artistic films, or Faroese cinema. **PT**



The family, playing a game of Ludo

The Faroese Festival Summer

THE ÓLAVSØKA NATIONAL HOLIDAY
AND G! MUSIC FESTIVAL

by Miranda Metheny



Summer in the Faroe Islands is short but exquisite. The grass glows a vibrant green, flowers bloom, and the sun doesn't set long enough for darkness to take hold. Even at midnight, the sky glows a beautiful blue and calls you to enjoy every hour. It's no wonder that the Faroese want to fit as much fun into the summer as possible. June, July, and August offer a huge variety of festivals and other activities.

The most traditional are the local festivals, or “stevna,” which feature rowing competitions, sports, activities for children and of course dancing and partying in the evenings. There are also many other types of local festivals and events. The last and greatest of the annual stevna is Ólavsøka, in Tórshavn, which is also the national cultural, political, and religious holiday of the Faroe Islands.

In recent years, music has also become a crucial part of the Faroese summer. Each summer features a calendar of concerts spread evenly through the summer months, different genres, and unique venues ranging from cafes in downtown Tórshavn to churches on remote outer islands. There are also several huge music festivals, including the magical G! Festival in the village of Gøta.



After the rowing competition, young men play in the Tórshavn harbor.

Ólavsøka – History

Ólavsøka is the national holiday of the Faroe Islands, and is a religious, political, cultural and sporting high point in the year. The Faroese parliament, or løgting, opens at this time. Historically, this was the time of the year that the most people from the various Faroese villages and islands would crowd into the capital to socialize, trade, and celebrate.

Ólavsøka means “St. Olaf’s Wake.” Like the smaller holiday of Olsok in Norway, Ólavsøka commemorates the death of the Norwegian King Olaf II Haraldsson, who is credited with bringing Christianity to Norway. King Olaf died on the 29th of July 1030 at the Battle of Stiklestad. However, the Faroese parliament predates this, so although the date has been changed, the origin of the holiday is even older.

Ólavsøka – Festivities

Ólavsøka traditionally takes place over two days, Ólavsøka eve on July 28th and Ólavsøka proper on the 29th. However, in recent years some events have in fact started on the 27th, with concerts and the Faroese gay pride festival taking place before the main holiday.

One of the centerpoints of Ólavsøka is the rowing competition. At the various stevna throughout the summer, regional teams have competed in rowing, but the finals are held at Ólavsøka. There are also various folk concerts, chain dancing, performances, a carnival for children and a variety of processions.

A typical Ólavsøka celebration involves wearing traditional Faroese dress as you wander from event to event, meeting people you know and sharing pictures and conversations with them. There are many restaurants selling delicious Faroese food here and



Many people wear Faroese national dress to the Ólavsøka festivities.



Some of the major Festival Summer events (Late May - August):

Norðoyarstevna - The stevna of the northern islands (Klaksvík)

Mentanarnáttin - An event celebrating both modern and traditional Faroese culture, with a huge schedule of varied events. Some call it "the little Ólavsøka." (Tórshavn)

Eystanstevna - The stevna of Eysturoy (Runavík)

Sundalagsstevna - The stevna of The Sound (alternates Kollafjørður, Hosvík and Hvalvík)

Voxbotn Music Festival - Music festival with local and international bands (Tórshavn)

Jóansøka - Midsummer and the stevna of Suðuroy (alternates Tvøroyri and Vágur)

Varmakeldustevna - A local festival (Fuglafjørður)

Útoyggjastevna - The stevna of the outer islands (location alternates greatly)

Fjarðastevna - A local festival (alternates Vestmanna, Skáli and Strendur)

Vestanstevna - The stevna of Vágur (alternates Sandavágur, Miðvágur and Sandavágur)

G! Festival - A magical summer music festival showcasing Faroese and international Music (Gøta)

Ólavsøka - The national cultural, political, and religious holiday of the Faroe Islands (Tórshavn)

Summer Festival - A huge summer music festival (Klaksvík)

Ovastevna - A festival celebrating local rowing hero Ove Joensen (Nólsoy)



there. At night, if you like, you can change out of the Faroese dress and go out on the town, as the bars and clubs are bustling.

The ending of Ólavsøka is perhaps its most distinctive moment. Thousands of people gather in the square for an All-song, or public singalong. Faroese and a few tourists alike all join together to sing about twenty Faroese songs from a printed booklet. This is the official end of the festival, but then, as everyone prepares to go home, a different sort of song starts coming over the speakers - a Faroese kvæði, or ballad. Everyone then links arms and starts dancing to the ancient Faroese ring-dance. It's a magical moment

that brings together the most traditional and beautiful elements of Faroese culture.



Thousands gather for the sing-along that marks the end of the official Ólavsøka festivities.

Scenes from the Summer

Top left: Hanus G. Johansen and Cantabile perform at Ólavsøka.

Middle left: The crowd at Voxbotn is in high spirits despite a drizzle of rain.

Bottom left: Delicious Faroese langoustine is grilled and sold on the street.



Scenes from the Summer

Top Right: The Faroese parliament's first session is open to the public.



Middle Right: Beautiful Faroese national clothing at Ólavsøka. This woman inherited her home-made and unique whale-bone jewelry from her mother.

Bottom Right: The Faroese national dress can come in many colors, with green and red the most traditional but blue, purple, and other colors also appearing.





G! – History

The G! Festival is widely considered to be the most important musical event in the Faroe Islands, and is, together with Summarfestivalurin one of the Faroes two biggest music festivals. Remarkably, this event takes place in the tiny fjordside village of Gøta, where an astonishing percentage of Faroese musical talent originates.

G! Was founded by two locals, Sólarn Solmunde and Jón Tyril, whose goal was to change the Faroese musical landscape. The first year was 2002, and the line-ups and attendance have been growing steadily since then. It has been estimated that up to one fifth of the Faroese population attends the G! Festival, and it is a veritable who's who of Faroese cultural icons.

G! – Festivities

G! takes place each year over the course of three days in July, a few weeks before Ólavsøka. The venues are built around the village of Gøta – on the beach, on the playground, in an old building foundation by the shore, and even in private homes. Gøta sits at the end of a long fjord, ringed by high green mountains almost like a natural amphitheater. As the festival begins, boats fill up the cozy harbor or sit out in the sparkling fjord, campers race to get the best spots in a huge party field, and the little village lights up with the wonderful energy that comes from music and togetherness.

People of all ages and interests flock to G! There is a

Greta Svabo Bech, who has worked with Deadmau5 and hit the Billboard Top 100, performs at G!



Danish pop singer Nabiha lights up the beach stage at the G! Festival.



Festival-goers gather to hear acapella choir Xperiment sing "Í Gøtu ein dag" (One day in Gøta), a Faroese ballad.





Modern Faroese Music

Faroese music has a rich heritage including not only the unique ballads, but also several other types of traditional church and secular music. Today, the Faroese have an astonishing number of musicians per capita, and you can find Faroese music in any genre, ranging from heavy metal to experimental, pop to country (oddly enough, several Faroese artists record in Nashville, Tennessee!)

The main Faroese record label, Tutl, has given most Faroese musicians their start. They organize many concerts in a huge variety of Faroese venues, and also operate a store in Tórshavn which is the best starting place for any visitor interested in learning more about Faroese music. The head of Tutl, Kristian Blak, is himself a notable composer and musician, and the founder of the Nordic ensemble Yggdrasil.

Here are some of the biggest names in Faroese music:

Eivør Pálsdóttir – From her birthplace of Gøta, the home of the G! Festival, Eivør has brought her unique voice and incredible stage presence to a huge variety of genres, from folk to rock, pop, and experimental music. She has recorded songs in Faroese, Danish and English as well as Icelandic.

Teitur Lassen – Generally considered to be the most world-famous of all Faroese musicians, Teitur's popular English-language music has brought him a global following.

Frændur – This band, which was formed in the town of Klaksvík in the 1980's, has produced some of the most famous and beloved of all Faroese songs, without which no Faroese party is complete.

Annika Hoydal – Recording most of her work in both Faroese and Danish, Hoydal is known as an actress and a singer-songwriter who records traditional and children's music.

Orka – Famous for building their own instruments and constantly experimenting, Orka started out with acoustic vocal songs in Faroese and has since delved into dark electronic and atmospheric music.

Byrta – One of the newest and hottest Faroese bands on the scene right now, Byrta's electro-pop sound was influenced by eighties music. The duo performs in Faroese and is rapidly gaining popularity in the Faroes and Iceland.

A variety of Faroese artists come together for the big sing-along at G!



Eivør Pálsdóttir performs at an intimate living room concert during the G! Festival.



Celebrations - The Faroese Festival Summer

Viking village for children, little restaurants set up on the spot to serve Faroese seafood and other delicacies, hot tubs and saunas by the ocean, and other attractions... but the focus is always on the music. Each year, musicians from both all around the Faroe Islands and all around the world converge there for unforgettable concerts that go late into the eternally lit nordic nights.

When the weather is good, Syðrugøta at G!-time might be the finest place on earth, as the fjord sparkles in the sunlight and the landscape seems too verdant and spectacular to be real. Even when the weather is bad (it's the Faroes, after all, and it's been known to rain, storm, and even flood the stages) the spirits of the Faroese seem unquenchable, and the party continues. **PT**



Children play on the beach during G! - the festival grounds are open and free each day, before closing to ticket-holders for the headline evening concerts.



Hot-pots and a sauna are set up on the beach during G!, and small restaurants selling sushi, snacks, gourmet food, and alcohol fill the small village.

View From the Town

The Parleremo Blog

The world of Parleremo is large and always expanding, with new people joining and new resources and languages being added.

Other projects also evolve around Parleremo, including various publications, daily learning materials, and fun merchandise.

To keep up-to-date on all the happenings, check out the View From the Town blog!

www.viewfromthetown.com



The Grind: Why the Faroese Hunt Whales

The Faroe Islands are famous worldwide not only for their beauty and culture, but also for the grindadráp, or whale slaughter. In an average year, the Faroese kill approximately 800 pilot whales in order to eat their meat and blubber, which is the Faroese national dish. This practice has provoked considerable controversy among anti-whaling organizations. In this article, we will look at the discussion from the perspective of two Faroe Islanders.



Some of the most common arguments against Faroese whaling are claims that the pilot whales are endangered, that it is a tradition that has no place in the modern world, that whales are an intelligent species that should not be eaten, and that whale meat is contaminated and unfit for human consumption. Faroese journalist Elin Brimheim Heinesen responds to these arguments in excerpts taken from her blog (<http://heinesen.info/wp/>):

The Faroese should stop killing pilot whales because the pilot whales are endangered.

The pilot whale is one of the most common whale species in the oceans all over the world, especially the long finned pilot whale. Pilot whales are not endangered according to the authorities in this matter. The NAMMCO (North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission) is the real authority on all matters regarding the North Atlantic pilot whale. The NAMMCO base their estimation on sightings – and they estimate that the number of long finned pilot whales in the North- and East Atlantic is 780.000, and that’s excluding the West Atlantic, so the number might be, even significantly higher. The ACS (American Cetacean Society) agrees with those numbers and the IUCN also agrees that the pilot whale hunt is, as they say: ‘probably sustainable’. The IWC doesn’t consider itself an authority on small cetaceans, of which the long finned pilot whale is one. So the pilot whale is not on the list of endangered animal species. The Sea Shepherd organisation stands alone in its claims that the long finned pilot whale is endangered.

The Faroese have killed pilot whales for at least 1.200 years, so the pilot whales should probably have been extinct by now, if the pilot whaling in the Faroes was a threat to the population as a whole. Since 1584 (that is how long it’s been care-



Pilot whales swimming in the ocean

fully monitored) the Faroese have killed 850 pilot whales (in later years around 800) on average a year, so that’s a tenth of a percent (0.1%) of the pilot whale population only in the North Atlantic, which is very far from exceeding the pilot whales’ reproduction rate at around 2 %. There is nothing to indicate that the pilot whale population is in decline. As long as the pilot whale is not endangered, this is not a rational argument. So this is a failed argument.

The Faroese should stop killing pilot whales because such a tradition doesn’t belong to the 21st century. They shouldn’t do this just because it is a tradition.

People in the Faroe Islands don’t kill pilot whales because it is a tradition. They do it for food, as they’ve always done. But opponents call this practice of getting food ‘a tradition’, because this way of living off of the natural resources of the ocean has been common on these islands for more than 1,200 years.

Pilot whale meat and blubber is so common and natural for the Faroese to eat that to them this food is no different than beef or bacon is to people in other countries, where they have a tradition for eating cattle or pig meat. It’s just that you can’t breed pilot whales in the same manner as you can breed cattle or pigs. But why would you want to do that, if there is an abundance of pilot whales around the islands living free their whole life? Why would the Faroese deprive the whales of that privilege and somehow cage them or put them in ocean feed lots?

Who’s to decide what belongs to the 21st century or not? Or which traditions are worth keeping for the Faroese or not? It is definitely not for people outside the Faroe Islands to decide. The right word for this is ethnocentrism. That is: judging another culture solely by the values and standards of one’s own culture. The ethnocentric individual will judge other groups relative to his or her own particular ethnic group or culture, especially with concern to language, behavior, customs, and religion. Ethnocentrism is not rational, so again a failed argument.

The Faroese should stop killing pilot whales because the whales are intelligent, sentient, and sociable.

Sea Shepherd founder Capt. Watson claims that it is a sign of highly developed intelligence that the whales have figured out how to live in harmony with nature, unlike us humans, so therefore they are more intelligent than people. Okay, if that is his logic, he could just as well claim a squirrel is more intelligent than humans. A squirrel also lives



in harmony with nature, and nobody would say that a squirrel is more intelligent than a human being for that reason. Capt. Watson is just being manipulative.

There is no doubt that bottle-nosed dolphins are some of the most intelligent creatures in the animal kingdom. Dolphins are good at learning tricks, especially in captivity – also pilot whales to a degree. Dolphins are proven more intelligent than most other animals, but they are still very far from being as intelligent as people. And not all whales rank that high. The pilot whale is in the dolphin family, but pilot whales are not the most intelligent of the dolphins. Pilot whales are not especially intelligent in comparison to many other mammals either.

Other animal species that humans kill for food are also proven highly ‘intelligent’. So this argument is inconsistent, if those who claim it is wrong to kill pilot whales because of their intelligence do not also oppose the killing of other intelligent animals for food.

Whether humans should refrain from killing “intelligent” animals or not is a matter of opinion. And there is no rational reason for claiming that one opinion is morally more right than the other. Also: How intelligent should an animal be to obtain a rank between the untouchables? How would you measure that to be able to set a border between highly intelligent and “stupid” animals?

Yes, pilot whales are sentient and sociable, that is true. And so are all other animals too, more or less. Animals, most people in the world eat – like cows and pigs, even chickens – are also sentient and sociable. So you can’t on the one hand say that the Faroese shouldn’t kill whales on these grounds, and at the same time accept the killing of other sentient and sociable animals.

If you are against the killing of animals because they are sentient and sociable, you are inconsistent if you don’t include all animals in the equation – that is: you must also oppose the killing of cattle, pigs and chickens, yes, any animal in fact. That is unrealistic.

The Faroese should stop killing pilot whales because pilot whale meat and blubber are contaminated and it is dangerous for the Faroese people’s health to eat it.

The Faroese will likely stop the pilot whaling gradually over the coming years, because pilot whale meat and blubber does contain mercury/methyl mercury at levels considered too high. Pilot whales also contain other toxins coming from man-made pollution, like PCB and DTD. And there are indications that exposure to some of these contaminants may affect human fetuses and



What's for dinner? Whale steak and vegetables.

their development. This fact is absolutely relevant and the majority of the Faroese people recognize this. But the anti-whaling activists often exaggerate the effects of this contamination, which are more subtle than they let people believe. There has, for instance, not been one single reported fatality due to eating pilot whale meat and blubber, not ever.

The Faroese health authorities recommend that pregnant women, or women who plan on being pregnant soon, should not eat pilot whale foods at all, as the critical levels for methyl mercury intoxication of pregnant women and fetuses are lower by a factor of 2–5 than for the general population. They do not recommend that pilot whale meat and blubber should be served to younger children, while it seems to be within safe limits for the rest of the population to eat pilot whale meat and blubber once to twice a month.

The Faroese people are not indifferent to this unfortunate development. People are taking action personally – many do not serve pilot whale meat and blubber to their children any longer, and most younger women as well as child-bearing women choose not to eat pilot whale meat and blubber at all. But as long as the health authorities haven’t recommended that the Faroese population as a whole completely refrain from eating pilot whale meat and blubber (which, by the way, is the Faroese national dish), and, as long as pilot whaling is done in a responsible, sustainable, care-taking manner, the Faroese see no reason for stopping pilot whaling altogether. And they think that there is absolutely no valid reason for others to interfere in Faroese matters, trying to force the Faroese not to utilize this natural resource in their own country. •



The Hunter's Perspective

by Morten Ejner Hønge

The Faroe Islands are a small island nation very bound in deep traditions, with our ring-dance, our national costume, and our long history. We live very close together, and we still cherish our values and our heritage as we have done throughout the centuries. We are descended from the great Vikings, and it is from them we get our stubbornness. We have eaten pilot whale since we first arrived on these islands of the North Atlantic over a thousand years ago, and it is still part of a daily life: we are not prepared to stop doing this because some foreigners disagree.

Whale hunting was very necessary in the old days, when hunger was a major problem in the Faroe Islands. Sometimes we had to eat seaweed or worse just to survive, and anyone caught stealing a sheep received the death penalty, so you can imagine how the discovery of the pilot whales seemed like a gift from heaven. The meat would be shared among everyone who had participated in the grind, or whale killing, and everyone who lived nearby. It was free, good meat from the sea. Whale meat still makes up a significant portion of our diet today.

Since April 2014, an organization called Sea Shepherd has been in the Faroe Islands. Its members have tried everything they can to get the world to hate us for killing whales. In return, we have treated them like our own people and been very nice to them, even if they are there to try to get us to change our way of life. But we won't stop, because it is part of our culture and tradition. For us, the whales have always been a valuable food source for which we have been extremely grateful.

The whales are killed in the most humane way possible. We don't go looking for them, but only drive the whales that have come closer to the shore themselves onto the beach so we can kill them quickly and humanely. A knife called a *mønustingarin* is struck into the whale near the blowhole, killing it instantly. After the whale is dead, it is cut to allow its blood to flow out. When the whale is bled out, we drag it onto the beach. The bleeding is done in the water because it is cleaner and gets the blood cleansed away quickly. This makes the process look messy, because the water is full of red blood after the killing. But if you would kill a cow in the ocean instead of in a slaughterhouse, hidden from sight, it would look

very similar.

After the whales have been dragged up onto the beach, the meat is divided among everyone who participated, and who lives in the area. The beach is full of people during this process, so it is a very social event and everyone gets their share. Much of the meat also goes to retirement homes, hospitals and the homeless to feed people. None of the meat goes to waste; everything is used.

Whale meat helps many people who have little money for food, and it is therefore still a great need in the Faroe Islands and will probably continue to be so for many years yet. Because we are so far away from the rest of the world, our food is very expensive to import. Fishing is a major part of the general collective Faroese food source, and most people eat fish here several times a week.

We feel it is much better to eat fresh food from the sea than meat from factory-farmed animals. It has long been a necessity for us to kill the whale and we will continue to do so for many more years, sticking to our old traditions that have kept us alive on these remote islands for many years. We will never forget these things, because they are what makes us Faroese.

The Faroe Islands are a great place on earth; a place that must be experienced at least once in a person's life. Come here and discover some of the traditions we have and enjoy our great hospitality. We love our nature and take great care of it. Discover an amazing place on earth; come visit the Faroe Islands! •



Morten Ejner Hønge is a grindadráp supporter, hunter, and founder of the "whale wars faroe island - hvalakriggi í Føroyun" group on Facebook, which has people discussing both sides of the whaling controversy.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/whalearsfaroeislan/948935571787983>



If We Lose Our Foods, We Lose Who We Are

by Elin Brimheim Heinesen

*Compiled with permission from her blog
<http://heinesen.info/wp/>*

I was born in the late 50's in the Faroe Islands. At that time we pretty much had a subsistence way of life in this remote place on earth with a hostile climate and an environment that humans could never hope to survive in without eating animals.

In winter, our region is stormy and dark for months on end, and the summer is very short. There are no trees except some imported trees in sheltered areas inside the villages and just a few edible plants. And yet, somehow we, the Faroese people, have survived here for more than a thousand years, relying on an intimate knowledge and understanding of our environment for our survival, constantly walking a tightrope between life and death.

In my childhood we still harvested most of our own food, integrating healthy, wild edibles into our diet. Most of our food supply was right outside our front door, and we used time-tested methods for living off the land and the sea. Our people were unencumbered, only depending on nature's resources and the skill in our hands. Sudden food cost increases or empty grocery shelves caused by turmoil on the international market were not our biggest concerns. The only uncertainties were the whims of nature.

I remember the foods of my childhood. We ate mostly fish, some sheep meat and quite a lot of whale meat and blubber, served with homegrown potatoes. And afterwards we would have porridge made from homegrown rhubarbs, for instance. Our storage of dry and salted food and our new freezer were filled with fish, sheep meat and whale meat and blubber, my family had provided directly from nature's larder. Our dairy products were from local farmers. But the grains, flours and sugar we used for baking bread and cakes were imported. And we only ate vegetables and fruits, if we could afford it. They were very expensive, because they came from far away, so they were luxury foods, we could not have everyday.

But things changed. Our fishing became industrialized. We got money on our hands. And suddenly we were able to import exotic foods from countries far away, like oranges and bananas. When I was a teenager in the 70's, we probably already ate fifty-fifty, half traditional Faroese food, half regular European food. Today the division is more like eighty-twenty, at least for people living in the bigger towns, while people in smaller and less affluent villages still try to reduce food costs by holding on to the old traditional diet.

But it's very doubtful whether the modern foods replacing the traditional foods, are any better or healthier. The opposite is more likely. The closer people live to towns and the more access they have to stores and cash-paying jobs, the more likely they are to have westernized their eating. And with westernization comes processed foods and cheap carbohydrates—soda, cookies, chips, pizza, fries and the like. The young and urbanized are increasingly into fast food. So much so that type 2 diabetes, obesity, and other diseases of Western civilization are becoming causes for great concern in our country too.

Well, it seems that there are no essential foods—only essential nutrients. And humans can get those nutrients from diverse sources. One might, for instance, imagine gross vitamin deficiencies arising from a diet very scarce on fresh fruits and vegetables. People in southern climes derive much of their Vitamin A from colorful plant



Sheep grazing on a hill in the Faroe Islands. They are part of the Faroese standard diet.



foods, constructing it from pigmented plant precursors called carotenoids (as in carrots). But vitamin A, which is oil soluble, is also plentiful in the oils of cold-water fishes and sea mammals, as well as in the animals' livers, where fat is processed.

These dietary staples also provide vitamin D, another oil-soluble vitamin needed for bones. Those living in temperate and tropical climates, on the other hand, usually make vitamin D indirectly by exposing skin to strong sun—hardly an option in the long and dark winters in the north. If you have some fresh meat in your diet every day and don't overcook it, there will be enough vitamin C from that source alone to prevent scurvy. Traditional Faroese practices like freezing or drying meat and fish and frequently eating them raw, conserve vitamin C, which is easily cooked off and lost in food processing, so eating dry fish, sheep or whale meat and blubber is as good as drinking orange juice.

Fats have been demonized in modern western cultures. But all fats are not created equal. Wild animals and / or animals that range freely and eat what nature intended have fat that is far more healthful. Less of their fat is saturated, and more of it is in the monounsaturated form (like olive oil). What's more, cold-water fishes and sea mammals are particularly rich in polyunsaturated fats called n-3 fatty acids or omega-3 fatty acids. These fats appear to benefit the heart and vascular system. But the polyunsaturated fats in most Europeans and Americans' diets are the omega-6 fatty acids supplied by vegetable oils. By contrast, whale blubber consists of 70 percent monounsaturated fat and close to 30 percent omega-3s.

A young woman of childbearing age may choose not to eat certain foods that concentrate contaminants. As individuals, we do have options. And eating our fish, our sheep and our whale meat and blubber might still be a much better option than pulling something processed that's full of additives off a store shelf.

How often do you hear someone living in an industrial society speak familiarly about "our" food animals? How often do people talk of "our pigs" and "our beef?" Most people in the modern world are taught to think in boxes and have lost that sense of kinship with food sources. But in the Faroese hunting and farming village culture the connectivity between humans, animals, plants, the land we live on, and the air we share has not been lost—not yet, at least. It is still ingrained in most Faroese people from birth.

Many of our young people and people in bigger towns are quite influenced by western urbanized



Tvøst og spik - a traditional dish of the islands, consisting of pilot whale meat (black), blubber (middle), dried fish (left), and potatoes

culture and food habits. They are slowly getting alienated to our old traditions. However, it is still not possible, really, to separate the way many of us still get our food from the way we live in this society as a whole. How we get our traditional food is intrinsic to our culture. It's how we pass on our values and knowledge to the young. When you go out with your father, mother, aunts and uncles to fish in the sea, to heard the sheep, handle the wool, to gather plants, to hunt birds and other animals or catch whales, you learn to smell the air, watch the wind, understand the way the currents move and know the land. You get to know where to pick which plants and what animals to take.

This way of life has been an integrated part of our culture for so long, and it still is to a degree, especially in the smaller villages, where people share their food with the community. They show respect to their elders and the weak in the society by offering them part of the catch. They give thanks to the animals that gave up their life for their sustenance. They get all the physical activity of harvesting their own food, all the social activity of sharing and preparing it, and all the spiritual aspects as well. You certainly don't get all that when you buy prepackaged food from a store.

That is why some of us here in the Faroe Islands are working hard to protect what is left of our old way of life, so that our people can continue to live and work in our remote villages, as independently as possible from polluting transport systems and a fraud-full modern economic infrastructure. Because if we don't take care of our food, it won't be there for us in the future. And if we lose our foods, we lose who we are. **PT**

Elin Brimheim Heinesen is a Faroese journalist and freelance consultant. For more on this subject and her complete blog visit <http://heinesen.info/wp/>.