

Mr. Winter and Mrs. Polgreen,

I received your names from John Eligon, who suggested that you would be the right people to pitch this story to.

On a tiny island nation known for its bird cliffs, free-roaming sheep and bloody whale hunts, 22-year-old Lydia Hansen dreams of her future as a fashion photographer. She comes home each summer to earn some money at the local fish factory and shoot eerily beautiful images in the mountains and the fjords she's grown up with, but every autumn she flies back down to Denmark. In order to pursue her education, she must leave behind not only her village, but her entire nation – and she may never return.

Many young Faroe Islanders go abroad for university and job opportunities, and many, disproportionately women, are not coming back. In a tiny population of 50,000, there are almost 2,000 fewer women than men, and the gap is largest among those in their twenties and thirties, prime ages for marriage and raising children.

If this trend continues, the birth rate in the Faroes could fall to unsustainably low numbers. Ethnic Faroese people also live in large numbers in Denmark, but struggle to pass their culture and language onto their children while living in the Danish society. A recent trend is for Faroese men to marry women from abroad, mostly Thailand and the Philippines, but this may also mean a change to the Faroese way of life, as they are often more comfortable cooking spring-rolls than whale steak.

I spent the summer living in the Faroe Islands, where I learned the language and traveled widely from island to island meeting, interviewing and photographing a variety of women. Some have permanently resettled abroad, leaving families split across multiple countries. Others plan their lives carefully, or sacrifice their careers, so they can raise their children in the tight-knit community they grew up in. There are female business owners and politicians -- exceptions to the rule where women are not seen as leaders -- farmers' wives, Filipino brides and a generation of young women on the verge of making the big decision: to stay or to go?

The Faroe Islands sometimes come into the media as a travel destination and in regards to their controversial hunting of pilot whales. However, the rest of what's happening there is almost completely ignored in the international media. I would love to write about this demographics issue, and could also bring in other information about the Faroese culture or current topics like the whale hunt as desired. I also see parallels in the situation some rural American towns are facing, and think it could be interesting to compare a similar situation in two places that may otherwise appear to be polar opposites.

I did the research and reporting for this story as my master's project for the Missouri School of Journalism, from which I will graduate in December. While at the Missouri School of Journalism, I worked as a newspaper reporter and an editor and contributing writer for the city magazine. For an example of my reporting and writing on an issue feature, you can read this cover story I wrote for Vox Magazine about a Missouri drought: <http://archive.voxmagazine.com/stories/2012/09/13/dried-out-lack-summer-rain-brings-consequences-env/> Other clips and photographs are gathered here at The Columbia Missourian: <http://www.columbiamissourian.com/accounts/profiles/MirandaMetheny/> I have already done a lot of work in the islands, but am also very willing to discuss the angle, size and other aspects of how the story could work for you and to continue fleshing it out from a distance. I look forward to receiving your reply,

Miranda Metheny

Sample Photographs:



(Photo: Lydia Hansen climbs the mountain that rises behind her house every day of her visits home, regardless of the weather. She always misses the mountains when she's away studying in flat Denmark. "If you go running on the street, you can't compare it to walking in the mountains. I like it a lot.")



(Photo: Lydia Hansen at a photo shoot with Faroese model Renata Jensen. "Denmark is so boring when it comes to nature and stuff. I really like to have the model with the nature behind," she says. "The weather doesn't matter actually.")



(Photo: Súsanna Bærendsen and Sirið Højgaard relax at Sirið's home while Súsanna's daughter Lilja lies on the floor. The two young women have been best friends all their lives, but are set to go in two different directions now that Súsanna has become a mother at 19 and Sirið is considering a move to Denmark for university.)



(Photo: Bára Joensen cuts hay on her farm. As a child, Bára hoped to become an electrician when she grew up, and asked her uncle to take her as an apprentice. He refused, saying it wasn't a job for a woman. Bára now works as a farm wife, a mother of three and a part-time tour guide.)