

MOVEMENT IN AN INSULAR COMMUNITY: THE FAEROE ISLANDS' CASE

Toomas Lapp (1979–2010)¹

The ocean can be a linking way or an isolating factor. For the Faeroe Islands, movement is at the origins of their population, but its history has revealed itself surprisingly sedentary. After the Vikings stopped there and populated the islands, where lived already the famous “Irish monks” – who were also supposed to have migrated in order to get to those desert islands, the Faeroese population has remained stable and stationary. Why? Which are the mechanisms that have dissuaded the population to pursue its once mobile way of life? How the sea is perceived in the archipelago – has it allowed and encouraged the contacts between the islands or, on the contrary, prevented the movement of the Faeroese within their internal space? How commerce and contacts with other powers affected the Faeroese communities? To all these questions this paper hopes to give an answer based on the analysis of the Faeroese experience throughout the centuries.

The Faeroe Islands are an archipelago of eighteen rock islands in the Northern Atlantic, in the middle of a triangle formed by Norway, Iceland and Scotland. From the administrative point of view, it is an autonomous region within the Kingdom of Denmark, and is inhabited by about 50.000 persons whose language is Faeroese, a Scandinavian language close to Icelandic. They live nowadays mainly from fishing and discuss more or less actively of becoming independent from Denmark, as the Islands' territorial waters are thought to contain rich oil fields.

As they are situated in the midst of the Ocean, the possibility or the impossibility of crossing the water has been one of the main elements in the islands' life. On the one hand, seafaring has been the way of connecting the Faeroe Islands with the external world, mostly with Norway, Denmark and Scotland, and on the other hand sea is the connector between the islands themselves. At the same time, because of natural and political factors, often the water connection has been more a means of dividing than of uniting: the more than one



thousand years in which the islands have been inhabited may be characterised more as static than dynamic. I shall examine firstly the physical movement in history between the islands themselves and then movement between the Faeroe Islands and the rest of the world.

INTERNAL MOVEMENT

Movement between the islands has been determined mainly by the natural conditions. Firstly, the Faeroe Islands are rock islands, with very few places to land. This has been a precondition for human habitat, which has chosen the places where landing was easier to establish villages. On the other hand, the scarce quantity of driftwood available has also influenced the amount of communication throughout time between the islands themselves: the Faeroese had actually no boats, which would be fit for sea fishing and could only afford to remain close to their shores and to elaborate community techniques allowing

them to get from the sea as much food as necessary to feed the people. So whale hunting was not held in high sea, but the whales were directed to places close to the shore, where they could easily be slaughtered by a whole community of Faeroese. Even when the communities had small boats allowing them to pass from one island to the other, the weather conditions made movement between the islands a complicated venture: the islands are very windy and the sea is often dangerous, especially for small crafts.



In history

The movement between the islands, as the rest of the islands' life, was regulated by the so-called "Sheep letter" (Old Norse '*sauðabréfit*' of 24 June, 1298). The annual meeting of the *ting* was the occasion during the Middle Ages in which Faeroese gathered, coming from different islands: until 1298, the *ting*, was both a legislative and judicial organ and after, it preserved only the judicial authority. People still continued to meet in Tórshavn every year. At the same time, it was the occasion to buy and sell goods. One of the consequences of this system is that women became fundamentally sedentary.

Thus, until the 20th century, movement between the islands was very limited. It determined a very keen island identity and dialectal differences. Movement was limited to certain layers of society, mainly to priests and pastors, who were compelled to move from one island to another.

The Catholic church, in the Middle Ages, had seven priests in the Faeroe islands, with assistants to help them, and at the end of the Catholic times (before 1000–1535) the seven priests served the fifty four churches existing on the islands. The churches were located far from one another: actually even within one island, moving from one church to another might be a demanding undertaking. For example let us take the northern part of the main island, Streymoy. One priest had to move between Saksun and Tjørnuvík churches, that are not far from one another in distance, but as there are no roads, the priest had to climb up and down rocks to move between his parishes. So mass could not be held every Sunday or even every holiday. The situation did not change later, in the Reformation period, the only difference being that while the priests in the Catholic time were Faroese, the Lutheran pastors were mostly Danes, coming from Denmark, and compelled to adapt to conditions very different from those they were accustomed to.

Considering the difficulty of transportation between the islands, a special service, called *skyds / skjuts*, was installed during the 19th century: each island had an appointed responsible for boat transportation, who was due to help organising the movement of priests, officials and private movements or tidings from one island to another. The *skyds* was a kind of forerunner of the postal service (from 1870), ensuring contacts between the islands. The postal service at the beginning ran but seven trips a year to each island.

New kinds of movement

After 1856, the building or buying ships (see below) allowed the Faeroese to increase movement between islands. While the Faeroese were becoming a navigating people, the drain towards the capital, Tórshavn, increased.

In order to avoid urbanisation, in the 1980s, the Faeroe Islands invested, with the help given by Denmark's state budget, in building huge infrastructures. Roads are good, and several islands are now connected with one another with tunnels – for example the tunnel connecting Eysturoy (Leirvík) to the Northern islands (island of Borðoy, Klaksvík, the second town in the Faeroes), called Norðoyatunnilin, was opened in 2006 and with its 6300 m is the longer in the Islands. Even small villages are connected to good roads and tunnels open them up, as for example the two villages in the island of Kunoy, Kunoy and Haraldssund, whose population amounts to some dozen persons.

In addition 12 helicopter landing fields were constructed. Helicopter tickets have even nowadays very cheap prices, in order to encourage mobility between the islands. In order to avoid foreign visitors taking exaggerated advantage of the low fares meant for the local population, a non-resident is not allowed to buy return tickets.

While most of the islands are quite close to one another, and are connected either through tunnels or bridges (with some connections by boat), the Southern islands, Sandoy and Suðuroy are more distant than the others, being accessible only by boat or by helicopter. The ferry Smyril M/S connects Tvøroyri and Tórshavn, it is a large boat for around one thousand passengers and more than 200 cars. It circulates two or three times a day and it is important for Suðuroy's community that it is their boat and that it spends the night in the island.

So, movement between the islands has become much easier in the Faeroe Islands in the last decades. The aim of such regional policy was indeed to give the Faeroese easy access to the towns, hoping they would go on living in small places and remote islands. At the beginning, the results were not very convincing: urbanisation went on and villages were deserted. The most attractive places were firstly the capital but also the second town Klaksvík as well as Runavík. The regional policy launched in the 1970s starts only now to give some results: if the improved infrastructure was used in the 1970s and 1980s to quit the remote regions, now we can point out the reverse tendency. Many people work at home with their computer over the internet and prefer to do it in the countryside, far from the noise of Tórshavn, while knowing that when-

ever they feel the need, they may access very easily the capital. Still, several islands remain very scarcely inhabited, mainly by elders, while houses formerly used during all the year have become mostly summer residences.

EXTERNAL MOVEMENT

Movement towards the Faeroe Islands was decisive in the first stages of their history: the first occupation of the islands as well as the second occupation, of longer duration, came from outside.

The occupation of the islands

The occupation of the Islands by mankind started in about 600–650 AD: they are discovered by Irish hermit monks, in search of isolation and solitude. West (1972: 5) is convinced that the Irish monks arrived in the Islands while following the direction given by birds' migration, considering that it should lead to land, where the birds would be able to rest. In his text written in 825 *Liber de mensura orbis terræ* ('The Earth's Measuring Book'), the Irish scholar Dicuil describes the islands North and North-East from Britain:

Sunt aliæ insulæ multæ in septentrionali Britannix Oceano, quæ septentrionalibus Britannix insulis duorum dierum ac noctium recta navigatione, plenis velis, assiduo feliciter adiri queunt. Aliquis presbyter religiosas mihi retulit quod, in duobus æstivis diebus, et una intercedente nocte, navigans in duorum navicula transtrorum, in unam illarum introivit. (Walckenaer 1807: 30)²

In his description, Dicuil mentions that the monks lived in the Islands about one hundred years but were compelled to quit because of the Viking plunderers. The Vikings arrived at the Faeroe Islands in the 8th century. After sailing from Norway, the Vikings had stopped on the British Islands, married local women and gone with them to the Faeroes (Jorgensen *et al.* 2004). When they arrived at the Faeroe islands, the Vikings found there not only monks, but also a fair amount of black wild lambs, and gave the Islands the name *Føroyar*, which means in Faeroese 'Lamb islands'.

If the first inhabitants, the Irish monks, did not influence in any way the later social relations, the lambs they had brought became the bases of the society's economy until the mid 19th century, when wool was the main export

article. Wool is still called nowadays the gold of the Faeroe Islands (in Faeroese *Seyða ull er Føroya gull*).

The Faeroese society developed on the bases of the Viking population, which had brought the social system from Norway, the Vikings installed in the Islands a pastoral society. Although no trees grew on the rocks, the absence of tree wood was not problematic at the beginning, as drift wood was used for building houses, tools and boats as well as for heating the dwellings. The remains of a Viking dwelling discovered in 1942 through archaeological excavations prove that the Vikings were in touch both with Norway and the British islands, from where they imported crops, soda-lime, wood and luxury goods – as glass and hazelnuts (Dahl 1970).

At the end of the 10th century, Olav Trygvason, King of Norway, decided to spread Christianity not only in Continental Norway but also in all the places occupied by the Norwegians, i.e. the Vikings in the West, in order to consolidate his Kingdom (Mortensen 2003: 9).³ At the turning of the millennium, the adoption of Christianity also concludes the period of the Faroese' independence, and in 1035 the King of Norway started to collect taxes from the islands.

Immobility for 600 years

The Faroese become more and more sedentary, because they had not enough wood to build crafts that would have allowed them to cross the Ocean: the Vikings former bold navigation skills sink into oblivion. During more than 600 years, the Faeroese do not move. This immobility is also due to regulation that does not encourage physical movement nor dynamism in society.

Trade

The Faroese own immobility still does not mean that the islands were completely isolated from the rest of the world. They have never been self sufficient as far as wood and food are concerned, and they have always needed connections with the outside world (Thorsteinsson 1991: 21). In spring 1271 Norway's King Magnús Lagabøte sent the Faroese a letter, in which he praises their docility and promise to send every year two trade ships from Norway (Young 1979: 139).

In 1535 the Faeroe's trade monopoly was established that was to determine the islands' life and fate for the three centuries. In essentials it meant that the King gave only to one trader (or he traded for some time himself) the right to

trade with the Faeroe islands, and the Faeroese were forbidden, under death penalty, to trade with any other partner.

Still, in spite of the prohibition, smuggling was widespread especially with British and Dutch ships, and almost all layers of society practised it. As Danish priests as well as the members of the legislative body, the *Løgting*, failed to respect the ban, usually smuggling affairs were indulgently treated in court (West 1972: 40; Wylie 1987: 29).

The rules for trade monopoly were strictly fixed by the King, but often the traders themselves did not respect them. For example they were due to transport across the Ocean for a symbolic fare all the Faeroese who wanted to present the King any letter of demand or complaint; still, the sending of complaints to Copenhagen was complicated if not impossible, for the content of the letters concerned usually the traders, who were thus not interested to have them transported to Copenhagen. The Faeroese had no ship at all to sail far from their shores.

The monopoly trade had a direct influence on the Faeroe Islands' social structure. The prices were fixed and they were changed, during the whole duration of the monopole trade, only a couple of times. The prices were the reason why it was advantageous for the Faeroese to deal mainly with wool and not with fishing: the society was organised as a mono-functional economy and therefore it was almost motionless. Moreover, rules regulated most strictly marriage and thus reproduction, striving to keep the islands population stable: marriage was forbidden unless the couple could prove possession of a certain amount of land.

The Faeroese were accustomed to stationary society from the Middle Ages on and they were scared of changes and therefore pretty conservative. The following example may illustrate their approach: although fishing was not economically essential for the Islands, still the Faeroese caught fish close to their shores for their own feeding. At the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century, British fishermen started to fish close to the Faeroe Islands. In 1617, the Faeroese sent the Danish King Christian IV a letter of complaint, in which they protested against the British catching in their fishing points hering that they would use as baits for bigger fish in their nets. The Faeroese did not use nets and thus they were at their disadvantage, and eventually were deprived of sufficient food and were in trouble for paying the king their due taxes (Zachariassen 1961: 133). Wylie (1987: 30) interprets the letter's content not as an attempt to make the king help the Faroese renew their fishing techniques in order to yield better catch, but to have him drive the British away so that the Faeroese could go on fishing as they had done for centuries.

Another example of the Faeroese conservative spirit goes back to the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, when the civil servants repeatedly recommended to lift the trade monopoly and thus to free the Faeroese trade. At the same time, the Faeroese peasants sent several letters to Copenhagen, demanding the monopoly trade to be maintained, for they were afraid of the possible chaos during the transition period. Officially, the monopoly was lifted only in 1856.

The foreigners

Until 1821, each spring, the first ship brought not only the traders, but also the *foogt*, the representative of the King, who spent all the summer in the Faeroe Islands and went back to Bergen in autumn with the last ship. In winter, the *foogt* was replaced by a Faeroese, the "*winterfoogt*". The *foogt's* task was to collect taxes and to participate to court processes as prosecutor (Wylie 1987: 11). The other foreign civil servants on the island were the head of the garrison, who was in charge of helping the monopoly warehouses and in general the town of Tórshavn as well as the appointed merchant. Danes or Norwegians never populated massively the islands and only some few times they were landowners (Debes 1995: 23). Thus, the Faeroese had extremely limited contacts with people from different cultures.

After the peace of Kiel in 1814, in which Denmark had to yield Norway to Sweden, Denmark still kept all its former colonies in North Atlantic – Greenland, Iceland and the Faeroe Islands. Denmark started to administrate directly these regions as its own regions and thus a governor, the *amtmand*, was sent in 1821 to the Faeroe Islands: he was the highest representative of the Danish state power. Unlike the former high civil servant positions⁴, the governor's position was temporary and many ambitious Danish civil servants saw in the Faeroe Islands a good springboard towards a promising career. They used it to be noticed and thus attempted to be as useful as possible to the islands⁵. In connection with movement, we must mention Christian Pløyen, who was governor in 1837–1848: he was so keen on the Faeroe islands' development that he applied for money from the Danish state, in order to discover Shetland and Orkney, whose natural conditions are similar to the Faeroe islands', in order to find skills that would optimise the Faeroe islands agriculture and fishing (Pløyen 1999). After this visit, he helped, with financial support from Denmark, several gifted Faeroese to travel to Shetland and Orkney to learn new fishing techniques. Moreover, it was Pløyen's initiative to establish a regular postal service between the Faeroe Islands and Denmark as well as Great Britain

so that the islands were no more an archipelago isolated from Europe, which was not concerned from Europe's events: now information moved from the world to the Faeroe Islands in a couple of weeks.

Religion

During the Middle Ages, besides the merchants and the *foogt*, the Faeroese were in touch with the external world through the Catholic bishop. The diocese of the Faeroe Islands was established in around 1100: at the beginning it belonged to the archbishop of Bremen, later to Lund and later to the archbishop of Nidaros (Trondheim) (Bruun 1942: 674). Among the thirty four bishops in the history of the Faeroe Islands, there were only a few Faeroese; the others were Norwegians, Danes or Germans. The local priests were almost without exceptions Faeroese; they had been trained as priests by the bishops on the spot. The diocese of the Faeroe Islands lasted more than 400 years, but we have very few data about it because of scarce sources. We know from indirect sources that the headquarters of the diocese were often plundered by pirates – another way in which the Faeroe Islands were connected to the outer world...

After the Reformation (1535–1540), the Faeroese pastors were more and more frequently replaced by Danish pastors; the Catholic school that trained ecclesiastics was closed and the Latin school that opened later in Tórshavn was expensive and did not train pastors, it only gave students the possibility of starting theology studies in Copenhagen. In general, until the second half of the 19th century, sending children to school was beyond the means of the Faeroese families.

Ryberg's trade

In the Faeroe Islands' otherwise very quiet history, there is one short twenty-three years period in which the whole society was shattered quite properly. It was when the Danish trader Niels Ryberg decided in 1766 to found on the Faeroe Islands a transit warehouse in order to stock goods from the Indian Ocean and Caribbean before smuggling them to Great Britain. At the same time, Ryberg was not allowed to sell goods to the Faeroese, because it was a threat to the Royal trade monopoly (Rasch 1964: 170). Trading was especially successful during the American Independence war, when Tórshavn harbour welcomed fifty crafts, instead of the two or three that sailed to the Islands before yearly (Jacobsen 2006: 99). Not only foreign sailors, but also foreign carpenters, coppers arrived in Tórshavn, and they started to adapt the town to

their needs: they established a tobacco factory, a club and a riding field. Ryberg finished the activity of transit storing in 1788, when Great Britain practically gave up import taxes and smuggling was not profitable any more. Although Ryberg's intermezzo did not influence the development of the Islands on the long term, it was the first window for the Faeroese to the world: Ryberg employed Faeroese boys in his warehouses and ships. One of the boys who worked on Ryberg's ships was Nólsoyar Páll, whom I shall present hereafter.

TOWARDS NEW MOVEMENT

Nólsoyar Páll, the uncommon Faeroese

After Ryberg's warehouses were closed, life went on in the Faeroe Islands as it has gone on for centuries before – the population herded lambs and contacts with external world, when they happened, were scarce. But we must mention a remarkable personality called Nólsoyar Páll (or Páll from the island of Nólsoy), who was presented at the end of the 19th century, in the context of the Faeroese national awakening, as a national hero. He was born in 1766, and worked as a boy on Ryberg's trade ships, later on other ships, crossing many seas. Páll is supposed to have served both in the French and British fleets, and later as a captain on American trade ships. In 1800 he returned to the Faeroe Islands and started to keep a farm. But being a curious and progressive spirit, he did not keep to agriculture but invented means to improve fishing activities: he elaborated a new kind of hull, well adapted to the Faeroe Islands windy waters and their strong currents and changed the form of the boats' sails – his innovations were adopted almost everywhere in the islands. He is also remembered because he looked with some friends for a shipwrecked sailing boat and built from it a boat fit to navigate, the *Royndin Friða* – the first long run boat built in the Faeroe Islands and belonging to a Faeroese. With his boat, he transported different kinds of goods between the Faeroe Islands and Norway, Denmark and Great Britain, and for this, he was assigned by the civil servants to court for violating the monopoly trade rules and dealing with smuggling. Páll perished in a storm on the way between Great Britain and the Faeroe Islands in 1809.

Nólsoyar Páll, with his moving nature, was in striking contrast with the static society of the Faeroe Islands, while by trying to find ways to sidestep the rules of monopoly trade and by sailing with his own ship he was a forerunner of the change that would come to the Faeroes a hundred and fifty years later.

The end of monopoly trade

The static aspect of Faeroese society had been mostly a consequence of the restrictions imposed by the monopoly trade. This absolute rule is more and more discussed in the 19th century.

The monopoly trade had been bringing losses for quite a long time and the king's advisers in Copenhagen had been repeatedly recommending liberalising trade with the Faeroe Islands. The King had agreed – in spite of the confused reactions coming from the islands. The Faeroe peasants had on the one hand asked the King to maintain the monopoly, but on the other hand Nólsoyar Páll had demanded liberalisation of trade. The main obstacle to monopoly trade revocation was only that the Danish government had more urgent issues – for example Napoleonic wars at the beginning of the 19th century or, some years later, the Schleswig-Holstein question. The monopoly rules were definitively lifted in 1856.

For many Faeroese, the abolition of monopoly trade is a major milestone in the history of the Islands – it represents the official end of the Middle Ages in the Islands and some people consider it even as the first year of a new era – for now the Faeroese could trade with one another as well as with foreign merchants (Olafsson 2000: 123). Their society, which was until that time relatively static and closed, started immediately to develop and to grow. Between 1860 and 1901, the number of the Faeroese doubled. Movement increased, mainly from the Faeroe islands towards the world.

The development of export possibilities led to a change in the islands production's pattern. Soon wool and wool products export was replaced by fish: at the end of the 19th and beginning of 20th century, Great Britain replaced its sailing ships by modern steamers and the Faeroese were able to buy quite cheap sailing boats. Fishing became industrial and concentrated on far fishing, an activity that was completely unknown until that time to the Faeroese. This development meant that the men were absent for months from home and this factor influenced strongly agriculture, which had dominated until then the Faeroese economy, and the Faeroese culture as a whole.

Another direction of movement from the islands towards other Northern countries is connected to education. As the Faeroese richness started to grow rapidly, it became possible for more and more Faeroese to study in universities abroad. In general Faeroese went to University in Copenhagen, but some went to Iceland or Norway⁶. Compared to the situation in the Nordic countries at the time, the Faeroese' quick enrichment and the absence of unemployment represent a remarkable exception, for during the same period, millions of people quitted Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Iceland towards the Unites States

of America in quest of economic wealth or spiritual salvation. Officially no one from the Faeroe Islands emigrated at that time: thus the movement pattern does not follow the Scandinavian model at all.

Movement developed not only from the islands, but also towards them. The frequent movement of fishermen between the Faeroe and the British Islands allowed in 1860 the arrival of the first non-Catholic and non-Lutheran missionary William Sloan, representing the Plymouth Brethren, a conservative evangelical denomination. He did not immediately succeed in the Islands: at the beginning he scared people so that he was several times left to sleep outdoors (Berghamar 1992). But after working obstinately for decades, Sloan achieved confidence from many people and today the Plymouth Brethren are the biggest non-Lutheran religious movement in the Faeroe Islands.

Opening towards the world

At the beginning of the 20th century the Faeroese started to add engines to their sailing boats and to sail further and further. The new movement towards the world yet did not bring a radical opening of the sailors world: they remained in the North Atlantic and the contacts with other population remained limited. They sailed towards Iceland, but from the 1920s on they moved to Western Greenlandic shores, looking for better catch. Although geographically they sailed very far from home, their trips did not afford any cultural enlightening contact. Greenland was a closed colony belonging to Denmark and the Danes made sure that Greenlanders did not meet any foreigner, included Danish citizens. Therefore the Faeroese were not allowed ashore even to drink fresh water. They found a temporary compromise in 1927, when they were allowed to build their own port on a desert island, Færingehavn, in order to get drinking water and to store fish catches. In 1937, Denmark allowed also non-Faeroese fishermen in Færingehavn – and thus the Faeroese met people from several other countries there, although the contacts with Greenland's natives remained inexistent.

Both World War I and World War II meant isolation from Denmark for the Faeroe islands, but they intensified contacts with Great Britain, and implied movement in both directions. When, during WWI, famine started to harass the Faeroe Islands, the Faeroese ensured income of food through the British. But vice-versa, during WWII – which is seen in the Faeroese history as a period of economic development, the Faeroese offered the United Kingdom substantial assistance by daring transport fish from the Icelandic ports to Great Britain, which suffered from lack of food, while the Icelanders considered sea-

far too dangerous and were not ready to risk German attacks on their boats. The modest and old-fashioned Faeroese boats were actually more fit for sea travel in those troubled days, because they escaped detection by radars.

Even more important, the main movement direction was not from the Faeroes towards Great Britain, but the reverse: the British moved towards the Faeroe Islands. Actually, in order to avoid so important a military strategic location to be taken by the Germans, Great Britain, on April 8th 1940, occupied the Faeroe Islands in an operation called “Valentine”. Two hundred sailors were soon replaced by foot soldiers. At the highest point of the occupation, there were in the Faeroes until 8000 British soldiers, who went almost all away in 1945, when the control over the Islands was returned to Denmark (Dalsgaard 1989: 13). Although the Faeroe Islands protested against the occupation, several authors have called it a formal occupation (cf. Dalsgaard 1989; Åkesson Filholm 2009; Strøyberg 2004). While the Faeroese wished to remain neutral in the war, they were well aware that they would be sooner or later occupied by one of the belligerents and thus they were quite happy that the British arrived before the Germans. The occupation is called by the Faeroese people “the Friendly Occupation”. Around one hundred and seventy British soldiers married Faeroese women and remained in the Islands. The fact that the Faeroese were not very seriously against the occupation is proved by the celebration held in 1990 of its 50th anniversary, where many British ex-service-men were invited. Moreover, this period is a forerunner of later self-rule: symbolically, the Faeroese flag was first officially used under the British rule (Lapp 2009: 110).

The bank crisis in the 1990s

In the last decade of the 20th century, physical movements have also been doubled by more virtual movements, proving the opening of a traditionally closed society: the changes in behavioural patterns were well revealed with the 1990s bank crisis. The crash was mostly due to the accumulation of foreign debt, due to the welfare aspirations of the Faeroese society. Capital had been flowing to the Faeroes and allowed developed infrastructure and personal consumption, but all under Danish warrant. Eventually the situation exploded, and the collapse of the fish industry revealed the weaknesses of the Faeroese economic system and its dependence from the outside world (Baerenholdt & Aarsaether 1999). The year 1992 is remembered as a “anno horribilis”: the islands financial bankruptcy led to the emigration of one quarter of the population towards Denmark, while Denmark, in spite of internal tensions and a

debate about the cost of supporting the islands for the Danish taxpayer, payed and helped the Faeroes to rebuild its economy.

In the last decades of the 20th century, movement seems to be generalised in the Faeroese every day reality: in spite of the creation of a Faeroese University⁷ in 1965, more and more Faeroese youth move abroad to be trained, and many remain abroad for some time to work in their profession. Still, there is also the reverse movement – Faeroese going back to their native islands after some year of work experience abroad – mainly in Denmark, where they have all the advantages of being citizens. The emigration for study or for working abroad represents still a considerable amount of the Faeroese population.

The Faeroese and Denmark (01.01.2006)

Men	Women	Total
10.499	12.050	22.549

CONCLUSION

While one would have expected the traditional economic system of an archipelago to be very much dependent on the sea and on movement across it, the case of the Faeroe islands seem to lead us in another direction: the sea, for the major part of its history, was only marginally a connecting way, but mainly maintained the islands and their inhabitants in a most isolated condition, condemning them to sedentary life. The natural conditions of the rock islands, in which trees do not grow, did not give the local population access to the sea, and nailed them on the islands, where they survived thanks to the lambs, the sea birds eggs (on some islands) and the fish caught near the shore. During the Middle Ages (that finished for the Faeroes in the mid-19th-century), the rules established by Norway and later by Denmark enhanced this closeness, and thus, political factors confirmed the trends due to natural elements.

The traditional opposition to change and thus to movement was challenged by external conditions: the opening of trade on the one hand, in 1856, and the opportunity of acquiring ships enhanced a new role for the sea as connector and stimulated movement and change in the Faeroese society. At the beginning of the 21st century, progress has closed the gap and Faeroese society is now in touch with the world's general development.

The Faeroese case is thus interesting and peculiar in Europe's history, which is as a whole characterised by the intensity of contacts between different cultures and societies: while the waters around the Faroe Islands have both united

and separated the islands from each other and rest of the world, for most part of the Faroese history, however, they are to be seen as the isolating factor.

NOTES

- ¹ This article is based on the material Toomas Lapp had written for his presentation in the seminar Worldroutes I, Tartu, May 30 2010. The article was not concluded when Toomas Lapp tragically perished on July 12th. His message has been reconstructed, translated and completed by Eva Toulouze, who was his doctoral supervisor and had discussed at length his positions for this presentation. By publishing his last scientific contribution, we homage our colleague, whose path was so brutally interrupted.
- ² Translation: “In the Ocean north to Britain there are other islands, where one gets by sailing from the Northern British Islands two days and two nights with favorable winds. A reliable priest told me that he sailed with a two-bench boat two summer days and the night in-between and visited one of them“.
- ³ While in Iceland, where the occupation has many similarities with the Faeroe’s one, evangelisation went smoothly – because of the Icelanders’ pragmatic approach, according to which adopting Christianity was necessary in order to keep good trade relations with the Christian world –, the Faeroese at the beginning were opposed to the new faith. The Faeroe Islands’ evangelisation is reported in the ancient *Færeyinga saga*, ‘The Faeroese saga’. Some time later they were compelled to give in and to submit to Norway’s King’s pressure.
- ⁴ The *foogt* was a lifelong position. The foreigners in the islands, included the pastors, integrated into the Faeroese society, and became usually Faeroese, without exercising any influence on this society that would change it.
- ⁵ For example Christian Ludvig Tillisch, who was governor in 1825–1830, founded schools in several villages, the Tórshavn handicraft school for girls, established the first library and the first hospital.
- ⁶ It is towards Iceland that V. U. Hammershaimb, the creator of Faeroese written language, directed young Faeroese, hoping that studying in Icelandic would arise interest for the Faeroese language and in general for the Faeroese national question.
- ⁷ Not all subjects are taught at the Faeroese University, which has three faculties.

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