



Ram rearing on the Faeroe Islands - tradition, recreation and cultural dilemma

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Abstract

The traditional Faeroese sheep husbandry was based on extensive farming where sheep fed on grass and resided in the outfield throughout the year. Today the price on outfield land usually exceeds what it could pay. Sheep husbandry and private subsistence production of mutton are today one of the very few contacts the people have back to their traditional cultural roots. To ram rearing is a special modern kind of hobby connected with the sheep husbandry. Two phenomena in the modern ram rearing are of special interest, and are also the essence of a cultural dilemma; one is the hidden exaggerated feeding as a key element in the mutual competition to produce the largest and heaviest ram; the other is the fact that the rams acquire so much fat on the barrel that fewer and fewer people like to eat the mutton. There is a conflict between the old value norms

about good sheep husbandry and with the modern conception of healthy and unhealthy eating.

Keywords

Faeroe Islands, agricultural systems, traditional sheep husbandry, modern ram rearing, popular rituals.

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Nú tosar hvørt mansbarn um fletting og skurð
øll vilja vera skarpast
fletta tey frens uppá seksti pund,
tað má í luftina varpast.
Vektin er tað sum ger tað

Old tradition in a modern society

Sheep-rearing is discussed in detail by J. C. Svabo (1959:200ff) about 1780. His description is in consonance with the situation known from the 19th and 20th centuries as it is compiled by E.A. Bjørk (1956-57) in *Færøsk Bygderet* (Faeroese local village law). R. Joensen's book (1979) *Fåreavl på Færøerne* (Sheep Husbandry on the Faeroe Islands) is the most original and comprehensive work on traditional Faeroese sheep husbandry.

The sheep-husbandry is the part of the traditional Faeroese way of life that has changed least in modern

society. Broadly it can be traced back to the *Seyðabrævið* (The Sheep Letter) - an ordinance from 1298. In those days, and so nowadays, common as well as private ownership existed. Under common ownership, *felag*, the yield of the sheep is divided equally among the owners. The relation between the different owners and the sheep is impersonal. Under private ownership, *kenning*, the owner only puts out into the outfield his animals and receives only the yield of these sheep. Where the sheep are bred in *felag*, the total concept is more conservative and more difficult to change than under *kenning* where there are much wider possibilities of individual initiatives and of accommodation to new and changed conditions. Where king's land (*kongsjørð*) dominated the king's farmer via his shepherd was the sole decision maker, but where private land (*óðalsjørð*) dominated the owners made the decision in common.

In those villages on Suðuroy where the ram husbandry has been investigated both the king's land and private land is found, but the share of private land is much larger than the king's land in most of the villages. In no village the

king's land exceeds 50% (Hansen 1981:724). In most villages both *kenning* and *flag* are found.

Earlier the outfield was not only intended to sheep, but also to cattle, horses and geese, but from old times the total carrying capacity was defined according to traditionally fixed regulations that laid down the carrying capacity for the different outfield parts (Bjørk 1956 and Taxationsprotokol 1873). As I have tried to point out in other connections (Joensen 1981:97) the traditional Faeroese farmer society was very conservative in the daily practice where the claim to follow the instructions of the tradition was very strong. By driving, distribution and butchering traditional principles were followed. They were current from the moment the sheep were taken into the *roykstova*, literally the smoke room, i.e. the old kitchen, or the cellar until the body of the sheep was cut in the proper way, so it became a handsome *krov* or carcass. The norms and practices lead the thoughts to what Giddens (1997:70) calls ontological security. A reliance on one's own situation, to own knowledge that made it possible to behave with security in local surroundings.

Not until the 20th century roofed sheep shelters have been erected in the outfield and systematic feeding began in winter (Bjørk 1956/57:261ff). The old Faeroese were afraid of the fact that the sheep would not be capable to manage in the winter if man interfered too much: "*It was a disaster (to feed the sheep), the sheep became dull, they did not think of scraping for grass any longer, they were just running after people. The result was that it was harmful to give hay to the sheep*" (Joensen 1982:83).

This was particularly evident in places with common property. It was different in places where the sheep were privately owned. Here the owners usually took better care of their own sheep and inured them to eat hay during the winter. In the severe wintermonths the owners could even take them home, so that they could survive (Sigvardsen 1997). Hanne Heen (1979:92) ascertains in connection with her fieldwork on the island Hestur in the late 1970s that "*only in snowy winters feed is carried out to the sheep. This means that one was let off the feeding work in winter*". As in other places on the Faeroes the ideal was here the vigorous sheep that could do well in the outfield in summer as well as in winter.

The round up of the sheep still takes place twice a year. In June to cut the wool and after Michaelmas day (29 September) to collect the sheep to be butchered. Previously the round-up of sheep to be butchered took place in two

rounds. First the young rams were taken. This had to take place before they were in rut, because the rut influenced the taste of the mutton. On the same occasion the young rams to be used as breeding sheep were chosen. They ought to have the best wool, the right shape, fine horns, strong legs and all the positive characteristics that were expected from the sheep to keep the strain strong and healthy (Joensen 1979:100).

Old female sheep as well as *geldseyðir*, castrated male sheep, and *feitiaer*, fat barren female sheep, were rounded up a few weeks later. Mutton from these two latest categories was of especially good quality. It gave prestige to be able to serve mutton from *geldseyður* or *feitiaer*. Nowadays the animals to be butchered are taken in one round. "*For the Faeroese the young ram is a real wild beast, full of cunning and hidden forces*" R. Rasmussen tells us in his memories from the end of the 19th century (1985:78). Earlier the young rams for breeding were let off at once, but later they were first held at home and later let off again around 1st of December so that the female sheep did not bring forth the lambs too early when the weather could be bad. A young ram was assumed to be able to cover between 20-50 female sheep (Bjørk 1956/57:234). The young breeding rams are less than one year of age when they overtake the task to carry on the breed. Svabo (1959:222) was worried or offended in the 1780s, "*when the offspring that they produce before they are grown up and have reached full power must in either smallness or weakness bear the mark of the breeding rams misplaced passion*". This has not changed since, and young rams are still used as breeding rams. The reason for this was that experience shows us that the old rams used so much energy on to defend their territory and female sheep against other rams, that they neglected their proper duty.

Earlier the young breeding rams could either be butchered in winter or some of them could be placed on feed grasslots in the mountains. These lots were specially lushy but isolated grass areas in the birdcliffs or on grassy islets that were hardly accessible. Some of them were castrated and had the opportunity to stay out the rest of the year (Svabo 1959:201). The young breeding rams are nowadays as earlier taken home around Epiphany (6 January). "*Most of the young rams are used for a year, some in two, but then they are butchered*" as Heen (1979) ascertains in her fieldwork from the village Hestur.

New ways in sheep husbandry

In contrast to the sheep husbandry the cattle husbandry has changed drastically in the last 30-40 years (Brandt 1996). The general social changes together with an improved infrastructure made the population more mobile, and nobody wanted to be tied up with a single cow in the cellar throughout the year (Joensen 1982:59ff). It happened at the same time as some farmers specialized in milk production by introducing larger and more productive cow races which resulted in a multiplication in milk production in 30-40 years.

The modern cow husbandry has caused changes in harvesting methods, use of feed, as well as the feeding system. New areas outside the traditional infield has been cultivated because the old infield was unsuited for the use of agricultural machines, and in this way large areas of old infield were left over (Brandt 1996).

This development has to be seen in relation to another phenomenon in the Faeroese land use system, the *traðarmenn* or cotters as well as the registration of the infield. A *trøð*, is a relatively small land area without rights in the old in- or outfield. The *traðarmenn* had only right to the produce from the *trøð* itself. Originally this was a social arrangement, making it possible to make a living for the growing population with a cow and a couple of sheep (Joensen 1982:17ff).

Before the registration and the following land distribution, *útskifting*, with an exchange of strip holdings the infield was divided into small pieces. The change to larger compact holdings made it possible for the owners to conduct a more modern private sheep husbandry. It is important to note that Suðuroy was the first island where the land redistribution took place in the 1930s (Hansen 1981:720). So there is a clear connection between the land redistribution in the infield and the new possibilities for a privatized sheep and ram husbandry in Suðuroy.

These structural changes led to a situation where large areas of both *trøð* and old infield were unused, as there no longer was a need for hay as winter feed for the cows. Some landowners saw this niche, and started a entirely new and more domesticated way of sheep husbandry, where the sheep spent the whole year in smaller enclosures. They never came out in the outfield that was already occupied by the traditionally fixed number of sheep. By applying for a winter-enclosure the outgoing sheep were prevented to trespass the areas of the private sheep.

After the World War II this trend has developed into a swelling hobby of ram rearing. The relations to the traditional sheep husbandry slackened and a private gray-zone grew up.

Here one can observe clear tendencies of disintegration in the traditional work life (Joensen 1982:50) e.g. in the traditional way of haymaking (Nyman 1958). It is in this zone of weak norm control that the private sheep- and ram rearing has developed especially in Suðuroy.

Ram husbandry on Suðuroy

The empirical data for this description is primarily collected in four villages on Suðuroy; Hvalba, Porkeri, Vágur and Sumba, and is for the main part done by Magnus Magnussen, but is supplemented by new information. 30-40 years ago the sheep husbandry in these villages did not diverge substantially from the situation in other Faeroese villages. They had the number of rams needed to cover the female sheep.

There is possibly a connection between the ram husbandry and the economic stagnation and the lacking occupation on Suðuroy in the 1950s. The situation was parallel to the 30s when a general depression hit the Faeroe Island. Then the general interest in agriculture and sheep husbandry increased (Joensen 1987:53). In the village Vágur a man, the pioneer, started with ram rearing in 1934 and after the World War II this type of husbandry increased considerably when he had 12-15 rams (Magnussen 1993: 23). Besides hay the rams got a sack of concentrates during the year supplemented with household rubbish. Some of the rams were led to the feed grasslots during the summer, but most of them were kept on the *trøð* throughout the year. This man used a whistle to call together his rams. His *trøð* was located near the football ground, and it caused mirth when the football judge whistled and all the rams rushed out.

Gradually a special form of ram culture developed on Suðuroy which is without counterpart on the Faeroe islands. In 1993 there were 700 rams in Hvalba, 350 in Porkeri, 1500 in Vágur and about 400 in Sumba, and these numbers are almost equivalent to the population of the villages (Magnussen 1993:22). It is not a special social category of people who keep rams, it seems as the interest for rams is universal in these villages and usually a man has 6-8 rams, but some men may have 15-30.

Ram rearing has developed into a competition between the men. All remedies are used to get the rams so big, fat and heavy as possible. It is, however, difficult to have an admission on exaggerated feeding. Apparently they have, or they pretend to have the illusion that it is not feeding, but special strain qualities with the ram that make it so big. This due to the fact that the feeding to a great extent goes on secretly. In this circus there are two acts. The first goes on while the rams are fed secretly and the next is the butchering which has quite another form of publicity.

The feeding - a private secret

The ideal Faeroese sheep is living in the open throughout the year, while the rams are kept indoors in the winter. They get both hay and concentrate so they are in good condition when they are let on grass in the spring. But when the final spurt begins feeding escalates and becomes from now on a private secret. "They get a little more than usual", is a commonly heard remark. And it is mostly "the others" that give the rams too much concentrate. Nobody will admit that they themselves use much concentrate - even if it can be stated that considerable amounts are sold. In a village as Porkeri it can be as much as 12 tons a year. (Magnussen 1993:18). "I have personally seen a man from Vágur on his knees cramming white bread into the ram that lay on the ground. He gave it white bread and rye bread every day as well as concentrate", Magnussen (1993:18) has observed. It also appears that men are sneaking out after dark to feed the rams while lying down. In August the evenings on the Faeroe Island are getting dark and the rams lie down to rest when it becomes dark. The eating thus decreases and it can result in a stagnation in the growth. Therefore the owners wish to feed while the rams lie down. "Often the rams are tethered alone. Some owners are moving it several times daily, as well as they get concentrate several times daily" (Magnussen 1993:20)

Among people it is said that men in certain villages are giving their rams soft brown sugar, to make them consume more calories. Some claim that the rams are given eggs or even eggs mixed with brown sugar. In a particular village the rams are, according to the local gossip, fed with Danish pastry and Madeira cake. This is information blowing in the wind, hardly possible to confirm. I have asked a man from the Northern Islands if there were many rams in his home village. The answer was that they had rams as well

as they bred young rams as usual, and that they were butchered the following autumn. Then he added on his own account: "We do not have brown sugar rams, as they have on Suðuroy".

A special kind of folklore arises around the ram husbandry. Thus it is told of a man who had overtaken a ram from another man. The new owner had problems with the ram, it did not thrive or put on. He complained to the former owner and learned that he was a dedicated lozenge-eater who used to give his ram a 'Ga-jol' lozenge after feeding the rams. Then the new owner regularly bought this kind of lozenges and gave it to the ram after the meal. Now the ram began to thrive good as in the old days.

A ram that moves around and runs much uses much energy. That is why it is rumoured that some men find it appropriate to give their rams tranquilizers or blunting medicine to prevent them from moving too much. Magnussen (1993:19) says: "It is asserted that someone has given the rams Valium, a kind of tranquillizer, that make them as peaceful as possible... I asked if it was true, but the answer was of course no. But even if it really was true they would never in their lifetime confess it, because it would be "skomm", degrading".

No matter if this information is true or not, the fact that these stories, of brown sugar rams, Madeira cake rams, Danish pastry rams, Valium rams, are important information saying something about the reciprocal signalling in the formation of a local identity. Moreover, the stories tell us something about the whole ideology behind the ram husbandry as well as the competition to get the biggest ram, and that there is a discrepancy between ideology and practice. Most men are understating or telling white lies about the feeding. On the other hand, people are actually knowing what is going on because everybody are more or less involved, by giving the rams more feed than they claim. This is a part of the game and the competition. None the less it is hoped to find an explanation in other causes, preferably genetic. They prefer, when the ram is butchered in the autumn, to tell other men "that the ram did not get so much concentrate. The ram was good because 'hann var av góðum slag', it was of good breed. (Magnussen 1993:19).

Ram-rearing - the mens world

In traditional, Faeroese economic culture the sheep belong to the sphere of the men, while the cows belong to the

female sphere. A Faeroese proverb tells: *kúgv er kvinnu lík* (literally: cow and woman are alike) (Vestergaard 1981: 81). Is the man absent or otherwise not able to take care of the sheep, the woman may lend a hand, however without the same commitment. It is as if the women have a distance to this male phenomenon, just like the men formerly only at exceptional cases could milk the cows (Magnussen 1993:22).

Ram-shows formerly were frequent events at the Faeroe Islands. *"It was exiting to see the rams that were awarded to prizes. If a man (sic!) was awarded, he became very eager to get an award next year, too. It was not just to get an award personally, the "slagið", the strain too, became much better. It was only the very best of the breeding young ram that were awarded. Generally just awarded rams were allowed to "brunda" i.e. to cover the female sheep. It was little acceptable if a man allowed a "brund" that was not awarded to cover".* The same informant is looking back at those ram-shows. *"The ram-shows ought to taken up again. Not because of the money, but for the sake of the family and the excitement"* (Magnussen 1993:23).

The butchering - a social event

A normal weight of a ram was usually 40 pounds - 45 was regarded as fine and 50 exceptional, as it appears in some memoirs from the beginning of the 20th century (Johansen 1970:52). The starting point of the humoresque ballade *"Veðratátturin"*, of T.N. Djurhuus is that the weight of a ram in fact is news in the local radio broadcasting - cf. the quotation at the beginning of this paper (Tongla Tummas 1965:3). The feeding of the ram is a secret - by no means the butchering is. On the contrary it is a public event in the village with a large share of male population participating as actors and audience, Andreassen (1992). The whole social event produced a kind of mutual connection across any social barrier.

The butchering of the sheep through the ages has been one of the great events in the common life on the Faeroes, and still the butchering is taking place in the cellar at home. The butchering implies skill and knowledge of the anatomy of the sheep to be executed in the proper way. It is perhaps not unfounded that the Faeroese butchering could be regarded as a kind old cult - inheritance from pagan times, when the *blóting*, the offering, had to be

performed according to certain prescriptions (Rasmussen 1985: 81). The butchering has an aesthetic of its own and will reveal if it is a good or bad *flettingarmaður*, butcherman. The unskilled will instantly be disclosed. Many desist from the butchering thinking he is not sufficiently skilled. There is a certain intimacy in the room where the butchering is taking place, and where it must not be too cold; if so the process is impeded. Some stir the blood that run into a bowl. The butcher loosens the skin by pressing his fist between the skin and the body. There is a smell of warm blood, meat and entrails as the damp rises from the carcass. The butcher pulls the small intestine out and places it with the belly on the floor, so the women later can take hand of them. The other intestines and the lard are placed on dishes and finally the carcass is hung on a nail and washed by water.

Certain procedures had special attention. Several villages had a certain *gávuseyður*, a sheep as a present, chosen before a wedding, a costume that still survives in a few places. B. Niclasen tells us about an event in the 1930s, when he was a witness of the butchering of such a sheep in the village Haraldsund. It was at the very beginning of the wedding festivities with a ritualized serving of drinks. *"I was told, it had never happened before in Haraldsund that a man had not drained the first glass in a single draught. I had not the inclination to drinks of that size, however, the others drained off, and I thought I better had to do so. Thanks to Heavens, it does not come up"* (Niclasen 1983: 52). More drinks were served, as the butchering proceeded. After supper and further drinks there was dancing. *"After the dancing had prevailed for some time, and everybody had by hand felt the carcass to realize how fat it was - this appeared to be a duty - everybody went home to sleep. Early next morning the host came and told me that it was time to go home to watch the carcass. I did not really understand, but he told that so was the village costume. Off we went, and the most adult men were assembled. All had they fingered the carcass, and the most accessible side was dark and dirty"* (Niclasen 1983:53).

Svabo (1959:203) documents the same interest for the size and weight in 1781/82 and also Hammershaimb (1891:420) as well as Petersen (1963:129): *"The evening afterwards the men went in and out at each other questioning about the butchering"*. This tradition has survived on till modern times; it is part of common culture to be able to discuss these phenomena, the butchering and the weight - especially one should be invited to visit the

kjøthjallur to see the *krovini*, the carcasses hanging to be preserved by drying in the wind. This was a mark honor to an appreciated guest, and an opportunity to offer a drink without letting others to know. Commonly it was regarded unbecoming if a guest or stranger himself asked the host to visit the *hjallur*.

The rams were brought in before the butchering and tied before the house. Then the interested men could by sight evaluate the rams, and many showed up to watch and discuss. Photographs were taken and the date and the weight were noticed on the reverse as documentation in the future; by time video recording has become common (Magnussen 1993:20). Then the butchering could start.

The smaller rams, of little interest, are butchered at first, but as the as the larger ones approach then the excitement increases. More and more men enter the room. Generally beer and brand are served. There is a certain obligation for the man who has an especially large ram - "*that is a part of it*" and "*it helps the eloquence*" to offer a drink (Magnussen 1993:21). The talking concerns primarily the rams, their weight and quality, and the weather, which is also important for the growth of the animals. The rams from previous years are also in discussion. The butcher has to be moderate and concentrated; it is prestigious to be a good butcher, *flettari*. If something goes wrong - it will never be forgotten. When the butchering is finished, then it is the butcher's turn to have a drink. Some food, bread and meat, is served in the room, too. The small esser rams are not much under consideration - bad weather gets the blame.

The village is really alive such an evening. People are going in and out everywhere. This was observed in the village Sumba in the 1980s on field work by the American anthropologist D. Gaffin (1996:52): "*Still today on September 29, the traditional Faeroese sheep butchering day, men go from house to house to see who butchered the heaviest ram. He receives no prize, but as one young villager put it, the winner 'gets proud'*"; Gaffin continues: "*the purpose of rearing rams is to get food, and to be proud*". Men from neighboring villages were visiting, too. A man from Porkeri had received a lamb from two men from a neighboring village; the lamb grew in four years before it was to be butchered. At the very day those two men came to witness the event. Now, this was an exceptional specimen of a ram "*at the butchering its weight was 108 pounds, which cause, the owner was specifically hospitable that evening. The two men by no means were drunkards, however, this particular evening they were*

'skít', really pissed, as they were brought homewards late that night" (Magnussen, 1993:22).

In the butchering the men have a forum, where they can talk and tell and find a local identity in fellowship centered about the rams (Brück, 1984). The women that take care of the serving are by no means held outside, but apparently they have little interest in the project.

The festival of the ram

The private, individual *veðragildi*, ram celebrations inspired at the end of the 1970s Dia Poulsen from Vágur to organize a large common *veðragildi* in the local club. This new festival was held every year until the club was closed at the beginning of the 1990s. At the beginning the festival was for members of the club only, later it was extended as a larger event for everybody in the village. The festival was revived in 1997, organized by the local football club. Informants on this part are DP, RB and NPN.

The different ceremonies, which were important elements of the festival, by time got a more fixed setting. The festival should give the illusion of a Viking festival in the early history of the Faeroes (Cf. Lowenthal, 1985). At the opening four men entered dressed like shepherds with a ram in front. The ram was to be butchered. The part of the ram was performed by a man crawling on all fours; he was covered by a large ram-skin, at the back of the neck and the shoulders was placed a very large ram-skull with horns and wool - preserved with formalin. In fact it looked like a real ram was driven to be butchered with great fuss, so the guests were able to get something to eat. After this introduction and a tiny interval the four men entered again - now dressed as Vikings with ram-skins over the naked waists and polished helmets with ram-horns. These helmets were made to this special use and were reused every year. The Vikings were bringing a roasted ram on an old fish stretcher - of the type which was primarily used to carry the cod out for drying in the sun. At the stretcher and inside the ram small folio-containers with cognac were placed. The cognac was set on fire, the light in the festival-hall was switched off, and so the illuminated and flamed ram was brought in. The four Vikings sang the first verse of the well-known song by J. H. O. Djurhuus "*Frægir funnu Føroya land*" (The best found the Faeroes) referring to the *landnám* and Grímur Kamban, probably the first who came to the Faeroes. The first part of the verse praises

those men who in a distant past found the Faeroes; the last part connects the history with the present, when in a dance hall with dancing and loud songs the glorious past is praised.

The ram was already roasted at the bakers - the only one who had an oven large enough. In the first years one ram was sufficient, but gradually the festival became more popular and some hundreds of people participated and more meat was necessary. The impressive ram at the stretcher got more a symbolic significance; however, those who were particularly interested could take a slice.

It was not riskless to furnish the ram for the festival. If it was too small or otherwise was not able to meet the expectations, the supplier could be a target for a satirical song. That was what happened at the first festival. The entertainment at the ram festival was songs, story-telling, cabaret-like sketches about local events especially concerning rams, the butchering and strange events in this sphere of rams. Special satirical ballades were written and gave substance and spirit to this particular ram-culture and social fellowship stretching far outside the butchering-room. The ballades are a source of information on the festivals as well as they throw light on other events with connection to the rams in the village life. For example there is a ballade about a man, who imported ram mutton from Iceland; an other one about a little dog barking so much that a ram got stressed; one about a man, who butchered too early and got problems with flies laying their flyblow in the ram meat when drying. The ballades are all popular tunes.

The ram festival is a complete new tradition born in Vágur. It is fundamentally born out of the local interest for rams. When the festival was revived the interest was as great as ever.

The dried meat - cultural categories

At the festival fresh, roasted meat was served. But by far most of the Faeroese mutton and lambs meat are conserved by air-drying. Also when hung in the *hjallur* to dry it is the mens domain; the man controls that no flies spoil the meat - especially in the first time. But, if there is no man at home, the woman does the job. Primarily it was only the farmer himself who had the key to the *hjallur*. "*The farmers 'hjallur' was regarded as a kind of a holy cage; not everybody was allowed to enter. Other farmhouses might be unlocked, but the hjallur had a lock. Nobody*

could get the key from the farmer except the wife, and it was not every farmer, who had so much confidence to the wife to allow her to have the key, as much as she wanted" (Rasmussen 1985:84). Nowadays, is there more equality in this connection, however, still many women think it is the men's job to take care of the dried meat and to carve it on the table.

Since the distant past dried mutton has been used on the Faeroes. The air-drying take place in a special building, *hjallur* (Stoklund 1963). The dried meat is named *skerpi-kjöt*, when dry. It could be of very different quality and taste - depending on the fat. There is several kinds of fat: *tálgarfiti*, tallow-fat, and *glærfiti*, glass-fat - and further *mergjafiti*, marrow-like fat, and *snikfiti*, oil-like fat. These terms also to the taste and looking of the meat. "*The marrow-like from the rib is clear and looks like good, dry blubber from the pilot whale, but the taste is that of the good marrow*" (Joensen 1979:209).

The most common is *glærfiti* and *tálgarfiti*. Chemically the fat is not the same in these two kinds. *Glærfiti* is a special delicacy because of a taste and consistence - appearing after the drying, but also fresh it is better. Also from a nutritional point of view *glærfiti* is preferable as the contents of poly-unsaturated fatty-acids are much higher than in *tálgarfiti*, which has more poly-saturated sebacic-acids (causing cardiac diseases). Surveys are in course to find out if *glærfiti* is genetically transmitted. It is in fact observed that sheep grazing in the same infield may have very different patterns of fatty acids - even taking in consideration age, sex and the kind of feed (inf. HB).

When *skerpi-kjöt*, the wind-dried mutton, is brought in it is with certain expectations to the reaction from the guests - provided they have some qualifications - generally it is known, who has sense for dried mutton, and who has not (Joensen 1987:162). It is an obligation to ask the host from where the meat comes, provided it is of good quality. This implies knowledge as well as style, just like discussions about wine. The ignorant has to be modest and also to leave to others to cut the meat, if he or she does not know how this should be done.

The archives in the Department of Linguistics, University of the Faeroe Islands, contains information about a special ritual only existing in the village Sumba, a ritual for the final result of the butchering. This tradition is older than the newer interest for the rams. This old ritual contains a presentation of *páskariv*, the Easter Rib, and briefly explained it was performed as follows: The men choose the

fattest and very best wind-dried chop joints in their *hjallur*. From this piece the *triðja skamrivið* was taken, i.e. the third rib from the bottom not connected to the breast bone. Then early Easter morning the men went to visit each other to see who owed the fattest ribs of the sheep, which had hung for drying until Easter. This rib was the *páskariv*, the Easter Rib. It is also told that the men at this early Easter walk were carrying the rib *undir kotinum*, under the jacket from where it was taken when the different ribs should be compared. During the comparison of the *páskariv* drinks were served - and certain obligations were on the man who turned out to have the prime rib (Inf. EW).

The *skerpikjót*, the wind dried mutton from the rams was commonly regarded as being especially good, strong and tasty meat. The ram carcass, however, is large and thick and so it is a long lasting process for the *tjógvini*, haunch to dry - not until summer. "In fact it not really dry, there is always soft mutton close to the bones" says one of the informants, who is an acknowledged expert (Inf. EW). The lesser rams have generally fine meat without too much fat, whereas the larger ones usually have a lot of regular fat (Inf. HB). The ultimate, conclusive weight in the competition of the largest ram is fat, which is problematic, as only a few are willing to eat the very fat meat. It is against modern dietary habits. Especially the younger people are unwilling to eat the fat, and the women snap of the men and their fat mutton (inf. BB). At their side, it is difficult for the men to confess, they have had so much trouble and used so much money to win the competition to have the largest ram, and then such a large part is more or less inedible. To this it should be added that a result of the over-feeding is *tálgarfiti*, which is little appreciated compared with *glærfiti*. Mutton with *glærfiti*, in fact might have a fine quality, which also counts for the lesser rams raised on the common feed grass-lots. So in connection with the mutton there is a conflict similar to that of the feeding. It is pretended that all the meat is of the highest quality and is left to tell that much of the larger share of the fat has been cut off and thrown away.

However, the competition for having the largest ram of the year still is very popular in the southern villages on Suðuroy. The interest for ram-rearing are in progress to other islands, but without the same relation to the competition. A change of values now appears to be in progress, and several now try to breed fleshy rams instead of the very fatty ones.

The ram competition as it appears contains a lot features

hidden and untold, as it has been expressed: "Because people know a great deal about each other and because everything is salient as public knowledge, people have to behave in particular ways - to conceal certain things, to restrain others. They have to accord with the conventions of an intimate society and, at the same time, they have to resist the tensions inherent in the too-close coexistence of small-scale society. With the accumulated folk knowledge of tradition and of their own lifetimes people adjust to each other to produce and maintain order and coherence, but with the much fuller and, therefore, potentially more dangerous knowledge of their neighbours than may be generally available to the members of metropolitan social milieu. If such a community is to survive in its valued form its structure must be organised accordingly, and a strict regimen recognised and accepted for its maintenance" (Cohen, 1982:10).

Conclusion

The sheep husbandry still has an importance in the village life on the Faeroes, an importance that exceed the economic life of to day. The geographer E. Arge (1997:19) has put it right: "As many a Faeroese man own some agricultural area, they are assured a part of the sheep stock, even if they have no other, direct connection with agriculture. Every autumn a large share of the population is mobilized for the large job to collect and drive the sheep together before the butchering. The mutton production of the hobby-farmers today is part of the common Faeroese mans connection with his cultural roots".

The sheep is traditionally a common sphere for a large share of the villagers. So to speak it is a strong cultural institution historically with a long continuity. However, it is practised in a undefined sphere apart from the traditional sheep husbandry. It is a kind of underground life, in which one has to be integrated to be able understand and appreciate - in spite of the fact that harmony between ideology and practice are not always found, as in many other parts of human life. The fenced sheep reared in the in-field is not a part of the traditional Faeroese sheep rearing in the out-field. The latter ones are closer to savagery and nature and are more original 'Faeroese' - compared with the more domesticized in-field sheep fed daily by commercial feed and bread. There are two social classes of sheep, which also might be symbolic in an other figurative sense. The in-field sheep are sometimes a virtual accumulation of single

rams. This is an anomaly compared with the traditional, extensive sheep husbandry with a very rational economic utilization of few, potent rams for the covering.

The new kind of ram rearing is apart from the traditional system, but at the same time it uses the old, fundamental values and the interest for the butchering. However, the dilemma is it not really confessed that the competition for having the largest ram now is performed on completely other conditions than primarily when the result was just depending of the wild grazing in the out-field. At same time one is proud of having the largest ram, the fact is suppressed that this is a product of the owner's direct action, manipulation and overfeeding and with a secondary production of much of the less attractive fat. However, new norms for the preference of more meat and less fat appear to come. More and more people realize that the traditional Faeroese way of sheep husbandry is ecological in accordance with the ideas of ecological food gains access to the common, daily food habits. The conflict between old and new is just problematic as regards ram rearing in relation to the traditional sheep husbandry. This does not change the fact that ram rearing has a significant social importance in the Faeroese villages. Ram rearing unifies many men in a common interest - just like football.

Informants

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