Firouz Gaini

11 Jerusalem in the North Atlantic

The Land and State of Israel from a Faroese Perspective

Abstract: In this paper I ask why a predominantly Evangelical Lutheran North Atlantic society has given Jews and Israel such a central position and role in local and national discussions on religion and politics, culture and society. How do current societal changes in the Faroes, associated with newfound cultural diversity and religious hybridity, affect the special Faroese-Israeli connection? This paper, based on a selection of written media and literary accounts as sources of information, focuses on the period since the end of the twentieth century, but links this period to the whole post-Second World War era in some of its discussions. While the Faroes might be less secular than other Nordic countries, we can see that its religious and cultural identities are dynamic, adapting to new societal premises, and rekindling Faroe Islanders' passion for Jerusalem.

Keywords: Christian Zionism; Faroe Islands; frontiers; identity; Jerusalem; religion.

Introduction

"I do not believe it is a coincidence that there are *eighteen* islands constituting the Faroes," says Jeffrey Bernstein while visiting the North Atlantic island community in spring 2013, "because the number eighteen is associated with 'chai' (*ḥai*), which means life or living in Hebrew."[1] Bernstein, a prominent Messianic Jew from New York City, who founded the congregation Gates of Zion, considers the Faroes (or the Islands of Life, as he calls them) to represent a sacred gift contributing to the salvation of Israel.[2] Like many other Christian and Jewish missionaries who have visited the remote islands since the late twentieth century, he expresses the sense of being "among friends" who have a special connection to Jerusalem and Israel.

1 Snorri Brend, "Jeffrey: Ísrael eigur nógvar vinir í Føroyum," *Portal*, 3 November 2013, ‹ http://umsit.portal.fo/jeffrey+israel+eigur+nogvar+vinir+i+foroyum.html ›. Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet has a numerical value. The word חי (*ḥai*, "life") has the value 8 + 10 = 18.

2 Brend, "Jeffrey."

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In Tórshavn, the capital of the Faroe Islands, all public city buses flew the azure blue and white flag of Israel on 14 May 2018, in commemoration of the birth of the State of Israel seventy years earlier. The Mayor of Tórshavn, Annika Olsen, from the right-wing pro-independence *Fólkaflokkurin* (People's Party), defended this controversial decision despite some criticism in the media. Normally, the city buses only fly Faroese and Nordic flags on national days. That same day, *Ísraelsvinir* (Friends of Israel) and *Vinirfelagið Føroyar-Ísrael* (Faroes-Israel Friendship Association) organized an event with speeches and music at the city-centre square. Svenning av Lofti, the indefatigable religious campaigner for Faroese-Israeli relations, who has been a guide and promoter of tours to Israel for more than forty years now, addressed the audience of approximately 150 people. The Israeli right-wing activist Avi Lipkin participated (and gave a talk at another meeting later that same day) as a special guest. You could see Israeli flags in the hands of many people at the square, but also a Palestinian flag carried by a small group of young Faroe Islanders opposing the jubilee.

Israel has played an important role in Faroese political and religious debates for seventy years now, yet there has never been a Jewish community in the Faroes. There are just twelve Jews in total in the Faroes, six men and six women, of whom seven were born in the Faroes (according to the 2011 census). There is very little information about Jews living in the Faroes since the seventeenth century, when the first Jewish families of Spanish-Portuguese origin settled in Denmark. There have probably been Danish Jewish traders in the Faroes from time to time, for instance people working for entrepreneurs like Jacob Franco, Abraham Levi, and Abraham Cantor, who were in charge of tobacco exports to the Faroes and Iceland in the early eighteenth century.[3] Occupied by the United Kingdom in April 1940, the Faroes did not receive Jewish refugees in the 1930s or during the Second World War.[4] There have, of course, been examples of Jews marrying into Faroese families over the centuries, for instance the case of the Meyer family from the island of Suðuroy (Mr Meyer settling in the Faroes at the beginning of the twentieth century), but genealogical mapping is a complex task. People were

3 Vilhjálmur Örn Vilhjálmsson, "Iceland, the Jews, and Anti-Semitism, 1625 – 2004," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 16, no. 3 – 4 (2004): 132.

4 Jan Alexander S. Brustad, from the Resource Department of the Centre for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities in Oslo, Norway, told me (by email correspondence) that they do not have any information on Norwegian Jews fleeing to the Faroes during the Second World War. Jonathan Harmat, at the Jewish Information Centre (*Jødisk Informationscenter*) in Denmark, told me (by email correspondence) that they do not have any information on Danish Jews fleeing to the Faroes during the war. Historians in the Faroes have drawn the same conclusion in oral communication.

familiar with *jødar* (or *gýðingar* in old texts), which is the Faroese word for Jews, through the Bible, which was read in Danish prior to the first Faroese translation in 1937.[5] However, Faroe Islanders' ideas about Jews have never been investigated before. Nor has there been any scientific research on the relationship between the Faroes and Israel. From an Evangelical Lutheran North Atlantic perspective, people have known of Jews from the Bible and have also been aware of Jerusalem. Despite this focus on Biblical and present-day Jerusalem, there is a lack of scholarly work on Jewish-Christian relations in the Faroes, and their assumed impact on philosemitism, antisemitism, etc. in the North Atlantic.

In this paper, I ask why a predominantly Evangelical Lutheran North Atlantic society has given Jews and Israel such a central position and role in local and national discussions on religion and politics, culture and society. How do current societal change in the Faroes, associated with newfound cultural diversity and religious hybridity, affect the special Faroese-Israeli connection? This paper, drawing on a selection of written media and literary accounts as sources of information,[6] focuses on the period since the end of the twentieth century, but links this period to the whole post-Second World War era in some of its discussions.

Religion and new spirituality

The Faroe Islands (51,000 inhabitants) is an autonomous country within the Kingdom of Denmark, located in the North Atlantic, midway between Norway, Iceland, and Scotland. The Faroes, originally belonging to Norway, were Christianized during the tenth century. More than 95 per cent of the population is Christian (according to the 2011 census). Almost 85 per cent are members of the Faroese Evangelical Lutheran (State) Church, which includes the Inner Mission (probably about 10 to 15 per cent of the population), even though this congregation is highly autonomous and hence could be treated as a separate de-

5 Although the Bible in its entirety was only translated to Faroese very recently in history, there have been older Faroese written documents with stories and citations from the Bible. Some of the chants and ballads from the Viking and medieval eras (oral tradition in the Faroes) contain biblical messages. The oldest known Bible translation in Faroese (viz. the Gospel of Matthew) was undertaken by the priest Johan Hendrik Schrøter in 1823. The Lord's Prayer, for instance, was translated by Fríðrik Petersen and printed in 1892. See further Elsa Funding, *Føroyskar bíbliutýðingar* (Tórshavn: Faroe University Press, 2007).

6 All translations from Faroese and Danish to English language are my own.

nomination.[7] Around 15 per cent belong to the Calvinist-inspired (Plymouth) Brethren, focusing on asceticism and the ideal of being "Equal under Christ" in social relations.[8] The Brethren has been in the Faroes for almost 150 years. Since the 1970s and 1980s, various new globally oriented neo-evangelical churches (Pentecostals, neo-Pentecostals, and Charismatics) have gained a foothold in the Faroes, and even though they might have relatively few members, they have had a very significant impact on the religious landscape in the Faroes. One such movement, initially known as Christ is the Answer (*Kristus er svarið*), includes congregations "nurtured by a new Utopia concentrated on the individual."[9]

The Faroes have a very high rate of believers compared to the other Nordic countries, and many young people from all layers of society have adopted neo-evangelical Protestantism as their identity. The free churches, with members considering themselves to be "true believers" in contrast to the State Church's secularized and laid-back "Christians by tradition" who "belong without believing," represent various associations that – in some cases – are in strong competition with each other.[10] What American scholars have sometimes termed postmodern evangelical Christianity,[11] aiming to attract new groups of young members, mirrors tendencies in the Faroes today, where mysticism in relation to the reconfiguration of the God/Individual relationship is at the core of religious identities.[12]

Some of the groups associated with neo-evangelical associations, but also with the older free churches, subscribe to Christian Zionism in their beliefs and spiritual visions. In these sects, sometimes described as Christian fundamentalists in the media, support for Israel is deep-rooted. While the Christian Zionist inspiration largely seems to come from the United States, Faroese congregations emphasize the Faroese foundations of their religious and political message. The messianism of such millenarian sects is often centred on a vision of a future Israel (or Messiah), as when a young man from the Brethren says:

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7 Christophe Pons, "The Anthropology of Christianity in the Faroe Islands," in *Among the Islanders of the North: An Anthropology of the Faroe Islands*, ed. Firouz Gaini (Tórshavn: Faroe University Press, 2011), 84.

8 Gerhard Hansen, *Eindarmentan føroyinga og vekingarrørslurnar* (Tórshavn: Emil Thomsen, 1987), 309–16; Jan Jensen, "'Be Real and Relate': An Anthropological Study of Religious Practices in a Faroe Islands Christian Church" (master's dissertation, Copenhagen University, 2017), 12–16.

9 Pons, "The Anthropology of Christianity in the Faroe Islands," 82.

10 Pons, "The Anthropology of Christianity in the Faroe Islands," 85–87.

11 Edwin Zehner, "Missionaries and Anthropology," in *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, ed. Hilary Callan (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2018).

12 Pons, "The Anthropology of Christianity in the Faroe Islands," 120–23.

> We see today's Israel as the earthly version of the Israel to come; it is the foundation of what shall come, but is not the genuine, true, or complete biblical Israel at all. Not until the rapture will Israel be more, according to our dispensational thinking. The reality is already there, i.e. Israel; and it is a message from God regarding what is to come.[13]

Today, many young people, echoing some of the nineteenth-century founders of the Brethren movement, seem to be absorbed by the question of the "destiny of Israel and the Jews and their situation in the end times."[14] The Christian Zionism of Evangelical Christians in the Faroes and elsewhere views the establishment of the State of Israel as the start of the realization of Biblical prophecies which will lead to the "Second coming."

Islands and frontiers

Standing in the square with Tórshavn Town Hall just behind him, wearing a suitable blue-and-white-striped scarf, Svenning av Lofti's highly emotional oratory focused on the shared destiny of Israel and the Faroes:

> Perhaps no other nation understands the struggle for existence of the Jewish people as well as the Faroese. How they were robbed of their right to existence far back in time. They not only lost sovereignty over their own country, but also lost the Hebrew language ... and have been chased and hated among nations, just because they were Jews. But they got their mother tongue back after a long struggle – like we Faroese did.[15]

He tones down the religious rhetoric and emphasizes people's right to live and work in their own country – with their own language and national characteristics. "God bless Israel, God bless the Faroes" (in this order), were the last words in his speech, which aimed to strengthen the sense of being part of a common struggle (or mission), in the Faroes and in Israel.

The Brethren in the Faroes, maybe especially among the first generations of followers, maintained a strong interest in Faroe Islanders' "right to political identity and autonomy in the same way as Biblical Israel."[16] Later, among Brethren as well as other Faroese (neo-)evangelical congregations, but also among Faroe Islanders in general, the awareness of the colonial past and the sense of

13 Tórður Jóansson, *Brethren in the Faroes* (Tórshavn: Faroe University Press, 2012), 281.
14 Jóansson, *Brethren in the Faroes*, 89.
15 Svenning av Lofti, "Røða: Ísrael sjeyti ár," *Sandportal*, 22 May 2018, ‹ http://sandportal.fo/tidindi/ro-a-israel-sjeyti-ar ›.
16 Jóansson, *Brethren in the Faroes*, 34.

being on the edge of the modern world sparked new interest in corresponding "marginal peripheries" around the world.[17] Echoing what Danish pastor and philosopher N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872) described as the unity between the Nordic spirit and the spirit of God, which he said was laying the ground for a (Nordic) New Jerusalem, the islands symbolize a frontier of Christianity.[18] Faroese preachers and ministers often describe the islands as some kind of remote outpost or haven for Christianity and Biblical Israel. In a (Zionist) Jewish perspective, this mapping could also express a symbolic extension of the frontier myth, which normally refers to Israel's geographic border regions. Frontier settlements, idealized by Zionist leaders as places of steadfastness and patriotism forming resilient people, have been "glorified by the Ashkenazi elite since the founding of the State of Israel."[19]

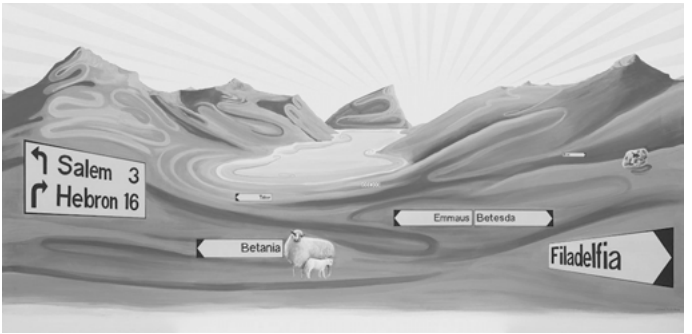

Figure 11.1: Edward Fuglø, *A Promised Land* (2010). With permission.

Annexation of the Faroes is of course not on Israel's political agenda, but the frontier metaphor is quite interesting in relation to discussions about issues concerning Christian Zionism and Messianic Judaism today. Hebron, Bethel, Mizpa, Smyrna, Nebo, Elim, Hermon, and Salem are all places mentioned in the Old Testament, associated with important persons and tales, but they also appear on the religious map of the contemporary Faroe Islands. If you travel through the Faroes, you will notice these names, as well as many others that bring Israel to mind, on the signs of halls belonging to small congregations (part of the

17 Pons, "The Anthropology of Christianity in the Faroe Islands," 112–24.
18 Pons, "The Anthropology of Christianity in the Faroe Islands," 91.
19 Cathrine Thorleifsson, "Guarding the Frontier: On Nationalism and Nostalgia in an Israeli Border Town," in *Identity Destabilised: Living in an Overheated World*, ed. Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Elisabeth Schober (Oxford: Pluto Press, 2016), 111.

Figure 11.2: Hebron is a small Plymouth Brethren congregation in Argir, just outside the capital Tórshavn, which started its activities in the 1930s. The "new" Hebron (depicted above) opened its doors in 1992. Photo by author.

Brethren or other denominations) in villages and towns. On several occasions, Jewish religious and political dignitaries visiting the Faroes, for instance Yitzhak Eldan (in spring 2001), then Israeli ambassador to Denmark, have talked about the "Israel-friendly" Faroe Islands, alluding to less friendly (or even hostile) neighbouring Scandinavian countries voicing criticisms about Israeli policies.[20] Faroe Islanders supporting the Scandinavian countries' relatively critical standpoints towards Israeli policies (usually regarding the situation of the Palestinian population) often keep silent in order not to enrage pro-Israel religious communities and their political allies in the Faroes. Actually, most Faroe Islanders seem to be more interested in the cultural history and geography of Christianity than in what takes place in the Knesset in twenty-first-century Israel. This reflects the past/present/future temporal dimension – and its boundaries – in the presentation of Jews and Israel in Faroese narratives and discourse.

20 Ritzaus Bureau, "Israels ambassadør besøger Israel-venlige Færøerne," *Fyens Stiftstidende – Fyens Amts Avis*, 15 April 2001, ‹ https://www.fyens.dk/indland/Israels-ambassadoer-besoeger-Israel-venlige-Faeroeerne/artikel/225583 ›.

Jerusalem in heart and mind

In the recent branding of the country as a tourist destination, the Faroes is portrayed as (probably) the "last Paradise on Earth." The religious connotation of this Paradise is clear, but it also reflects an image of the islands as unspoiled, authentic, and maybe also, as American rabbi Niles Elliot Goldstein writes in a travel report, as a place to experience the spirituality of solitude. Travelling in the Faroes, he writes, "I felt a kinship with that sense of solitariness," because, he adds, it spoke to "a part of my soul in a way that only nature could."[21] There is also a nostalgia in the presentation of Faroese culture and nature, a longing for something that might reveal the so-called Nordic spirit, yet also the Nordic New Jerusalem, which for some people is found in the past and for others (like apocalyptic millenarians) is found in the future. Nostalgia can, according to Marilyn Strathern, function as a potent source of reconnection and identity in turbulent times,[22] and Jerusalem (also called *Jorsala* or *Jorsalaborg* in Old Norse) is the symbol of a form of spiritual homesickness touching many people in the Faroe Islands.

In a remarkable book about his "pilgrimage" to Jerusalem in 1951–52, the Faroese clergyman and writer Kristian Osvald Viderøe (1906–91) wrote: "Finally it is clear as daylight to me, that I will enter the huge band, which has gone to his Holy Land and up to Jerusalem."[23] The book, *Ferð mín til Jorsala* (My Voyage to Jerusalem), published in Faroese in 1957, does not represent the account of a typical Christian (or Christian Zionist) pilgrim or tourist, because Viderøe's Jerusalem is (1) a concrete city, (2) a city in history, and (3) a religious concept linked to redemption and salvation.[24] It is both a real and an imagined place. From childhood memories, Viderøe recalls his mother singing about Holy (New) Jerusalem coming down from the skies after the end of the world.[25] To him, visiting Jerusalem is a religious expedition as much as it is a pilgrimage. Lost in his deep philosophical meditations, Viderøe forgets practical matters such as booking a hotel, and enters the city of Jerusalem when "all cheap hotels are full."[26] It is a dark day, cloudy and rainy, bringing homely Faroe Islands to the wayfarer's mind,

21 Niles Elliot Goldstein, "No Jew Is an Island – Especially in the Faroes," *Forward*, 17 October 2015, ‹ https://forward.com/culture/322291/no-jew-is-an-island/ ›.

22 Thorleifsson, "Guarding the Frontier," 107.

23 Kristian Osvald Viderøe, *Ferð mín til Jorsala* (Tórshavn: s.n., 1957), 21.

24 Bergur Djurhuus Hansen, *Er heima til? Ein tekstslagsástøðilig og bókmentasøgulig viðgerð av ferðafrásagnum Kristians Osvald Viderø* (Tórshavn: Faroe University Press, 2015), 91.

25 Hansen, *Er heima til?*, 19.

26 Hansen, *Er heima til?*, 116.

and influencing his descriptions of the city, a mix between expectation and disappointment. Viderøe, a Lutheran protestant in the Holy Land, does not find the spiritual enlightenment and transformation that he was hoping Jerusalem, through a rite of passage, would offer him. Pilgrimage, he concludes, does not open any gates, and the imagined New Jerusalem becomes lost in the downfall of the world.[27] Back home in the North Atlantic, in an elegiac mood of being unwelcome, Viderøe feels thrown out of the Faroese Paradise. He desires this Paradise, but sees that he has no access to it.[28]

Kristian Osvald Viderøe, an explorer who travelled the world for decades, has written very original and inspiring books from Israel and other parts of the world for Faroese readers. He is a very influential writer of modern Faroese literature, but he does not fit into any dominant literary genre and has been described as mysterious and perplexing, because of his writing style (inventing new words and odd spellings of common words) and his extensive use of classic world literature in his examination of life in the Faroes. He is a kind of "postmodernist" author experimenting with Faroese linguistic conventions.

Viderøe's mission was very different from those who go on today's Christian Zionist "Blessing Israel" pilgrimages, which often function as a kind of ritualistic religious-political statement.[29] These pilgrimages are supposed to strengthen the religious identities of the travellers.[30] "We stand together with Israel," was the message of the Nordic Christian Evangelical pilgrims, including a group of Faroe Islanders waving Faroese flags, participating in the annual Jerusalem March (in 2017) organized by the pro-Israel International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ).

Shortly before his expedition to Jerusalem, Viderøe, who had been working as pastor in a Faroese village for decades, began to suspect that the villagers were not satisfied with his performance as spiritual adviser.[31] He observed an old woman passing by, and he knew that in her mind she lived at least as much in *Jorsalaborg* and the Holy Land in the days of Jesus, as she did in the village of Hvalvík.[32] She lived her worldly (secular) life in Hvalvík, but her spiri-

27 Hansen, *Er heima til?*, 130 – 31.

28 Hansen, *Er heima til?*, 303.

29 Maria Leppäkari, "Nordic Pilgrimage to Israel: A Case of Christian Zionism," in *Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Management*, ed. Razaq Raj and Kevin Griffin, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: CABI, 2015), 209 – 14.

30 Leppäkari, "Nordic Pilgrimage to Israel," 213 – 14.

31 Viderøe, *Ferð mín til Jorsala*, 19 – 22.

32 Viderøe, *Ferð mín til Jorsala*, 4 – 8.

tual life was in the Holy Land – Mary Magdalene.[33] People will keep travelling to Jerusalem and Israel, with different dreams and projects, reinventing the continuity and rupture between past, present, and future.

Jews and the Nazis in local papers

Under the headline "Zionism," an anonymous Faroe Islander using the pseudonym Harald Heims-Forvitni (Harald World-Curious) authored a poetic and allegorical article about a new political movement of the Jewish people. The text was published in the Faroese journal *Fuglaframi* in February 1902.[34] Harald talks about a coming "beautiful summer morning," more celestial than other mornings. Signs tell that it is not far away; and one of these signs, he says, "is that the dispersed Jewish people shall build their old country again, as they did in an earlier time." He then introduces the movement, which aims to gather Jewish people in Palestine in order to establish this country. Even if they do not have traditions of farming, sailing, or artisanship, says Harald enthusiastically, there is no reason to believe that Jewish people cannot become as proficient in these trades as anyone else. "Let us be 'good people,'" he says in the conclusion to his Biblical scenario, "then we will one day enter the 'full day' [following the 'beautiful morning'; author's comment], free from all (worldly) work and trouble."

Except for a limited number of personal letters of this kind, prior to the 1930s the local press mostly offered short descriptive summaries of news from the Nordic and European press about Jews, for instance regarding the Dreyfus Affair. In the 1930s and 1940s, Faroe Islanders could read about the situation of Jews in Nazi Germany in the local press, but the articles were again mainly brief translated synopses of foreign bulletins. Accounts of Jewish people and Judaism were not tainted by antisemitism or anti-Jewish sentiments, but in a few cases, the narratives could give the reader a sense of passive empathy with the German nationalist ideology. In 1935 the newspaper *Dagblaðið* (referring to reports in local German newspapers) wrote about a group of Faroe Islanders participating at a (traditional) dancing festival in Lübeck.[35] The Germans honoured their Faroese and other Nordic guests with a generous reception, which – as expected and required – ended with the gathering singing the national anthem and performing

33 Viderøe, *Ferð mín til Jorsala*, 4–8.

34 Harald Heims-Forvitni, "Zionisman," *Fuglaframi* 22 (1902): 3–4.

35 [*Dagblaðið* editorial], "Dansiferðin til Lübeck," *Dagblaðið*, 13 July 1935, 3.

the mechanical Hitler ("Sieg Heil") salute. While this scene, of course, does not mean that the dancing group necessarily supported Nazi Germany, it is curious that the newspaper does not raise an eyebrow over the political context. In another article from 1938, the newspaper *Tingakrossur* refers to news from *Völkischer Beobachter* (the NSDAP's daily) without mentioning the source's political affiliation.[36] In the early 1940s, disputes between Faroese politicians and intellectuals in the papers occasionally involved insinuation that the counterparty was a "Nazi sympathizer" with "Nazi behaviour" and "Hitler methods."[37] Nobody wanted such a label in the media. Grækaris Djurhuus Magnussen, a Faroese journalist who wrote the book *Dreingirnir í Waffen SS* (The Boys in the Waffen SS), says that more than ten Faroese men joined the Waffen SS. Most of these young men, he says, were Nazis.[38]

Israel in local media

During the Cold War, especially from the 1970s on, strong antagonism between leftist and rightist parties affected the debate on local and international political issues in Faroese newspapers. Israel was now frequently in the spotlight, and especially *Dagblaðið*, the newspaper of the conservative-liberal right-wing *Fólkaflokkurin*, became infamous for the inflammatory language and hard-line anti-socialist and pro-Israel positions of its editorials and articles. In November 1956, *Norðlýsið*, a local newspaper from the town of Klaksvík, printed an article under the title "Shepherd and Commander," about David Ben-Gurion, "the creator of the new Israel." It is a greeting and congratulations from the Faroes, for Ben-Gurion's seventieth birthday. The word "shepherd" likely made the reader think of a Faroese man taking care of his sheep. Ben Gurion, the nameless writer says, is a rare personality, "who is not afraid to go his own way and is often criticized, also by Jews."[39] Not only did he establish a state, says the writer, "but also a fortress, which resists all Arab attacks."[40] The shepherd is portrayed as a good man, the commander as a brave and resolute guardian of the country.

36 [*Tingakrossur* editorial], "Hvat verður av jødunum?" *Tingakrossur*, 9 July 1938, 2.

37 For instance: [*Tingakrossur* editorial by Rikard Long], "Louis Zachariasen og P. M. Dam viðvíkjandi," *Tingakrossur*, 4 February 1942, 2; [*Tingakrossur* editorial by Louis Zachariasen], "Tveir dómar," *Tingakrossur*, 12 April 1944, 1–2.

38 Grækaris Djurhuus Magnussen, *Dreingirnir í Waffen SS* (Tórshavn: Steyrin, 2004).

39 Norðlýsið, "Seyðamaður og herhøvdingi," *Norðlýsið*, 23 November 1956.

40 Norðlýsið, "Seyðamaður og herhøvdingi."

In another article (reader's submission) in the *Dimmalætting* newspaper in October 1979, Ivan Carlsen talks about the "Historic Rights of the Jews against the Palestine-Arabs." He decided to write the text, he explains, as a response to the opinion (from a radio interview) of a Norwegian woman working for the PLO, which the Faroese communist journal *Arbeiðið* referred to in one of its pieces. "Now that the Jews have occupied the land of the Palestinians..." was the woman's statement that enraged Carlsen. How can it be, he writes rhetorically, "that communists are always ready to attack Israel and defend the Arabs?" He then explains that Israel is much closer to being the socialist ideal state than any Arab country:

> This country [Israel] is the only country in the world, which with its kibbutz-method carries out genuine communism, and it works excellently, yes, so well that Moscow and Peking can only dream about it, but never realize it. ... But the essential and best of all is that there is complete freedom. And is this not exactly what communism says that it wants to promote? ... We [in the Faroes] who have such good lives, and still have our freedom, can only wish for peace to be obtained; I am convinced that this much-desired peace will come, but when, yes, that is another question that will not be discussed on this occasion.[41]

This article illustrates the role of Israel in local debates about political ideologies in the 1970s. The image of the State of Israel from the 1970s – with the kibbutz as a symbol of an inclusive socialist project – is quite different from usual portrayals of Israel in the twenty-first century. In the early 1980s, the clash between left and right in the political press of the Faroes became more outspoken and bitter, with accusations of antisemitism and hatred of Jews (e. g. *Dagblaðið*, 21 August 1985) on the one side, and of wilfully ignoring Zionist brutality and the oppression of the Palestinians (e. g. *Sosialurin*, 27 January 1983) on the other. Some of the readers' letters and commentaries are so rabid and irrational, that it is difficult to take them as anything but sordid entertainment.

In a long article in *Sosialurin*, at that time the newspaper of the Social Democratic Party, Israel is compared with South Africa: "Israel has the same characteristics as South Africa when you look at the respective treatment of the Palestinians in Israel and the black Africans in South Africa."[42] In the last paragraph of this article, which is based on a trip to Israel, readers are told that: "A serious talk with a Palestinian says more about the Holy Land than all the Israeli tourist

41 Ivan H. Carlsen, "Søguligu rættindi jødanna mótvegis Palestina-arabanna," *Dimmalætting*, 30 October 1979.

42 Leif Olsen, Jógvan A. Joensen, and Øssur Winthereig, "Hitt hersetta ferðamannalandið," *Sosialurin*, 27 January 1983.

offices and Zionist world movements together can provide."[43] *Sosialurin* and *Dagblaðið* were the largest newspapers to focus strongly on the Israel/Palestine conflict; for them it was a pivotal case to engage with (on both local and international levels), representing a divergence in a society experiencing many ruptures and changes: modern/traditional, global/local, individualist/collective, secular/religious, etc. The debate on Israel in local media, you could perhaps say, has absorbed political, cultural, and religious controversies into itself, like distorted images in a crystal ball.

In May 1988, *Dagblaðið* ran a short news piece regarding the festivities for the fortieth anniversary of the State of Israel. There was a "very successful parade," which shows that Israel still "has many good and faithful friends" in the Faroes, read the newspaper.[44] "The future of our land is inseparably connected to the future of Israel," said Fríðtór Debes, one of the speakers at the event.[45] He also stressed the very important duty of the Faroes to continue to be positive towards Israel, hence not to be party to the ongoing "media war" against Israel. In February 1992, at a meeting organized by *Vinarfelagið Føroyar-Ísrael* in Tórshavn, Jákup Kass explained that it is crucial for all Christians to understand that we have to help the Jews against their many enemies in order to help ourselves – otherwise, he said, we will lose our Christian heritage, which we received from the Jews.[46] We note that the pro-Israel Christian right in the Faroes is very active in the media and is prepared to defend Israel on every occasion. The Bible-oriented Christian Democratic party, *Miðflokkurin* (Centre Party), which was established that same year (May 1992), has played an important role as a catalyst for the religious-political programme of the Christian right.[47]

In May 1993, *Sosialurin* visited an Israeli-Faroese family in Israel; the newspaper wanted to get the views of Israelis regarding the complex Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Sloomi Yagubaec (sic), who has a Faroese wife and two children, lived in the Faroes for three years before the small family moved to a Jewish settlement close to Jerusalem. He says that Faroe Islanders should not believe everything that the Western media are saying about Israel, because much of it presents a distorted view of the situation in the country. Yagubaec claims that Faroe

43 Olsen, Joensen, and Winthereig, "Hitt hersetta ferðamannalandið."

44 [*Dagblaðið* editorial], "Sera væleydnað skrúðgonga," *Dagblaðið*, 24 May 1988.

45 [*Dagblaðið* editorial], "Sera væleydnað skrúðgonga."

46 [*Dagblaðið* editorial], "Jákup Kass heldur røðu," *Dagblaðið*, 19 February 1992.

47 Jenis av Rana, the chairman of *Miðflokkurin* and newly appointed Faroese Minister of Culture, Education, and Foreign Affairs (as part of the coalition Government from September 2019), has the establishment of a Faroese "Embassy" in Jerusalem as one of his main political goals.

Islanders are familiar with this predicament: "When foreign media make a big story about the [Faroese] pilot whale hunt, and dramatize it, while hardly mentioning that other larger countries kill thousands of dolphins..."[48] He says that foreign countries do not understand Israel. Asked how they will attain peace, he says:

> The day we get either a complete right government or a complete left government. If we get a left government, it will return all the so-called occupied territories to the Arabs, and then we might get peace for a while, but we will get serious problems in the end. You just have to look at the map...[49]

Since the 1990s, with the introduction of new media (Internet) and cultural globalization, Faroe Islanders have turned to new sources for inspiration and information in their quest for answers to difficult political questions. Israel, somehow, was also unfastened from the religious-political tautologies of Faroese media narratives. While hard-line members of Christian Zionist congregations, and *Miðflokkurin* in the Parliament, are determined to keep their pristine image of Israel intact, other Faroe Islanders are reinterpreting and renegotiating their relationship to Jerusalem and Israel. The distance between the imagined historical city and present-day Jerusalem seems to be growing. Yet, people generally avoid conflicts, in media debates or elsewhere in society, because of the Faroese egalitarian style of social organization and demand for conformity. Living together without giving offence, avoiding topics that lead to conflict, is part of everyday life in the Faroes, for congregation members as well as in society as a whole.[50]

New cultural horizons

Faroe Islanders got the opportunity to explore fresh and alternative images of contemporary Israel through the exciting Faroe Islands International Minority Film Festival (FIMFF) in August/September 2018. The festival's founder and coordinator, Nadia Abraham, has a Faroese mother and a Palestinian father. She grew up in the Faroes, and experienced what it is like to represent a minority in a small island community. The festival has the goal of encouraging

48 Jan Müller, "Gevist at stuðla yvirgangsmonnum," *Sosialurin*, 15 May 1993.
49 Müller, "Gevist at stuðla yvirgangsmonnum."
50 Dennis Gaffin, *In Place: Spatial and Social Order in a Faeroe Islands Community* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1996), 136–38.

> Visibility and empowerment, by being an open and inclusive platform for queer and minority cinema, and an arena which facilitates the sometimes tough conversations around culture, race, religion, and sexual identity.[51]

Here are summaries of three of the movies shown:

> *Disobedience* (Director: Sebastián Lelio, 2017) tells the story of a successful New York photographer returning home to her Jewish Orthodox community in London. She is reunited with her childhood friends, David and Esti, who are now married. The two women rekindle old feelings and attractions. The three characters are forced to re-evaluate personal values and beliefs, while sensing strong pressure from the community.
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> *The Field* (Director: Mordechai Vardi, 2017) is about Ali Abu Awwas, a Palestinian activist teaching his compatriots non-violent resistance. He reaches out to Jewish Israelis at the heart of the conflict. Through the organization The Roots, he and others from both sides of the conflict meet to listen and tell each other their stories of suffering.
>
> *Bar Bahar* (Director: Maysaloun Hamoud, 2016) is set in the city of Tel Aviv. Two single Palestinian women are sharing an apartment and living a free-spirited lifestyle. Laila is a successful lawyer and Selma is an aspiring DJ. When Nour, a reserved Muslim woman, moves in, tension starts building. Through their shared fight for truth and rights in a culturally sensitive society, the three women seal as strong friendship.

The movies in the film festival address sensitive subjects which used to be taboo, in the Faroes as well as in Israel, and which many people from the conservative religious communities deem offensive. They also demonstrate the way identity is negotiated by young people representing sexual minorities in communities characterized by strong religious family values. Nadia Abraham has narrated her own life story in an article about FIMFF in the Danish newspaper *Politiken*.[52] Her parents divorced when she was three years old, and her mother moved from Denmark back to the Faroes with the children. Nadia's mother told her that her father was Israeli, because that made "things simpler" in the Faroes. "It was not so easy to be Palestinian here. It was not so good, and you did not talk about it. Because, well, a Muslim thirty years ago…"[53] Today, she emphasizes, you can be as you like, "as long as you don't make too much noise, it is fine."

In November 2018, the Faroese Film Club organized the screening of three new Israeli films. The Israeli Film Days included the following movies: *Foxtrot* (Samuel Maoz, 2017), *Red Cow* (Tsivia Barkai-Yacov, 2018), and *Outdoors* (Asaf

51 FIMFF, "Second Faroe Islands International Minority Film Festival Catalogue," August 2018, ‹ http://fimff.fo/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/FIMFF-CATALOGE-FINAL-PRINT-1.pdf ›.

52 Emilie Maarbjerg Mørk, "Drags, homoseksuelle og muslimer: Filmfestival vil ruske op i færinger," *Politiken*, 8 September 2018.

53 Mørk, "Drags, homoseksuelle og muslimer."

Saban, 2017). The Israeli embassy in Copenhagen provided the films and Benjamin Dagan, the Israeli ambassador to Denmark, opened the festival on a Monday evening (after having been the guest of honour at the Brethren's conference in Tórshavn the day before). The films represent new artistic and cultural productions aiming to contribute rich narratives about present-day Israel as well as images critically reflecting on the nation's moral and cultural foundations. The films make small everyday life stories important, hence also demystifying the spiritual nostalgia for Jerusalem and Biblical prophecies. The festival was a success, but it attracted some people, most likely from the religious communities, who were not prepared for the cinematic presentation of present-day Israel. During the show Monday night (*Red Cow*), a part of the audience chose to get up and march out of the hall – in front of the ambassador – in protest against the film's theme: the sexual awakening of a young lesbian girl from a Jewish Orthodox family.

Final remarks

In March 2015, more precisely on Friday 20 March at 10 a.m., the Faroes experienced a total solar eclipse, which had attracted several thousand spectators from all around the world to the archipelago. This was also the day of the vernal equinox. In the Jewish tradition, a total solar eclipse is regarded as a warning to unbelievers and a sign of judgment over nations. The darkness caused by the eclipse is a bad omen. Doomsayers would say that the solar eclipse augurs sombre times in the North, influencing the relationship with Israel in a negative direction. On the other hand, as Jeffrey Bernstein pointed out, the eighteen islands constituting the Faroes can also be linked to *ḥai* (meaning "life" or "living" in Hebrew, and with the sacred numerical value of eighteen), which announces a much brighter future. In the same way, there are many ways of reading and decoding the past/present/future relationship between the Faroes and Israel, with reference to worldly as well as metaphysical schemes. This paper has detailed some of the reasons why Jerusalem and Israel have played a central role in local debates on culture, religion, and politics. While the Faroes might be less secular than other Nordic countries, we have also seen that religious and cultural identities are dynamic, adapting to new societal premises, and rekindling the passion for Jerusalem.