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*“Ever true unto your forefathers stalwart stay”:  
Týr’s Folk Metal as a Neo-Medievalist Response to the  
Perceived Loss of Culture*

**ABSTRACT:** *This article explores the phenomenon of folk metal and the band Týr adopting the ethos of Viking culture. It argues that Týr ties its modern genre to the Faroese ballad to connect with what they perceive as a loss of cultural identity due to the island nation's forced conversion to Christianity in the eleventh century and contemporary controversies surrounding the slaughter of pilot whales. The author argues that the band portrays themselves as the inheritors of Viking culture, adapting the perceived tenets of individuality and self-determination for a global audience to protect against the erosion of Faroese traditions.*

**KEYWORDS:** *modern history; neo-medievalism; Vikings; Scandinavia; Faroe Islands; whaling; metal music; folk music; Týr; Heri Joensen*

*Introduction*

Scandinavian metal occupies a chaotic space in the music world. Many Scandinavian and Northern European bands have created a blend of their own folk traditions with the modern genre of metal, thus combining two disparate elements whose time periods are nearly a millennium apart. In addition, their unique combinations of musical sentiment often generate international interest in countries whose listeners share little to no linguistic or cultural similarities with these bands’ musicians. The popularity of the band “Týr” and Viking/folk metal bands like Turisas, Korpiklaani, and Ensiferum outside of their native cultures provides an opening to investigate this phenomenon. Týr’s position in the music of their Faroese homeland and in relation to the anglophonic world can be analyzed to better understand the modern folk metal movement. Additionally, Týr’s combination of traditional folk music elements with the metal genre offers possible insights into modern interpretations of the Viking ethos. Týr provides an opportune subject to conduct an interdisciplinary analysis—not just of modern expressions of Viking history presented by their descendants and of the commodification of traditional practices—but also of what happens when globalized markets take umbrage with a millennium-old tradition. The band is a modern expression of ancient cultures and religions that are centuries removed from their original context. Týr exemplifies the reasons folk metal is popular outside its Scandinavian cultural heritage as the band connects modern sensibilities with a perceived loss of cultural identity.

*I. Týr and the Faroe Islands’ Viking Heritage*

Once heavy metal music had emerged in the 1960s—a genre of music that distinguishes itself through its use of distortion and guitar power chords, it soon

spread outward from its origins in the United States and the United Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> As the Scandinavian region developed its own take on metal, a subgenre appeared, popularly called Viking metal or folk metal, which usually implements Nordic pagan images of Vikings and incorporates clean vocals alongside traditional, regional instruments.<sup>2</sup> Though these qualifiers are not requirements for the genre, they help illustrate the bands' implementations of their own cultural folk traditions into a market dominated by Anglophones.

The band Týr, from the Danish-controlled Faroe Islands, emerged from the islands' very small metal scene in 2001 and, as lead vocalist and guitarist Heri Joensen notes, quickly grew more popular outside the island nation than within.<sup>3</sup> The band's implementation of its own native Faroese traditional songs, adapted largely for English-speaking audiences abroad, in addition to their adherence to a modern interpretation of Viking culture, have created an interest in Faroese traditions and the nation's medieval beginnings beyond their native shores.

The Faroe Islands lie roughly halfway between the Shetland Islands and Iceland.<sup>4</sup> The nation traces its heritage from Irish monks who, as recorded by the medieval Irish scholar Dicuil, were forced to abandon sea travel near the islands due to "Northman pirates" during the early ninth century.<sup>5</sup> By the end of that century, Vikings had semi-permanently populated the islands, likely establishing longphorts or other domiciles along the steep cliffs. Unfortunately, little is known about early Faroese society, especially its pre-Christian history. What is known comes from the twelfth-century *Færeyinga Saga*, an Icelandic text viewed by many scholars as "inaccurate and anachronistic."<sup>6</sup> The saga tells of the struggles between the pagan chieftain Tróndur í Gøtu and Sigmundur, a Christian who pledged to convert the islanders for his king, Olaf Tryggvason (Olaf I of Norway, r. 995-1000). Some Faroese worshiped the old Norse gods until the successful conversion of the islands to Christianity in the early eleventh century.<sup>7</sup> This conversion put the Faroese islanders under Norwegian control. Their loss of political power to various Nordic countries is a recurring theme in Faroese history.

## II. Performance: Adapting the Past for Modern Audiences

This tumultuous time for the islands created a need for community and a common literature, especially given the increasing encroachment of foreign governance. It was through these communal gatherings that the *Føroyskur dansur*, the national

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Freeborn, "A Selective Discography of Scandinavian Heavy Metal Music," *Notes: Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association* 66, no. 4 (2010): 840-850, here 840.

<sup>2</sup> Freeborn, "Selective Discography," 843.

<sup>3</sup> Heri Joensen, interview by Alex Melzer, *The Metal Observer*, March 2004.

<sup>4</sup> John Frederick West, *Faroe: The Emergence of a Nation* (New York: C. Hurst, 1972), 1.

<sup>5</sup> See Jonathan Wylie, *The Faroe Islands: Interpretations of History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Wylie, *Faroe Islands*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> Wylie, *Faroe Islands*, 10.

Faroese dance, developed. Since the islands increasingly found themselves controlled by the Danish Church and political institutions, the *dansur* custom and the daily retellings of oral traditions marked a "vitally important cultural institution [...] [in which] a peculiarly Faroese identity was bound up with everyday life, with the vernacular [...] with local scenes and the local past."<sup>8</sup>

The dance involves the *dansiringur*, a "ring" of dancers who sing traditional ballads. While the dance itself is not a native custom, it is a remnant of a medieval tradition common throughout Europe and has become uniquely Faroese:

[T]he Faroese link arms, moving around with a step that looks very much like the Faroese step [...] the Faroese dance indoors, in rooms almost too small to hold all the people, and the "ring" is a great convoluted affair, with loops and eddies and whorls, so that as you dance around you seem everywhere to be passing a line parallel to your own [...] The *dansringur* nearly represents [...] the complex inward turnings of Faroese culture and its torturous sense of wholeness.<sup>9</sup>

The ballads sung and dances performed were created as a connection to a common past—a need for a connection genuinely Faroese while being true to the commonality of the pre-Christian, pre-colonized islands. The continuing tradition follows its connection to a past before foreign influence and reinforces the uniqueness of Faroese identity.<sup>10</sup>

During the *dansur*, the community sings one of the many ballads in the repertoire. A single individual leads the song, reciting the many verses, with some ballads containing as few as seven stanzas while some number up to 600.<sup>11</sup> Between each stanza, the dancers chant the refrain, historically called the "burden" because the refrain is "borne up" by all individuals.<sup>12</sup> This communal effort of sharing the "burden" and joining the community in bearing the tradition extended beyond the recitation of songs. The ballads maintained a near-total oral tradition throughout the centuries. Whereas the Icelandic sagas and *Beowulf* were written down and eventually codified by unknown scribes, as Danish was the written language in the spheres of trade, governance, and religion, the Faroese ballads and folk tales remained exclusively an oral tradition.<sup>13</sup> With the evolution of Faroese from Old Norse, but diverging significantly from Danish, the language did not

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<sup>8</sup> Wylie, *Faroe Islands*, 42-43.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Wylie and David Margolin, *The Ring of Dancers: Images of Faroese Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 12.

<sup>10</sup> See "[Sigmundskvæðið yngra: Faroese folkdance](#)," YouTube video, 06:48, November 16, 2010; and "[Sinklars visa](#)," YouTube video, 08:14, January 29, 2010, to view performances of the *Føroyskur dansur*. The first video shows the participants in traditional clothing, the second video shows them in contemporary garb.

<sup>11</sup> Patricia L. Conroy, "Faroese Ballads and Oral-Formulaic Composition" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1974), 23.

<sup>12</sup> Eleanor M. Smith-Dampier, *Sigurd the Dragon-Slayer: A Faroëse Ballad-Cycle* (first published 1934; New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1969), 21.

<sup>13</sup> Wylie and Margolin, *Ring of Dancers*, 73.

receive a standardized orthography until the late nineteenth century. Jonathan Wylie and David Margolin argue that the collection of folktales and ballads helped redefine the language and transformed Faroese into a national standard, one that could be used in the political sphere to overcome regional dialects. This emergence of national identity caused a shift in civil consciousness, which allowed the Faroese to push for self-governance in 1948.<sup>14</sup> While this may be a simplification of the complex, Wylie's and Margolin's argument certainly endears readers to the possibility that a connection between shared ancestral oral literature and the ballads allowed the Faroese some level of self-determination and self-definition.

While the ballads appear in several different forms, of note here is the heroic ballad or *kvæði*. The *kvæði* does not strictly fall under the usual narrative ballad with a limited focus but, rather, follows a larger narrative: the hero's story often begins in childhood or early life and continues till death.<sup>15</sup> This tradition differs from other literatures and epic works which tend to focus only on the great deeds of a singular protagonist. One popular and culturally important ballad is *Regin Smiður* ("Regin the Smith") which tells the story of Sigurd who slays the dragon Fafnir before marrying Brynhild. This ballad is based on a thirteenth-century text, the *Saga of the Volsungs*.<sup>16</sup>

Týr adapted this ballad for their 2003 album *Eric the Red*. While this is not the first traditional Faroese song adapted by the band, it is the first under the direction of lead vocalist Heri Joensen. The band adapted the form in many ways, for example, by shortening the verses considerably from the traditional 124.<sup>17</sup> Of the verses selected for adaptation, almost none pertain to the Sigurd legend. The little that is related through the song instead hints at the characters of Regin, Fafnir, and Odin in the guise of the wanderer. The chorus reveals the most about the full ballad's content:

*Grani bar gullið av heiði,  
brá hann sínnum brandi av reiði,  
Sjúrdur vann av orminum,  
Grani bar gullið av heiði.*

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<sup>14</sup> Wylie and Margolin, *Ring of Dancers*, 73. The people of the Faroe Islands have been under the religious and political purview of larger nations since their Christianization in the eleventh century. Until 2007, their state church was a diocese of the Church of Denmark. While the Faroese largely maintained a spirit of self-reliance and independence due to their geographic isolation, they were the subjects of occupation by the British for much of World War II. Though no blood was shed in the Faroes' surrender or their return, the turmoil of the war and the years-long removal of the islands' control from Denmark ushered in a renewed interest in Faroese self-governance.

<sup>15</sup> Many of the heroic ballads divide the hero's life further into chapters, called *tættir*, which describe not only the exploits of the central hero but also the heroic deeds of the hero's father and sons. The ballads' focus extends beyond the deeds of the hero, and multiple ballads of hundreds of stanzas often combine to form a narrative. Conroy, "Faroese Ballads," 22-23.

<sup>16</sup> Smith-Dampier, *Sigurd Dragon-Slayer*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Smith-Dampier, *Sigurd Dragon-Slayer*, 52.

Grani bore the gold from the heath,  
 he drew his sword in rage,  
 Sigurd defeated the serpent,  
 Grani bore the gold from the heath.<sup>18</sup>

While not the climax of the story, Sigurd's defeat of the dragon Fafnir is the most widely known part of the legend. However, nowhere in Týr's adaptation is Sigurd's triumph mentioned outside the chorus, neither is his climactic death. The story told by the band fades into the background of the music. While it may be argued that the band does not expect individuals outside their nation to understand the lyrics, there are many in neighboring Scandinavian countries who can. By removing well-known story elements, the band focuses on the song's form, which would have been new to many outside the islands. The band seems to deem the story less important than the balladic form, especially since the song needed to be adjusted to fit the genre of music.

In addition to removing considerable portions of the original text, the band changed the instrumentation of the form to adapt *Regin Smiður*. Traditional ballads are sung *a capella*. Many in the Faroes treat songs, narratives, and dancing as an "inseparable whole" of artistic expression, one in which instrumentation is rare.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Týr's adaptation breaks away from that tradition, incorporating the percussive drums and distorted guitar chords indicative of the metal genre. Yet, despite these changes, the band maintains some of the traditions. In "Regin Smiður" and their other songs adapted from traditional Faroese, the band preserves the chorus sung by the entire group, just like the *Føroyskur dansur* requires the entire community to sing the "burden." While having the band sing the chorus collectively would have been natural for their own culture, it was novel to foreign listeners. Early interviews show Joensen expressing surprise when asked about this method of singing. Adapting the form so that only he would be singing the chorus did not seem to occur to Joensen, and in keeping that small part of the traditional form, he created an artifact of his own culture to send abroad. When asked about the inclusion of traditional Faroese songs, Joensen commented, based on the popularity of "Ormurin Langi" on the first album, "It went to show that the language is no barrier in music."<sup>20</sup> While Joensen has shown his ability to adapt the ballads in whatever way he likes due to their non-instrumental nature,<sup>21</sup> he still treats Faroese traditions with the utmost respect, remarking that "[t]he melody is holy, both tone and rhythm, and everything else is adapted."<sup>22</sup> Here, Joensen mixes the past with the present. The adaptations allow the band to act as

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<sup>18</sup> Smith-Dampier, *Sigurd Dragon-Slayer*, 32.

<sup>19</sup> Smith-Dampier, *Sigurd Dragon-Slayer*, 25.

<sup>20</sup> Joensen, interview by Melzer, *The Metal Observer*.

<sup>21</sup> Heri Joensen, interview by Jason Muxlow, *Deadtide*, January 11, 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Joensen, interview by Melzer, *The Metal Observer*.

narrators and re-enactors in their performance of music.<sup>23</sup> Strict authenticity is not the point. It is related to re-enactment, but it is for entertainment. For Týr, it is about spreading their own culture abroad, to invite everyone to the ring dance, and to build community.

### III. Lyrics: Týr's Perception of Viking Independence and Pagan Sentiment

One notable addition to Týr's perception of the Viking and Pagan comes on the 2006 album *Ragnarok*. The entire album is organized in a cyclical manner. The introductory track, "The Beginning," opens on a simple and haunting instrumental riff which in due course transforms to take on the melodies of the other songs on the album.<sup>24</sup> The penultimate track, "Ragnarok" adopts the opening instrumental and then adds vocals, revealing the full meaning of the song, one which was previously hidden through the obfuscation of the lyrics.<sup>25</sup> The track recounts the Viking myth's twilight of the *Aesir* (gods), Fenrir (the wolf) escaping from his bounds to wreak destruction on man, and the cyclical nature of the end as the world is reborn from the final battle. The song laments the unrelenting passage of time and the ineffectiveness to try to affect fate. The narrator sings, "With heavy hearts we head on towards the end/I've done all I can, never will I bend." Here, the narrator accepts his fate, the certainty of the end, yet he does so while refusing to simply allow the inevitable. Even during *Ragnarok*, when man's actions are ineffectual against the might of Fenrir, Jotun (the giants), and Jormangandr (the serpent), the individual refuses to simply allow these things to happen. By doing so, Týr relates the Viking ethos which refuses to see man as ineffectual; instead, the individual represents a force that understands the certainty of time and death, and who fights against that inevitability with a sword and shield in hand, calling to action the narrator's modern counterpart to struggle against the same. Finally, "Ragnarok" fades to silence before the last track, "The End,"<sup>26</sup> starts, repeating the melody of "The Beginning." This repetition plays as a lament to the unrelenting passage of time, the inability to change fate, yet a reassurance that the struggle against the inevitable is noble.

The middle of the *Ragnarok* album provides another example of this multi-track connection and shared narrative. "Grímur Á Miðalnesi"<sup>27</sup> is a recording of a traditional Faroese ballad. However, unlike the previously referenced *Regin Smiður* that was adapted to fit the metal genre, this recording is used only in its function to tie the traditional to the modern. Joensen said that the track is a two-verse snippet of a ballad recorded in 1966, conceding that the audio has nothing

<sup>23</sup> Steven P. Ashby, and John Schofield, "'Hold the Heathen Hammer High': Representation, Re-enactment, and the Construction of 'Pagan' Heritage," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 21, no. 5 (October 2014): 493-511, here 494.

<sup>24</sup> Týr, "The Beginning," track 1 on *Ragnarok*, Napalm Records, CD, September 22, 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Týr, "Ragnarok," track 15 on *Ragnarok*, Napalm Records, CD, September 22, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Týr, "The End," track 16 on *Ragnarok*, Napalm Records, CD, September 22, 2006.

<sup>27</sup> Týr, "Grímur Á Miðalnesi," track 8 on *Ragnarok*, Napalm Records, CD, September 22, 2006.

to do with its content—a complicated story of a farmer's row with a dwarf.<sup>28</sup> Instead, the track was likely included simply to connect tradition to Týr's modern expression of that custom. The fact that the track includes Foley-added footstep sound effects to cement the connection to the ballad as performed in dance adds credence to this interpretation. "Grímur Á Miðalnesi" was not used for content but, rather, for the signified connection to a millennium-old tradition, creating an ethos that implies the band's expertise with regard to the Viking tradition.

The "burden" and one of the verses from "Grímur Á Miðalnesi" are used in conjunction with the next song on the *Ragnarok* track, "Wings of Time."<sup>29</sup> The same recording from the previous track is used as the chorus in "Wings of Time," but the band members also add their own singing layered with the 1966 recording.<sup>30</sup> This is a direct way of connecting modern sensibilities with a faithful replication of tradition, combining them in a way that maintains the integrity and purpose of the custom and incorporating modern influence into the authenticity of tradition. Though the verses in "Wings of Time" are sung in English, the chorus is the verse and "burden" from the 1966 Faroese native-language recording. The English portion adds to the lament of the passage of time and the fatefulness of fighting against a predetermined outcome. The narrator sings:

One thousand years facing your fears [...]
   
The great wings of time are still in their prime
   
Maybe in some age to come we shall see
   
The talons of time take hold of a tree
   
Time folding its wings, the end of all things.

This section, like "Grímur Á Miðalnesi," generally mourns the passage of time. However, it diverts from that simple and common motif across many cultures and modes of art. The "thousand years facing your fears" specifically reflects the current uncertainty of the future of Faroese tradition.<sup>31</sup> For a thousand years, the tradition has stood firm, but the band perceives that Faroese life and culture is decaying in the modern world. The song implies a loss of cultural identity or of the direct connection to tradition. The verses in English, juxtaposed with the 1966 recording, highlight the foreign influences on the Faroe Islands, which accentuates a contrast between folk custom and the multicultural globalist, Anglophone-dominated capitalist structure in which the song is released and traded as a product. This allows Týr to incorporate traditions directly, but in a manner that empowers. Týr does not passively present small digestible portions of their culture to be reflexively consumed in the globalized economy; they are not simply commodifying their culture. Týr actively interprets and builds upon the messages of the past repeated in the ballads.

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<sup>28</sup> Joensen, interview by Melzer, *The Metal Observer*.

<sup>29</sup> Týr, "Wings of Time," track 9 on *Ragnarok*, Napalm Records, CD, September 22, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Joensen, interview by Melzer, *The Metal Observer*.

<sup>31</sup> Týr, "Wings of Time," track 9 on *Ragnarok*, Napalm Records, CD, September 22, 2006.

While participating in the global market to share their culture with the world at large, Týr rebels against parts of the very multiculturalism they participate in. The band is openly critical of Christian ideology, singing provoking and sometimes offensive lyrics, such as "May the mighty Mjølfnir nail the bleeding/ And naked Nazarene upon the pagan planks/ Pound in the painful nails now and hang him high and dry."<sup>32</sup> The album *By the Light of the Northern Star* is filled with these confrontational images and phrasing, though none quite as provocative as Thor crucifying Jesus. The album's opening track, "Hold the Heathen Hammer High," celebrates the contrarian nature of reviving Viking religion a millennium after its historical death.<sup>33</sup> The singer relates that "For the pagan past I live and one day will die." This contrasts with the 2011 census, according to which 95% of Faroese islanders identify themselves with Christianity, while only 1% identify themselves with "other belief."<sup>34</sup> Thus, the Faroe Islands are largely a "Christian" nation, yet Týr portrays Christianity as an invasive foreign influence and colonizing force throughout this album.

The band stresses cultural and religious differences in their understanding of Viking perspectives. In another song, Joensen sings, "Lesser men hope for freedom when they die/Home is where the heathen banners fly," which later also emphasizes that, according to the Viking religious understanding, individuals create their own freedom through strength of arms.<sup>35</sup> The "banner" implies a brotherhood or tribe against the "lesser" Christians, who merely hope for freedom after death, while the heathens fight for their own self-determination. The entire album makes frequent allusions to the forced conversion of the Faroes and other Scandinavian nations during the Viking Age. "By the Sword in my Hand" narrates the singer's perspective on the conversion of the Faroes by an invader.<sup>36</sup> The narrative takes place years after the conversion: the singer says that, as a boy, he was "deceived by a god" who caused him to be "bereft of his blood." An unnamed foreign conqueror, but one who is heavily implied to be Olaf Tryggvason, forced the character to kneel in fealty. The singer portrays the conqueror as a homicidal tyrant who used religion to veil his own vainglorious grasp for power:

By the sword in my hand  
I will conquer the land  
I will decimate and decapitate  
Those who question the sword in my hand

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<sup>32</sup> Týr, "By the Light of the Northern Star," track 9 on *By the Light of the Northern Star*, Napalm Records, CD, May, 29 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Týr, "Hold the Heathen Hammer High," track 1 on *By the Light of the Northern Star*, Napalm Records, CD, May, 29 2009.

<sup>34</sup> "Religion," *Statistics Faroe Islands*, census 2011.

<sup>35</sup> Týr, "Ride," track 7 on *By the Light of the Northern Star*, Napalm Records, CD, May, 29 2009.

<sup>36</sup> Týr, "By the Sword in my Hand," track 6 on *By the Light of the Northern Star*, Napalm Records, CD, May, 29 2009.



I hold the final truth of all eternity  
 It happens to include my own superiority  
 Mischief of the past has come to seal your destiny  
 Kneel before me now or I will have your head for heresy.<sup>37</sup>

This charged sentiment, one that emphasizes the historicity of Scandinavian conversion to Christianity, is part of the band's ethos. The band cries out against what it sees as a foreign influence over the Viking ideals of individuality, self-expression, and self-definition – all celebrated on their previous *Ragnarok* album. This historical event is so important to them that Týr's biography – on previous iterations of their website – featured a retelling of the forced conversion before any mention of the band itself.<sup>38</sup> While the band says that, as Pagans, they respect other nations and faiths,<sup>39</sup> their recalling and citing of specific past events identifies them not only as musicians, but as narrators and re-enactors.<sup>40</sup> Týr act from a Neo-Pagan position, offering a reactionary reading of Viking sentiment regarding conversion.

#### IV. Folk Tradition: The "Grind" and Foreign Imposition of Morals

Alongside the ring dance, another Faroese tradition has lived into the modern era. The *grind*, the hunt and slaughter of pilot whales, though more controversial than the dance, is another direct connection between today's Faroese islanders and their Viking ancestors. While practiced long beforehand, the *grind's* earliest record is the "Sheep Letter," the oldest written Faroese law from 1280, and the implication is that the practice likely originated elsewhere before it was brought to the islands by settlers.<sup>41</sup> The term *grind* refers to a school of whales and is a synecdoche for a structured form of slaughter. The *grind* occurs in several stages: first, the school of whales is sighted; it is then chased into a bay, beached, and slaughtered. While the participants and locals celebrate, the sheriff decides the appropriate division of meat based upon the amount of work rendered by individuals during the hunt. Finally, the whales are divided up and carved, and the meat is taken to be dried or eaten fresh.<sup>42</sup> The Faroese hunt long-finned pilot whales, a large species of whales (second to the Orca in size), measuring up to 6.1 meters and weighing up to 2,722 kilograms.<sup>43</sup> The whales are hunted strictly for food, as the whale meat is a sustainable source of nourishment. The entire carcass is used, nothing is wasted,

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<sup>37</sup> Týr, "By the Sword in my Hand," track 6 on *By the Light of the Northern Star*, Napalm Records, CD, May, 29 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Týr, "Band," accessed June 12, 2021, no longer contains this reference.

<sup>39</sup> Igor Dvornikov, "Statement on Behalf of Moonsorrow, Týr and Eluveitie," *VK video*, April 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Ashby and Schofield, "Hold the Heathen Hammer High," 503.

<sup>41</sup> Ove Fosså, "A Whale of a Dish: Whalemeat as Food," in *Disappearing Foods: Studies in Food and Dishes at Risk, Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 1994*, ed. Harlan Walker (Devon: Prospect Books, 1995), 78-102, here 86.

<sup>42</sup> Wylie and Margolin, *Ring of Dancers*, 95.

<sup>43</sup> "Pilot Whales, *Globicephala macrorhynchus*," *MarineBio Conservation Society*, 1998-2021.

and the subsistence it provides is significant to the Faroese economy and diet. The *grind* is heavily regulated. It has evolved to fit in with Faroese law, which requires that animal slaughter is carried out only by those with government authorization and proper training, and only by using a spinal lance that renders the whale unconscious and then dead in seconds. Faroese animal welfare laws stipulate that the creatures be slaughtered efficiently and quickly to minimize suffering.<sup>44</sup>

The *grind* is a method of gathering food that has become a part of Faroese identity. It is "an eminently practical business [...] [and] none of the [men] I have talked to say that they take any particular joy in the killing; it is hard, dangerous work, and even rather distasteful."<sup>45</sup> It is not a rite of passage or wild affair. It was and is something done to harvest animal protein and fat. This would be especially important and necessary in a landscape as infertile as the Faroes. In addition to the benefits of providing sustenance, the *grind* creates a camaraderie among the participants, especially considering the coordination needed among those chasing the school of whales in boats and the hunters doing the slaughtering on shore. The *grind* is described as a social occasion, as different villages join in the hunt and oftentimes share meals and drinks afterwards.<sup>46</sup> Due in part to its heavy metal contents,<sup>47</sup> the Faroese are now consuming less whale meat, but it remains a stable part of their diet and is becoming a "symbolic food."<sup>48</sup> While this almost ritualized hunt has become a necessary concept for understanding Faroese cultural and natural identity,<sup>49</sup> it has caused much controversy beyond its native shores.

The sheer amount of blood and viscera spilled into the water during the *grind* makes it an easy target to international audiences who are often ignorant of the context for the sensational photos of hundreds of men dotting the red shores and piling on carcasses for cleaning. Among many animal rights and welfare groups,

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<sup>44</sup> "Whales and Whaling in the Faroe Islands," *Føroya landsstýri*, 2017; Wylie, *Faroe Islands*, 8: Though heavily regulated and distanced from the Viking traditions that would have used wooden boats, sharp fish hooks, and wicked knives, the hunt likely was always a sobering experience. Wylie and Margolin, *Ring of Dancers*, argue that, though the atmosphere of the hunt is wild, it was likely always a resolutely grim experience. Young men running amok or an overeager use of spears and knives would have endangered many on wet shores when butchering such large creatures in their death throes.

<sup>45</sup> Wylie and Margolin, *Ring of Dancers*, 101-102.

<sup>46</sup> Wylie and Margolin, *Ring of Dancers*, 98.

<sup>47</sup> The toxic substances, not the genre of music.

<sup>48</sup> Wylie and Margolin, *Ring of Dancers*, 98.

<sup>49</sup> This proposal that the *grind* is both a ritualized hunt and an affair strictly for procuring food may seem contradictory. However, I see them as separate matters. The whales are not caught and killed as a rite of passage or for other merely symbolic reasons, and the Faroese have strict legal control over who participates in the slaughter and how it is completed. The number of people who must coordinate their efforts to chase, beach, slaughter, and butcher the animals requires predictability and repetition in their actions to secure both a greater number of whales caught and the safety of those who participate. Any complex activity that requires a community of people to coordinate their actions, when repeated over a millennium, would develop a ritual.

*Sea Shepherd* has been a consistently outspoken critic against Faroese whale slaughter.<sup>50</sup> On May 12, 2012, the head of *Sea Shepherd*, Paul Watson, debated Heri Joensen of Týr in a live online debate after the airing of an episode of Animal Planet's TV show, *Whale Wars: Viking Shores*, which documents the conservation society's attempts to disrupt and sabotage the *grind* by driving the whales away from the Faroes' shores.<sup>51</sup> It was certainly an odd decision for Animal Planet TV to host a debate between a conservation society director and an independent citizen with no connection to a governmental agency or *grind* regulations.<sup>52</sup> The debate proceeded anyway, due to Joensen's outspoken defense of Faroese customs. Joensen knew his position was extremely unpopular and possibly dangerous to his livelihood as an international public figure, a reality Watson openly mocked,<sup>53</sup> but it was a position Joensen felt required defending against foreign influence and forced imposition of morals. The row with Watson did not end with the public debate. On their 2013 album *Valkyrja*, Týr included an adaptation of *Grindavísan*, a traditional ballad that glorifies the hunt and its participants. The song's liner notes include a dedication to Watson.<sup>54</sup> This jab against Watson, a year after the debate, shows the lack of forgiveness over what Týr perceived as a transgression and foreign imposition on Faroese culture. Ten years earlier, in their 2003 song "Rainbow Warrior," Týr had already portrayed Watson as a foreign invader who was attempting to influence the ingrained culture by means of an ethnocentric imposition of morals, and Joensen and the band responded with pointed criticism and satire against this transgression.

Joensen remained unrepentant in his advocacy for the ritualized hunt, continued supporting the cultural exercise, and eventually participated in the *grind* himself. In July 2016, he posted to his *Facebook* page an explicit picture of himself carving a whale carcass stripped of its skin and blubber.<sup>55</sup> Though he had participated in the hunt and the cleaning of the carcass, he himself had not killed the whale. This picture stirred a controversy over both the continued existence of

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<sup>50</sup> Jane L. Lee, "Faroe Island Whaling, a 1,000-Year Tradition, Comes Under Renewed Fire," *National Geographic*, September 12, 2014.

<sup>51</sup> Dean Kuipers, "'Whale Wars' Paul Watson on Faroes Killing, Online Debate," *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 2012.

<sup>52</sup> At that time, Joensen was already familiar with Watson. The song "Rainbow Warrior" relates a narrative of Watson as the titular character who comes to the island to tell its inhabitants how their "ways unchanged for centuries do dismay/Concrete hearts." The Rainbow Warrior is described as a "confidence" man who fallaciously argues from pathos. Joensen makes his dislike of Watson unobvious; he includes the lyrics "May your ship sink." Týr, "Rainbow Warrior," track 7 on *Eric the Red*, Tutl Records, CD, June 2003.

<sup>53</sup> Paul Watson, "Takk Heri Joensen: Viking Vs Viking Over the Grind," *Sea Shepherd Conservation Society*, May 8, 2012.

<sup>54</sup> Týr, "Grindavísan," track 7 on *Valkyrja*, Metal Blade Records, CD, September 16, 2013.

<sup>55</sup> Heri Joensen, "Real men kill their own meat, like this long-finned pilot whale," *Facebook*, July 27, 2016.

the *grind* and Joensen's participation. While the post drew some supporters, many others, especially those unfamiliar with the band or the Faroes, reacted with outrage. Soon after, an internet campaign began to circulate, calling for a boycott of Týr's upcoming tour dates and urging individuals to call venues and demand they refuse to do business with the band in the future. Joensen responded publicly in a video he posted to *Facebook* and *YouTube*. In this video, Joensen focuses on what he describes as a "Disney-fairy-tale-like relation to meat" which removes the disturbing reality of butchering animals for meat, especially one that differentiates between the acceptable slaughter of livestock and the stigmatized slaughter of wildlife. Joensen questions the stigmatization of the harvesting of meat based on the source. He argues against the efficacy and logic of the opposition, as he freely explains that he has slaughtered many sheep, but that it was a picture of him carving the carcass of an animal that he himself had not killed that caused these *ad hominem* attacks.<sup>56</sup>

### Conclusion

Heri Joensen's actions of goading marine welfare societies and his public defense of Faroese tradition show his reading of Viking culture as one that stresses local and individual independence as well as disentanglement from foreign impositions. In his defense of his cultural practices, he never makes the fallacious argument from tradition, and by doing so, he changes his debate style to meet a foreign manner of argumentation, yet he also stresses a Western appeal to independence. While Joensen could have chosen to not post the picture or to avoid controversial topics in general, he and Týr refused to back down. Instead of apologizing for having caused offense, the band reached out to their supporters, asking for grassroots action and requesting that fans call and urge venues to reject a boycott, but also requesting that these same supporters be respectful to the venues' owners.<sup>57</sup> Joensen continues to antagonize detractors of the *grind*, posting pictures of his meals of whale meat and blubber, while also using these occasions to interact with and educate fans who express an interest in his culture and its cuisine.<sup>58</sup> He is unapologetic and openly contrarian in the eyes of those who would impose ethnocentric morals on the Faroese lifestyle.

Through these public debates, which some see as mere provocation, through the adaptation and exportation of Faroese traditions, and through their lyrical choices, Heri Joensen and Týr promote their view of a Viking ethos for their modern sensibilities, a lens that accentuates individuality and freedom from foreign solicitations. Týr does not strive for an accurate representation of Viking culture, rather, they invoke imagery and concepts that look critically at

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<sup>56</sup> Heri Joensen, "Grind," *YouTube*, August 24, 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Heri Joensen, "Please Help Us!" *Facebook*, September 13, 2016.

<sup>58</sup> Heri Joensen, "Dry fish, potatoes, dry whale meat, and salted blubber," *Facebook*, March 11, 2017.

contemporary society.<sup>59</sup> Týr see their native Faroese traditions eroding under the wings of time and due to the tyrannical imposition of foreign cultures and armchair activists. They actively rally against this erosion through their music, spreading their culture abroad, inviting the world to join the ring dance, and asking their listeners to boldly "hold the heathen hammer high."

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<sup>59</sup> Ashby and Schofield, "Hold the Heathen Hammer High," 504.