

**'NOW HOLD ON, MY ATTACHMENT TO THIS PLACE IS HOME. THAT'S IT':  
The Politics of Place and Identity in an Irish Fishing Locale**

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*Abstract* This paper presents findings from a larger study which aims to promote a better understanding of rural youth emigration through consideration of the importance of place in young people's lives and life choices. In this paper, I focus primarily on the ways in which narratives of place become articulations of identity. More specifically, I examine the ways in which the development, organization and practices of the 'local' fishing industry work to shape, both negatively and positively, the symbolic and structural dimensions of young people's sense of place and identity. Here I draw attention to the changing social and economic landscape of fisheries (under)development in northwest Ireland to explain the complex and contradictory ways in which young people's articulated values and identities convey a clear connection to the sea, a corresponding lack of local culture, and concerted dissociation from the fishing industry and fishing community. In doing so, I locate local youth identities in the shifting landscape of a fishing community in transition and argue for the continued importance of place in studies of identity and migration.

## **Introduction**

This paper comes from a larger study which addresses gender disparities in rural youth emigration through consideration of the ways in which young people's sense of place in rural society (and by implication, desire to leave) are shaped by subjectivities of gender (see for example Dahlstrom 1996). Attention to young people's subjective expressions and experiences of place revealed linkages between place and identity that cut through the category of gender emphasizing instead themes redolent of broader social and economic processes and inequalities connected to the development and transformation of the local fishery.

Located in the shifting and unstable landscape of an Irish fishing community, this paper focuses on the ways in which narratives of place become part of articulations of identity. Here I draw attention to the ways in which the development and transformation of the fishery contributes to key, and at times contradictory, themes in local youth identities. In doing so, I argue for the sustained importance of place in studies of identity and migration despite claims that we are living in the placeless times of 'late modernity' (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991).

Said differently, this paper demonstrates the ways in which local youth self-consciously situate themselves (individually, collectively and hierarchically) within and against the cultural and moral landscapes of a fishing community in

flux. Drawing primarily on youth discourse of 'community' and 'consumption', I pay particular attention to the ways in which young people construct and maintain social and symbolic boundaries between themselves and others, and how through these boundary-making processes articulations of identity and morality emerge. Fundamental to this is consideration of the ways in which the development, organization and practices of the 'local' fishing industry shape, both negatively and positively, the symbolic and structural dimensions of young people's sense of place.

## Methods

Data drawn on here comes from eleven months of fieldwork carried out in 2007-2008 in a fishing community in County Donegal, Ireland. Fieldwork entailed conducting more than sixty-five semi-structured interviews with local youth, teachers, parents, fishers and industry workers, and other community members and leaders. Data for this paper come primarily from semi-structured interviews with twenty-one young people from the community. This includes eleven males and ten females between the ages of nineteen and thirty-one.<sup>1</sup> Interviews with young people concentrated on questions related to interests and goals, economic and leisure activities, and attitudes towards home, migration and peers, fishing as an occupation and a lifestyle, and rural life in general. These topics served to explore more hidden themes such as values and identities, social networks and relations, attachment to locality and gender relations. In addition to youth interviews, I also draw on discussion with parents, teachers and community members throughout this paper to better contextualize young people's perspectives and experiences. In all cases, confidentiality was assured and the names and exact ages of all respondents have been altered to preserve anonymity.

## A 'Millionaires Town' in a 'Forgotten' County?

Often referred to as the 'forgotten' county, County Donegal is the poorest and most rural region of the Republic.<sup>2</sup> Situated in the northwest corner of the island, Donegal shares only a sliver of six miles of land border with the rest of the Republic. Its narrow mooring to the Republic carries with it important political-economic connotations that remain palpable in the current economic climate as well as in contemporary identities and attitudes. As the most disadvantaged region of the Republic, the Donegal social consciousness is saturated in sentiments of marginality and being 'left behind'. This will be discussed later on.

This research was carried out in the southwest corner of the county in the small fishing town of Killybegs (population 2,235 (cso 2006)) – the industrial centre of southwest Donegal. Killybegs experienced rapid industrialization over the last thirty years due to the development of an offshore mid-water trawler fleet targeting pelagic species, primarily mackerel, but also herring, horse mackerel and more recently, blue whiting. The development of the pelagic sector earned the

small town of Killybegs the impressive title of 'Ireland's Premier Fishing Port'. It also earned a small number of pelagic vessel owners the unwanted title of 'mackerel millionaires'.<sup>3</sup> It is worthwhile to point out that many if not most of the so called 'mackerel millionaires' are considered 'blow-ins'; to be differentiated from *true* Killybegs people (that is, those born and bred in the community) (see Peace 2001 for discussion on blow-ins in Ireland). The majority arrived from various other fishing ports in and around Ireland and Europe in the mid to late 1970s to take advantage of the high prices paid for herring in the northwest due to herring closures in adjacent European waters (Molloy 2004). (Following the reopening of herring fisheries in the North Sea in particular, fishermen in the northwest turned their attention towards developing a mackerel fishery).

Such was the flood of fishermen to Killybegs during this period that between 1971 and 1981 the population of Killybegs increased by 39.7 per cent (from 1,634 to 2,282) (CSO 1981).<sup>4</sup> In the decade to follow, the 'tumultuous 1980s', the burgeoning mackerel fishery sheltered the small town from the economic turmoil and high rates of emigration felt elsewhere in the country. This influx is significant to the cultural identity and 'community-ness' of Killybegs and will be discussed below.

Ranging in value from nine to nineteen million Euro and in length from twenty-seven to seventy-one meters, today the Irish pelagic fleet of twenty-two trawlers (plus one factory vessel) comprises one percent of the overall Irish fleet and forty per cent of the capacity (Cawley 2006). Few in numbers but formidable in size, the development of the pelagic fleet transformed Killybegs into an oasis of wealth and work in a region of the Republic often characterized as an employment 'black spot'. It is notable that for a small town situated in a peripheral corner of an island oft referred to as an 'emigrant nursery' (Mac Laughlin 1994), 2006 marked the first year since the inception of the Free State in 1926 that Killybegs experienced population decline.

A key factor in recent population decline can be traced back to the summer of 2004 when someone 'blew the whistle' bringing forward allegations of widespread fraud and illegal fishing practices (over-fishing) against Killybegs pelagic fishermen.<sup>5</sup> The recently exposed 'scandal', while no doubt triggering a new set of problems for the Irish fishing industry, is symptomatic of larger and more long-term problems facing Irish fisheries dating back to Ireland's colonial encounter with Britain and more recently, Ireland's entry into the European Union (see for example Molloy 2004; Cawley 2006; Tucker 1999). It is in part the chronic underdevelopment and undervaluing of Irish fisheries that allowed for the rapid development of the pelagic fleet in Killybegs. Nevertheless the legislative backlash stemming from recent allegations and investigations, coupled with declining fish stocks and quotas in EU waters, have left the Irish fishing industry in a state of formidable flux and secured, it seems, a stationary black cloud over the town of Killybegs.<sup>6</sup>

Fishing is so quiet and everything is doom and gloom around this town like. It's all bad news, bad feelings between fishing people. (Diana, age twenty-six)

Yeah, I'm sure you've heard of the whole [fishing investigations] situation. Since that thing it's just turned into a sort of cultural, sort of a community, like everybody is thriving on fuckin' doom and gloom. ... People's spirits are down, it just seems to have sank with the fishing industry. (William, age thirty)

Volatility within the fishing industry and a corresponding, and much lamented, 'quietness' about town have prompted many community members to now consider emigration as the 'only option' for local youth.<sup>7</sup> It is within this unsettled and shifting topography of place that I examine the ways in which Killybegs youth articulate an identity in relation to the contradictions and complexities of local and larger socio-political realities.

To be clear, the narratives of place and articulations of identity presented here should not be understood as permanent or fixed in any way, but rather as always and only partial and provisional. Central here is Falk and Pinhey's (1978) contention that the 'social world must be regarded as an ongoing accomplishment, not a taken for granted facticity' (cited in Halfacree 1993:30). With this in mind, the following section begins to investigate the ways in which the local fishing industry is appropriated by youth as both a divisive and unifying force in the locality.

### **Symbolic, Spatial and Social Divisions: Us and Them**

I think because Killybegs is such a big kind of business town that they're kind of lax a little bit in like culture, like community kind of, because business has kind of built it into what it is. (Laura, age twenty-three)

You know, the community spirit, there is no community spirit here. ... See, this is it, money breeds mistrust and then gossip and then, okay, money, mistrust and gossip, they're all intertwined. (Eric, age twenty-seven)

Laura and Eric are not alone in their failure to find 'community' in Killybegs. Although some participants (five) felt that there was definitely a strong sense of community in Killybegs (linked predominantly to community festivals and football matches), the dominant impression put forward by young participants was marked by a degree of ambivalence if not pessimism.

Interview questions related to the sense of community in Killybegs prompted several participants to reference nearby communities, notably Kilcar, Carrick, Teelin and Glencolumbkille – collectively and colloquially referred to as 'In Through' – as *the real thing* in terms of 'community'.<sup>8</sup> Reciprocally, it was during visits 'In Through' that Killybegs was described to me as 'culturally barren' and a 'bit of a garrison town.' In the excerpts below participants compare 'community' in Killybegs to nearby localities.

If you look at the other parishes around Donegal, their sense of community is way stronger. Do you know Ardara, like that's got a really big sense of community, so does Kilcar and Carrick, they do like. (Tony, age nineteen)

Now you can definitely see that, even in Kilcar there's far more of a sense of community than there ever was here, or even now. (Katie, age twentyfour)

In Killybegs there's nothing. ... Whereas I was down driving through Ardara seven o'clock [in the] evening and... there was music on the street so there was. I just don't know what it is about Killybegs. ... I think its begrudgery more than anything. (Chris, age thirty-one)

Lack of cooperation or 'togetherness' was a key theme in youth interviews and highlights tension within the community of Killybegs that will be addressed later on. For now, I want to focus attention on the ways in which Killybegs youth compare and contrast their own position in the local landscape to their closest counterparts 'In Through' through discourse of consumption. Below, Killybegs youth, in drawing from the same local reservoir of resources which denies them strong community spirit, assert a collective identity which hierarchically positions 'us' (Killybegs) against 'them' (In Through).

I'd hate to be stuck in somewhere like Glen or somewhere just so remote, there's probably even less things to do than there is here. (Laura, age twenty-three)

Being 'stuck' somewhere 'just so remote' reveals how the 'idyllic' is often plain 'dull' for rural youth (see Haugen and Villa 2006; Rye 2006; Dunkley 2004). Two project participants (who had left Killybegs to attend college) contended that they would consider moving back to the Killybegs area in the future, but would not live on the side of town bordering 'In Through' as it would be 'too far away'. Shields (1991:29) contends, 'spatial metaphors, or even simple descriptive spatial divisions, frequently recode geographic space to signify certain social divisions, cultural classifications or particular values, events or feelings'. The social and symbolic 'coding' of spatiality is evidenced below in Karen's (age twenty-six) account of the differences between the 'Killybegs corner' and the 'farmers' corner' in a nearby nightclub (The Limelight).

Karen: Like we have a Killybegs corner. It's just silly. I don't know maybe other towns do it too. Oh yeah, like Studio two is more Carrick, Kilcar, Glen based.

RD: Where is Studio two?

Karen: It's in the Limelight. There's two studios, two dance floors. Studio 1 would be more dance music and we'd have the Killybegs corner up there and Studio two is more what we call farmers.

Because Orla was there and she's from Kilcar, and she said, 'Oh we were at the Limelight'. And I said, 'So was I, didn't see you'. I said, 'I suppose you were in Studio two'. Ha ha, she'd laugh, you know, but she was.

Karen's socio-spatial mapping of the nightclub is redolent of not only boundaries between 'us' and 'them', but a perceived hierarchy according to degrees of 'ruralness' (for example 'farmers' corner). Dunkley and Panelli (2007:12) write:

Spaces and practices come to be associated with the identities of those groups who lay claim to them, and the various degrees of 'ruralness' accorded to specific places and activities influence their desirability for differing groups. Processes of inclusion and exclusion are expressions of power.

One of the ways in which Killybegs youth stress the difference between themselves and 'others' is through use of the negatively loaded concept 'culchie'. The term 'culchie' carries pejorative connotations associated with 'backwardness' and being 'too rural'.

People down there [in Dublin] would call us culchies... but you see, us in Killybegs, we call them [In Through] culchies. (Pete, age nineteen)

I think because quite a lot of kids, when I was growing up, had quite a lot of money ... because their parents were involved in the fishing industry. I think there was that kind of looking down on everyone else kind of thing, especially from like people from Carrick and Teelin, who would be considered culchies and stuff like that. (Laura, age twenty-three)

Haugen and Villa (2006:190-191) encountered similar concepts ('harry' and 'raner') used by rural and urban Norwegian youth to describe male rural culture and rural people as the 'peculiar other'. The authors conclude, 'some rural youth protest and some agree with the above images, but it is always the other and not they themselves representing the peculiar rural 'harry' culture. No one likes to identify themselves with a culture defined as inferior and peculiar' (see also Dunkley and Panelli 2007). This interpretation fits well with the ways in which Killybegs youth self-consciously resist and rationalize their own and others perceptions of who gets counted as a 'culchie'. Contrary to romanticized notions of the 'rural (Irish) fishing village', it is the fishing industry which serves as the source of sophistication, if not urbanism, in youth experience and identity.

The prosperity of northwest pelagic fisheries is not necessarily confined to Killybegs, but symbolically it remains closely bound to the community and engenders a key difference between the town and those surrounding it. The towns' industriousness and wealth enables local youth to shore up their identity as more 'urbane' and sophisticated than others in the area (see Kjeldgaard 2003; see also Dunkley and Panelli 2007). From the perspective of Killybegs youth, one of the ways in which difference between 'us' and 'them' is expressed is in relation to

consumption habits/opportunities/preferences (for example preferred styles of music and clothes) but also and more generally in terms of a perceived cosmopolitanism or worldliness (see also Matthews *et al.* 1998).

We used to belittle other towns as well like if they hadn't got this or they hadn't got that. ... We thought we were unique because of the fishing industry I suppose, we were always, within southwest Donegal, Killybegs is just that bit bigger than the other towns like Kilcar, or Ardara or Glenties. (Andrew, age twenty-two)

I don't know you just can tell, you can spot them [In Through people] off. Yeah. Not that anybody is better than anybody. You just can tell, but then you'd hear things like ones [In Through] are involved in drugs and stuff and you're like, in there? Like, they can get it? You know, that sort of way. Or these ones come out and they're looking trendy. (Karen, age twenty-six)

Karen's knack for 'spotting them off' paired with her expressed surprise in hearing that they can get drugs 'in there' or 'come out looking trendy' engenders a common notion that 'In Through' people are more innocent or 'less knowing' than their Killybegs counterparts (see also Rye 2006:411). It is another marker of one's 'ruralness' and despite emphases on equality ('not that anyone's better than anyone else'), such utterances connote a complexity of inferiority and admiration. These again speak more to the social and symbolic distance felt between the localities as the road distance between Killybegs and Glencolumbkille (the furthest village from Killybegs) is twenty-seven kilometers.

Thus far I have discussed some of the ways in which aspects of fisheries development/industrialization are expressed as a source of collective identity and difference, of being 'better than'. I have done this by drawing attention to the ways in which Killybegs youth create and maintain boundaries to situate themselves on the 'right' side of 'too rural'. Additionally, I have briefly highlighted the ways in which youth perceive aspects of industrialization as integral to the undermining of 'community' in Killybegs. In the next section, while maintaining focus on discourse of community and consumption, I bring to the foreground evidence of additional 'others' which suggest that the social and symbolic significance of the wealth in Killybegs, inextricably linked to the fishing industry, is not as straightforward as this discussion portends.

### **More Millionaires Than...**

From the outset of fieldwork, I was well informed of the double-edged nature of the wealth in Killybegs. It was put to me on several occasions: Do you know there are more millionaires in Killybegs per square mile than Beverly Hills/Texas/Paris/Dublin/all of Europe? One such occasion came a few months into fieldwork when I ran into an acquaintance in a local pub. After chatting briefly, the young

man turned to me and said, 'The guy who owns this place is a millionaire, but we still drink here'.

Killybegs is known through out the rest of Ireland as 'a millionaires' town' and this reputation is significant to both young people's sense of place and identity. Nadel-Klein (2003) reminds us that the way people refer to themselves as belonging to a group is produced in part by the ways in which others see them (see also Nadel-Klein 1991). Studies on rural youth identities in particular emphasize the importance of not just how young people perceive their community, but how young people perceive *others* to perceive their community (Kjeldgaard 2003). Below I evidence the ways in which local youth talk about a prevailing perception others have of Killybegs. I do this to lay the necessary groundwork for a subsequent discussion on the ways in which particular values have become imbued in young people's narratives of Killybegs, and how these values intersect and influence articulations of individual identities.

Fine, there's more millionaires per square mile in Killybegs then there is in Beverly Hills. .. But not everyone in the bloody town is a millionaire. (Eric, age twenty-eight)

A lot of people would say, 'Oh, you're from Killybegs, youse are all loaded in Killybegs.' Its like, 'What do you mean by that?' (Caitriona, age twenty-six)

If people say to you, 'Where you from?' and you say Killybegs, they say, 'Well, that's a millionaires town.' That's the way they look at it, but it's nothing like that at all. ... but half of them haven't even been here, but then the people that have been here say, 'No, the Killybegs people are very nice.' (Ben, age twenty-three)

Discourse surrounding 'the money in Killybegs' engenders an undeserving aspect stemming in part from the 'morally suspect' and widely-publicized aforementioned 'corruption' in the Killybegs fleet. Ben's above qualification, 'No, Killybegs people are very nice' speaks volumes about the negative values currently infesting the dominant narrative of Killybegs. It implies that the categories of 'millionaire' and 'nice people' are mutually exclusive. Paired with Patrick's comments below about 'people from around here' we begin to feel a formidable tension which shapes and is shaped by the communities *within* the community of Killybegs.

But even people from around here that wouldn't be from direct fishing families, they'd be at the same craic, like 'Youse have plenty [of money] made'. (Patrick, age twenty-six)

The more succinct remark of a long-time fisherman further evidences the constituent fragments and frictions which make up the community as a whole. When asked if he felt there was a sense of community in Killybegs, he responded: 'There are two communities in Killybegs: the wealthy one and the ordinary one'.



Such remarks were not uncommon and reveal the heterogeneity of an ostensibly homogenous community (in that Killybegs is predominantly Irish, white and Catholic). In the next section I point to some of the ways in which socio-historical and political-economic processes are implicated in the veritable lack of community in Killybegs. While mindful not to overstate its significance, there is a marked lack of social and economic integration in Killybegs. Interviews with community members (young and old) reveal a tendency to distinguish between the 'fishing community' (largely through not entirely composed of wealthy vessel and fish factory owners) and the community in general.

### **Immediate 'Others' and the 'Communities' of Killybegs**

Killybegs was always like that, a port town. Things come and go. People come and go. So you never have this situation of being considered a blow-in, everybody blew in, you know. There's no feeling of strangeness. (Mr. Byrne)

The above, put to me by a community leader, is at best a half-truth. Certainly not everyone blew in. For example, Mr. Byrne didn't 'blow in', a point that was made during the interview: 'I'm the last local left!' And despite the contention that 'there is no feeling of strangeness', one does at times have to contend with 'being considered a blow-in' (although this is not a matter of equal import to everyone in the community). It was not long after landing in Killybegs that I shared in a sidewalk conversation which turned spontaneously towards the topic: 'They call us 'blow-ins' but sure, we built this town.' Though expressed in a non-serious manner, the seminal role of 'blow-ins' in the rise and success of Killybegs as a fishing port is undisputable. Perhaps 'strangeness' is not the best word to describe community dynamics, but where one does and does not come from matters. Below, Mr. McIntyre, a school teacher in the area, discusses the impact of 'newcomers' on the community and subsequently laments the waning potential of the fishing industry to become a 'community thing'.

Killybegs never had a great community. The reason being that too many people came into Killybegs who had no affiliation with Killybegs whatsoever, they just came in to earn money... Those people never really regarded themselves as Killybegs people. They still regard themselves as from Mayo or from Galway or from Dublin and so on. But given another generation that would have ended. The next generation would have been local. But now that the fishing industry has collapsed almost, their offspring are inclined to look back towards going out again. So it never lasted long enough. If we could have gotten another generation out of it, it probably would have become a community thing, but it never even got a chance to happen. (Mr. McIntyre)

As previously discussed, the vast majority of pelagic trawler owners (the so called 'mackerel millionaires') are not from Killybegs, and according to Mr. McIntyre (and he is not alone on this accord): 'never really regarded themselves as Killybegs people'. This particular configuration of *who does not belong* and *who has money* means that extreme individualism – already identified as a common characteristic of fishing communities (Byron 1986) – may be (or at the very least perceived to be) *more* extreme in Killybegs.

Rye (2006:411) contends that 'strong social ties foster not only caring communities in the good sense but also a culture of strict social control.' He writes: 'There is less tolerance for those who succeed, in particular if they brag about their achievements, or if their behavior deviates in other ways. Besides this the local community has more means to force the deviants into line' (Rye 2006). Examples of this are not uncommon in rural and Irish studies (see Peace 2001). In this case study they are evidenced in part in Tony's (age nineteen) discontented remarks below.

Tony: There's always people saying... 'Oh, you'd think they would do this or you'd think they would do that', but who is they? ... And then if someone did [do something], then they were criticized for it, then they didn't do it right. I think there's a lot of negativity.

RD: Where do you think that stems from, that attitude, is it recent?

Tony: I think it might be because the people that might be doing that might be not from Killybegs. They're living in Killybegs but they might not be from Killybegs. So it might be the old Killybegs people talking, 'Who's he, who's she', doing that like.

Efforts aside, the ability to 'control' members of a community is contingent on notions of belonging which 'blow-ins' may not buy into (see Inglis 2008; Peace 2001). Young (1971:39) reminds us that 'a society can only control effectively those who perceive themselves to be members of it' (cited in McRobbie 2000:182). In this way, the twin forces of industrialization and individualism in Killybegs may be particularly inimical to community interests. As outsiders, the individuals at the helm of the fishing industry are well insulated against informal social constraints (for example gossip, see Inglis 2008:66). This likely assisted some in realizing their ambitions in the locality relatively unrestrained but continues to invite accusations of greed, selfishness, and being 'uncommitted' to Killybegs.

See, there's a whole thing too that people will mention about blow-ins coming into the town ... how they had money, and how they didn't invest it into the town. And then people will say, well, that's because they're not really local. (Karen, age twenty-six)

I love Killybegs as it's my own town... but it's just the fact that the, if you want to call them the big people of the town, just don't want nothing really

to happen. Because they're happy. Their wallets are full and that's the way it is. (Nathan, age twenty-five)

I don't think you can fix it [Killybegs], it's too many uneducated kind of greedy men that are running it and they're not going to change. They're still doing the exact same thing, so it doesn't make any difference. (Michael, age twenty-six)

The simmering resentment evident in the above accounts surfaces through both discourse of community and consumption, including comments on the pervasive 'spending spree' and excessive consumption habits of Killybegs. Several participants expressed disillusionment with what was described as an 'obsession with property... a huge mortgage, a nice car, things' and the widespread tendency of 'jealousy to creep in'. Killybegs, I was told, 'is way too materialistic'. Although consumption trends in Killybegs need to be situated within the larger context of the Celtic Tiger economy and Ireland's new found freedom to spend, it is important to note that local trends, though now subsumed in national trends, are considered by many youth to be somewhat distinct from trends associated with Ireland's economic renaissance of the late 1990s. Similar to youth evaluations of 'culchies' remarked on earlier, no one identified themselves as being caught up in the materialism of 'keeping up with the Jones' or 'living beyond their means'.

By and large, youth discourse of community and consumption engendered a disappointed if not depressed air due largely to recent volatility in the fishing industry (for example 'nothing good seems to be happening'; 'people's spirits are down'; 'people are scared of their own opinions'). This however should not be taken to mean that local youth, including those who convey less favorable depictions of community, are unhappy, discontent or disaffected. Here is where we begin to see a complex geography of values and belonging emerge through expressions of commonality and difference. Most respondents, regardless of where their views fell on the spectrum of community spirit, articulated a fondness for and attachment to home, it is, after all, 'home'. Questions concerning if and how participants saw their sense of self/identity as linked to Killybegs elicited two primary responses. Firstly, several participants expressed a strong attachment to the sea, particularly the aesthetic seaside.

I've always said where ever I go, where ever I settle down, I'd like it to be beside the sea, so that would be a big influence on my life, I love being near the sea. (Thomas, age twenty-two)

Well, I would always say, like, definitely, the fishing is in my blood or the ocean is in my blood. ... I'd always say I'm a coastal person and it will always be in my blood. (Beth, age twenty-five)

You know, I grew up by the sea and you can't help it... (Eric, age twenty-eight)

I don't know, I couldn't see myself living in a Midland area. I would have to be around the sea... sounds strange, but... (Tony, age nineteen)

Secondly, questions concerning linkages between locality and identity elicited carefully conveyed distinctions between the nature and identity of one's self and family, and of the community as a broader collectivity. Central here is Herzfeld's (1987:43) contention that the 'language of identity is a language of morality'. In the next section, I focus on the ways in which local youth situate themselves within, but mostly against, the cultural and moral landscape of Killybegs. Important here is Kjeldgaard's (2003:293) reminder that it is 'often it is a matter of explaining that to which one does not belong that gives meaning to one's own position in the landscape'.

### **Belongings, Attachments, Dissociations and Dis-Identifications**

Bourdieu (1984:479) reminds us that 'social identity lies in difference, and difference is asserted against what is closest, which represents the greatest threat'. The most poignant example of this is evidenced in Eric's rather abrupt amendment to a follow-up question which implied he felt 'attached' to Killybegs: 'Now hold on, he said, my attachment to this place is home. That's it'. His interviewee finished as follows:

You know something, if I didn't have family here, family is very important, to me it is. Trust is more important than money. That's the way I choose my friends. If you mistrust your friends then what's the point. My friends are loyal friends. (Eric, age twenty-eight)

Implicit in this assessment of values is the intimation that these values are not found in the community at large. Despite being born and raised, having immediate family in the locality, and expressing a strong attachment to the sea, Eric described Killybegs 'as only a place of work for me'. Antagonistic and apathetic articulations of one's individual identity in relation to Killybegs were not uncommon and highlight a tendency towards dis-identification with Killybegs (though still elaborating an identity in relation to a specific geographic locality). Below, participants respond to the question: How do you see your sense of self/identity as linked to Killybegs?

I don't know, that's a funny question because when I'm away, when I'm off in Dublin, people say, 'Are you from Donegal?' and I say, yeah, but I never automatically mention Killybegs. ... Donegal is the first thing I say. ... It's somewhere to be proud of. ... So that's why I always mention it first. ... It's hard to be away from Donegal. (Katie, age twenty-four)

Well... I would say Donegal, but not Killybegs, I don't know. (Erin, age twenty-two)

Yeah, I would say I'm from Donegal, not really Killybegs, but people do kind of identify you as a Killybegs man. (Michael, age twenty-six)

You take pride in being from Donegal. (Thomas, age twenty-two)

Certainly the recent and very localized 'blow up' in the pelagic fleet needs to be taken into account in the tendency towards dissociation with Killybegs.

And the fishing isn't that good anymore so is it anything to be boasting about? (Katie, age twenty-four)

Well, I would always say I'm from Killybegs, whenever anybody says, 'Oh, where you from?' And I would be very proud of where I'm from. I'd be very proud. ... There's nothing to be ashamed of in Killybegs, like alright, it has changed... there was a lot of people outside Killybegs that were making their money inside Killybegs, but they would never say that now, if you know what I mean. (Ruth, age thirty-two)

It was a proud thing to be, you know, a Killybegs man, a Killybegs fisherman, but that's kind of gone out the window now. ... I've kind of lost my identity with Killybegs a bit. ... Yeah, I don't know if it's a bit of... is it embarrassment? There's something there and I can't put my finger on it because every fishermen knows that he shot himself in the foot. (William, age thirty)

Though differing in outlook, Ruth and Williams' word choice (ashamed, embarrassed) is illustrative of an uneasiness and uncertainty currently shaping the moral and cultural landscape of Killybegs. Both also suggest that it is more than local youth who are 'distancing' themselves from the dominant narrative of Killybegs.

The success of Killybegs was astounding, the pride deserving, because it was 'self-made' – particularly in contrast to the Celtic Tiger's dependence on multi-national corporations. Not only that, it was self-made during a period of widespread economic turmoil (1980s) in a 'forgotten' county on an island in the North Atlantic. But recent ruin and rupture in the industry also bears the stamp of 'self-made' and this contributes to a sense of place redolent of dissonance, disenchantment and detachment.

Fishing is finished. There was a great sense of pride in the town because it was the number one fishing port in Europe. ... Take this onboard and use it as a life philosophy: greed fucks everything. That's what happened here. (Eric, age twenty-eight)

There's a very poor community spirit in Killybegs. There's more of a sense of bitterness since the fishing collapsed. But if there was dishonesty in the industry, then what do they expect? Its all sob stories about people who were earning a lot money and now can't take their boats out. (Lisa, age twenty-four)

An older community member compared the current situation in Killybegs to that of the farming, logging and coal mining towns of the United States. 'The difference is, he said, we did it to ourselves. Everybody wants to blame somebody else, but it's our fault too'.

The morally untenable tone of the current cultural climate in Killybegs is clearly a critical facet of young people's sense of place. It can not however fully explain the significance or meaning of the Donegal badge of distinction in the above articulations of identity. Matthews *et al.* (1998:196) remind us that 'places become imbued with cultural values and meanings, affording not only a sense of identity, but also generating a sense of difference and of being special.' Below, participants describe how the Donegal identity hinges on notions of isolation, peripherality and pride.

At the end of the day the people in government don't really care about the people up at this end of the country. ... We're so far out in a peripheral region. We're out on the edge. (Ben, age twenty-three)

You know, Donegal people tend to be quite proud of being from Donegal. Not necessarily proud, but tied to their county maybe more so than other places in Ireland. Like even in college, people used to say that Donegal people, like you would know Donegal people because they'd often stick together like. You could just tell a Donegal person from other people. There was a unique sort of culture or attitude or something ... I think its because we're out on a limb, you know. We're sort of cut off from the rest of the Republic of Ireland. (Alexis, age twenty-eight)

In a study on social exclusion, MacDonald and Marsh (2005:876) encountered similar expressions whereby youth in socially and economically disadvantaged neighborhoods were 'united by a common experience of economic marginality' and 'remained tied to locally-rooted, social networks' (see also MacDonald and Marsh 2001; Kjeldgaard 2003). Similar sentiments were expressed by participants of this project ('Donegal people tend to stick together'). It was not uncommon for youth currently living away from Killybegs to identify Donegal ties in social groups formed outside of the county.

Further to this, it is worth pointing out the striking similarity between Alexis' above remark: 'you could just tell a Donegal person from other people' and Karen's earlier description of 'In Through' people: 'you can just tell, you can spot them off'. The (hierarchically figured) lines of difference between the 'us' and 'them' of earlier are now it seems superseded in collective expressions and experiences grounded in part in a perceived sense of shared peripherality. It is through

the diversity of dialogue presented here that we begin to see the permeability of social boundaries and the multiplicity and multi-layeredness of narratives of place in constructions of both collective and individual identities (see also Kjeldgaard 2003:300). Wilson and Donnan (2006:179) contend:

Identity has become the veritable stuff of politics and power in the local, national and global societies and culture precisely because it is so meaningful, malleable and adaptable. 'Identity' and 'culture' are idioms in the expression of community, place, history, politics, economics, sexuality, class, nation and state, both within formal institutions and across multiple social fields and on potentially countless social occasions.

Echoes of Wilson and Donnan's above contention are heard through out this paper.

### **Conclusion and Discussion: The Politics of Place and Identity**

In the following and final section of this paper, I bring together the above points and conclude that young people's articulated identity is intimately entwined with one's perceptions and experiences of processes of place-based politics and power as they play out across and through the multi-layered levels of local, national and global scapes. At the surface the dominant narratives of Killybegs and County Donegal contradict each other. As the industrial centre of southwest Donegal, Killybegs is (or was, until very recently) perceived to be an economic oasis but culturally barren. County Donegal, on the other hand, is geographically and economically peripheralized but a champion of Irish culture, tradition and language.<sup>9</sup> Both narratives are imbued and invested with a complexity of values, meanings and morals that transmute opportunities for celebration and stigma.

Killybegs boasts a heroic, hard-working narrative of self-made success but now struggles with the reputation of 'too rich', a wealth now tinged with contemptible connotations. In contrast, the cultural identity of County Donegal capitalizes on 'idyllic' assets of tradition, tranquility and remoteness but risks being seen as 'backwards' or 'too rural'. What is intriguing is the way in which the fishing industry, the flagship of Killybegs, symbolizes both modernity *and* marginality; for I can think of no better example of Ireland's 'subservient' integration into the European Union than the sphere of fisheries.

The Irish fishing industry has been chronically under-developed, undervalued, under-represented and until very recently, under-regulated (Molloy 2004; Conaghan 1974; Conaghan 1997). The peripheral position of fisheries in state politics engenders policies and practices redolent of a 'fend for yourself' ethos. This is precisely how Killybegs became a 'millionaires town' and why even 'mackerel millionaires' at times articulate a consciousness characteristic of alienation and powerlessness. In this way, young people's articulations of modernity and 'urban sophistication' in Killybegs are intimately and paradoxically complimentary, rather than contradictory, to their articulations of peripherality: both stem from

a sense of powerlessness and alienation from the national and supranational political and economic order.

It is outstanding and ironic that one of the finest fleets of supertrawlers in the world is part and parcel of a peripheral industry in a peripheral county in a semi-peripheral country. Killybegs youth are inundated with sometimes subtle, sometimes striking reminders of their peripheral position in relation to the rest of the Republic and also the European Union, despite Ireland's status as the 'darling of the EU'. This is due primarily to the unforgettably 'raw deal' Ireland received under the Common Fisheries Policy (see Molloy 2004; Cawley 2006). In the case of fisheries, this is further confirmed in the changing nature and gradual disappearance of the fishing industry from the local landscape – most notably the Europeanizing and globalizing processes currently shaping and shaped by the Irish fishing industry. These include, as evidenced below, the vanishing visibility of the local whitefish fleet, the delocalization of the pelagic fleet, and by implication, dramatically declining employment opportunities in the local fishing industry.

You'd be unloading, you're actually standing on the pier, working nets. ... You used to get the gang gathered there [at the town pier] every morning but you never see it now. (Chris, age thirty-one)

There was auctions, they were selling the fish off right in front of you. (Nathan, age twenty-five)

You'd see fish being loaded and unloaded constantly in huge amounts and that really doesn't happen anymore so you don't actually see the industry actively going on as much. ... The streets used to be covered in fish, they were falling out of lorries they were so full... (Andrew, age twenty-two)

It is troubling to know that the fish served in the fish-and-chip shop in 'Ireland's Premier Fishing Port' comes from Iceland, not Ireland. Opportunities for youth to live and work locally, particularly in the fishing industry, are severely and increasingly limited, often to only the 'privileged' sons and daughters of pelagic vessel owners who can *afford* to stay in the locality.

Well, people always say it's who you know, but I think that means if your daddy owns a big boat than you'll get a job. (Karen, age twenty-six)

The direction of Irish and European fisheries, particularly the increasing importance of EU – Third Country Agreements, suggests that is unlikely that the fishing industry in Killybegs will ever become a 'community thing'. In a very troubling way, Killybegs has been 'left behind' by its offshore fishing fleet.<sup>10</sup> Given the importance, instability, exclusivity and increasing absence of the industry in the local landscape, it is not surprising that Killybegs often fails to measure up to young people's (albeit idealized) notions of what a 'community' *should be*. Interestingly, it is often through young people's contested tropes of 'no community' in Killybegs that we see evidence of 'community-ness' including: the centrality of family,



a combination of intimacy and rivalry, and a proliferation of gossip, disputes and social control tactics (Peace 2001:123).

I can not close this discussion of place and identity without recognizing contemporary youth as the vanguard of global consumer culture. Contemporary youth are held up as the 'new global generation' whose identities are increasingly linked more to homogenizing consumption trends in the global cultural economy than localities (see for example Tully 1994; see also Matthews *et al.* 1998). Killybegs youth are no exception and my intention here is not to argue against the influential role of transnational and technological flows in contemporary youth identities. Rather, I am suggesting, as others before me have, that the influx of mobile phones, MTV, iPods, the worldwide web, and other novelties of 'late modernity's' placeless times (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991) have not rendered place meaningless in young people's lives and identities (see Kjeldgaard 2003). Whether felt and figured positively or negatively, as centre or periphery, local or global, urban or rural, rich or poor, place remains suffused with meanings.

Rob Shields (1991:199) contends that 'places or regions mean something only in relation to other places as a constellation of meanings'. In this paper I have highlighted some of the ways in which local youth sense and situate themselves, subjectively and self-consciously within and against the shifting and multi-layered landscapes of place, selectively drawing on values associated with places to construct meanings of the self (Ruddick 1998:345). I have tried to show that this constellation is always 'in the make' and should never be taken for granted, particularly in the context of a contemporary rural Irish fishing community.

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## Notes

- 1 I initially intended to target youth between the ages of eighteen and twenty-eight for the interview process. Of the thirty-eight young people from the locality interviewed for this project, all but four were between these ages. The remaining four participants were all in their early thirties. Interview participants included twenty-one males and seventeen females.
- 2 Seventy-five percent of Donegal's total population lives in Aggregate Rural Areas (areas in which the residing population is less than 1,500 inhabitants) (CSO 2006). Additionally, the county struggles with the highest unemployment and age dependency rate in the country as well as the lowest level of disposable income and the least educated adult population (Donegal Baseline 2007).
- 3 See for example: 'Netting the Millions' in *Ireland on Sunday*, June 14, 1998.
- 4 This influx helps to explain why County Donegal has the highest proportion of fishermen per total population in the State. For example, between 1996 and 1998, the proportion of fishermen in County Donegal as a percentage of the total population figured at 0.52 percent (compared to the State figure of 0.08 percent) (Marine Institute 2000:10).
- 5 See for example: 'Killybegs Under Scrutiny, Again!' in *The Donegal Post*, July 7, 2007; 'Killybegs Fishermen to Face Fraud Charges' in *The Irish Mail*, October 29, 2006; 'Fishery Officers Get Court Order to Inspect Killybegs Plant' in *The Irish Times*, date unknown; 'Gardai Raid Fishermen's Homes Whilst Drug Smugglers Run Rampant' in *The Marine Times*, August 2007
- 6 See for example: 'Emigration Only Option for Young People in Killybegs' in *Donegal Democrat*, January 18, 2007. The allegations have also incited an intense wave of fisheries regulations and restrictions, including the insertion of fisheries offenses in the 2007 Criminal Justice Bill. The provision means that fisheries offenses in Ireland are now handled as criminal offenses.
- 7 See 'Emigration Only Option for Young People in Killybegs' in *Donegal Democrat*, January 18, 2007
- 8 It is not uncommon for Killybegs people to speak of 'In Through' as one community, however Karen's more careful assessment – 'Well, I wouldn't see a difference between Carrick or Kilcar but they probably would' – is exactly right (see for example Taylor 1981, 1987). Also, the tendency for Killybegs youth to turn towards 'In Through' in discourse of community needs to be reference framed with a variable range of familiarity in mind. Although all Killybegs youth are acquainted with the nearby communities, this is to varying degrees of intimacy, depending in part on family ties and friendships which extend 'In Through'. Here I am not questioning the sense of community in surrounding towns and villages, only drawing attention to a 'distance' which may be critical in the perceptions Killybegs youth have.
- 9 County Donegal is home to the largest Gaeltacht (Irish speaking) district in Ireland.
- 10 See 'The Crisis in World and European Fish Stocks: Consequences for the Fishing Sectors and Local Livelihoods in West Africa' by O'Riordan, September 21, 2002; see also 'Monster Ships are Fast, Huge-and Irish' by Roddy, 2002. Four Killybegs-based trawlers recently applied for licenses to fish in the international waters off of the Chilean coast. Killybegs trawler owners are also involved in other overseas fishing opportunities and business ventures in countries such as Mauritania, Morocco and the United States.

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