LOCAL BELONGING, IDENTITIES AND SENSE OF PLACE IN CONTEMPORARY IRELAND

Tom Inglis

LOCAL BELONGING, IDENTITIES AND SENSE OF PLACE IN CONTEMPORARY IRELAND

Tom Inglis

No. 4 in the Discussion Series: *Politics and Identity*

Institute for British-Irish Studies
University College Dublin

IBIS Discussion Paper
No. 4

ABSTRACT

LOCAL BELONGING, IDENTITIES AND SENSE OF PLACE IN CONTEMPORARY IRELAND

What importance does identity with place have in the ongoing construction and redevelopment of personal and social identities? This paper follows on from recent research which suggests that in an increasingly geographically mobile and globalised societies like Ireland, a sense of place is still a strong marker of identity and central to people's knowledge and understanding of themselves and others. Combining findings quantitative findings from the International Social Survey Project with qualitative findings from a qualitative study of Contemporary Irish Identities, I show that not only is identity with place of living still very strong, but that it is deep and complex and enmeshed with a sense of belonging to the place where people grew up, the wider county and the nation.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Tom Inglis is a professor in the School of Sociology in University College Dublin and author of Truth, Power and Lies: Irish Society and The Case of the Kerry Babies (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2003) and Global Ireland: Same Difference (New York: Routledge, 2008). He was co-leader of the Changing Irish Identities project within the Identity, Diversity, Citizenship research programme at the Geary Institute, University College Dublin, 2003-5. His main areas of research are identity, religion, cultural globalisation and secularisation.

LOCAL BELONGING, IDENTITIES AND SENSE OF PLACE IN CONTEMPORARY IRELAND

Introduction

The question of what it means to identify with and have a sense of belonging to a particular place or locality has greater significance in an increasingly globalised world (Agier 2001; Savage *et al* 2005; Tilley 2006). Ever increasing numbers of people think and operate globally, across multiple time-zones and spaces. Both physically and cognitively, time and space are no longer bound by place (Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1996). The trend seems inexorable: the more the local becomes penetrated by global flows, the more people move around the world, the more family and community will become 'disembedded' (Giddens 1991: 146). The obvious consequence of globalisation and increased mobility would seem to be less identification with and attachment to the local. Place becomes more like a perch than a cage. Beck (1992: 97) claimed that traditional forms of community beyond the family were beginning to disappear and that globalisation may lead to the destruction of local communities (2000:57).

And yet there is the evidence from research in Britain and Ireland that identification with place has not declined (Furlong and Cartmel 1997; O'Connor 2008; Savage *et al* 2005). People may move around the world, but they still strongly identify with and remain attached to the place in which they grew up (Appadurai 1996; Flusty 2004; Hannerz 1996). 'Blow-ins' often develop a strong attachment, an 'elective belonging', to the place into which they have moved (Savage *et al* 2005: 29). Indeed, increased attachment to the local, the particular, the different, is often an equal and opposite reaction to increased globalisation and sameness (Flusty 2004; Inglis 2008; Robertson 1992).

The issues which need to be addressed are, therefore, quite simple. In a increasingly mobile, globalised world, to what extent do individuals still identify themselves with a place or a number of places? This could be the village, town, city or country in which they were brought up or where they live now. It could be a favourite holiday resort. Moreover, when we talk about identifying with a place is it the geographical location or the people or, again, a mixture of both. What is the nature of the identification with people in a place? Is it more imaginary than real? Can we include the family home as a place? How does this micro form of identity link into people identifying themselves with Ireland and with being Irish? How significant is place in people's knowledge and understanding of themselves and how they describe themselves to others? Does place still play a significant role in creating and maintaining an ongoing sense of self in an increasing liquid world (Bauman 2000)? Does place remain the primary 'form-of-life frame' which acts as a filter for global cultural flows (Hannerz 1996: 73)? I do not intend to address all these issues in this paper, but I raise the questions as a mechanism of raising awareness of the importance of identity with place.

For a long time, place and belonging in Ireland were associated with studies of relatively enclosed, homogeneous, rural communities. In such a world, people were seen and saw themselves as belonging to extended families from particular parishes and smaller divisions called 'townlands' (Arensberg and Kimball 1968; Peace 2001).   Not only does this lead to fine distinctions, but also a dynamic between, on the one hand, people identifying with a place and, on the other, being labelled as from a certain place (Jenkins 2004: 72–6). Ronald Regan may have become President of the United States but for many people in County Tipperary he was still one of the Regans from Ballyporeen. What was often deemed to be essential about them – by themselves and others – what made them different, was the family and village from which they came. There were regular reminders in everyday life that this identification was central to an understanding of who they were.

In this paper, I follow the argument that the global can never be understood except in the way in which it is manifested locally (Beck 2002; Savage *et al.* 2005). In the first few years of the twentieth century, Ireland was categorised as the most globalised society in the world (Inglis 2008: 16–17). What relevance has place and the local in such society? I begin by making some suggestions about central themes in the conceptualisation of place. I argue that identification with place involves some form of categorisation, of notions of members and non-members, insiders and outsiders, or what are called in Ireland locals and 'blow-ins'. Secondly, categorisation with place is a form of social labelling as much as identification. Whether people from Ireland identify with being Irish, there are seen to have shared social traits (Beck 2002; Inglis 2008; Savage *et al* 2005). The same holds for cities, suburban areas, counties and even parishes. Thirdly, we need to investigate the link between these 'imagined' social traits and the existence of a particular habitus which is maintained through regular rituals or practices. What are the practices through which a collective consciousness of place is maintained? To help answer these questions I will examine some responses that emerged in a recent study of identity in Ireland. I am particularly interested in the way participants referred to and talked about their sense of identifying with and belonging to place. Do Irish people have a strong sense of home, a specifically defined place to which they will always feel attached, or has the sense of home changed to wherever people 'hang their hat'? Ireland is perhaps a good place to study these issues as it has been traditionally characterised as a slow-moving, rural society based on 'cosy homesteads'. But I will begin by looking at the renewed interest in place, and issues involved in conceptualising and understanding what it means today. I will then look at some at some findings from a study of identity by carried out by ISSP (International Social Survey Project) in 2002 which reveal the relative importance of identity with place with other social and personal identities.

Renewed Interest in Place

The heyday of community and neighbourhood research seems to have been during the 1950s and 1960s (Crow 2002). The spread of industrialisation, suburbanisation, bureaucratisation were seen as part of the development of 'mass society' which would inevitably lead to the eclipse of community life

(Stein 1960). Many community studies focused on the decline of rural and urban communities due to increased migration. There was an emphasis on studying relations between the established members of the community and outsiders or blow-ins (Strathern 1981; Edwards 2000; Crow and Allen 1994). Elias and Scotson (1994) found that increased functional interdependence meant that individuals in local communities were less dependent on local social networks. Rex and Moore (1967) emphasised how racial differences led to the notion of community meaning different things to different people and that just because people lived in the same locality, they did not necessarily constitute a community.

This difference between locals and blow-ins has been taken up by Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2005) in their study of four suburban areas of Manchester. They found that blow-ins from other parts of Manchester and the surrounding region were more likely to feel that they belonged to the suburban area than those who were brought up in the particular area (2005:47). They argued that while the level of attachment that emerges from feelings of belonging vary, they revolve around a shared familiarity and disposition – similar to Bourdieu's concept of habitus. However, the sense of belonging had more to do with a commitment to the area than having been brought up in it and any claims to historical roots. Long-standing residents were not deemed to have any more rights than any other group who lived in the suburb and, in some areas, it gave them less(2005: 44). They use Simmel's phrase of 'come today, stay tomorrow' to describe how in increasingly mobile world the local is not pitted against the global, but rather there are new cosmopolitan forms of 'elective belonging'. Residential areas 'become sites for new kinds of solidarities among people who chose to live in particular places, and whose deep concern about where they live is unlikely to be overlain with extraneous concerns arising from knowledge of others who have historically lived in the place' (2005: 53). Increasingly, they argue, individuals see places 'as sites for performing identities' and home as related to the 'reflexive processes in which they can satisfactorily account to themselves how they come to live where they do'(2005: 29) Bagnall *et al,* argue that these feelings of belonging and solidarity give rise to new ethics and forms of collective action.

Place as Cultural Classification

Following Durkheim (1976), we can say that identity with place involves interactive processes of social labelling and identification. People classify themselves and others as belonging to different counties, countries, cities, towns and villages. Initial interaction between strangers is often a process of cognitive mapping, giving and receiving clues that enable participants to gather information which helps them categorise the stranger and make her less strange. Signs are looked for and interpreted (skin colour, accent, expression), questions are asked, to gather as much information as possible.

In Ireland, one of the most common communication probes – after asking people their name – is to ask them where they are from. Place is seen as a major social indicator, of culture, class, nationality, urbanity and so forth. It is part of the multiplicity of signs that enable individuals to socially and culturally

classify each other. It establishes similarities and differences and the strength of the bonds and boundaries that could unite or divide them. Among people born in Ireland, particularly outside Dublin, the initial classification is often in terms of county. Once this is established, strangers may be asked the parish or townland to which they belong. Finally, depending on the knowledge of the questioner, information may be sought about family relations, neighbours and friends.

But, as well as being a social label and cultural indicator, place is also often about a sense of bonding and belonging. It is about feeling at home with others, that they are similar, that there are shared understandings, dispositions and ways of being in the world – what Bourdieu referred to as habitus (1990). This sense of belonging, of being at home, is obviously strongly associated with family and community. It is perhaps mostly associated with small groups that revolve around regular face-to-face interactions. The question, then, is whether in a more highly mobile, urbanised and globalised Ireland, in which geographical mobility has increased, there is the same level or sense of belonging to a suburb, town or city as there is to a rural place. This raises questions of the differences in bonding and belonging between cosmopolitans and locals (Inglis 2008: 195–248).

Changing Ireland

The salience of place varies between two imaginations. At one extreme, place conjures up small intimate geographical communities – typically villages – into which people were born and reared and to which they feel they belong and are part of, even though they no longer live there. This imagination has been fostered by recent memoirs such as McGahern's (2005) At the other more detached extreme, place is seen in terms of people gathered together in a particular location, territory and space which creates particular forms of social dependence and interaction (Tovey 1985). This form of imagination is linked to a conceptualisation of modernisation and urbanisation involving a decline of traditional communities characterised by regular intimate, emotional interactions and attachments and a move towards relations of cooperation that are practical but wider, shallower, less intimate and less emotional.

Irish society and culture are globalising rapidly. The flow of people in and out of the country increases every year. Villages, towns and cities are being transformed through increased population and the influx of migrants. Twenty years ago, Ireland used to be a homogeneous place in which over 90 per cent of the people were not just born in Ireland, but were white, Catholic and English-speaking. There were fine differences made between people based on the parish, the village and the town in which they lived and to which they felt they belonged (Peace 2002). People have become more mobile. They have greater access to transport and systems of communication. They are no longer bound as much to place. Their family, friends, neighbours and workmates may not live in the same area. People move in and out locations, to set up home, go to work, school, shopping, on holidays, and to visit family. They are 'on the run'. In this context of globalised flows what does it mean to be in a space, place, location, area, community? How has the sense of place changed during the Celtic Tiger? More importantly perhaps, to what extent to

people see themselves as belonging to a place, how do they interpret and make sense of this belonging? Is Beck (1992) correct? Have towns and suburbs in Ireland become imagined communities (Anderson 1991)?

Or have they become places with which people identify and to which they have a sense of belonging? In this context, what do people mean when they say they are from a particular area village, town, city or county? What is the sense and level of identity, belonging and attachment? Is there a strong sense of identification, bonding and belonging?

There has been some important research on place and sense of belonging in Ireland, particularly the New Urban Living study of four Dublin suburbs conducted by Corcoran and her colleagues (Corcoran 2000, 2002, 2005: Corcoran *et al* 2003, 2007). In their analysis of Ratoath – one of the four locations studied – Corcoran and her colleagues concluded that respondents had a strong sense of identification with where they lived. 'Spatial community fosters a sense of community which is real and vibrant (2003: 157). In a more recent analysis of all four areas (Lucan Esker, Leixlip, Mullingar and Ratoath), they found a distinct social 'embeddedness' and 'connectedness'. Residents felt positive about where they lived. The personal networks of social support were predominantly local and were mobilised among families in everyday social life. They found evidence of a strong structure of feeling of attachment in these suburbs often demonstrated by references to the local character and heritage of the area. They also found evidence of Savage *et al's* (2005) 'elective belonging'; those residents who felt most at home in these suburbs were those that made a deliberate decision to 'make a go' of living there.

Comparative Importance

Before examining how Irish people refer to and talk about their identity with the place in which they live, it is useful to locate Irish people's level of identity with place in terms of other identities and see how this compares with some other European countries. In the 2002/2003 International Social Survey Project (ISSP), respondents were asked to how close they felt to their town or city, their county and their country. I compared the responses from respondents in Ireland with those from Great Britain, France and Spain – these were chosen for comparative purposes and not for any specific reason. The level of identification with town-city, county and country was very high in all four countries, but there were important variations (Table 1). In Spain, the proportion (97 per cent) who felt close or very close to their town-city, was much higher than for respondents from Ireland and Great Britain (both 81 per cent) and France (75 per cent). The level of identification with county was slightly lower in Spain (95 per cent) and Britain (75 per cent) and slightly higher in France (77 per cent) and Ireland (85 per cent). However, national identity is high in all four countries with over 90 per cent of respondents in Ireland, Spain and France feeling close to their country.

Table 1: How Close Respondent Feels to Places (ISSP 2003)				
		Town / City	County	Country
Ireland	Very close / close	81%	85%	92%
	Not very close / Not close at all	19%	15%	8%
Great Britain	Very close / close	81%	75%	80%
	Not very close / Not close at all	20%	25%	20%
France	Very close / close	75%	77%	90%
	Not very close / Not close at all	25%	23%	10%
Spain	Very close / close	97%	95%	91%
	Not very close / Not close at all	3%	5%	9%

But how does identification with place compare with other identities. Respondents were given a number of pre-selected identities – including family or marital status, nationality, gender, religion, and part of the country in which they lived – and asked to rank them in terms of importance. In all four countries examined, very few respondents ranked the part of the country in which they lived as their most important identity. It was only 2 per cent in Britain, 3 per cent in Spain, 5 per cent in Ireland, and 6 per cent in France. Local place ranked significantly lower than national identity particularly in Ireland (17 per cent) and France (15 per cent). Irish respondents ranked national identity as more important than occupation (17 per cent), gender (10 per cent), and religion (8 per cent).

However, when respondents chose which identity was second most important to them, the part of the country in which they lived increased significantly: in Ireland it more than doubled at 10 per cent. When it came to deciding what was their third most important identity, more Irish respondents (19 per cent) chose part of the country in which they lived than any of the identities offered. This suggests that for Irish people, after family, identity with the place is almost as significant as any other identity, including religion and nationality. What is also obvious, particularly when it comes to second and third choices, identity with place is as strong in Ireland as it is in Britain, France and Spain and that in all countries, it is as significant as national and religious identity.

Table 2: Ranking of Groups Respondent Considered Important in terms of self-description (ISSP 2003)						
		Family / Marital Status	Nationality	Occupation	Gender	Religion	Part of country you live in
Ireland	Most Important	17%	15%	10%	8%	4%	5%
	2nd Most Important	18%	17%	11%	12%	4%	10%
	3rd Most Important	16%	14%	9%	11%	5%	19%
Great Britain	Most Important	9%	12%	10%	3%	2%	2%
	2nd Most Important	14%	24%	15%	5%	2%	9%
	3rd Most Important	17%	18%	12%	5%	4%	14%
France	Most Important	15%	14%	20%	4%	7%	6%
	2nd Most Important	14%	16%	11%	4%	5%	10%
	3rd Most Important	13%	16%	8%	5%	7%	13%
Spain	Most Important	7%	21%	14%	2%	3%	3%
	2nd Most Important	7%	13%	17%	3%	7%	7%
	3rd Most Important	8%	12%	11%	3%	5%	12%

While the results from ISSP tell us much about the relative importance of identity with place, they do not give a thick description of what place means to people. We do not get an understanding of how they conceptualise and talk about place, and the way in which they see and understand place, how it integrates into their general disposition or habitus. We gain some insight into these issues from a recent study of identity in Ireland.

The Study

In 2003, researchers at the Geary Institute in University College Dublin began a study of Identity, Diversity and Citizenship in Ireland. This included an empirical study of Contemporary Irish Identities. The study aim conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with 110 people from three different places – a

suburb of Dublin (referred to as 'Firtown'), a large town in Ireland ('Oldford') and a town in Northern Ireland (not referred to in this paper) – about social and personal identities. We were interested in how people saw and understood themselves. We used a semi-structured questionnaire that began with open-ended questions about how they would describe themselves. These descriptions and identities were then explored in more detail. If respondents did not mention certain identities and issues, such as nationality and religion, they were probed about these later in the interview.

One of the advantages of an open-ended, qualitative approach to social research is that it can bring to the surface issues and processes that were not identified at the outset as being significant. If this had been a quantitative study we would perhaps have hypothesised that due to increased mobility and the decline of traditional geographically bound community, a sense of place would not be significant. However, when respondents were simply asked at the beginning of the interview to 'Tell me about yourself', there were numerous references to the place in which they reared and in which they now lived. These were often combined with a strong identification with being Irish.

Twenty-eight interviews were conducted in Firtown and 56 in Oldford. Firtown is a large sprawling suburb of Dublin that grew up in the 1970s; Oldford is a large town 30 miles from the city which, in recent years, has experienced significant population growth and become a major satellite town of Dublin with a large number of commuters. The interviews, which generally lasted an hour or more, were conducted by Dr. Theresa O'Keefe mostly in people's own homes or place of work.

I looked at the interviews to discover if there the same level of attachment to place and elective belonging found by Savage and his colleagues in the suburbs of Manchester and by Corcoran and her colleagues in the suburbs of Dublin. But I also found a high level of identity with the place in which people had grown up, and with Ireland generally. The responses of the participants revealed the complex way in which people think about place, the fine differences they make about local places, and how this is interwoven with a sense of Ireland being home.

Local Attachment

Both Firtown and Oldford have undergone rapid expansion over the last twenty years. Both have seen a dramatic increase in population and new housing. And yet both have a sizeable population of people who were born and reared in the area. There is, among the established residents, a strong sense of attachment and belonging.

When Joan, a elderly life-long resident, was asked if she considered herself a Oldford person, she responded effusively: 'Oh definitely'. Her sense of identity and belonging was very strong. She said she was: 'Very proud, I love it …a lovely town and I mean (at) my age you know all the people. You walk over High Street and you're meeting all your own age group, you know. And we

grew up together and as I say we reared our families together and we all know each other' (Oldford 33).

But the sense of local attachment was equally strong among young residents of the Dublin suburb Firtown. Sheila has been living in Firtown most of her life.

> I was brought up (here). We're living in Firtown, the last twenty-five years, since I was four. I love Firtown. I'd never move outside Firtown. Over the years the changes that happened in Firtown is absolutely huge like construction wise …When we first moved up here there was absolutely nothing. There was an awful lot of poverty …nobody had money but everybody was in the same boat like you know (Firtown 24).

Elective Belonging

But what about blow-ins? Is there any evidence to support Savage *et al* and Corcoran *et al*'s findings that blow-ins often have as much, if not more, identity with their area of residence which stems from a mutual interest in people coming together and making a go of community life.
Sarah has been living in Oldford for the past ten years. Her sense of belonging comes from going to Mass and her children attending the local school.

> I'm a long time here now. I kind of blended in with it and gotten used to it so. And like anyone that'd ask my 'where you're from' the first word out of your mouth's going to be 'well I'm from Oldford (Oldford 30).

Derek is a Protestant, originally from Northern Ireland, who worked in Zambia and South Africa, and moved to Oldford in 1971. He insisted that both he and his wife saw themselves as Oldford people.

> We are Oldford people, I mean this is home to us now, this is where the children grew up and as Pat says, we've been too long away from the North. … It's very nice and we have excellent neighbours and we have no reason to move away. And the fact that we're and have been Protestants in which is largely as you know a Roman Catholic country hasn't mattered at all in fact I think if the truth were told it has been an advantage rather than a disadvantage (Oldford 51).

The same sense of elective belonging is evident in Firtown. Joanne is about 50 years old and originally from Limerick. She has been living in Firtown since 1969.

> One of my immediate next door neighbours is from Oldford … There's Welsh people there. There's Dublin people. There's one woman her family is from Fermanagh. So there's quite a gathering, a mix on the road you know. Yes, I suppose I would say, people ask me where am I from, I'd say Firtown and they'd say to me 'but you don't have a Dublin accent so where are you originally from' you know so. But … I'd

> always say like there's such a mix of accents in Firtown …I would consider Firtown my home now (Firtown 3)

Michelle echoes this sense of elective belonging and draws a distinction between the sense of belonging and attachment in her native village and in Firtown.

> Where I come from down in the country, it was a small village, and possibly because I grew up there too, it was a fairly close-knit community. Now that was good and bad. You know, in ways it was great that you kind of knew everybody and everybody knew you but it was also bad in the sense that people could be very nosy. I find in Firtown, with the place I'm living, people will rally around if you're in trouble. They will come to your assistance like I'd go to their assistance. I still don't think it has developed an actual character of its own. There is nothing there that makes Firtown unique to Firtown (Firtown 5).

Deep Rooted Belonging

Elective belonging has to be put within the context of a long-term attachment to place of upbringing. Attachment to place of upbringing can often be stronger to place of residence. This sense of belonging can be to a village, town, county or city. It arises primarily for those who have migrated. The question then is how strong is the sense of belonging of the area in which one was born and reared. Does it transcend elective belonging?

Jack has been living in Oldford for 19 years. He talked about how he was still treated as outsider. He mentioned how he would often go down at the end of the evening to the local shop in his area and people would be gathered around talking and while he feels included in the banter, he is still seen as a 'runner-in'. He feels that Firtown people seem to stick together and while 'runners-in' are accepted they are not seen as 100 per cent part of the community. The unintended consequence of this may be a stronger identification with his county.

> No, because to be honest my roots are in Clare and I have often thought that … I would have no problem when my children are able for to look after themselves, going back to Clare. Not to where I was born which was on the west coast (mentions a seaside town) but more east Clare. I am not a (Oldford person) as you would term it (Oldford 25).

> I was born in Cork and I … figured enough about myself at this stage that I'm part of that. I've a lot of the characteristics that Cork people have. We talk a lot; we're very probably opinionated (Oldford 49).

On the other hand, a respondent from the same county in which Oldford is located, saw himself as belonging not so much to Oldford or the county, put the little village in which he was reared.

> I suppose I was reared in Ballybow which would be the village out there, I don't actually consider – isn't that strange, that's a very good question – I don't actually consider myself Oldford person. I would still I suppose I would be from Ballybow. I've lived in Oldford most of my adult life… (Oldford 50).

National Belonging

As well as place of living and upbringing, there is also a sense of place and belonging that comes from being from being Irish. At different times and in different contexts, people will identify with being from Ireland. Most of the respondents, either voluntarily or when prompted, declared that they were Irish and, often, that they were proud of it. Much of this relates to generations of family being from Ireland. 'My whole family is and their family and family for generations you know are all from, we're all Irish so (Firtown 17). Others related it to political identity (independence) and national cultural identity (language, literature, sport, music, dancing, humour) and, more generally, a sense of difference from other nationalities. But sometimes this sense of belonging while very strong, was also vague.

> Oh, in England, Ireland was my home … . Ireland was part of me, part of my husband as well, you know what I mean so you always consider yourself as Irish (Firtown 21).

> Well it's my identity, it's in my psyche, it's everything that I am. So it's being Irish. Em, yes, I like being Irish (Oldford 48).

> I love Ireland, I have to tell you I am died in the wool Irish and I absolutely love it and I love everything about Ireland, I love even the fact that we are so insincere at times, and the way we're sentimental but we would walk across you if we needed to you know, all these things. … (Oldford 19)

What we have found, then, is a melange of identities and senses of belonging. Deep rooted belonging is mixed with elective belonging and both come together with a general sense of belonging to Ireland. For some, identification with where they were brought up is stronger than where they are living now. But again this varies. Some have a sense of belonging to a particular county rather than to a particular area within it and others have a general sense of belonging to Ireland rather than any particular area. Obviously what is crucial to understanding identity with place is which forms of identification are stronger for some people and when, where and why these identifications are manifested and how they are performed.

Although it would require a completely different study to explore the complicated nature of place identity manifestations and performances, we can, by looking at how one person talks about sense of place, build up a picture of the complexity of the problem.

Mary had been living in Firtown for fifteen years. When asked if she would consider herself a Dubliner, she immediately declared herself as having a deep rooted belonging to County Wexford. 'No. I'd consider myself a Wexford person because that's where I was born and reared like.' But then she mentions the particular town, Blackwater, in which she grew up. So for her place identity is with the County generally and, in particular, with Blackwater. However, although she sees herself as being from Blackwater she would not go back there. 'I wouldn't live back in Blackwater again. No, I wouldn't. I'm happy where I am.'

So although Mary has developed a sense of belonging to Firtown, she identifies herself as Wexford woman and, particularly a Blackwater person. She seems to have a strong, almost essential, sense of being from Blackwater, as if it was a form of indelible mark that was left on her. It forms a boundary between her and other people. Mary made a distinction between people from Blackwater and other towns in County Wexford.

> When I was growing up now, there was a difference between Blackwater' and Moretown people. Moretown is 4 miles away…. There was a hatred there from Blackwater to Moretown … there was a huge difference in people you know and then in Ballybay which was maybe about 15 miles away … there's a huge difference. They were very country (Firtown 23).

Having made such fine distinctions, Mary then went on to make further distinctions between people from Blackwater and Kildore. The Blackwater people turned off the Kildore people 'because the fellas were coming in and taking the 'Blackwater women. So there was rivalry there as well' (Firtown 23). What we learn from Mary is that sense of belonging is variable and relational. Some people are rooted to their area of residence, others are rooted to their county of origin, and others to the particular town and village in which they were reared.

Conclusion

Understanding identity is a tricky business. People can seem rooted to certain forms of identity and yet, at the same time, flit between them like a bee visiting different plants. Identities are a form of cultural took-kit that people use to construct an image and understanding of themselves. This exploratory study has tried to shine a light and the way people living in contemporary Ireland identify with place. What we have revealed is a complex web. Results from the International Social Survey Project (ISSP) reveal a strong identification with place. The results from the study of Contemporary Irish Identities suggests that there is definite evidence of elective belonging, identification with place may vary between established and outsiders (blow-ins). To complicate matters further, many people also have a strong sense of identity not just with the village and county in which they grew up, but with Ireland as a whole. Place identity may, then, be best understood as a form of interlocking, overlapping forms of bonding and belonging. It is quite obvious from these

interviews that, despite globalisation and the world increasingly becoming one place, identity with local place is still very strong. What is not clear of course is how this identity with place relates with other identities and how it is declared and performed in different contexts.

What is also not clear is whether the level of identification with place and the level of emotional attachment was higher in more traditional communities which were more bounded and interdependent. Certainly, the increased flow of people around the world through migration, work and travel, combined with the increasing ease to maintain social bonds through information technology, has enabled people to stay connected with groups and places with whom they feel they belong (Appadurai 1996). In an increasingly mobile, fluid, cosmopolitan, globalised world it may be anathema for people to see and identify themselves being from a particular place, as if it somehow represented their true self, beyond the identities of place that they have picked up over the years. It would seem perhaps obvious that with globalisation and a decline in local social, political and economic interaction that attachment to place would become multiple, diffuse and shallow. But the results of the Contemporary Irish Identities study suggest otherwise. It may be that increased globalisation has had the unintended consequence of binding people to the particular place in which they reside or grew up.

References

Abrams, P. 1984 'Introduction' pp. 5–19 in P. Abrams and R. Brown (eds) *UK Society: Work, Urbanism and Inequality.* London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson

Agier, M. 2001 'Identity Troubles in Times of Globalization' *Mana* 7.2 7–33

Anderson, Benedict 1991 *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* Revised Edition .London: Verso

Appadurai, Arjun 1996 *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

Arensberg, Conrad and Solon Kimball 1968 *Family and Community in Ireland.* 2nd ed. Cambridge [Mass.]: Harvard University Press

Bauman, Zgmunt 2000 *Liquid Modernity.* Cambridge: Polity

Beck, Ulrich 1992 *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity.* London: Sage

Beck, Ulrich 2000 *What is Globalization?* Cambridge: Polity

Beck, U. 2002 'The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies' *Theory, Culture and Society.* 19 (1–2): 17–44

Bourdieu, Pierre 1990 *The Logic of Practice.* Cambridge: Polity

Corcoran, M. 2000 'Mall City' pp. .. in M. Peillon and E. Slater (eds) *Memories of the Present.* Dublin: IPA

Corcoran, M. 2002 'Place attachment and community sentiment: A European case study' *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* 11.1:

Corcoran, M. 2005 'Finding your place: forging an identity and sense of belonging in suburban communities' International symposium on Civic and Social Life in the Suburbs, NUI Maynooth

Corcoran, Mary, Jane Gray and Michel Peillon 2003. 'Local Sentiment and Sense of Place in a New Suburban Community' pp. 146–59 in M. Breen, E. Conway and B. McMillan (eds) *Technology and Transcendence.* Dublin: Columba Press

Corcoran, Mary, Jane Gray and Michel Peillon 2007 'Ties that Bind? The Social Fabric of Daily Life in New Suburbs' in T. Fahey *et al.* (eds) *The Best of Times?* The Social Impact of the Celtic Tiger. Dublin: IPA (forthcoming)

Crow, G. 2002 'Community Studies: Fifty Years of Theorisation' Sociological Research Online 7.3. http://www.socresonline.org.uk/7/3/crow.html

Crow, G. and G. Allan 1994 *Community Life: An introduction to local social relations.* Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf

Durkheim, Emile 1976 *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, London: George Allen & Unwin

Edwards, Jeanette 2000 *Born and Bred*. Oxford: Clarendon

Elias, Norbert and John Scotson 1994 *The Established and the Outsiders: A Sociological Enquiry into Community Problems*. London: Sage

Flusty, Steven 2004 *De-Coca-Colinization: Making the Globe from the Inside Out.* London: Routledge

Furlong, A. and F. Cartmel 1997 *Young People and Social Change*. Buckingham: Open University Press

Giddens, Anthony 1991 *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity

Hannerz, Ulf 1996 *Transnational Connections: Cultures, Peoples, Places*. London: Routledge

Jenkins, Richard 2004 *Social Identity*. 2nd ed. London; Routledge

McGahern, John 2005 *Memoir.* London: Faber and Faber,

O'Carroll, J. P. 1985 'Community Programme and the Traditional View of Community' *Social Studies*. 8.3/4: 137–48

O'Connor, Pat 2008 *Irish Children and Teenagers in a Changing World.* Manchester: Manchester University Press

Peace, Adrian 2001 *A World of Fine Difference*: the social architecture of a modern Irish village. Dublin: University College Dublin Press

Rex, John and Robert Moore 1967 *Race, Community and Conflict: A study of Sparkbrook.* London: Oxford University Press

Robertson, Roland 1992 *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*. London: Sage

Savage, Mike, Gaynor Bagnall and Brian Longhurst 2005 *Globalization & Belonging*. London: Sage

Stein, Maurice 1960 *The Decline of Community: an interpretation of American Studies*. Princeton [N.J.]: Princeton University Press

Strathern, Maurice 1981 *Kinship at the Core: An Anthropology of Elmdon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Tilley, C. 2006 'Introduction: Identity, Place, Landscape and Heritage' *Journal of Material Culture* 11.1/2 7–32

Tovey, H. 1985 '"Local Community"'; In Defence of a Much-Criticised Concept *Social Studies.* 8.3/4: 149–64

Weafer, J. 1985 'Urban Community – Dead or Alive' *Social Studies.* 8.3/4:179–87