

# **“It’s not something I’m proud of but it’s...just how I feel”: Local surfer perspectives of Localism**

This article focuses on one of the defining concepts of modern surfing; localism. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, the data for this study were collected using participant observation, field note taking and interviews between 2008 and 2009 with a significant population of *local surfers* in a village location in Cornwall, South West of England, UK. Developing Bennett’s (2004) definition of localism, data suggested a benign form of localism in this setting and in conveying this finding we make a number of associated observations. First, how a process of Othering led to the construction of Established insiders based on location, rather than gender. Second, how these Established insider surfers saw the need to protect their community and its way of life from Outsiders. Third, how benign localism was exacerbated by overcrowding and lastly, how these local surfers’ experiences of localism served to make them aware of their becoming Outsiders in other surfing localities and modifying their behaviour accordingly. The paper concludes by suggesting that debates about localism in surfing need to view the concept as continuum of attitudes and behaviours ranging from the benign to the heavy and that attention needs paying to the way localism varies between contexts as well as the ways in which localism may share social antecedents. Lastly, we highlight the utility of viewing the beach and waves as liminal spaces that give rise to *communitas* for those who surf it together regularly.

Keywords: local surfer, localism, community, space, identity, liminality, Cornwall

## **Word Count**

6,171

## **Introduction**

“Localism is one of the defining concepts of modern surfing” (Scott, 2003: web site) and is seen by some as “the dark side of surfing” (Olivier, 2010:1224). Despite localism becoming a frequent topic of commercially popular mediums such as News media, surfing books (Fitzjones et al., 1998; and Wade, 2007), magazines and online forums, it remains a relatively under-explored topic in academic research (notable exceptions include Lanagan, 2003; Bennett, 2004; Booth, 2004; Sweeney, 2005; Waitt, 2008 and Olivier, 2010). Therefore, further academic research into localism is timely in order to explore the phenomenon in greater detail. This paper draws on ethnographic and interview data collected between 2008 and 2009 to explore the meanings of localism in one village context in the South West of England from the perspective of the local surfers who live, and surf there. This paper begins by de-constructing the idea of localism with a view considering intertwining of gender, insider, outsider relations, Othering and territory, place, and liminal social space. The methodological strategy for this study is then outlined, followed by an analysis in we illustrate a number of points in connection with the themes outlined above: First, how a process of Othering led to the construction of Established insiders based on location, rather than gender. Second, how these Established insider surfers saw the need to protect their community and its way of life from Outsiders. Third, how benign localism was exacerbated by overcrowding and lastly, how these local surfers’ experiences of localism served to make them aware of their becoming Outsiders in other surfing localities and modifying their behaviour accordingly. The paper concludes by suggesting that debates about localism in surfing need to view the concept as continuum of attitudes and behaviours ranging from the benign to the heavy and that attention needs paying to the way localism varies between contexts as well as the ways in which localism may share social antecedents. Lastly, we highlight the utility of viewing the beach and waves as liminal spaces that give rise to *communitas* for those who surf it together regularly.

## **(De) constructing localism**

According to Bennett (2004: 346) localism “is strongly ingrained into...surf psyche and culture”. Localism is simultaneously a popular and academic term, with academic definitions having evolved from studying the usage of the term in a variety of surf settings around the world. At its most basic and benign level Bennett’s (2004: 346) observations of the Australian context leads him to consider that;

Being a local means belonging to a particular beach or area of coastline where you were either born or have lived for some accepted period of time. Localism is simply a preference for what is local, and may be expressed through ideas, customs, attitudes and behaviours of the surfers in your local area.

While somewhat broad and benign, Bennett's definition provides a useful starting point to contextualise and evolve. Evers (2007:1) also writing from the Australian context comments, “beaches...are carved up through a cultural know-how of the space. This know-how, and the policing of its rules and the territory they operate in, is a process surfers call ‘localism’”. A rather more formulaic expression of localism in the US context is presented by Sweeney (2005:4) who writes: “localism=f(population, proportion of population that surfs, topography, local culture)”. Writing from the UK context Olivier (2010:1224-1225) lists possible *acts* of localism:

Localism is enacted in the following (escalating) ways: warning graffiti near the beach (for example, locals only); hostile glares in the parking lot; open oral warnings not to paddle out at the spot; having your car windows waxed (with surfboard wax) while you are in the water; broken car windows, deflated tyres, or in extreme cases having your car torched; stinkeye in the water; warnings to paddle back in to the beach; being herded out of the line-up by a group of locals; having your fins snapped off your surfboard or having the board damaged in some other way; being held underwater as a warning or as a punishment for some

transgression; being slapped; having a surfboard speared at the body or the head; being punched; and finally, being called out of the water to settle the differences on land.

Clearly, this is not an exhaustive list but it serves to provide examples of acts of what Bennett (2004: 348) describes as *heavy localism*, which he defines as; “excessive territorial behaviour that typically involves threats or intimidation towards newcomers, though more rarely can involve physical assault or property damage”. Acts of (heavy) localism are also manifested publicly through “graffiti tabs” such as the “locals only” tab illustrated by Waitt (2008:75). Surfing media can also be the site for localism where, as Booth (2004: 99) reports the example of one local surfer who publicly used surf media to warn kooks “not to step out of line, in or out of the water” at his break. Otherwise, he threatened, “I’ll be all over you” (Cherry 2000: 18, cited in Booth, 2004: 99).

While extreme (and unpleasant) forms of Localism such as these are the most publicised, we would emphasise a balanced perspective of localism. A balanced view positions localism as a continuum of values and behaviours ranging from the benign or even positive expressions of local identity to actual acts of violence towards ‘outsiders’ or their property. Moreover, localism, has contextually specific features in particular locations as well as shared features across locations. In what follows, we consider some of these aspects.

### **The Gender order and patriarchal localism**

Ford and Brown (2006:83) note that “on the surface many practitioners consider there is ‘no issue’ with gender in surfing”. However, a number of researchers have interpreted surfing as male dominated and localism as a *primarily* gendered phenomenon. Booth (2004:99) observed that in the Australian surf context although surfing appears relatively informal, (male) surfers frequently congregate in small

groups at specific local surf breaks. In this context, Booth (2004: 99) argues “local surfers bear many of the characteristics of sporting patriarchies,” which marginalise female surfing within ‘local surfing’ contexts and “jealously protect their territory against outsiders and ‘kooks’ (beginner surfers)”. Evers (2009) concurs that men still dominate surf culture, being seen as icons of it and also notes localism tends to consist of male surfers protecting their waves from others using a verbal and physical intimidation. Given the numerical dominance of men in most surfing populations, acts of localism are typically local male surfers against non-local male surfers - indicating that what is at issue here is a form of struggle over hegemonic and other forms of masculinity within surfing contexts. Wheaton (2004:17) suggests that the Gender Order so characteristic in modern Western sports plays out somewhat differently in postmodern lifestyle sports such as surfing, commenting;

Lifestyle sporting cultures represent both a re-inscription of traditional masculinities - most notably in relation to ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ as well as the *potential* for more progressive sporting identities.

Moreover, Wheaton (2004: 16) further argues that it is “misleading to view ‘sporting masculinity’...as essentialised or fixed. Rather, like other ‘traditional’ masculinities it varies over time and cultural spaces”. Indeed, since Booth’s (2004) analysis there are suggestions that women may be beginning to carve out their own place in surfing culture which goes beyond superficial change. For example, Waitt (2008) notes that while in Australia, young, white, heterosexual, able bodied males typically may use violent terminology to defend their surf breaks from outsiders and to gender their surfing spaces, the “fluid” identities of women who surf, is challenging these masculine spaces and carving out spaces for themselves. Elsewhere, Ford and Brown (2006) illustrate, that some women have been able to challenge and re-work what gendered surfing practice means and in so doing some have become iconic in

global surf culture, while others have integrated as members of local surf groups on their merits. Given these changes, and Tuan's (1977:64) provocative statement that; "we appreciate the company of our own kind," questions remain for us as to whether masculinity/maleness are actually the primary identification constituting "our own kind" for the local surfer's in every local setting, or as Lanagan (2003: 175) drawing on Maffesoli (1996) confirms, "location becomes connection".

***The Othering logic of local surfing identity: Established local surfers, Outsiders and boundaries***

A range of empirical research has focused on the insider/outsider relationship in community and sporting contexts. For example, Neal and Walters' (2008) research on the Women's Institute and Young Farmers Clubs in rural areas, found that the participant's concept of community contained notions of boundaries, insiders, outsiders, and external conflicts and struggles. In particular, they found that these two groups were so embedded in the community, that entry into them demanded prior knowledge of the groups and that outsider's often lacked the sociocultural 'maps' needed to enter the group.

Perhaps, the most influential study on insider/outsider relations has been that of Elias and Scotson's (1964) figurational work in which they studied a small middle and working class British community, "Winston Parva" and how Established and Outsider relations were manipulated to maintain class based power for the Established insiders in this figuration. As Velija (2010) confirms, Elias later used the Established/Outsider concepts developed in this study as part of the development of a broader theory of power relations balance pertaining not just to class, but also gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Subsequent research in the sociology of sport has drawn on this theoretical model and notably includes Velija and Flynn's (2010:301) work on

female jockey troubled integration in horse racing. They illustrate how the male “insider community” continued to view female jockeys “as weaker and less capable than male jockeys” and utilised this belief to maintain female jockeys’ outsider status. Velija (2012) extended this focus to consider the plight of certain female cricketers and how their Outsider status is maintained through generalised ascriptions of their sexuality and social class by the Established group of middle class heterosexual female cricketers. In the Canadian context, Lake (2012) drew upon this theory to show how in spite of Lawn Tennis Association changes to open itself up to a new and broader social membership, the established membership engaged in a range of exclusionary practices to render access and opportunities difficult for new members.

On the surface, it might seem logical that surfing localism is primarily explicable through the formation of local surfer groups into something akin to a surfing patriarchy built around the fundamental gender identity division that recognises itself as Established (as a hegemonic male/masculine patriarchy) and seeks to exclude Outsiders on this basis. However, as Booth (2004:99) concedes, “common experiences do not explain the peculiar relations and patterns of bonding in surfing.” This is an extension of Sarup’s (1996:47) postmodern view that, “though people can share cultural features” (such as the committed skilled practices of horseracing, cricket, tennis or surfing), “and have many similarities with each other” (such as the preponderance of the same gender practicing horseracing, cricket, surfing), “there are differences to consider”. Therefore, while gender issues remain, and the formulation of the (Established) Insider and Outsiders is clearly apparent and needs retaining as a categorical distinction, both aspects needs some re-alignment to be able to consider why, in situations where the insider group shares many features of the outsider group certain differences become significant. To help make this re-alignment, another concept, that of Othering, is useful. Young’s (1990:98) postmodern critique of the

modernist logic of identity is based on the premise that “any identifiable something presupposes a something else against which it stands as background, from which it is differentiated.” This view is helpful to expose the dynamic positioning of individuals in localised surfing contexts. Young (1990:84) continues that, “marking ourselves as having the same identity as one group of people, we simultaneously mark ourselves as different from others”. In spite of many similarities between local and non-local surfers the us/them identity division used to frame surfing identity relations in this manner is based on what constitutes being a *local* surfer with every other ‘differently similar’ attribute of non-local surfers being used to define them as *Outsiders*, thus constructing an Established local surfer/Outsider surfer binary. The Othering logic is a powerful antecedent stimulating localism because it provides a relatively visible, locality based boundary for identifying those surfers who belong and those surfers who do not (although as we shall see this is also problematic in practice). As Sarup (1996: 47) further stipulates, “to maintain a separate identity, one has to define oneself against the Other: this is the origin, for Lacan, of that aggression towards the Other, who threatens separateness, and thereby identity”. In surfing, localism is just such an aggression borne out of the perceived threat of the Othered identity takes many forms from the symbolic to the practical. Evers (2007) illustrates that ‘Othering’, involves a struggle over boundaries in terms of territory and Local/Outsider creates an ‘us and them’ culture in surfing comparable to that found in nationalism. Preston-Whyte’s (2002: 43) study of Durban beach space “showed that experience acquired through direct contact with the waves was communicated in social groups to become insider knowledge that enhanced the ‘We’ of a shared identity and exacerbated the perception and definition of ‘Others’ as outsiders.”

Moreover, it plays a moral function, similar to Elias’ and Scotson’s (1964) “disgraced” Outsider, in that those who are placed outside of the unity category are



'Othered' for the way in which their *collective presence* (no matter what they 'do') is a threat to practical and symbolic unity of the Established local surfers grouping; (practical, because the arrival of the 'Outsider Surfers' threatens to over-run the local break as a socio-spatial and symbolic resource because the identity-locality relationship is called into question by their presence, more on this later). Adapting slightly, Velija's (2012: 39) point, it is important to qualify that a focus on binary distinctions such as the Established local surfer/Outsider surfer helps us see how "complex power imbalances are constantly in flux", and we would add, not necessarily recognised or respected by Outsiders or indeed locals all the time. The reason for this surrounds the complexity of the core identification of binary difference embedded in the idea of *locality*, because it assumes *stable* social and symbolic boundaries, which in practice are often rather *unstable*. As Thrift, (2006:140) contends, 'there is no such thing as a boundary. All spaces are porous to a greater or lesser degree'. We address this question next.

### ***Surfing places as liminal spaces: Native place attachment and crowding***

The idea of social and symbolic boundaries also invokes concepts of territory, space and place, which is supported by Evers' (2007) interpretation of localism. Each of these are important if, unstable or porous. First, localism is commonly associated with the more restricted idea of *territory*, which connotes an area of land (or sea) under the jurisdiction of a given group. This is indicated in one local surfer's comment highlighted by Lanagan (2003) reflecting on the work of Leethal (1999: 174, cited in Lanagan, 2003);

You get people coming here to surf and they think that just 'cause they're shit-hot they can surf here. I don't think so. If you're not one of our crew you don't surf here unless we tell you to.

Territory is useful to inform on perceptions of ownership of a beach or break, however, to capture the ideas of the social/symbolic boundaries we need a closer examination of the ideas of place and space. Both beach and break are places in which Tuan's (1974) idea of *Topophilia* or love of/attachment to place remains pertinent and distinct from territory. As Laurence and Cartier (2003: 10) note, places can consist of "layers of cultural sediments that are bound, eroded and metamorphosed locally" forming a repository of meaning for residents of the place. Unlike the Outsider Surfer, it is assumed that through frequent attendance at a place, locals develop a concept of native place; "a deep wellspring of lasting memories that cannot be easily erased", (Laurence & Cartier 2003: 10). This wellspring of embodied memories and attachments seem to inform local surfers reactions when their native place is being co-habited, reinterpreted and contested by Outsider surfers. Of course, this may be unstable and problematic because Outsider surfers may also, through frequenting a place also develop their own attachments, but remain excluded, or they may see a place as merely a resource to be exploited.

Native places are also, in other ways, *spaces*. Preston Whyte (2002:139) contends that, "the issue of space and its control runs as a central thread through any attempt to understand how surfing space is constructed." In particular, the notion of spatial contestation in surfing, extends beyond the idea of ownership/attachment and includes Yi Fu Tuan's (1977) observations of the impact of crowding. While crowding is culturally varied there is a broad acceptance that it is a significant issue in surfing across the world. The presence of the Outsider surfer in surfing culture represents a very specific challenge in an everyday practical sense as the number of suitable breaks, waves and importantly *spaces on those waves are finite*, whereas the number of potential outsiders is unlimited. Such a view aligns with Shields (1992) view that the beach is a kind of liminal space or zone that is 'consumed' through leisure activities.

As Shields (2004: 46) writes, “from the viewpoint of the surfing, beaches are merely a support zone for an even more indeterminate space in the waves.” We would add that the surfable wave, is a specific *liminal zone/phase* or *space* that has potential to aid our understanding of surfing and localism. Liminality as a concept is as Bigger (2009:209) argues “both slippery and rich in potential” particularly in relation to studies surrounding community practice and identity. Agreeing with Turner (1980: 161) it is both possible and useful to ‘to extend the notion of liminality as metaphor beyond ritual to other domains of expressive cultural action’. Turner (1969: 359) writes;

The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae (threshold people) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.

Turner (1977) considered liminality and *communitas* to be interconnected elements of *anti-structure*, commenting that, “the ‘anti’ is here only used strategically and does not imply a radical negativity....when I speak of anti-structure, therefore, I really mean something positive, a generative centre,” (Turner, 1974: 272-3). Liminal spaces/phases, actions and people in liminal positions generate forms of *communitas*, which Turner (1977:96) viewed as;

“a moment in and out of time,” and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however, fleetingly, some recognition...of a generalised social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties.

The local surf-able beach/break can be seen as a liminal space that under *certain conditions can give rise to communitas*: The *primary, sensual, embodied* ‘goods’ of surfing culture open up with full intensity only for the few seconds that a surfable wave breaks; This liminal space remains open albeit at lesser intensity for the duration of surf sessions where the surf is up; and by contrast this liminal space closes when surf is not up, rendering surfing culture relatively more latent until surf is up again. The local surfing space is not just as an individualised resource for personal enjoyment by community members, but also a community resource. As a community resource this is a combined shared surfing experience with other *local* people in a *local* environment that is cherished by all present. The combination of these elements might be compared to the idea of a secular ritual through which communitas is generated that then becomes structured into community relations. From this viewpoint, localism is not about defending a territory so much as *protecting a liminal space*. Moreover, theoretically, when outsiders colonise liminal spaces/phases they do more than prevent local surfers the opportunities to catch waves, they disrupt the ritual making and remaking of a surfing community and surfing in the a community.

## **Methods**

The data collection used in this article took place between 2008 and 2009 and formed part of a broader ethnographic study which focused on better understanding the role surfing played in community life and the meanings attached to surfing practice in a small village (we call Hessiock, a pseudonym) in Cornwall with a local beach break and a prominent surfing population (in what follows, all proper nouns are replaced with pseudonyms).

(Author 1) already had access to what Hammersely and Atkinson (1995) describe as *gatekeepers* Hessiock. Data were collected data over approximately one

calendar year in order that seasonally based local surf lifestyle practices might be included. In this way, key community events, such as the Winter Cold Water Classic (pseudonym, a local community surf competition), the local community raft race (which was co-organised with the local surfing association) and informal surf sessions throughout the season were focused upon. Various local beach surf breaks, the community pub and the Hessiock Working Men's Club emerged as focal areas for observation. Assuming the role of ethnographer, in Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995:1) sense of 'researcher as instrument,' (Author 1) immersed herself in the task of,

participating, overtly or covertly, in people's lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions...collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research.

Formal interviews were solicited as soon as key community members had been identified and were familiar with the researcher. Interview participants were selected according to the objectives of a case study which "is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation" (Yin, 2009:48). Therefore, the primary criteria invoked was that the interviews engaged with people of different ages and people who had been a local surfer for varying amounts of time. A total of 29 participants were involved in this study. This participant number was reached when in the process of participant observation and interviews, names were mentioned by participants. These names then became possible participants within the study and, if relevant, were then included within the study through participant observation and/or interviews. At a point during the data collection period where no new names of possible participants were revealed it was felt that a saturation point had been reached. 19 participants were directly observed during participant observation and 16 participants

were interviewed in either individual or group formats. As some of the participants were interviewed concerning the concept of community (a concept not directly addressed within this study, but a significant element of the original project), out of the 16 participants, the voices of seven are presented in this article: (Respondent ages at the time of data collection are provided in brackets) Rachel Matthews (29), Jacob Matthews (32), Michael Howard (25), Phil Cole (51), Wes Deacon (29), Ruth Deacon (30+), Billy Reed (15), Interview duration ranged from 20 minutes (Michael Howard) to 58 minutes (Wes and Ruth Deacon).

Our data analysis strategy was to examine the *content* of the various forms of data collected and follow Hsieh and Shannon's (2005:1278) interpretation of content analysis as 'the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns'. This analytical process moved the stages of transcription of notes and interviews, to formal coding (where codes included localism, Identity construction and confirmation) and preliminary analysis, and finally to thematic organisation interpretation. Codes were generated from the theory or concept being focused upon as well as emerging findings from the data and thus were a combination of emic and etic coding approaches (Heandland and Pike, 1990). The process of bringing together the emic and the etic on occasion, led to the search for alternative conceptual explanations, such as the introduction of the notion of liminal space.

As Authors we were concerned to present a balanced view of the participant's that was neither supportive nor condemnatory of their views and practices of localism. This led to us deciding to adopt a realist tale that presents the participants voices in a way which conveys this balance recognising that, 'well-constructed, data-rich realist tales can provide compelling, detailed, and complex depictions of the social world' (Sparkes, 2002:55). As researchers we were aware the impact visible and intangible

characteristics of the researcher in the field may have on the data provided. In particular the female gender of the researcher raised interesting points around reciprocity, which we must pay attention to if we want to get good data; “thick, rich, description and in-depth intimate interviews” (Harrison *et al*, 2001:323). Harrison *et al* (2001:323) go on to state that ‘through judicious use of self-disclosure, interviews become conversations, and richer data are possible and this was a consideration within the data collection process, however visible characteristics such as gender which cannot be controlled through judicious self-disclosure did have an effect on the data collected. For example, on asking a local surfer about the lack of female surfers his response began “I don’t mean to be sexist but...” which then framed the remainder of his reply. One questions whether this response would have been the same had the researcher been male. On the other hand two of the local female surfers in this study responded well to the interview process being run by a female researcher.

### **The Hessiock local surfing community and benign localism**

The beach and its break are both physically and symbolically connected to the Hessiock village community that surrounds it. The Established local surfers in this study live either in the village or very locally to it, many have grown up here and many now children surf with their children, partners as well as with groups of friends, of course many also surf alone. Therefore, the first and most basic observation to make is in this community of local surfers gender, although demographically significant, is re-positioned as a subordinate *identification* to that of *locality and community*. Of the seven local surfers discussing localism in this paper, two are females and the age range spans 15-51. This age range is not unique here with the local community surf club membership age range being even greater than this. This kind of Established local surfer demographic stands in contrast to the work of Waitt and Warren (2008) in their

investigation in to a group of male shortboarders, in Australia, in which they observed surfers articulating their ownership over a break by performing surfing manoeuvres designed to defend ‘their’ waves. These surfing manoeuvres demonstrate the *defence* of surf breaks which Waitt (2008:75) describes as an action used by young white, heterosexual, able-bodied males to “remain snug in the gendered orthodoxy of sport spaces”. Waitt and Warren (2008:361) concluded that localism helps male surfers “dictate their gendered surfing subjectivities” with the “sensual economy of masculinity” playing a crucial role in localism. Little of evidence from our data pointed to either heavy or dominant masculinist localism of the kind witnessed in Australia by Waitt and Warren (2008) or Evers (2009) occurs in the South East Cornwall Peninsula and especially around the Hessiok community. Having said this, localism was very clearly present but, on a spectrum from heavy to benign (as in mild) it remained invariably benign in this location.

The elder of these, Phil reported that he has never seen any incidences of heavy localism along the South Cornwall peninsula describing it as “pretty laid back” (Phil, 26/08/09). Similarly, Billy commented that although he has seen verbal acts of localism he has never seen anything “really serious” (Billy, 28/11/09). However, the participants did relate having experienced heavy localism themselves in other surfing contexts. For example, when venturing into waters in Northern Spain, Michael had the back window of his car smashed (Michael, 26/10/09). There were also stories of heavy localism occurring elsewhere in Cornwall outside the specific community location of this study. Wes and Ruth recounted several stories, albeit in limited detail, concerning heavy localism after their interview, including one in a popular surf spot in North Cornwall where a friend of theirs had been head butted.

These experiences concur with popular accounts of heavy localism in parts of the UK and the South West in particular. In 1998, The Stormrider Guide stated that



incidents of aggressive or heavy localism were extremely rare in Great Britain due to the lack of crowds and the naturally mellow instincts of the surfers within this area. However, at the time, British Champion Gabe Davies had begun to sense the beginnings of localism.

Hardened by cold weather, polluted and freezing seas and inconsistent swells, the locals are some of the keenest, most competitive and yet friendliest surfers anywhere, who give meaning to the term hard-core. There's an independent spirit and a strong local pride built on close friendships and a close-knit surfing network that exists along the coast, which becomes enriched by further discoveries of new breaks. Surfers who wait all winter for classic swells will not stand for visitors who arrive with a disrespectful attitude. (Fitzjones *et al*, 1998: 77)

This statement further highlights notions of boundaries, and their connection to the waves as liminal spaces that once open help (re)-constitute *communitas* for Established insiders ('close friendships and a close knit surfing network') and outsiders ('visitors'). A prime example of this is the area in Cornwall known as the Badlands around St Agnes which is a well-known local-only break. Wade (2007) reports the experience of Chris Nelson, a surfer from Yorkshire (in Northern England) who came to understand the dangers of entering the Badlands through the magazine articles and urban myths that told of spontaneous acts of violence, regular drop ins, flat tyres and 'locals only' being waxed onto your windscreen if you surfed as an outsider in the Badlands. Moreover, it is generally recognised that this 'local only' attitude at the Badlands has been present for generations and is passed down within families who surf there, as one young local surfer said "watch out, my nan shreds low tide Aggie and she'll wax your windscreen if you drop in on her" (Wade, 2007:39). Peter Lascelles, a local surfer of the Badlands, admits that if you paddle out and try to dominate, the local surfers will have words with you. However, he describes the tales of violence as a myth, but a myth that has worked. Therefore, while in Hessiock,

despite the noticeably reticent attitude displayed towards discussing localism by all local surfers, they do articulate a benign form of localism that they enact in defence of what they see as *their* Hessiock waters. However, less than 50 miles away other waters are defended by heavy localism that employs tactics that have overt dominantly masculine associations of the sort highlighted by Olivier (2010). These observations lend some support to the idea that localism is more usefully seen as a continuum/spectrum of dispositions and behaviours which are expressed differently across cultural contexts and, we would add, given our cross gender and generational sample of participants that these dispositions towards their own break and outsiders surfing it seem to be shared across generations of surfers within this context.

***Established insiders protect their community from Outsiders***

One aspect that merged clearly from the analysis is that local surfers very much had a sense of us/them, supporting the idea of Established local surfer and Outsiders. What also emerged was the idea of a benign localism in which the concern is to *protect* native place and in particular the liminal space of the breaking wave from disruption by Outsider surfers. Moreover, all of this was in service of the idea of protecting their community and its way of life. It is also helpful to highlight the For example Wes stated that “It’s where you feel like you totally belong” (Wes and Ruth, 02/11/09), which is very evocative of Laurence and Cartier’s (2003) theory of ‘native place’. Jacob felt similarly noting that;

Especially at Hessiock in the winter you get a lot of students out there which generally creates a little bit of animosity not animosity but you know like we don’t like it the locals and we tend to like it if they go and surf the other peaks and leave the one that we surf alone. (Jacob, 11/08/09)

It is important to stress the local surfers in this study are particularly protective about the Hessiock break because it is seen as *part of their local community*. Those visiting their break are visiting their community. When asked what interests he shared with community members Jacob replied, “obviously there’s the surfing side...that’s mainly the thing”. Wes comments similarly, “the surf club yeah I’ve seen yeah quite a community spirit...going down to the comps surfing, yeah, go down to the beach, see lots of people”. (Wes and Ruth, 02/11/09). These local surfers declared a strong attachment to their local waters in ways similar to Bale’s (1991 and 1993 cited in Bale, 2000) use of Yi-Fu Tuan’s (1974) idea of “love of place” or *topophilia* with football stadiums and football supporters. Beach breaks, like Football stadiums become revered places containing layers of collective experiences that provoke strong feelings of attachment. Many of the local surfers accounts of their localism suggested the perceived existence of boundaries which implied sense of ownership of their ‘native place and liminal space and also of protecting other community insiders (particularly, younger surfers in the community) from the collective presence and actions of Outsider surfers. As discussed earlier at a conceptual level the beach and wave are usefully seen as liminal spaces/phases that are a central resource for the making and re-making of a local community *of surfers and* also a local community in a more general sense *through* surfing. Much of this community making is done through the *communitas* emerging from the shared experience of the surfing between Locals in their Local setting, and this *communitas* then becomes structured into community relations. Phil, (26/08/09) for example, stated in reference to surfing at Hessiock that “I don’t like it when lots of people come over from Danock [to surf]”, adding;

I guess where as I might sit back if I feel I’ve had quite a few waves and let other people catch them if they live in the village, I probably won’t do that for people who’ve come from Danock. (Phil, 26/08/09)

Similarly, Wes and Ruth (02/11/09) talked of their subtle, protective approach when Outsider Surfers visit their break:

Wes: Some people sort of vocalise that and get aggressive but I mean, I would just tend to sort of get more waves and try to snake in [and] out of them.

Ruth: You might not say it but you put it into practice with your surfing a bit more .

Billy recalled defending a local surfer who had dropped in on inexperienced outsider surfer who then became aggravated. If this happens in his local waters, Billy feels he can get involved as someone will always “have his back” (Billy, 28/11/09). This supports what Evers (2007) describes as locals feeling they have the right to be more assertive at their local break reinforcing the idea that localism is in a large part a collective protective behaviour in which Established insiders look after themselves and their break especially in its liminal phase, as a part of their communities.

### ***Crowding and protecting access to liminal space***

While the very presence of Outsiders invokes a protective localist response from these local surfers, crowding exacerbates the feelings and behaviours highlighted above.

Scott (2003:web site) suggested that;

Surfing saturation in popular culture has resulted...in an excess of participation.

For the ‘original’ members of surfing subculture, surfing has simply become too crowded, resulting in frustration that is too often being expressed in aggressive behaviour and surf rage.

In Hessiok and the South East Cornwall peninsula one particular ‘problem’ is with students coming over from nearby institutions to surf. This was highlighted by several local surfers with the situation being described as an “absolute nightmare...Cause they turn up with about fifty people”

(Wes and Ruth, 02/11/09). Although this number is likely to be exaggerated, it illustrates how crowding is experienced as a particular threat.

Scott's point is echoed by Phil, a mature local surfer crowding in surfing has been developing over a period of time;

Initially, as I say there wasn't really much of a crowd problem even abroad...there just weren't really any Portuguese surfers only other travelling surfers so it never was really a big issue until maybe I'd been surfing ten years or so and then you just notice some places it was quite aggressive and people didn't like you there. (Phil, 26/08/09)

A sense of crowding of the liminal space/phase of the breaking wave was vocalised by several participants in the context of there being a finite space associated with a wave which can often concentrate surfers in to one given area; "the influx, the break can only handle a certain amount of people before it gets crowded and it does get crowded quite quickly, and as soon as its crowded everybody's unhappy" (Wes and Ruth, 02/11/09). Similarly Phil noted that;

Surfing, resources are finite, there's not, on a given day there's only a certain number of waves that are gonna break and if there are thirty people trying to catch them, it causes a lot of tension cause some people aren't gonna get waves, umm, and if you, you might just about cope with that if you know those people, if you don't know them, they come from thousands of miles away you, it's gonna antagonise you, if they're catching waves and you're not and you feel like you live there. (Phil, 26/08/09)

This sense of crowding triggers heightened feelings of having their community space invaded making the protectionist behaviours stronger. While protecting the liminal spaces is mainly practiced through manoeuvres in the water such as dropping in on Outsiders and allowing other Locals the wave nearly all surfers spoke of how their feelings of Outsiders transgressing their place/space would be occasionally be

vocalised. Even Billy, a young surfer, stated that as well as dropping in on them, he would say: “you shouldn’t be out here” (Billy, 28/11/09). With some reticence, Jacob also confessed that “yeah some words get spoken sometimes” (Jacob, 17/06/09), although Wes and Ruth (02/11/09) later confided that Jacob “can be one of the worst for it” describing him as giving loads of aggro and abuse at Hessiock, suggesting Olivier's (2010:1224) point that, in an era of congested beach breaks, for some surfers localism has become “a necessary evil, serving a regulatory function in situations of scarce resource”. In spite of these comments we got no sense that Jacob or Billy’s localism were forms of *heavy* localism, but what is clear however is that the response of the local surfers seems to elevate in intensity along with the level of crowding.

Reflecting on their own localism and how it most often emerges in crowding situations, Jacob felt that his being local and a person who sat and watched his local break all the time somehow gave him a right over Outsiders in a situation of crowding. Similarly, Ruth noted how desperate people get to have their own waves when they cannot get to them because of Outsiders. As Ruth commented, “everyone’s quite rude about the students, oh it’s that bloody \*\*\*\* course again” (Wes and Ruth, 02/11/09). Phil describes his localism as “just human nature” and “not something I’m proud of but it’s, you know, just how I feel” (Phil, 26/08/09). Similarly Jacob notes that “whether that’s right or wrong that’s quite a common human trait” (Jacob, 17/06/09). Jacob also added that, “I’ve never seen a fight or anything” but follows that it is a possibility by saying “if it got busy enough it could happen” (Jacob, 17/06/09). Crowding, is for these local surfers a restriction of *access* to the liminal space of the surf-able wave that only opens up for a few seconds at a time. Those who live beside such waves, structure their lives around surfing and consider the beach part of their community clearly feel they have a ‘natural’ right to be able to access those waves.

These findings concur strongly with popular reports of localism generated from crowding in surfing in the South West of England. Wade (2007: 40) noted that in an interview, with the editor of Carve magazine, he refused to give up the location of his favourite breaks anymore as he would “turn up to surf a secret spot in winter to find it packed”. In another interview, Jersey based Surf School owner Jim Hughes explained that the saturation of the line-ups was leading to people becoming more territorial and increasingly aggressive in the water concluding that ‘localism is on the increase, for sure’ (Wade, 2007: 139). The crowding at certain English surfing locations has been made worse by the installation of web cams which can be viewed on the internet. In reaction to the web cam placed at Porthleven, local surfer Dan Joel comments “now everyone checks message boards online, so it’s not just a handful of people who know it’ll be on, it’s a bus load.” Wade (2007: 48) describes these changes as the lament of many surfers local to the better surfing areas of Cornwall and Devon. A final aspect of crowding plays a significant role in expressions of localism in England. The ‘Wannabe’ surfer who is the relatively new modern commercial form of *kook* (or beginner) has dramatically increased in population causing crowding at several beach breaks during peak tourist periods (many Wannabe’s surf on holiday) within the South West of England. This caused aggravation among the local surfers and one interviewee described the ‘Wannabe’ as having little respect for the local area (author, date) or in Laurence and Cartier’s (2003) terms, ‘native place’ and local surfer’s appear hold disdain for those who do not share the deep attachment to the place, or respect that that others may do. A point we move to next.

### ***Established local surfers as outsiders***

Mark Durbano (interviewed in Wade, 2007) claims that most surfers do not give a damn about localism, admitting however that there will always be some localism.

Wade (2007) agrees that heavy localism in the form of violence and vandalism is not the answer and should be abhorred, but he does view a surfer's rite of passage as earning a place in the line-up by behaving respectfully towards those who live in a given area. This suggests that local surfers are themselves should be more aware of respecting other localities than those surfers not belonging to any given locality.

Considering the above, many of the local surfers of Hessiock recounted examples of surfing at other breaks where they were considered Outsiders. In these accounts they spoke of displaying respect towards the locals as they understood how they felt about their local waters indicating a degree of reflexivity from lived experience. This respect was shown through an understanding of surfing etiquette and its importance for local surfers. Local surfer Jonty Henshall tributes surf etiquette to the famous surfer Nat Young in Australia who put up signs on beaches explaining the basic rules of surfing etiquette. Surfing etiquette is very much a learned set of rules passed on from surfer to surfer during identity construction. More recently, Mackert (2005) set out these ten unwritten rules entitled "The golden rules of surfing" in order to educate surfers that were unaware of their existence. Of significance to this study are rule nine and ten which state

(9) Respect the 'locals' and don't behave like an idiot! That means, work your way in from margins, don't just plunge in right in front of their noses.

(10) Show respect and goodwill towards nature and your fellow surfers.

(Mackert, 2005: 105)

When away from his local break Billy says he and his friends "won't get involved and will keep their heads down" (Billy, 28/11/09). Having said this Billy tries to gain respect through his surfing ability. On being asked how he felt about surfing in waters where he was an outsider Billy replied he was "not bothered, I just show them how I surf" and "just take their waves and show like yeah, I am better than you



so...” which according to him provokes the reaction, “yeah I’ll let this guy have some slack actually” (Billy, 28/11/09). Wes recounts finding himself in a reverse situation (to his local one) when he went to University in Swansea and has subsequently has some sympathy with the students (from a local institution that often visit Hessiock) stating “the thing is because that’s kind of transient, they don’t make any effort, I know when I was a student in Swansea you don’t make any effort to mix with the local crew... you don’t make any effort to talk to the local people” (Wes and Ruth, 02/11/09). Wes added that “even in Criock [a popular Cornish break outside of their area] I guess we’re more known now but wherever you go and you’re not known you have to prove yourself every time” (Wes and Ruth, 02/11/09).

However local surfers seemed to have an understanding of the ‘beach rules’ or surfing etiquette as it is more commonly known in the UK and they follow this etiquette when entering waters as an outsider to avoid localism being inflicted upon themselves. For example, Wes notes “if I turn up at a new spot I’m quite respectful of people who I would perceive to be locals and you know you won’t hassle them” (Wes and Ruth, 02/11/09). As a beginner surfer in North Devon Jacob felt his ability and his outsider status did not warrant him to surf in particular areas and at particular times. He notes “I tended not to surf low tide Boyde a huge amount which is like where all the short, the high the good quality sort of local short boarders will surf...I still didn’t feel like I was, like amazing” (Jacob 17/06/09). Jacob’s application of surf etiquette also showed when reflecting on his surf trip to New Zealand.

When I went to New Zealand I was very very aware that I was a visiting surfer and was and was very respectful of the locals and I wouldn’t, wouldn’t just go in there and like take every single wave,... and if there was a local out just getting loads more waves than me I would begrudge him that because its, that’s where he lives you know like I’m just visiting so at the same time at Hessiock that’s kind of how quite a lot of us feel. (Jacob, 11/08/09)

There is then a lived understanding of surfing etiquette surrounding use of the liminal space/phase of the wave, which suggests a mutual understanding or potential for a degree of *communitas* to emerge between local surfers from different locations. There is also a sense that etiquette is slightly more important for local surfers as they become more attuned to other local surfers' attachments to *their* place and *their* sense of a right to access waves on 'their' own break.

Although, given the increasing issue of overcrowding and the saturation of location surf breaks, surfing etiquette might only represent a partial resolution to localism, local surfer Jonty Henshall takes the view that education is the answer; "People need to be educated about surfing's unwritten rules- and its dangers- before they paddle out...There are too many surf tourists and wannabes who think they have the right to abuse local beaches" (Wade, 2007: 69). This concurs with Evers (2007) views that inexperienced surfers, and we would add surfers not attached to any local surf break, may be less familiar with or inclined to adhere to 'beach rules' resulting in localist reaction. Connections with a Durkheim's sense of anomie (normlessness) are worth raising briefly here, because as Berger (1967:21-22) puts it "the radical separation from the world, or anomy, constitutes such a powerful threat to the individual", societies and here also surf communities. The spread of surfing as an individualised lifestyle practice has led to its being increasingly detached from the *communitas* that emerges from local community engagement. Non-local surfers arrive, not as a coordinated whole but as a mass of individuals, each intent on *consuming the liminal spaces/phases of the wave for their pleasure* and remaining unaware and/or unconcerned for the locality, its inhabitants or the rules of the space/place territory.

## Summary

In this article we have presented findings from an ethnographic study that attempted to show local “Established insiders” perspectives on what we identified as a benign (mild/gentle) form of surfing localism. Those insiders were residents of a village in South Cornwall with a surf break and a significant population of local residents who surf as part of a way of life and saw the surf break as part of the community. What emerged was a strong sense of location connection, an attachment to their ‘native-place’ and their surfing families and community. According to Bale (2000) such forms of localism, reflect the strength of the sport-place bond which Lanagan, (2003) drawing on Maffesoli (1996) confirms, “location becomes connection” (cited in Lanagan, 2003: 175). Drawing on data from the study we illustrated how a process of Othering based on location, rather than gender, used benign localism to attempt to *protect* the community and its way of life from Outsiders. We confirmed how benign localism was exacerbated by overcrowding and also how these local surfers experiences of localism served to make them aware of their becoming Outsiders in other surfing localities and modifying their behaviour accordingly.

These findings contribute to our conceptual understanding of localism in a number of ways. First, it shows, how localism varies from context to context and is not always centrally configured around a hegemonic masculine core of gender relations. Connected with this is the point that we should not assume *power* is ultimately held by the insider group particularly in the absence of institutional structures that the insider group can manipulate to its advantage. This adds insights to Velija's (2011: 39-40) conclusions that Established/Outsider theory, an ‘highlight how interdependent relationships that are characterized by complex power imbalances are constantly in flux’. In the absence of institutionalised, policed forms surf etiquette

Outsiders may, on occasions, have as much or more power than insiders, to shape the happenings on the liminal spaces/phases of surfable waves.

Second, what this is important about this reading of localism is that the beach and its break are physically and symbolically connected to the village communities that surround it. Therefore, crucially, at a conceptual level these liminal spaces/phases are a central resource for the making and re-making of a local community *of surfers* and also a local community in a more general sense *through* surfing. Much of this community making is done through the *communitas* of the surfing ritual that then becomes structured into community relations. The liminality of each breaking wave and surf session, forms something of a suture between the Established local surfers and the Outsider Surfer's because as Syndor (2000: 236) maintains, in liminal spaces civility and culture are up for grabs - they can be reshaped and negated.' In other words the arrival of outsiders threaten to disrupt Established insider access to these liminal spaces and thereby the ritual renewal of community.

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