

Belonging in the Ocean: Surfing, ocean power, and saltwater citizenship in Ireland

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Abstract

In 2016, the Trump International Golf Links and Hotel in southwest Ireland sought permission to erect a boulder wall along the entire length of a beach to protect its golf course from erosion. This beach happens to be home to a good-quality surf break and, accordingly, local and international surfers quickly mobilised resistance to the plan. This paper investigates how Irish surfers' relationship with different water flows have been (re)producing and transforming these political narratives, both in relation to this dispute and in the State more generally in the 2014-2018 period. Through their politicised associations with waves, Irish surfers enact "saltwater citizenship", a political status that grounds its legitimacy not only on its relationship with state power but also (and primarily) with ocean power. I explore how this specific form of citizenship has three defining features: 1) It multiplies authorities of political legitimation; 2) its struggles against Irish state-corporate entanglements take place predominantly as right-of-access and right-of-ownership disputes; 3) because it is based on surf-specific notions of belonging and relies on contemporary global flows of information and people, it disarticulates and reconfigures elements of citizenship (territoriality and entitlements, for instance) in ways that complicate traditional distinctions between localism and cosmopolitanism.

KEYWORDS: Ireland, saltwater citizenship, surfing, water, belonging

Introduction

During the winter of 2013/2014, the West of Ireland experienced a particularly intense storm season. At the coast of County Clare in the southwest of Ireland, the newly built quay that services boats running between the Aran Islands and the mainland suffered extensive damage. About a forty-minute drive south, the golf course at Doonbeg, a small, rural town, was eroded up to eight metres in places by swollen seas. With the Irish economy deep in recession, the owners could not afford the renovations required and put the golf course and adjoining hotel up for sale. The club was bought by property tycoon – now US president – Donald Trump and renamed Trump International Golf Links and

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Hotel Doonbeg (hereafter TIGL). In the months following, TIGL announced plans to build a sea wall along the entire length of Doughmore (pronounced Dug-more or Duck-more) Beach, which separates the course from the North Atlantic. The wall would consist of 200,000 tonnes of rock armour and sheet metal piling and would require bulldozers to raze part of the dunes and cobble area at the top of the beach. Surfers, environmentalists, and other members of the local community and beyond organised protests and submitted objections to this proposal. Others, particularly TIGL employees, Doonbeg residents, and those whose homes and farms lie on the land behind the golf course, have supported the proposal.

On a late spring day in 2016, I joined Seán, a young veterinarian from Cork City in the south of Ireland, for a surf at Doughmore Beach, or “Duggie”, as the break is known among Irish surfers. He parked as usual with two side wheels of his car in the ditch of a narrow country road, and we made our way across the golf course to the beach. After a short walk, the grassy dunes give way to large, loose rocks and standing here, about 500 metres north of the course’s grand hotel, it is possible to survey both breaks at the beach. We watched for a moment as good-quality waves rolled consistently into the bay (to Seán’s relief) and I looked up and down the dune system that we were standing upon. This was precisely the location of the proposed development. ‘So all this is going to be bulldozed to make way for the wall?’ I asked. ‘That’s the plan,’ answered Seán as he also surveyed the beach. He shook his head and added, ‘That wall is going to destroy the wave; what gives them the right to do that?’

This article investigates how relationships with water flows are (re)producing and transforming political narratives of belonging around coastal Clare and the Irish State more generally. Krause and Strang (2013) rightly point out that one of the significant characteristics of water flows is their variability and that they are defined carefully in each context. Irish surfers make their lives around waves. Far from being random and chaotic disturbances of water, the surfers perceive distinct and persistent characteristics in each break. This allows for the development of intimate relations between surfer and surf break over many years of practice in which surfers come to feel they belong in/with the ocean (Britton 2019) and feel compelled to defend it from what they see as the illegitimate incursion of non-surfing outsiders. In the context of surfing and political action, the term “water flow” thus refers to a unique combination of saline liquid, atmospheric process and seabed topography that give shape, value and (importantly) a sense of power to surf breaks. By asking ‘what gives them the right’, Seán questions the authority of both TIGL (a private corporation) and the Irish State (which gives planning permission) to inhabit surfing spaces in certain ways.

In his book *Hydraulic City* (2017), Nikhil Anand theorises “hydraulic citizenship” in Mumbai as a mode of belonging which is ‘formed through the historic, political, and material relations [people] make with water pipes’ as they negotiate access to the state-controlled water supply (Anand 2017: 7). Though inspired by Anand’s analysis of how water flows mediate forms of power and authority and reinforce social inclusions/exclusions, the originality of my analysis lies in the claim that surfers’ political relations with saltwater flows mediate a relationship with a *non-human* form of authority. “Salt-

water citizenship”, as it is used here, is defined as a sense of belonging and corresponding rights and responsibilities that are derived (in this case) primarily from Irish surfers’ exclusive relationship with the flows of the North Atlantic as opposed to the state. Unlike other “environmental” citizenships (Dobson 2003), it does not only reflect the effects of human politics on the environment but also the opposite – the role of environmental processes in transforming regional politics: by claiming that their legitimacy in surfing spaces derives from their association with waves, the surfers recognise the ocean as a political authority in its own right, with which state and corporate power compete. In the process that I document, Irish surfers are constantly reminded of the futility of efforts made by public and private actors to predict and control the movements of the North Atlantic in the course of their everyday interactions with this power. In theorising how non-humans might not only mediate human forms of authority but themselves act as legitimizing forces, I challenge a tendency in the anthropology of citizenship to multiply ways of negotiating the *state-citizen* relationship without theorising how different political practices might fundamentally transform our understanding of the other kinds of power which can be hidden behind the citizenship concept.

Ireland has suffered from a history of misrepresentation in anthropological literature. Gate-keeping concepts that ‘restrict theorizing an anthropological region to certain themes’ (Wulff 2015: 142) such as the community (Arensberg & Kimball 1968), the death of rural life and culture (Fox 1978) and dysfunctional rural sociality (Scheper-Hughes 2001) have, on occasion, missed more significant trends in Irish life. One result has been the creation of a false dichotomy separating urban from rural; traditional from modern; nationalist from post-nationalist in Irish society (Fagan 2003; Wilson & Donnan 2006). I counter this by describing how conflicting understandings of belonging between foreign/non-Clare-based surfers and non-surfing Doonbeg locals cannot be characterised as a classic friction between cosmopolitan and localist values, as both of these groups produce narratives and practices that mix aspects of the two, inviting nuanced anthropological description and retheorisation. As is often the case, the situation on the ground (or, in this case, on the water) is more complex.

Methodology

The data used in this article were generated as part of a broader fourteen-month ethnographic investigation into Irish surf culture. Methodologically, the project sought to understand the creation of surfers and surfer-ocean relations by using long term participant-observation and the apprenticeship approach to practical learning. This argues that practices are best approached ethnographically by focusing on “communities of learning” (Pálsson 1994) as opposed to “expert” individuals in isolation. It also points to the significance of the learning process to cultural development and academic understanding. As such, crucial data can be collected amongst beginners and intermediates as well as it can among advanced practitioners. Of course, there are also good reasons that the anthropologist might become an apprentice: surfing is a practice-oriented culture of which a large part involves the attempted reproduction of ‘types of substantial experiential sensa-

tions that largely exist outside the linguistic realm' (Lavolette 2016: 1). In this affective context, the learning body of the researcher is an essential tool to understanding cultural competency (Stoller 1997; Waquant 2004), allowing her to engage with experiences that participants consistently report are impossible to put into words yet central to understanding surfing.

The total number of research participants numbered around eighty and were mainly members of the south-west of Ireland's surfing community – surfers living in rural and urban areas around Cork and Clare, mostly male, and variously young and middle-aged. They also included non-Irish surfers and non-surfing locals of Doonbeg – business owners, farmers, and employees of TIGL. Doughmore Beach is situated alongside Doonbeg in coastal West Clare, a very small town with a population of 262.¹ More focused data for this article were collected around Doughmore and Doonbeg using semi-structured interviews. These totalled fifteen and ranged from fifteen to forty minutes in length. Six of the participants were chosen at random at Doughmore beach and in Doonbeg; two were sought out as prominent anti-wall supporters; two as pro-wall supporters; two as surfers whose opposition to the wall seemed connected to environmentalist sensibilities; and three whose opposition to the wall but lack of explicit environmentalism seemed interesting. The research also involved watching the dispute unfold on social media, in international surf publications (online), and in local and national newspapers in Clare and Ireland. As such, a broad spectrum of views surrounding the wall, surfing, and environmentalism is represented. All informants were made aware of the purpose of the research before participating. To protect participants' identities, all names have been anonymised, and some biographical information and descriptions of events have been minorly altered.

I begin by situating the article between theory concerning citizenship in 21st century Ireland and that surrounding water and non-human political power. I use surfers' narratives and practices around waves to theorise The Ocean as a non-human source of power which Irish surfers contain through skilled engagement. This containment makes surfing possible but is also used as the foundation for a coast-based right of belonging that includes ideas of responsibility and exclusion – what I call saltwater citizenship. I then examine its three defining features: (1) The multiplication of authorities of political legitimation to include The Ocean; (2) its struggles against Irish state-corporate entanglements take place predominantly as right of access and right of ownership disputes; (3) this surf-specific, oceanic notion of the production of affinity with place is contradicted by the terrestrial conceptions that resist it. Friction between these has the effect of disarticulating and reconfiguring elements of citizenship (territoriality and exclusivity, for instance) in ways that complicate traditional distinctions between localism and cosmopolitanism. Overall, I ask: how might an investigation of human-saltwater interactions deepen our understanding of how people negotiate multiple and conflicting forms of power in their daily lives?

¹ All demographic information is taken from the 2016 census. Doonbeg is one of 80 towns that no longer has its environs included in its census figure since 2014. The population of Doonbeg was measured as 761 in the 2011 census under the old system, but this number included dispersed settlements removed from the town proper.

Ocean power and saltwater citizenship

Citizenship, a core concept in Irish political conversation and Western discourse on belonging, is complicated by the possibility of non-human political authority. Whether its different iterations can capture the more-than-human nature of coastal Irish claims of legitimacy in the current form is questionable. Recent academic work on Irish citizenship takes the first wave of inward migration during the 1990s “Celtic Tiger” economic boom as its point of departure, when a 2004 referendum removed the provision of citizenship by birth right from the Irish constitution (Gilmartin & White 2011, Harrington 2005, Maguire & Murphy 2012, Mullally 2005, Shandy 2008, White & Gilmartin 2008). Literature regarding conflict and citizenship education among nationalist and unionist communities in Northern Ireland has also theorised contested notions of Irish citizenship from this very different context (Aretxaga 1997, Niens & McIlrath 2010, Lister 1998). While capturing the interplay of localist and cosmopolitan tendencies as they persist and emerge in surf culture and contemporary Irish society (on this specific point, see Fanning & Mutwarasibo 2007, García-del Moral & Korteweg 2012, and Guillaumond 2016), these analyses rely largely on legalistic and constitutional definitions of citizenship, implying that ‘only the nation-state can implement citizenship entitlements, and protections claimed through recognized political membership’ (Ong 2006a: 15, notable exceptions include Aretxaga 1997, Maguire & Murphy 2012, Shandy 2008). As such, they preclude a focus on the role of non-humans in the production of rights and legitimacy. This would require an emphasis on the material context of different citizenship claims.

Environmental citizenship theory begins to do this. Along with its close relatives – ecological citizenship (Dobson 2003) and sustainability citizenship (Barry 2006) – environmental citizenship implies ‘a set of rights and responsibilities arising from the environmental impacts of human actions’ (Pallett 2016: 1) and argues for an active citizenship that is based on constraining human behaviour. This is in order to manage the relationship of varied communities with diverse environments and to address the imbalance of resource consumption between different regions (Clarke & Agyeman 2011, Humphreys 2009). Although there is a significant proportion of surfers who are ambivalent about the environmentally damaging nature of their travel, a reliance on unrecyclable products, water pollution, and so on, such an eco-active notion of citizenship is growing among the global surf community. The recognition of the fragility of coastal environmental health and the value of the ocean beyond surf breaks is giving rise to a sense of responsibility in some surfers to act as spokespersons for the ocean (Anderson 2017). This is manifest in current industrial attempts to produce environmentally friendly surf products (Laviolette 2019) and in the environmentalist activities of groups such as Save the Waves and Surfers Against Sewage (Laviolette 2009, Wheaton 2007). Surfing embeds citizenship in the environment, then, but in the context of an environmentally damaging practice, at least in current form (Hill & Abbott 2009). While surfing has the potential to produce environmentally friendly ethics, it is not necessarily the case that all surfers are environmentalists (Laderman 2014). As a concept, saltwater citizenship is not meant to describe or argue for a civic position in which environmentalism is the basis for political action. It is rather an explanation of how individual citizens are oriented in relation to the structures of power that affect their lives, which, in this case, include non-human forms of authority.

While environmental citizenship engages the relationship between political communities and the environment, power, and authority to alter behaviour remains with human sources, transmitted either from the top-down through state and corporate institutions, or the bottom-up through lobby groups and activism. It does not explain how the very materiality of the environment and the forces that animate it might take part in the production of human politics by acting as sources of social power. Conceiving of the ocean as a political authority in its own right challenges the anthropological imagination. When Michael Gilson analysed how ‘authority and legitimacy may be in fact imaged and experienced in vital ways as “things”, “properties” or “essences” existing out there independent of our volition, inexorably given in the nature of being’ (Gilson 1986: 20), he did so within the symbolic paradigm of anthropology, focusing on how (in his ethnographic case) the spectacle of violent *human* acts and the recording of *human* histories reproduce the idea of authority. However, how might we allow for the possibility that some also assign authority to potent *non-human* processes, or legitimacy to people somehow attached to those processes? Over the past decade, a wealth of social scientific scholarship has appeared that critiques the notion of the human as the sole object of social inquiry (Latour 2005, Law 2004, Mol 1999) and outlines a politics of non-human subjects (Braidotti 2006, De la Cadena 2015). When materiality is not understood as inert but ‘as much force as entity, as much energy as matter, as much intensity as extension’ (Bennett 2010: 20), it becomes possible for theory to appreciate how the vitality of non-human things may alter political ecologies. This is also to follow Franz Krause in realising that the traditional definition of political ecology as the ‘realisation that ecological problems are...replete with human agendas and influences’ (Krause 2012: 58) is only to acknowledge half of the political processes in a field. There are also ‘political struggles couched in material realities, and non-human participants may form part of the struggles’ (ibid: 58). The Doughmore Beach dispute is not only a struggle between individuals, corporations and state institutions but also storms, waves and sand dunes.

Although commonly overlooked in contemporary political ecology literature, Roy Wagner provides a critical early analysis of how social power might in some cases exceed human social relations (as opposed to itself being contained *within* culture). In his study of the Usen Barok of New Ireland, Melanesia, Wagner found that these people understand life to be grounded in power ‘which enables human capabilities and tests its limits, but also stands outside of it’ (Wagner 1986: xiv). The Barok describe their non-human environment as being replete with various types of power – place spirits, water spouts, and spiritually-dangerous ocean-spaces – that can be harnessed or avoided through ritual activity. Instead of understanding social power as a thoroughly human (cultural) creation, only transferred between individuals and groups via institutions, for the Usen Barok power is ‘the containment by human beings of a spontaneously occurring force or power’ (ibid: xiv) otherwise manifested in a variety of non-human phenomena. Like the Usen Barok, Irish surfers draw on non-human sources to increase social power. They too rely on ritual (organised, competitive interactions at surf breaks), legend (of great deeds and rare swells) and material and visual culture (increasingly meaning the internet video clip) to harness ocean power for social means.

Through ‘an embodied engagement with “the original energy” of the ocean’ (Anderson 2016: 66), ocean waves provide a unique social space for Irish surfers, one in which skill and knowledge of the particular surf break become important elements in structuring coastal social hierarchy. One professional bodyboarder², originally from Dublin, describes how he became accepted on the water in Clare in these terms; ‘At first, they could hear my accent and were like “who is this guy?” But I kept coming and showed them that *I was serious on the water*. Eventually, they seemed to accept me!’ Social power works differently for surfers “on the water” versus on land. When on the water, it is tied to a demonstration of tenacity in associations with waves and an embodied knowledge of “the power of the ocean” or simply “The Ocean” (as Irish surfers refer to this energy).

The contention that by associating with ocean power, people can claim ocean spaces as “theirs” in one way or another is a theme prevalent in sea-based societies as varied as Madagascar (Astuti 1995), Melanesia (Hviding 1996, Schneider 2012), and Scotland (Nadal-Klein 2003). In a sense, surfers draw the power animating oceans into human sociality through cultured techniques of engagement, through which surfers claim a right to belong in coastal spaces, as do other “saltwater people” (Sharp 2002). By defining those who belong at Doughmore Beach as those who have “put in the time” surfing there, surfers use their relationship with Irish waves as a sufficient condition for their belonging in Irish surfing spaces. In effect, they disarticulate their rights from the legitimating principle of state authority, instead re-articulating them with the ocean, now imagined as a source of political power.

There is a growing recognition of the role of non-humans in establishing a community’s sense of legitimacy and responsibility in anthropology. De la Cadena (2015) describes something similar existing between some Andean people and mountains. In contrast to de la Cadena’s analysis, however, I stop short of making ontological claims regarding oceanic personhood or kinship between surfers and waves. In their insistence of how surfing functions to “get you back into nature” and other similar expressions, Irish surfers’ discourse often expresses the traditionally Modern distinction between what is human and what is natural. At the same time, there certainly are surfers and parts of Irish culture that maintain their practice affects a more mystical communion with non-human forces. In either case, to use ethnographic material on Irish surfing and oceanic relationships as an opportunity for ontological analysis would be to universalise one set of beliefs across very diverse communities. Consequently, I analyse surfers’ relationship with Ocean Power as a political strategy, not an ontological one (see also Gose 2018).

Like all its conceptual iterations, saltwater citizenship also holds ideas of inclusion and exclusion in uncomfortable proximity. Surfing’s core ethics of travel and the unquestionable value of waves display a universalism that is contradicted by the strict ways

² Bodyboarders use a shorter board than surfers do and do not rise to their feet as they surf a wave. Generally, there is an air of competition between the two groups on the water. As it happens, then, surfers are not the only practice group that are politically active in Doughmore and are becoming saltwater citizens by interacting with the power of the ocean. It is possible that the specifics of practices such as bodyboarding, wave kayaking, sailing, and others create interesting comparisons with the political processes that I am discussing here. They were, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this study.

in which belonging at surf breaks is controlled. Throughout surfing history, one group's dominance of surf breaks has resulted in the exclusion of others. In pre-colonial Hawaii, this exclusion took place along class lines (Laderman 2014). Today there is a persistent problem globally with the racialisation of the coast (Britton et al. 2018, Garcia & Balto-dano 2005, Walker 2011) and the persistent male domination of surf cultural space (Booth 2001, Olive 2013, Wheaton 2013). "Localism" is another form of exclusion in surf culture, referring to the phenomenon of restricting access to surf breaks to people who have been born and raised in the vicinity. While surfing has the potential to challenge terrestrial hegemonies such as overbearing state-corporate relations, it can also transport others to a new environment or produce new surf-specific terms of hierarchical dominance. This practical dialogue between empowerment and exclusion is something I will try to bring out in the following analysis of the Doughmore wall dispute, one in which the politics of surfing and contemporary Irish society are churned together in deciding who belongs at the coast and what grants the right to speak on its behalf.

Multiplying authorities: The Ocean as political power

When 'thinking relationships through water' (Krause & Strang 2016: 633), what is significant is not just that they take place upon or around water, but that the specificity of water flows transforms the ways people relate to each other. The practice of harnessing oceanic energy by riding waves creates an ongoing struggle between Irish surfers and the power of The Ocean. This power is sometimes amenable, sometimes elusive, often ferocious and always unpredictable, giving rise to a mixed discourse of dominance and submission in Irish surf culture and mythology. On the one hand, there are aspects of surfing that express a neo-colonial power over The Ocean: Irish surf terminology (largely an American import) is often violent – surfers "hack", "cut", "rip", and "claim" waves (Waitt 2008).

In contrast, representations of relations with The Ocean as humble acts of submission are equally prevalent in surfing and Irish maritime culture. Surfing fatalities quickly assume legendary status, such as the 1994 death of professional surfer Mark Foo during a surf contest at Maverick's in California. After the shocking realisation that even the elite can succumb had sunk in, the common response of surfers to such incidents goes something like 'Well, he knew what he was risking out there'. Irish folklore also emphasises the essential unknowability of The Ocean: The Tuatha De Danaan are mythical sea beings that could cause storms to arise and disappear without explanation in the dangerous waters of the North Atlantic. Irish fishers historically (and anecdotally still) refuse to learn to swim as it would amount to a display of arrogance towards these powers (Sharp 2002: 28). The blending of these two tendencies of respectful deference and competitive challenge shape surfers' engagements with The Ocean. It emerges as a power that can be contained by those sufficiently skilled and daring, yet its ultimate authority in its domain – over who remains safe or who is swept away – goes unchallenged.

Surfers' understanding of The Ocean as ultimately unknowable and uncontrollable sits uneasily with state and corporate attempts to manage it. Whenever I read newspaper articles covering the Doughmore dispute or ask surfers from around Doonbeg whom I could talk to if I wanted to know what surfers think, how they are resisting, or about

sea walls in general, one name keeps appearing: Brian O'Connor is a Clare native and member of the West Coast Surf Club (WCSC). He is a life-long surfer of Duggie who has been engaged with political issues surrounding Doughmore Beach for over a decade. As a surfer with a professional expertise in coastal management systems, Brian critiques the logic of the sea wall-as-flood-barrier:

The problem with sea walls is that they just don't work. Soft spots appear at each end, the beach receding in front means that more and more boulders need to be piled-up over the years. You see at Lahinch that since they added boulders, they have had to keep adding them. Both the council and the golf club don't seem to understand that there is nothing they can do to stop flooding and beach change. Storm swells find a way through.

Brian is convinced that any efforts by the State or TIGL to control the movement of waves is simply futile, just as the same waves have resisted his own efforts to rationalise their movement during years of interaction. However, due to this insider knowledge and intimate experience of ocean power amassed by having "put in the time" upon waves, surfers like Brian claim to act and speak from/inhabit (albeit precariously) this space of ocean power, where state, corporate and non-surfing actors cannot.

Saltwater citizenship emerges through the surfers' negotiation of competing political authorities and not just as part of a relationship with the state. These politics have been emerging over decades in disputes regarding the right of access and ownership of surfing space: Both breaks known as Duggie appear toward the middle of Doughmore Beach and accessing them calls either for a two-kilometre-long walk around the course or a five-minute stroll across the rough of one of the holes. Before the golf course existed, the public had used this route as part of an informal agreement with the farming family who had owned the land. In 1998, the company that had bought the land with the intention of transforming it into a golf course attempted to close this route. At first, surfers simply ignored the new rules and kept using the course but, when the management became more insistent, they decided to do something more serious. Brian and a group of members of the WCSC decided to sue for beach access in court. This was an attempt by the surfers of having a historical, informal agreement which provided for access to waves recognised by the Irish State. The court sided with the surfers, and the developers were instructed to allow passage to the beachgoers across that one specific path. However, in Irish land law, such a right is awarded to individuals who can prove they have used their neighbour's land in a specific way for many years, at which point a right of way is established. Because of the individually-based nature of the law, the court granted this ruling *only* to the eight surfers who turned up in court that day to represent the WCSC – all other users were simply tolerated by management. For years this forced surfers to into uncertain acts of resistance against both corporate and state power in their association with waves. In 2009, however, when Clare County Council voted to extinguish this right and to provide alternative access to the beach, a local resident appealed this decision to the Supreme Court. Finally, in 2016, before the case was completed, the Council announced that it was dropping its plans and the right of way will remain.

The struggles and negotiations of saltwater citizens with multiple stakeholders around Doughmore – the Council, businesses, residents’ groups, landowners, surf clubs, and beach users – create an opaque legal environment and fuzzy political relations in which nobody can be certain where ultimate power lies. The WCSC’s case in 1998 set a precedent for the prevailing of public access over the dunes in which the State (in the form of the Circuit Court) recognised surfers right of beach access. However, in 2009 it was also the State (in the form of Clare County Council) that threatened this right, this time forcing surfers to support the legal battle against it. The Irish state thus has no definite perspective on the terms of access. They change over time and with respect to different manifestations of the state (the County Council, the courts, legal frameworks, etc.). This messy situation of access for some, tolerance for others, and attempted restriction is due to the inability of modern state logic to sufficiently contain the multiple and often conflicting traditional land relations that exist within it (de la Cadena 2015). At Doughmore, the logics of the state are stretched as they cannot comprehend that belonging is legitimated by a longstanding relationship with waves and ocean power. It is significant that the 2016 case ended without a ruling – informality remains. Leaving aside the eight WCSC members, others still access the beach based on an age-old convention. While uncertain, this situation serves to sustain the current system of multiple loci of power and is perhaps necessary to contain the messiness. Saltwater citizenship and ocean power fill a void where state and corporate power have failed to establish themselves as authorities through which a satisfactory right of belonging can be established.

Outside of the courtroom, there are other means for surfers to fight for their entitlement to surfing space. During the Supreme Court case, TIGL remained silent. This struck many as odd, considering it concerned a challenge to remove public access from land that they had bought as the case was unfolding. Of course, it became clear only a few months later that TIGL’s proposed wall would achieve what the Council had proposed by imposing a physical barrier between the beach and the dunes. Following their earlier successes in court, this is seen by surfers as an illegitimate claim to public and surfing space. Because of this, one aspect of their resistance involves taking it back. Seán was my regular partner on surf trips to Clare during fieldwork. He plays pitch and putt (which is exactly like golf but on a much smaller course) during the summer months whenever the waves are flat, and usually drives around with a few clubs in the boot of his car. On a summer evening during 2018, he and a couple of friends left the water particularly late – after sunset but before last light. After we changed into our clothes, Seán produced a club for each person, saying simply ‘Now is our chance.’ Moving quickly, each surfer brought their club and ball to the nearest tee-off. In the fading light, they looked like they were carrying rifles while jogging in a crouched position, as if they were conducting an invasion, which, I suppose, they were. They each played a few swings, but nobody made it to the green – the fading light and lack of skill ended the excursion early. ‘I’ve done it a few times,’ Seán boasted later, ‘when we were younger, we’d do it just to get a chase off the workers, or you might get shouted at by a golfer. They’re not making our lives easy here, so why not?!’

This playful act of transgression serves a serious political purpose. Not only are the surfers inhabiting private space to make a point, but they are also taking TIGL’s

product without paying. In his analysis of the London riots of August 2011, Slavoj Žižek explains that:

If one listened closely to some of [ex-Prime Minister of the UK] David Cameron's statements, it looked as if 'OK! They are beating people, burning houses, but the truly horrible thing is that they were taking objects without paying for them – that is the ultimate sin that we can imagine (Fiennes 2012).

In the context of consumer-capitalist economics and culture, corporate power is subverted by taking things for free. Refusing to pay for a game of golf has the effect of challenging what Seán sees as TIGL's illegitimate and disruptive incursion into *his* surf break – an overexertion of a private corporation upon public land and surfers' breaks. It is thus a legitimate form of protest as far as surf break politics are concerned.

In their demand for rights of access and the control of marine territories, saltwater citizens must interact with The Ocean and other regularised terrestrial forms of power. This creates messy, uncertain political processes in which authority is claimed by many but difficult for all to locate. Uncovering this messiness in coastal relations is precisely what saltwater citizenship does as a concept, better capturing the politics of human interactions with non-humans. Surfers like Brian and Seán do not conceive of their belonging to the State as guaranteeing their access to and stewardship of Irish surfing spaces. Conversely, it is their belonging in the ocean that authorises their access to the State, which can then be used either as a protective mechanism for waves (in the case of Brian's court case) or as a space for challenging other regularised forms of power at the coast (as in Seán's case). Through practice, The Ocean imposes its authority upon surfers. Their relationship with this authority then becomes their primary guarantee of the benefits of saltwater citizenship – rights, their belonging within certain spaces, and so on – *from which* they negotiate other relations of power with multiple coastal stakeholders.



Figure 1: A sign guarding the surfers' path across the dunes at Doughmore Beach

Reconfiguring citizenship: Saline (and other Irish) ideas of belonging

Writing on the increasingly global reach of surf culture and the propensity of surfers to regional, national, and (sometimes) international wave-hunting expeditions, Brown and Ford (2006: 50) note that ‘surfing is an example of a highly cosmopolitan “third culture” as a practice that transcends national boundaries.’ There is an ethical imperative of adventure to contemporary Irish surf culture that requires surfers to have surfed many of the world’s most famous waves to be considered elite. I have often noticed how small talk between surfers who do not know each other quickly slips into a subtly competitive recounting of good experiences on the water that has the effect of “name-dropping” famous surf spots or regions. This “trans-local” surfer identity’ (Anderson 2014: 237) can also be apprehended in the welcome extended by Doughmore Beach surfers to the help of others in relation to the wall dispute, both online and in person.

It is not the case, however, that surfers ubiquitously produce cosmopolitan narratives of belonging. Cosmopolitan citizenship is based on universalist principles that ‘[project] a sociality of common political engagement among all human beings across the globe’ (James 2014: x) in which affinity with diverse peoples supposedly replaces nativist notions of relatedness among a discrete group and its supreme right to a given space. This is not a fair description of ideas of belonging among Irish and global surfing communities. On the contrary, surfers guard surfing spaces strictly from “non-locals” until certain conditions are met, or perhaps even entirely. When Seán was surfing in southern California a few years ago, he claimed to have experienced bad surfing etiquette at a number of surf spots. ‘Why didn’t you say anything?’ I asked; ‘Because as soon as they hear your [foreign] accent at these places, you’ll get ordered out of the water.’ Surfing environmentalism is also somewhat contradictory in its blending of universalism and individual exceptionalism. The universalism is visible in the surf-environmentalist axiom professing that the value of unaltered surf breaks trumps all other coastal concerns. Its negation then arises both in each surfers’ environmentally damaging use of the breaks and in the restrictive manner that surfers manage break access. Saltwater citizenship, while certainly exhibiting cosmopolitan tendencies, is not ultimately tolerant and inclusive (Britton et al. 2018). While keen to surf the world’s breaks, surfers often have a different, more exclusive attitude to their “home break”.

What could be said of surfing in this regard could be also said of contemporary Irish society, in which the sea wall dispute serves as a good example of the interplay of cosmopolitan and localist tendencies. “Protect our Dunes; Protect our Jobs; Protect our Community” is the motto that they organise around but, in order to achieve this, the Donbeg community has largely extended a warm welcome to Trump and TIGL, a foreign multinational company. This is a perfect illustration of the overlapping and intermeshing of global and local scales in Ireland. In relation to surfing, Brown and Ford (2006: 50) suggest that ‘[such] notions as localist/cosmopolitan may be usefully linked to the plurality of individuals’ identities and affiliations within a globalizing world.’ In fact, practices such as surfing and political engagement in Ireland not only demonstrate a plurality of

positions but also how the abstract concepts of cosmopolitanism and localism are transformed into hybrid practices and narratives of belonging.

The degree to which local Irish and surfing political issues are affected by a global public is growing significantly through the use of the internet and digital social media (Pickerill 2003; Routledge 2017). During 2016, after TIGL submitted its planning proposal to Clare County Council, the anti-wall movement's resistance included public meetings but was primarily concentrated online. A Facebook group called "Save Doughmore Doonbeg Beach", which is run anonymously, was set up and is updated regularly with links to newspaper articles covering TIGL's proposal, with anti-Trump memes, and also a template "Letter of Objection" that the page's followers could submit to the planning department of the Clare County Council. The dunes are protected under an EU Directive as a habitat for a rare species of bird and endangered species of snail. The group's administrators suggested this as a key reason to object in order to increase impact. *Stab* and *Carve* – renowned international surf publications – advertised this group online and Save the Waves, a non-profit lobby group dedicated to protecting surf zones globally, offered their support. This organisation is not only highly regarded amongst surfers but also as a major environmental charity. Save the Waves enlisted several professional surfers to speak out against the proposal and launched an online petition to be presented jointly to TIGL and Clare County Council. During the winter of 2016, this was promoted online using the #NatureTrumpsWalls slogan (adapted from a similar slogan used in Hillary Clinton's campaign for the US presidency, which had taken place shortly before). Within a month, the petition had gathered over 120,000 signatures.

This internet activism demonstrates the tension between universal ideals and exclusivity at the core of Irish surfers' saltwater citizenship. TIGL surprised everyone in December 2016 by withdrawing the original proposal before Clare County Council had even announced a decision on it. In its place, the company submitted plans for a pared-back version consisting of sheet metal and rock armour for 650 metres and 200 metres at each end of the beach and with two holes to be relocated inland. The extent to which the petition exerted an influence on this decision is difficult to measure but surf media, running various "we did it!" articles (Haro 2016; Pierson 2016), as well as many local surfers at the time, were happy to claim this as a victory of the global surfing community. The local surfers effectively welcome non-local political support from people – non-surfers, non-locals, and so on – who would otherwise experience restrictions on their physical access to inhabit Duggie as a surf break.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the legitimacy of this internet activism and right of non-locals to involve themselves in the Doughmore wall dispute has been contested by some Doonbeg residents. The nature of online petitions meant that many – in fact, most – signatures came not only from outside the local area but outside Ireland entirely. Supporters of the original wall have been sharply critical of how the petition invited support from, as one non-surfing local resident put it, 'Some people who have never actually been to Clare or Ireland, but think it's ok to call the Clare people stupid and make assumptions about a project which they obviously know nothing about.' Leaving aside the validity of this argument with respect to the benefits and risks of sea walls, this complaint does highlight

an issue with the nature of the protest, concentrated as it was in an online petition. While ‘the projection of a particular struggle across national and international space helps to define the identity of that place as a site of struggle’ (Routledge 2017: 97), it does not necessarily produce in remote actors a deep connection with, or nuanced understanding of, that struggle (Ong 2006b: 503). ‘The petition and the withdrawal of the original proposal have made the wall a venomous issue locally,’ Brian admits. The cyberpublic that signed the petition was not necessarily aware of the decimation of Doonbeg’s economy during the austerity years of “The Bust” (as the 2008-2016 period of economic recession and austerity politics in Ireland is now known). With around 260 workers, TIGL is the biggest employer in the area. Many local businesses rely on its ability to draw tourists who are visiting the well-known attractions of north-west Clare down farther south, and the considerable local popularity of Donald Trump and TIGL. The internet activism has ultimately added to local community division without much *proven* success.

The venom that now characterises the dispute has seeped in as the friction between surfer and non-surfer and has aggravated competing local ideas of citizenship. Although opposed to the activities and the narratives of the surfers, non-surfing locals equally mix aspects of cosmopolitan and localist approaches to citizenship when defining who belongs in Clare. Following the revocation of the original proposed wall, a group of concerned locals set up The Doughmore Coastal Protection Group (DCPG) in order to lobby “for the good of the people of Clare”. The DCPG’s overriding concern is the security of local jobs:

There are 300 people employed there from places like Doonbeg, Cree, Cooraclare, Mullagh and Quilty. We have to protect these jobs. You hear very few announcements about jobs around the country. The greatest gift you can have is a job and that you can live in the area that you want to live in. That’s what we want to protect, as well as protecting the houses and the property (DCPG founding member, in O’Connell 2017).

As a creator of employment, Trump finds himself celebrated by many Doonbeg locals. There were lock-in parties in more than one local bar on the eve of his victory in the 2016 US election. When Trump’s planned visit to Doonbeg in 2018 was cancelled at short notice, a local bar owner lamented; ‘It would have meant a lot to Doonbeg ... We’re in the west coast of Clare, the biggest employer is up in Doonbeg, [Trump is] an investor and we’re delighted with him’ (RTÉ News 2018). Clearly, this non-surfing citizenship conception is somewhat localist – its overriding concern is the economic wellbeing of Clare residents. However, in its methods of protecting this wellbeing – by welcoming foreign investment and investors into the small town – it exhibits a form of neoliberal cosmopolitanism in which belonging is achievable through the command of certain skills (just as is the case in surfing), in this case, an ability to generate wealth.

The ocean itself plays a vital role in these transformations of citizenship at the scale of an emerging global imaginary. Though at odds, both pro-wall and anti-wall discourse agree that the ocean’s changing behaviour poses a challenge to coastal life. The surfers’ environmentalist claim is that while storms cause temporary damage, they ener-

gise the coast with its capacity to regenerate and the beach environment must be allowed to reach a natural equilibrium. However, like the pro-wallers, they acknowledge the threat posed by an increasingly ferocious and unpredictable coastal environment to their way of life. Surf publications and professional surfers as environmental ambassadors are increasingly communicating the risk that sea-level rise due to human-caused climate change may lead to the flooding of some of the world's best reef breaks or to the death of sandbank-creating swells in places like Namibia.

Interestingly (or perhaps unsurprisingly), this surf-specific environmentalism is structured by the interplay of dominant and submissive orientations towards ocean power that are characteristic of the practice. Essentially, surfers acknowledge the power that humans have demonstrated they wield over the ocean in their collective ability to alter its behaviour on a global scale. Saltwater citizenship is not only legitimised by The Ocean but also feeds back, transforming the nature of the authority upon which it relies. However, the result of this transformation is an increase in the ferocity and unpredictability of ocean power. The ocean ultimately reimposes its dominance over human life in its marine and coastal domain.

Relations with saltwater flows at Doughmore Beach challenge academic conceptions of how citizenship and the environment are related by disarticulating elements of cosmopolitan and localist notions of citizenship, environmental activism and self-serving arguments, and reconfiguring them with each other. Although the online activity of the dispersed group of surfer-activists evokes internationalist and universalist ethics (the right of diverse and dispersed peoples to inhabit Irish locales, the value of pristine nature as a universal truth, the shape of waves as something with value, etc.), surf cultural definitions of outsiders and techniques of their exclusion mean that Irish surfers' notions of belonging do not reflect cosmopolitan ideals. Similarly, to label the non-surfing wall support as localist would ignore its situation in the contemporary Irish globalised economy. By articulating themselves as against the wall, surfers evoke a concept of saltwater citizenship that argues for the right of all to ocean spaces, but the control of them to the very few. Those against the wall are also forced to articulate a theory of citizenship in relation to the waves that threaten the vitality of their community in the context of austerity and now an economic recovery, experienced more slowly and precariously than in the national engines of Dublin and Cork. For the wall's supporters, the flows of saltwater threaten to cut off an analogous flow of liquidity (see Reinert 2016) that depends on the long-term security that the wall offers – an oft-repeated warning by TIGL and the Trump family.

These hybrid ideas related to Irish citizenship derive precisely from the fact that none are linked straightforwardly to an association with one political authority. All negotiate Irish and global, human, and non-human loci of power in arguing their right to inhabit Irish space. Traditional, nationalist Ireland and modern, cosmopolitan Ireland are thus not two separate spheres. David McWilliams, the Irish economist and writer, characterises Ireland's economic strategy as 'cosmopolitan nationalism', which 'implies being a fully paid-up member of the global economy, embracing free movement of capital, technology and talent, while at the same time keeping idiosyncratic national policies, such as our tax policies, that set us apart from the rest' (McWilliams 2018). McWilliams understands

that in contemporary Irish life, old binaries such as tradition and modernity, nationalism and cosmopolitanism, environmentalism and environmentally damaging behaviour have ceased to be as separate as they are in theory. In saltwater citizenship and Irish coastal culture alike, cosmopolitanism and localism are aspects that inform each other, combining and resisting in the messy business of the people's hybrid sense of belonging.



Figure 2: A surfer surveys disappointing conditions while standing on the cobble section where the dunes meet the beach

Conclusion

Waves – saltwater flows – are constituent elements of daily surfing lives. They are provided to Irish surfers by The Ocean, understood as a limitless source of power and with which skilled engagements are significant to organising surfing social hierarchy and developing a sense of the value of waves, which surfers carry back to land. Unfortunately, these practically embedded valuations are rarely shared by other members of coastal communities who might see waves as a flood-threat or a surf break as a development opportunity. In Ireland, as elsewhere, there has been a history of dispute regarding the controlling of waves and coastal alterations generally in which complex narratives of environmentalism, economics and belonging emerge. Making sense of this movement of power from ocean to land as it ebbs and flows with surfers' practices requires an “amphibious anthropology” (Krause 2017) with the conceptual wherewithal to deal with this movement.

As they argue from *The Ocean*, I have suggested that surfers use their culturally specific techniques of containing this non-human power to wield an oceanic political authority as a challenge to human terrestrial competitors such as the state and corporation. I

have used the term “saltwater citizenship” to refer to this form of belonging, which works by allowing surfers claim ‘power over’ terrestrial social institutions (Wagner 2001: 46) by containing ocean power. This means that saltwater citizenship does not emerge in a binary relationship between citizens and the state (as is often seen in anthropology) but rather a complex process of interaction between competing loci of power that saltwater citizens must negotiate. In this way, saltwater citizenship differs significantly from other contemporary citizenship conceptions. It is an example of how we might use the specificity of environments and practices to rethink how non-human processes might be as central to social organisation as human cultural institutions are.

Saltwater citizenship is messy insofar as it is not a negotiation with one source of power but involves constant negotiation between different state, corporate and oceanic sources as they variously protect and challenge the political interests and wellbeing of surfers. Jane Bennett’s oft-cited *Vibrant Matter* challenges us to question ‘if we allow things a vitality of their own, how might it change our political ecology?’ (2010: i). Saltwater citizenship demonstrates that such an approach better communicates the complexity of stakeholder interactions in Irish coastal politics. In contrast to other environmental citizenships, which emphasise the effect of human actions on non-human processes, saltwater citizenship is based on a deep political, ecological understanding that also does the opposite. It is the unpredictable nature of ocean power and the inclination of North Atlantic saltwater flows to periodic and often extreme animation that both makes surfing possible and creates a politics that relies on such power. It is not just that things are equally as capable of political action as humans are, as New Materialist approaches presume, but they also form an authoritative foundation that allows certain groups to perform political actions. While adding messiness to the business of resolving claims of right and ownership, understanding the complexity of Irish citizenship may lead to a greater appreciation of the multiple relations of communities with their environments.

Finally, Irish surfers and non-surfers express a right to belong in a state in which their livelihoods, modes of living, and attachments to place are guaranteed. In the context of a globalised Europe that is facing distinct political challenges, to realise such an Ireland requires that Irish citizens maintain a complex mixture of localism and cosmopolitanism in their narratives of belonging. Seán, Brian, and many more of my research participants all guard certain Irish spaces as their own while arguing for the value of ocean spaces globally and the right of non-locals to make themselves at home. Saltwater citizenship thus holds many contradictions – highly territorial, exclusionary attitudes with cosmopolitan values of travel; environmentalism with polluting practices; a getting-back-to-nature ethos with internet activism. The navigation of complex identities is part of Irish daily life, even if these navigations lead to disputes such as that surrounding the sea wall at Doughmore Beach. Serious and fun in equal measure, the political tactics and rights that define saltwater citizenship are all geared towards making lives through surfing in Doonbeg and contemporary Ireland.

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Povzetek

Leta 2016 je podjetje *Trump International Golf Links and Hotel* na jugozahodu Irske zaprosilo za dovoljenje za postavitve balvanske stene po celotni dolžini plaže z namenom zaščite golf igrišča pred erozijo. Ker je prav ta obala znana po valovih, pomembnih za deskarje, je mednarodna skupnost deskarjev organizirala odpor do tega načrta. Prispevek raziskuje načine, na katere je v obdobju 2014–2018 odnos irskih deskarjev do vodnih tokov (re)produciral in spreminjal politične narative v odnosu do omenjenega konflikta kot tudi širše znotraj države. V tem spolitiziranem odnosu do valov delujejo deskarji skozi politični status "morskega državljanstva", katerega legitimnost je osnovana ne zgolj v odnosu do državne moči, temveč tudi (in predvsem) v odnosu do moči oceana. Prispevek predstavi tri osnovne značilnosti morskega državljanstva: 1) multiplicira politično legitimne avtoritete; 2) nasprotovanje državno-korporativnim prepletom je postavljeno predvsem v luči pravic do dostopa in lastniških pravic; 3) kot tako, osnovano na specifični ideji pripadanja in z ozirom na sodobne globalne tokove informacije in ljudi, tovrstno državljanstvo razdružuje in na novo oblikuje elemente državljanstva (teritorialnosti, upravičenosti...) na način, da zapleta tradicionalna razlikovanja med lokalizmom in kozmopolitizmom.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Irska, morsko državljanstvo, deskanje, voda, pripadanje

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